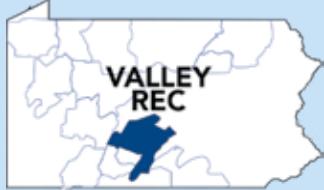


Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

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COOPERATIVE CONNECTION

The Low Down on Power Costs



RICH BAUER

2026 WHOLESALE POWER IS SHAPING UP to be one of the strangest developments in my 33 years of working for an electric cooperative. Power supply is struggling to meet higher demand due to the early closure of coal and nuclear plants, as well as increasing requests for more power from data centers. It all boils down to supply and demand, as well as how to get the limited power from one location to another.

I would like to break down each of these topics to help everyone get a better understanding of what we're seeing in the energy market and what we can only estimate will happen in the future.

Wholesale power is broken down into three major components: energy, capacity and transmission/transportation. Let's start with the energy portion, which is generated from power stations across the eastern United States. Most coal and several nuclear plants have been prematurely shut down due to political pressure related to environmental issues.

No matter which side you are on, these closures mean that 24/7 baseload generation is in the process of being shut down and replaced, mostly, with natural resources, like wind and solar generation, which are dependent on consistent winds or certain amounts of UV light per day. And that doesn't always happen.

On top of that, data centers have taken the center stage of energy needs, and our region is the top destination for new ones. I'm sure many of you have seen that the former Three Mile Island nuclear plant reactor will be reopening to provide all the power needs for a new data center complex. And none of that power will be used for the average consumer.

Many nuclear plant owners have worked out arrangements with new data center operators to provide their energy requirements, so that energy is no longer being supplied into the grid for all of us to use. Instead, that energy is going directly to individual data centers.

Most people will say, "Well, it's just a building. How much power can it use?" But as an example, a typical data center requires approximately 800 megawatts (MW) of power. Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) entire system, which covers parts of eight counties, peaks at approximately 100 MWs. One data center uses eight times more power than our entire system!

Because of the high demand from data centers and the limited supply of power available, the capacity markets, which are conducted via an auction, have surged more than 1,000%. The average cost per megawatt a day went from \$28 to more than \$370. Thank goodness we own more than 67% of our own generation and this increase only affected the remaining 33% that we need to purchase on the market.

Now, let's look at how we get all the power to our substations. This is the transmission/transportation part of the mix. Because supply is low and demand is high, the cost to transport power across the state's many high-voltage lines to our substations has increased dramatically. This year, Valley REC is expected to see a cost increase of more than \$1.5 million just for delivery.

These price increases are not of Valley's making, but they are costs we must pay to continue to provide you with the services everyone is accustomed to having. Our cost (minus the wholesale power cost) has been stable for many years, and we will continue to do our best to keep our costs as low as possible while trying to keep the wholesale power costs manageable.

On your March bill, you will see that we need to increase our rates to keep up with the ever-changing wholesale power market. When we looked at the true cost of service to make sure that each class of co-op members is not subsidizing the others, we found that our basic service charge was lower than it should be and our distribution portion was slightly higher than it should be.

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National Teacher of the Year is Product of Local School System

DOUG ROLES, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

A LOCAL EDUCATOR SELECTED as the 2025-2026 National Teacher of the Year (NTOY) says her year of service so far has been filled with opportunities to learn about a variety of U.S. school districts while being an ambassador for the teaching profession.

Ashlie Crosson, an English teacher at Mifflin County High School (MCHS), has been crisscrossing the country for speaking engagements and conferences since her selection by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in April 2025.

The honor thrust both Ashlie and Mifflin County into the national spotlight, with Ashlie making an appearance on "CBS Mornings" that also featured interviews with her students.

"I was really busy right after the announcement," she recalls. "That was crazy — to be in a national television studio, and it's going out to the world."

Ashlie is also the Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year for 2024. Her NTOY status started July 1, 2025, and runs until July 30, 2026. Since the start of the new year, Ashlie has been in Iowa to attend a statewide professional learning conference; in Florida for an in-person meeting of the NTOY cohort (the state-level nominees); and in Massachusetts to meet with a national company that specializes in global trips for students.

Earlier travels included going to London to participate in an education forum on artificial intelligence and to Austin, Texas, to address the National Association of State School Boards.

Teacher of the Year programs

CCSSO administers the National Teacher of the Year program, with Google for Education as a lead sponsor. The program recognizes the effective classroom work of exceptional teachers across the country and engages them in a year of professional learning to amplify their voices.

According to CCSSO, those chosen for the honor shine a light on the vital role of teachers by speaking at more than 150 events each year. The goal is to elevate issues teachers face and inspire others to join the profession.

