

APRIL 2026

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Danny Marshall, left, a line crew chief at DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative, collects climbing equipment with his father, Greg, who retired from United Electric after nearly four decades of line work.



ON THE COVER
 Josh Gutshall, left, journeyman lineman for Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), carries on a tradition of line work alongside his father, Steve, a Valley REC line crew leader.

PHOTOS BY JEFF FETZER

A Culture of Safety

Working Together to Make Sure Every Lineworker Makes it Home



DENNIS SHAWLEY

I'VE SPENT MOST OF MY career around lineworkers. If there's one thing you learn quickly, it's that these folks don't scare easily.

It's skilled work. It's demanding work. And the truth is, it's hazardous work.

Across the country, dozens of lineworkers lose their lives each year in work-related accidents. Many more are seriously injured. Line work consistently ranks among the most hazardous occupations in America.

But to the people in this business, those numbers aren't just statistics. Every one of them represents a co-worker, a friend, a family member.

That's why safety has to be more than a binder sitting on a shelf. It has to be part of the culture.

Our job at the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA), which represents the 14 electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, is to support these member co-ops in their individual safety efforts. The goal is to ensure lineworkers serving your co-op have the skills and training they need to do their jobs safely.

PREA's Job Training & Safety (JT&S) program plays a big role in that.

Many lineworkers still learn the trade the traditional way, working alongside experienced crew members who have spent decades on the line. That experience matters.

At the same time, the job keeps changing. Equipment gets more complex. Safety standards evolve. Crews have to stay sharp.

That's one reason we run safety schools throughout the year. Some focus on tools crews use every day, like chainsaws. Others dig into the technical side of the electric system. The point isn't just to check a box. It's to give crews a chance to step away from the daily workload, talk through real situations and make sure everyone is thinking about the job the same way.

But safety training doesn't just happen in a classroom.

One of our most valuable tools is our On-the-Job Training program. Through this, a JT&S instructor joins a cooperative line crew for several days while they work on a real project on their own system. While there, we offer guidance, point out potential hazards and reinforce safe work practices.

Apprentices gain valuable hands-on experience, and even veteran crews benefit from another set of experienced eyes on the work. (You can read more about this program on page 13.)

Every PREA member cooperative also participates in the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program, or RESAP, an effort by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to keep safety top of mind. In support of that effort, our team visits each cooperative on a three-year rotation — often unannounced — to review everything from management's commitment to safety to the way work is performed in the field.

In addition, we work with cooperatives that participate in the Commitment to Zero Contacts initiative, which focuses on preventing accidental contact with energized equipment. The goal is exactly what the name says: zero contacts.

Each year, on the second Monday of April (this year, April 13), we celebrate National Lineworker Appreciation Day to recognize the men and women who do this work. They deserve that recognition. Keeping the lights on takes skill, dedication and a willingness to face risks most people never see.

The best way we can honor that work is by taking safety seriously every single day.

When the lights go out, people notice quickly. Behind every restoration is a crew doing difficult work under challenging conditions.

Our job is to make sure they all make it home safely. 🚚

DENNIS SHAWLEY, MANAGER, JOB TRAINING & SAFETY
PENNSYLVANIA RURAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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REVISITING A MIRACLE

When I was 10, I began my short-lived career as a scrapbooker. It started with baseball and ended with a miracle.

The 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy stirred memories of the famed 1980 "Miracle on Ice" game against the Soviets – so much so that I grabbed my childhood sports scrapbook from the basement to relive some of those memories.

It was filled with whatever sports-related memorabilia I could tape or paste into the book: baseball cards, autographs, ticket stubs. I even enshrined the wrapper from a REGGIE! bar, named after Reggie Jackson, whose spectacular World Series performances earned him the nickname "Mr. October" – and his own candy bar alongside Baby Ruth bars. I had one of those wrappers in there, too.

Mainly, though, the book contained clippings from our local paper – back when it was a daily, with extensive sports coverage from wire services like the Associated Press (a cooperative) delivering stories from around the world – and into my scrapbook. Apart from baseball, much of the book documented the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid: pages detailing Eric Heiden's incredible five gold medals in speedskating, Ingemar Stenmark's dominance in the slalom and, of course, hockey.

Against the backdrop of the Cold War, a team of mostly American college kids defeated a veteran Soviet squad of hockey professionals in stunning fashion – a miracle. I smiled reading a clip quoting a man in Hershey, Pa.: "I've been jumping up and down rooting for them and heck, I'm Canadian."

So momentous was that game that people forget it was only the semifinal. Team USA still had to beat Finland for gold.

Incredibly, exactly 46 years to the day of that match against the Soviets, the men's team won Olympic gold again. This time, it was a 2-1 overtime victory over Canada in Milan, the first men's hockey gold since Lake Placid. And that came alongside another miraculous achievement: the USA women's team also won gold in a dramatic 2-1 overtime victory over Canada.

The last page of my scrapbook has the 1980 men's team celebrating gold. I never picked up scrapbooking again after that. How can you top a miracle?