One of the most impactful moments for Ashlie was addressing the National Education Association Representative Assembly in July in Portland, Oregon.



BEST OF THE BEST: Ashlie Crosson, an English teacher at Mifflin County High School, was selected as the 2025-2026 National Teacher of the Year and was recently featured on "CBS Mornings."

She spoke to an audience of more than 7,000 teachers.

"To stand in front of my colleagues from across the country was really something," she says. "It was really beautiful to see all these voices come together. It's a big responsibility to represent that diversity and help reach consensus. I consider education to be a national service. I feel really honored and privileged that I get to be one of the people to weigh in on the conversation."

Ashlie is the first NTOY from Pennsylvania. The program is managed by the state Department of Education and the state chapter of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year. The state's multi-stage selection process starts with nominations in the fall, followed by application reviews, interviews, and a selection of 12 finalists. It culminates with a state winner announcement in December, with the selected teacher representing the state in the NTOY cohort.

Pennsylvania's program requires a two-year commitment. For Ashlie, 2024 was her active year of speaking engagements; and 2025 was the national cohort year, made even busier by her NTOY selection.

Application to the national programs includes a series of essays, video submissions and interviews. The final steps are interviewing with the CCSSO press secretary and delivering a keynote address.

Rural roots

Ashlie, a Reedsville resident, teaches advanced placement language and composition and English 10. She also advises the school's journalism program. Her family is from Ferguson Valley, an area served by Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC).

She is a 2007 graduate of the former Lewistown High School, which consolidated with Indian Valley High School in 2011 to form MCHS. Mifflin County School District (MCSD) is one of 18 located in whole or in part within the Valley REC service area. The district has had students participate in the Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., and receive Valley's Brighter Future scholarships (See page 16D for details on both programs).

Ashlie earned her bachelor's degree in English education

and a minor in journalism from Susquehanna University. She obtained her master's degree in educational leadership at Penn State University. She is the first in her family to go to college.

Ashlie taught for one year in Woodbridge School District in southern Delaware and then spent eight years at Bellefonte High School until the opportunity arose to return home.

"I had always felt like I would come back," she says. "My teachers at Lewistown were phenomenal. I wanted to give back to another generation of students. To be able to do it in a community that did it for me is awesome."

Journalism advocate

Ashlie worked for the *Lewistown Sentinel* after college and during the first four summers of her teaching career. She staffed the news desk, wrote obituaries and features, and covered breaking news.

"I was interested in journalism in high school; it's always been a part of my student experience," she muses.

She now serves as adviser to the school's journalism program. Her students have gone on to be editors for college media, interns at television stations and local news writers.

When she came to Mifflin County High in 2020, she not only revived the student newspaper program, but also started *The PawPrint*, a district magazine produced by students in the Journalism III class.

"The whole goal is to have the students tell the narrative of what it's like to be a student at Mifflin County High School," Ashlie explains.

A global perspective

Ashlie also worked to bring back a Mifflin County program that benefitted her when she was a student. In her junior year of high school, she worked at Dairy Queen to save money to go on an international trip. It was coordinated by art teacher Elle Reddy and approved by then-high school principal Vance Varner, who is now superintendent of the school district. The students visited six European countries.

"It really changed my life," says Ashlie, who has visited 25 countries. "I studied abroad in London for a semester in college."

Ashlie says having a global perspective is particularly important to her because she has an adopted sister from Vietnam. She successfully petitioned Varner to resurrect the international travel program, and they started MC Goes Global. This summer, the group will travel to Greece, Italy and Costa Rica.

'Survival Stories'

CCSSO and Ashlie's peers have commended her for finding ways to engage students and build their

communication skills. In 2020, as the English department was restructuring and exploring options for half-year electives, Ashlie developed a "Survival Stories" elective in which students read essays of children who have experienced exceptional adversity.

At the time, the district was noticing a trend: Students didn't seem as interested in reading and comprehension due to increased use of social media and time in front of screens. The department wanted to design electives that would hold their interest.

"They didn't have a love of reading and writing like they used to," she says, "but our student data showed we had a lot of students who wanted to read real stories."

Ashlie previously participated in a Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Fellowship — an international academic exchange program founded in 1946 — and was looking at methods to engage students. The experience, which included a teaching exchange in Morocco, led her to think about helping her students become interested in stories from peers around the world.

"That's where 'Survival Stories' really came together," Ashlie says. "It focuses on memoirs of youths who are ages 11 to 17 during humanitarian crises."