PETER A. FITZGERALD
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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READY FOR PRIME TIME: Ahead of a historic 2026 tourism season, Pennsylvania's Secretary of Transportation Michael Carroll kicks off the 2026 Pick Up PA litter cleanup initiative. This year, the Commonwealth will host a number of noteworthy events, including the NFL Draft, PGA Championship, FIFA World Cup, MLB All-Star Series and America250PA. The activities are expected to bring more than 209 million visitors to the Commonwealth.

FRESHENING UP

Pick Up PA helping Commonwealth put its best foot forward

Image is everything — and, this year, Pennsylvania is working to put its best foot forward.

The state departments of transportation and environmental protection, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful and the Pittsburgh Steelers are teaming up to encourage participation in Pick Up PA, an effort to present a positive image to the millions of visitors who will be attending key events in Pennsylvania this year.

In 2026, the Commonwealth will host the NFL Draft in Pittsburgh, the PGA Championship near Philadelphia, the FIFA World Cup matches and the MLB All-Star Game in Philadelphia, as well as a number of events commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States.

Pick Up PA is an annual volunteer effort to clean up roads, parks, streams and communities. In 2025, 81,500 volunteers participated. More than 4 million pounds of litter and trash were picked up, 6.1 million pounds recycled, and nearly 63,000 trees, flowers, and other greens were planted.

SAFETY FIRST

Pa. hospital systems now operating own police agencies after attacks

To combat the rising number of violent incidents against health care workers, at least seven hospital systems across Pennsylvania are operating their own police agencies, according to the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania.

Those systems include UPMC, Geisinger Health, Allegheny Health Network, Temple Health, Jefferson Health, LECOM Medical Center and Uniontown Hospital. Meanwhile, WellSpan is scheduled to open a police department this year.

In recent years, hospital employees have reported hundreds of injuries at the hands of patients or visitors, while hospital officials say many verbal and physical attacks are not routinely documented if there are no injuries.

POULTRY PROTECTION

Pa. is only state with fund dedicated to helping producers recover

Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation with a fund dedicated to helping poultry producers stabilize and recover from devastating losses. The fund's importance came to light after a bird flu outbreak in Bucks County in early March.

Dubbed the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Recovery Fund, \$75 million has been committed to it since 2022. Since then, 302 poultry businesses have received \$15.6 million in grants to offset losses, sustain operations and strengthen biosecurity protections.

The Commonwealth has good reason to maintain the fund: Poultry is the largest single sector of its \$132.5 billion agriculture industry. It supports nearly 48,800 farms and almost 600,000 jobs in the state.

BACK TO WORK

More than 800 former federal workers join Pa.'s workforce after executive order

More than 800 former federal employees have joined the Commonwealth's workforce

following an executive order last year that called for the recruitment of the displaced employees to fill vacancies in Pennsylvania's workforce.

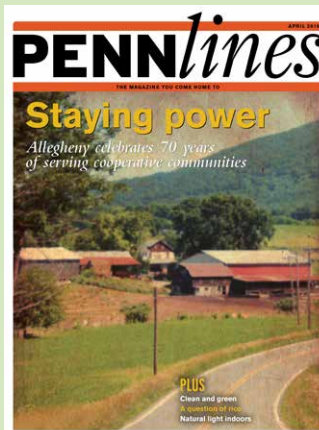
The federal government reduced its workforce by more than 242,000 employees in 2025. Last March, the order directed the state Office of Administration to accept federal government experience as equivalent to Commonwealth experience to streamline the hiring process. Today, these hires serve in law enforcement, public safety, human services, health care and other critical roles.

"By tapping into [this] expertise, we've strengthened our workforce and improved the delivery of programs and services that Pennsylvanians depend on every day," state Secretary of Administration Neil Weaver said. 📌

CLARIFICATION

Penn Lines would like to clarify information that appeared in the caption on page 8 of the March 2026 issue. In the article "More Than a Meal," it stated the potatoes included in the Mansfield Food Pantry delivery were supplied by Barnett Farms, a Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative member. While this is accurate, the potatoes were donated by members of Mainesburg United Methodist Church and delivered to the food pantry by Jim and Dora Tice. This was all part of a local food-assistance effort, the "Potato Project," which members of the church have participated in for years.

TIME LINES



APRIL 2016

A decade ago, *Penn Lines* celebrated 70 years of Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny) serving cooperative communities throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Formed in 1946, Allegheny continues to provide the wholesale power that cooperative consumer-members have relied on for decades. Now 80 years on, our 2016 cover story reminds us of all Allegheny does for our rural electric cooperatives.



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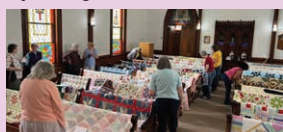


ON A ROLL

To commemorate the original Eisenhower Easter Egg Roll, the Eisenhower National Historic Site and the Gettysburg Foundation will host a similar event at 250 Eisenhower Farm Road in Gettysburg, Adams County. Set for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 4, the Easter Egg Roll is free. For more details, visit nps.gov/eise.

PATCHWORK IN THE PEWS

Modern and heirloom quilts will be on display April 18 at the Wyalusing United Methodist Church and the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church, Bradford County, when the Patchwork in the Pews quilt show kicks off at 11 a.m. For \$5, patrons can explore this year's exhibit, which celebrates America's 250th anniversary. Learn more at wyalusingmuseum.com.