Diverse districts

School district sizes in the U.S. range from hundreds of thousands of students to remote locations with a student population in single digits. Ashlie says a positive aspect of living in rural areas is that schools are a central part of the community, and it's not uncommon for teachers to have multiple generations of the same family in their classrooms.

On the opposite side of that, she says it can be more difficult to introduce change because of that history. She points to one recent accomplishment: MCSD's pandemic-era move to procure laptops for each student. She also says capital improvement projects, such as the district's athletic complex, can be more challenging in rural areas.

Continued on page 16D



DEDICATED EDUCATOR: The 2025-2026 National Teacher of the Year Ashlie Crosson gives instructions to students at Mifflin County High School in March 2025. She teaches English and composition and advises the school's journalism program. A 2007 Lewistown High School graduate, she became a teacher because of the impact teachers had on her.

CO-OP NOW ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) will award up to 35 scholarships of \$1,000 each to eligible students this year. Funding for this scholarship program comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state. Thanks to the efforts of our political advocates, we can now keep those funds in our communities.

Eligibility requirements

The applicant must be:

- A dependent of an active Valley REC member.
- A high school senior planning to enroll full-time at an accredited post-secondary institution or trade/technical school for the 2026-2027 academic year.

Previous Brighter Future Scholarship recipients are not eligible.

How to apply

Applications are available on valleyrec.com; follow the "Programs and Services" link to the "Scholarships" section.

Applications will also be available at all Valley REC offices and in the guidance offices of these public high schools:

- Altoona Area High School
- Central High School
- Claysburg-Kimmel High School
- Fannett-Metal High School



- Forbes Road Junior/Senior High School
- Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School
- Huntingdon Area High School
- Juniata High School
- Juniata Valley High School
- McConnellsburg High School
- Mifflin County High School
- Mount Union Area High School
- Northern Bedford County High School
- Southern Fulton Junior/Senior High School
- Southern Huntingdon County High School
- Tussey Mountain High School
- Tyrone Area High School
- Williamsburg High School

Application deadline

Applications and all required information must be delivered to Valley REC's office or be postmarked by March 31.

Scholarship selections will be made in late April. Award recipients will be notified by the end of June.

Please direct questions to brighterfuture@valleyrec.com or call 800-432-0680.

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Continued from page 12A

Raising the service charge and lowering the distribution charge balanced out, so that portion of the bill did not change. The generation rate, however, has increased 20%. This rate is a complete pass-through, so whatever the cost we pay is the cost we pass along to you, our members.

Our average member uses approximately 890 kilowatt-hours of electricity per month. This wholesale power cost increase will cause the average member to see a 10% increase, amounting to about \$14 more per month, on their bill. We understand the cost of everything is going up, and this is truly a direct pass-through from the increase in wholesale power.

This is a lot of information to digest, but my goal is to provide you with as much up-to-date information and be as transparent about our rates as possible. The value of the co-op model has never been more evident. We will still have one of the lowest rates across the entire state, and our rates are 33.5% lower than our neighboring investor-owned utility.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or any of our offices. Take care and God bless. ☘

RICH BAUER
PRESIDENT & CEO

NATIONAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Continued from page 12A

"I do think it looks different in rural areas," she says. "In National Teacher of the Year suburban areas, there are more and larger philanthropic organizations. It's interesting to see when you get into more populated areas how you have this secondary tier of support."

Ashlie is quick to point out other district highlights that brought positive attention to Mifflin County, including Trent Hidley's World Freestyle Wrestling championship in 2025 and his two-time AAA state wrestling championships; track star Carter Smith's five state championships and his status as the current New Balance national titleholder in the mile; and the Huskies' marching band earning the 2025 state and Atlantic Coast championships.

"It's cool to see your small town make some big waves and see all the community support," she says.

One of the barriers to a teaching career is the difference between the cost of tuition and teachers' salaries. For rural areas, another impediment is attracting young teachers who want to be close to urban amenities. Ashlie says one way to recruit teachers is to do it the way her career was created: spark a love of learning in students who will go into education and return to this area for its quality of life.

"Here, your teachers are your neighbors," she says. "Your teachers go to church with you in rural areas. I think our families have a lot of respect for what teachers are doing for their kids. Ultimately, my job is to prepare students for going into the world." ☘



THERE'S STILL TIME!

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is accepting applications for the 2026 Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., until **Feb. 13**. High school juniors whose parents/guardians are Valley REC members are eligible to apply.

Applications are available through high school guidance offices or at valleyrec.com by clicking the "Youth Tour" button at the top of the website.