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LITERARY LEGEND

Thriller author Sandra Brown will take the stage as part of Beyond the Books at the Appell Center in York, York County, April 23. In addition to discussing her journey to the top of the *New York Times* Bestseller List, she'll also sign copies of her latest release, "Bloodlust." For more, visit appellcenter.org.

150 YEARS OF IUP

Celebrate 150 years of Indiana University of Pennsylvania on April 25. Learn about the school's rich history, architecture and opportunities at this free event. The festivities kick off at 9 a.m. For more, go to visitindianacountypa.org/event/150-years-of-iup.



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POWER LINES — IN — THE BLOOD LINES

When Line Work Runs in the Family

JEFF FETZER

Penn Lines Contributor

AS A BOY, DANNY MARSHALL dreamed of following in his father's footsteps or, more accurately, in his gaff tracks.

He wanted to be an electric lineman.

Greg Marshall, who spent nearly four decades climbing poles and turning the lights back on as a lineman for United Electric Cooperative, always tried to talk him out of it.

"As a kid, I wanted to do what Dad did," Danny recalls, "and he would always say, 'Don't do it, unless you want to have bad knees and a bad back. Don't do it.'"

Danny didn't listen — and today, he's a line crew chief for the same cooperative.

Sitting at a cluttered table in the crew room at United Electric's headquarters in DuBois, Greg, now retired, leans back in his chair and explains why he tried to dissuade his son.

"I didn't want to encourage him because I knew what he was going to have to give up timewise and the sacrifices he would have to put up with," he says. "It is a really good career, but it's got to be something you want to do."

"I didn't want to push him that way. It had to be his choice."

ONE FATHER, ONE SON, ONE CO-OP: Danny Marshall, left, and his dad, Greg, have taken similar paths in life. Greg spent nearly 40 years as a lineworker with DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative. Today, Danny is a line crew chief there. "As a kid," Danny says, "I wanted to do what Dad did."

PHOTO BY JEFF FETZER

During high school, Danny considered enlisting in the military. His mother strongly opposed that path. So father and son had a heart-to-heart to discuss the younger Marshall's future.

"The conversation was: 'Your Mom really doesn't want you to go in the military,'" Danny recalls. "'What are you gonna do when you get out?' And I was like, 'Maybe do what you do.'"

A perfect fit

Conversations like the one between Greg and Danny Marshall have played out at kitchen tables across the country since the dawn of electric co-ops.

Ironically, for the Gutshall family in Huntingdon County, the discussion didn't happen at all.

Josh Gutshall, now a journeyman lineman in his ninth year with Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), always thought he'd like to be a lineman like his dad, Steve, a veteran crew leader, also with Valley REC. But when he graduated from high school, the cooperative had a nepotism policy that precluded him from working there.

So after graduating from Huntingdon High School in 2013, Josh stayed local, taking a job stacking lumber at a local sawmill. That was followed by work at an auto garage, a fiberglass container manufacturing company and a heavy equipment rental business, where he received his commercial driver's license.

After learning that Valley REC had an opening for

an apprentice lineworker and that it had rescinded its nepotism policy, Josh filled out an application, but neglected to tell his father.

Steve, however, heard about his son's pending job interview from Rich Bauer, the co-op's president & CEO. "They gave him a shot," the proud dad says, "and I am very grateful."

Josh began work as an apprentice in the co-op's Shade Gap district in 2017, and now works out of the Huntingdon district office with his father, who plans to retire early next year.

Steve admits he never tried to steer Josh into line work for a couple of reasons. First, he didn't think his son would have an opportunity because of Valley's nepotism policy.

"And there is a lot of sacrifice," the father of five says. "Our kids were all in sports, and their dad didn't get to see a lot of that because I was always working."

That sacrifice of family time — missed birthday parties, holiday gatherings, and kids' sporting events due to outage call-outs — was one of the main reasons Rex McRoberts gave up his position on the line crew at Adams Electric Cooperative. After seven years, he traded line work to be a

staking technician with the Gettysburg-based co-op.

Rex's son, Eric, was a young boy when his father hung up his climbing hooks for good and has little memory of his dad's days as a lineman. It was not a trade he had considered. Instead, with encouragement from his father, he decided to seek an electrical engineering degree.

"I went to Penn State York for a year and found out that college just didn't fit me," Eric says, "so I gave it up."

His father suggested he become a lineman.

"I had never thought of that," Eric says. "I guess I didn't really know what he did as a lineman or what was involved with the job."

Rex arranged for Eric to join one of the line crews at Adams Electric for a ride-along — a chance to see firsthand what line work was all about.

"Well, that was it," Eric says. "You bring any kid on a ride-along and that's it. It's fun. The guys all like what they do. It's like a little club, and you can't help wanting to be a part of something like that."

He saw the job was more than poles and wire and bucket trucks. It was about camaraderie, problem-solving, and getting a job done through trust and teamwork.

It was a perfect fit for Eric.

After graduating from a two-year lineman training program, he was hired as an apprentice with Tri-County REC, headquartered in Mansfield, Pa. He learned, advanced to journeyman, then to crew chief. For years, the job was ideal, but as the father of two athletic daughters, the overtime work — typically 300 to 500 hours a year — began to weigh on him. He missed many of his girls' games and lots of family time, too.

The year Eric's oldest daughter entered high school, he made a decision that echoed the one his father had made decades earlier. He stepped away from line work and into an office role.

"Both of my girls were always heavy into sports, and that's the only reason I'm in the office today instead of working with the line crew," says McRoberts, the co-op's director of operations. "I wanted to watch them play, and I've been able to see every sporting event they've been in for the past six, eight years."

A family tradition

For 23-year-old Josh Heess Jr., single and with no kids, the long hours are a big part of the appeal of line work.



JEFF FETZER

WHEN LINE WORK CALLS: As a younger man, Eric McRoberts, left, now director of operations at Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative in Mansfield, abandoned college to become a lineworker, a job his dad Rex encouraged him to pursue. The elder McRoberts spent his career at Gettysburg-based Adams Electric Cooperative, where he was a lineworker and later, a staking technician.

In fact, the Sullivan County REC apprentice lineman says after-hours work and the accompanying overtime pay are what he enjoys most about the job.

Josh Jr. knew early on that line work was his calling. His father, Josh Heess Sr., is a lineman/troubleshooter for Penelec, and his grandfather, Jud Benjamin, worked more than 40 years as a lineman at the same cooperative.

“I got into it because of my dad,” he admits. “We talked about it a bit when I was still in school, and then when I got out of high school, I tried going into the Penelec training program.”

At the time, Penelec’s training school accepted only 20 students a year out of roughly 400 applicants. Josh Jr. completed a two-week climbing school in Erie and advanced to the final 25, but ultimately wasn’t selected.

“You have to wait a year to try again,” he says, “so in the meantime, I went to work in the oil field as a roughneck for Patterson UTI in Ohio. Then this job opened up, and I got it.”

Now in his third year of a four-year apprenticeship, Josh Jr. says he’s proud to carry on the family tradition. His father is proud, too.

“When he got into the oil field work, I didn’t know if he’d come back,” Josh Sr. says. “But I always hoped he would get into line work. Everybody wants what’s good for their kids, and it is a good career — it really is.”

While no two journeys into the trade look exactly alike, the pull of the work sounds remarkably similar: The camaraderie of the crew. The hum of a bucket truck. The satisfaction of watching lights flick back on in a neighbor’s home.

Despite long hours, the physical demands and the inherent dangers of working with high-voltage electricity, sometimes in brutal weather, none of them talk about their calling with regret. Instead, all you hear is pride and passion.

Powerfully rewarding, powerfully dangerous

So what is the appeal of line work?

“Honestly, I like all of it,” says Steve Gutshall. “It’s very rewarding, especially doing trouble calls — going to an area and it’s dark and then coming back and everything is lit up. It’s a good feeling.”

That moment — when the lights flick back on — is a constant theme.



BORN FOR THIS: Josh Heess Jr., left, an apprentice lineman for Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) in Forksville, is a third generation lineworker. He’s following in the footsteps of his father, Josh Sr., right, and his grandfather, Jud Benjamin, who worked at Sullivan County REC for more than 40 years.

“You know the members are hurting,” Greg Marshall says. “They don’t have heat ... they don’t have water. Just seeing the appreciation when you turn the lights on — that’s the most rewarding part of the job.”

While linemen get a lot of satisfaction from power restoration work, Eric McRoberts notes there’s also a lot of pride in building something tangible.

“Line work is such a rewarding job,” he says, “because you’re either fixing an outage or saying, ‘Hey, we just built that line right down through there. That’s what we did today.’”

But line work comes with risks and that reality shapes the culture as much as anything else.

“You are doing dangerous work,” says Josh Heess Sr., “so you’ve all got to get along, and you’ve all got to trust

each other at the same time. You have to look out for them. They are your brothers.”

For Steve Gutshall, that trust carries extra weight when family is involved.

“When you’re a crew chief, you worry about everyone on the crew,” he says. “But when your son comes to work and you know the dangers that are potentially out there, you want to make sure everybody is going to be all right and be able to go home at the end of the day.”

‘It could happen to any of us’

Back in the crew room at United Electric, Danny Marshall says the dangers of the job became painfully real on a cold day in January 2021, when a mayday call came over the radio.

His friend and fellow United Electric lineman, Branden

Bauer, brushed his arm against a 7,200-volt energized line and was electrocuted. He survived, but the accident resulted in the amputation of both of his hands and ended his career as a lineman.

“I wasn’t on the crew when it happened,” Danny says quietly, “but when we got the mayday call, we all swarmed to the scene. That was the worst day of my career.”

Close in age to Branden, Danny says the incident changed him. It drove home the message, he says, that he isn’t invincible and caused him to pay more attention to safety.

“Branden was one of the best linemen here,” Danny says. “I realized that if that can happen to him, it could happen to me and it could happen to any of us.”

With a wife and two young sons at home, Danny knows his family counts on him to return home safely at the end of each day. He also says that if either of his sons wants to

become a third-generation line-worker when they’re older, he would welcome that.

“If that’s what they really wanted to do, yes, I would encourage them,” he says, glancing at his father and smiling.

“If I hadn’t become a lineman, I don’t know what I would be doing,” Danny adds. “I would be pretty lost, I guess.”

Greg Marshall leans forward in his chair. It’s his turn to smile.

“I am very pleased with the way he’s progressed in his life and proud of what he’s accomplished,” Greg says. “It kind of hits the spot that somebody wants to follow in what you did.”

FAMILY TIES: Josh Gutshall, left, pursued several careers after graduating from high school. Eventually, though, he heard the same calling as his father, Steve, a veteran line crew leader with Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC). Today, as his father prepares to retire, Josh is working at Valley REC, too, as a journeyman lineman.

JEFF FETZER



STATEWIDE PROGRAM PROVIDES ON-THE-JOB TRAINING FOR CO-OP LINEWORKERS

JEFF FETZER, PENN LINES CONTRIBUTOR

While many apprentice linemen learn the trade from seasoned crew members – sometimes from their own fathers – Pennsylvania’s electric cooperatives also invest in structured training.

Through the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA), the statewide organization representing the 14 electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, lineworkers have access to specialized training and safety programs designed to sharpen skills and reinforce best practices.

One of those offerings is PREA’s On-the-Job Training (OJT) program, which provides hands-on training while a co-op line crew is conducting a real project on its own system.

Recommendations and advice

As part of the program, PREA sends one of its Job Training & Safety (JT&S) program instructors to a participating cooperative for two to three days of observation and instruction. While there, they offer guidance and make recommendations to enhance safety and job performance.

One of those instructors, Fred Kuzemchak, says the training typically centers on work that line crews don’t perform regularly.

“The co-op picks the job,” Kuzemchak says. “They facilitate all the normal things that they would do daily – road control for that job or whatever they might need – then we serve as the instructors.”

The training typically takes place on energized lines, and he emphasizes that it’s the cooperative’s crew leaders, not the instructors, who direct the work.

“We don’t come in and try to run the job for them,” he says. “We are strictly there to recommend and give advice.”

From start to finish, instructors monitor the job setup, listen to the crew’s safety briefing and observe the work as it progresses.

“We make sure they are following the proper procedures, using the proper equipment for the job and recognizing hazards specific to the job and the work site,” Kuzemchak says. “We are focusing heavily on the safety aspect of things and honing their skills on that task.”

Kuzemchak, who worked for REA Energy Cooperative in Indiana, Pa., as a journeyman lineman and crew chief for 17 years before becoming a JT&S instructor five years ago, says the OJT program benefits lineworkers at every level.

“At most of the places we go, the crew makeup is anywhere from chief linemen down to apprentices,” he says. “We get a chance to see how those veteran linemen are doing out on the job, and we can interact with them and toss recommendations out to them that might help along the way.”

For apprentices, the OJT program provides hands-on, supervised training on live lines.

“Because the OJT is not about production, we are able to slow things down and focus on the safety aspect of the job,” Kuzemchak says. “It gives the apprentices a good opportunity to work on skills alongside a trained, qualified journeyman lineman.”

At the end of the day, when the job is done, the lights are on and the linemen return home safely, that preparation matters – for the crew and for the co-op members they serve.



LEARNING WHILE WORKING: Fred Kuzemchak, left, a safety instructor with the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, provides on-the-job training at Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative. He is shown with, from left, linemen Curt Wilson and Matt Fish.

VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Co-ops Ready for Extreme Weather Tap Tools and Shared Resources

CATHY CASH

THE EPIC GULF COAST BLIZZARD of 2025 encased New Orleans and surrounding communities in 10 inches of snow, but that's just one of many recent weird weather phenomena.

"Tornado alley" is widening from the Great Plains into the Deep South. Wildfires are no longer just a western worry, now spreading into the Midwest and Southeast. Pennsylvania has seen its share, too.

"Electric co-ops are experiencing more extreme weather events all across the country and are busy preparing, planning and forecasting differently than they have in the past," says Jennah Denney, senior program manager of technology integration with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



MUTUAL AID: Journeyman Lineman Scott Tubbs, second from left, and Crew Chief Dan Marshall, right, of DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative pose with lineworkers from North Carolina's EnergyUnited amid recovery operations following Hurricane Helene in 2024.

New sensors and weather-risk tools are giving co-ops early warning and situational awareness of threats. Cooperatives are also applying historical outage data in developing intelligent weather models to forecast crisis spots in their service territory.

Drones are being equipped with cameras trained by artificial intelligence to scan electric system equipment and spot potential weak points. Cooperatives are also updating their maintenance and vegetation management plans with the help of drone cameras and satellite imagery.

Co-ops continue to replace aging wooden poles with steel and underground power lines, where it's cost-effective and environmentally sound, to combat destruction from wind, floods, and wildfires.

Then there's cooperatives' real superpower: mutual aid.

Power in numbers

In the wake of the worst disasters, co-op crews volunteer to rise at any hour on any day to travel hundreds of miles to help rebuild another cooperative's power lines and restore electricity to members, often in treacherous conditions. In Pennsylvania, Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny), the wholesale power provider for the 14 rural electric cooperatives here and in New Jersey, helps to coordinate this cooperation among cooperatives.

Co-ops work hard to get mutual-aid agreements and their logistics — from meals to laundry and lodging for the arriving crews — in place in advance of storm seasons.

The mission could take weeks and thousands of co-op lineworkers, like

when horrific Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida then roared up into the Carolinas' rural mountain communities in September 2024. Dozens of lineworkers from nine Pennsylvania cooperatives were among those who headed south to clear rights of way and rebuild electric infrastructure. Before and since, these cooperative lineworkers have also offered a helping hand to neighboring systems — some a few miles away, others a few hundred.

"The selflessness and commitment of these lineworkers exemplify the cooperative spirit because, for them — and the rest of the cooperative family — helping one another is second nature," says Steve Brame, president & CEO of Allegheny and its sister organization, the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association. "It's built into their DNA, and it's one of the core values that sets them apart. When one cooperative is in need, others respond."

In and of itself, a cooperative is an exceptional tool for surviving unexpected catastrophes, he says.

"The principle of cooperation among cooperatives is a reminder that they are stronger together," Brame says. "This is the cooperative way: standing together, lending a hand, and ensuring that no one faces adversity alone." 🇺🇸

CATHY CASH writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

ALLEGHENY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC., based in Harrisburg, Pa., is the wholesale power provider for the 14 rural electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The cooperative has a proud history of investing in sustainable energy solutions to benefit the communities it serves while providing reliable energy at an affordable price.



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Local Lore

New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative

A Rude Awakening

The year was 1780. The month was July. Along with some Bedford County rangers, Capt. William Phillips was tasked with patrolling the area near what is now Liberty Township, a region served by New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative. Phillips and his team were there to guard settlers against attacks by Seneca war parties, who were British allies during the Revolutionary War.

When Phillips and his men, which included his 14-year-old son Elijah, crossed into Woodcock Valley, they spent the night in an abandoned log cabin to rest up for the day ahead. What they didn't know, however, was that British Lt. John Dochstetter, a

platoon of British soldiers and 60 Seneca warriors were nearby, staking out the Phillips crew.

After some of Phillips' men left at sunrise to continue their patrols, the remaining rangers became locked in a battle that lasted about an hour — until flaming arrows set the cabin on fire, forcing Phillips to surrender.

Although the British soldiers promised Phillips his men would be spared, it was not to be. The captain and his son were led over Tussey Mountain, where they were held until the British freed them at the end of the American Revolution. His soldiers however, were tied to trees and shot numerous times with arrows and muskets.

To commemorate the battle and the soldiers' sacrifice, the Captain Phillips' Rangers Memorial was erected off Route 26 in Saxton. To this day, it serves as a reminder of the sacrifices many men made to defend



LEGION.ORG

HONORING THE FALLEN: The Captain Phillips' Rangers Memorial sits off Route 26 in Bedford County to honor soldiers who died defending Pennsylvania's frontier during the American Revolution.

the Commonwealth's frontier during the American Revolution. 📍



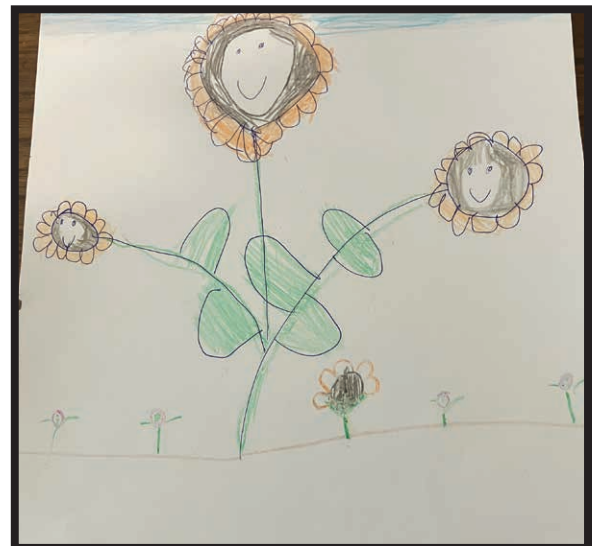
Main Office: New Enterprise, Pa.
Consumer-members served: 3,784
Website: newenterpriserec.com

HEY KIDS! EMAIL YOUR ART

A Sight To See

This month's artwork comes from Elaina Grace Ball, granddaughter of Nick and Patti Ball, members of Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative (REC). She drew sunflowers after she saw them in an issue of *Penn Lines*. "In the spring, seeds were planted in the soil," Elaina says. "With all the rain and sun, the seeds became sunflowers. By summer, the sunflowers became bright, tall sunflowers, reaching up toward the sky. The sunflower attracts butterflies — making a beautiful picture of nature!" Thank you, Elaina, for sharing your artwork with us!

Elaina Grace Ball, age 7, Claverack REC



CALLING ALL KIDS, ages 5 to 17: Show off your artistic skills!

Each month, we'll feature the artwork of our young readers (or our readers' youngsters), inspired by something they've read in *Penn Lines*. Paints, pencils, crayons, clay, sand — any physical medium is OK! You may send digital photos of the creation to CommunityCorner@prea.com, but please: no digital artwork.

Please include the artist's name, age and electric cooperative, plus a 25- to 50-word description of the art.

GROW

THE MESSAGE OF SAFETY

Planting season is a busy and stressful time for farmers. **Safe Electricity** reminds farmers to:

- **STAY IN** your vehicle or machinery if it comes in contact with a power line; **DO NOT** get out.
- **LOOK UP** to avoid machinery/power-line contact (long extensions or tall antennas can get caught).
- **ALWAYS HAVE 10 FEET** of clearance surrounding the live lines — even if no contact is made, an electrical current can arc or jump.
- **STAY AWAY** from a sagging or downed line; call 9-1-1 to have the utility dispatched.
- **USE A SPOTTER** with a broad vantage point when operating machinery around power lines.
- **TEACH** the 10-foot clearance rule to anyone working on your farm and review power line locations.

Learn more at [SafeElectricity.org](https://www.SafeElectricity.org)

 **Safe
Electricity.org**

Electrify Your Lawn Care

MIRANDA BOUTELLE

ELECTRIC LAWN EQUIPMENT HAS seen drastic improvements in cost, motor efficiency and battery power in recent years. From hedge and string trimmers to leaf blowers, chainsaws, and push and riding mowers, there are lots of options for electric lawn equipment.

Electric equipment is quieter than its gas-powered equivalent and typically needs less maintenance. There's no more mixing fuel, changing spark plugs or worrying about gas

going bad over the winter. Advances in rechargeable battery technology eliminate having to lug around a heavy extension cord to get your work done. Just pop in a battery and go.

Most popular lawn equipment brands offer battery-powered options, as do brands that specialize in electric tools. If you need multiple tools, buying the same brand with the same battery type allows you to swap batteries between different pieces of equipment. That also means fewer battery chargers to store or keep on your workbench.


Opt for equipment with brushless motors. They are more efficient, more powerful and have a longer lifespan than traditional brushed motors. A brushless motor typically costs more but is worth the improved

efficiency. A brushed motor transfers electricity using physical brushes, which can wear down over time. The friction caused by the brushes makes equipment run hotter and noisier. A brushless motor uses electronic commutation with less friction, which makes it more powerful, extends the lifespan and allows you to get more done on a single charge.

Just as gas-powered lawnmowers require safe storage and handling of gas and oil, battery-powered equipment requires proper care for maintenance, charging and disposal. Always use the manufacturer's original charging equipment, charge batteries on hard surfaces away from anything flammable and store chargers in a cool, dry place.

Most manufacturers recommend charging batteries only until they reach full capacity instead of leaving them on the charger until you are ready to use them. This helps prevent damage to the battery from overcharging and heat buildup and reduces potential fire hazards. Unplug chargers when not in use to avoid energy waste.

Similar to gas and oil, old or damaged batteries should not end up in household garbage and landfills, where they can ignite fires and leak toxic chemicals into soil and groundwater. Instead, recycle them at a big-box store or at a county or city waste management site.

If you're looking for a quieter, more efficient, lower maintenance lawn care routine, rethink your equipment options and consider electric models. 

MIRANDA BOUTELLE is the chief operating officer at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company. She has more than 20 years of experience helping people save energy at home, and she writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

MARK GILLILAND, PIONEER UTILITY RESOURCE



LIGHTER LOAD: Improved battery technology makes it easy to get more done on a single charge and avoid hauling around a cord.

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Lineworkers Are Ready When it Matters Most



RYAN MELLER

AS CEO OF NORTHWESTERN RURAL Electric Cooperative (REC), I have the unique privilege of witnessing firsthand the dedication and grit it takes to keep the lights on for our members. Each April, we proudly shine a spotlight on the extraordinary men and women who make it all possible: our lineworkers.

When storms threaten our communities and the power goes out, what most see as an inconvenience, our lineworkers see as a call to action. They're the first to respond, leaving family dinners, braving the night and heading into fierce conditions to restore power with unwavering resolve. This readiness is no accident; it's forged through rigorous training, deep experience and a relentless commitment to serving others.

What makes our lineworkers truly remarkable is that they aren't just restoring power to a system; they're restoring power to their own friends, families and neighbors. They live here. They raise their children here. For them, electricity isn't just a utility; it's the heartbeat of daily life, local businesses, schools, farms and emergency services. Powering the places we call home is deeply personal to every lineworker.

Electric cooperatives like Northwestern REC were founded on the principle of neighbors helping neighbors, and our lineworkers are the living embodiment of that spirit. They're the first to arrive and the last to leave, often working long, unseen hours. Sometimes, that commitment means lending a hand far from home through mutual aid.

When disaster strikes, Northwestern REC crews answer the call — whether it's across the county or across state lines — to help restore power and hope. This spirit of mutual aid strengthens every cooperative and benefits every member we serve.

We know outages can be frustrating, halting daily routines and plans. We're deeply grateful to our members for your patience and encouragement in these moments. Linework is demanding, physically intense and sometimes dangerous. Our crews tackle every job with a steadfast focus on safety and teamwork. They take immense pride in their craft and in the trust you place in them.

On April 13, we celebrate National Lineworker Appreciation Day — even though one day is hardly enough to honor their service. Every day, we thank our lineworkers for their unwavering dedication, which forms the very backbone of our cooperative.

Join me this month in thanking our line personnel and their families: Jay, Joe, Aaron, Dustin, Eric, Justin, Wesley, Michael, Chad, John H., Brandon, Derrek, Nevin, Gary, Cole, Alvey, John M., Matt, Ryan, Camden, Trevor, Chris, Blaze, Jordan, Dylan, Ross, Colin, Tanner and Kaiden.

We are proud to stand behind you and grateful for all that you do for our co-op and communities. 

Cooperatively yours,

RYAN MELLER
PRESIDENT & CEO

From Dawn's First Light to Midnight's Call: Inside a Lineworker's Day

EMILY SONNTAG, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

THE SHARP HISS OF A THERMOS shutting firmly breaks the quiet of the predawn hours. In the chilly darkness, a lineworker stands beneath the subtle glow of the entryway light, fastening flame-resistant clothing and lacing up heavy boots while the rest of the world still sleeps.

The house is hushed except for small, familiar sounds: the muffled rattle of breakfast dishes, whispered encouragements to kids getting ready for school, the click of a front door closing quietly behind them. Each goodbye is quietly exchanged, carrying a heaviness of uncertainty, as there is never a guarantee of a timely or safe return. The

drive and devotion required of a lineworker are truly extraordinary, making them distinct from most professions.

These men and women don't have the comfort of a predictable 9-to-5 job. Instead, they are always ready to work irregular, grueling hours — often far from home, braving fierce storms, bitter cold or scorching heat. Extreme weather isn't just an inconvenience; it's an ever-present adversary that can knock out power with a single storm, toppling trees onto power lines or damaging critical equipment.

The first line of defense

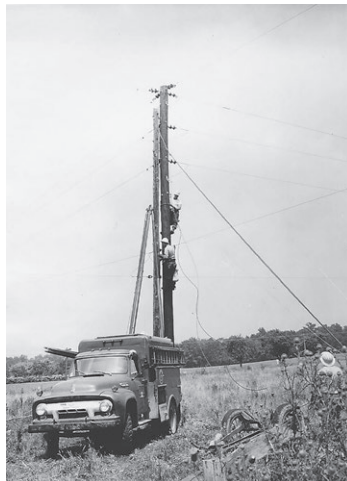
For Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) and other across the country, lineworkers are the first line of defense, restoring power and safety when chaos strikes. Workdays are not predictable for these brave men and women, as each shift brings new challenges and opportunities to make a difference in the communities they are proud to call home.

On brisk mornings, crews gather just as the sun is beginning to rise for their safety briefing; steam rises from the hot coffee in their thermos as the line superintendent outlines the day's jobs and challenges. Together, the crews review their checklists, loading trucks with coils of wire, insulators and tools. As they double-check harnesses and radios, there is an air of focused camaraderie and anticipation.

The tasks ahead might involve threading heavy cable through frost-covered ground, repairing battered transformers, or splicing new line high above swaying treetops — each job requiring precision and teamwork. With everything loaded and ready to go, the crews roll out as the first light edges over the horizon, ready to face whatever the day brings them.

After loading up transformers, poles, wires and hardware, the crew heads into the field, where the real test begins. Before any hands touch the lines, they gather for a tailgate meeting to review hazards, strategize logistics and make detailed plans to ensure everyone's safety.

With dangers ever present — high-voltage electricity, unpredictable weather, and challenging terrain — safety is always the top priority. Detailed protocols are rigorously followed, from lockout/tagout procedures that secure equipment before repairs to the use of insulated sticks and protective gear engineered for high-voltage work.



BLAST FROM THE PAST: Top, Bud Briggs, an early lineman for Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative, stands in front of a service truck in 1956. Left, two linemen work on a pole in 1956. Right, lineworkers set a replacement pole in 1956.

One wrong move can mean disaster

Every lineworker knows the stakes: One wrong move can mean disaster. Yet, in the face of these risks, they build an unbreakable camaraderie, relying on each other with unwavering trust, motivated not only by duty but also by the desire to return home safely to their families. The feeling of respect and dependability in each crew is a fundamental pillar, both on the job and at home.

The truth is, any normal day can turn into an emergency at any moment, causing any or all crews to be dispatched to respond to outages or accidents. Every lineworker is trained to give lifesaving help to one another, as the risk of injury or death is present throughout the day while working with high-voltage power lines.

Beyond battling the elements, lineworkers often find themselves in hard-to-reach places — deep woods, remote fields or tangled rural landscapes. While bucket trucks and digger trucks are standard tools, sometimes the only solution is to climb towering poles, navigating slippery surfaces or uneven ground. These physically demanding situations add another level of risk and require intense focus, agility and strength, especially when working with high-voltage power lines high above the ground.

After hours of grueling, high-stakes work, lineworkers carefully clean up the job site and re-energize lines that have been restored. What does relief look like after 12 hours on

your feet? With the most dangerous tasks behind them, they head back to the cooperative, tired though fulfilled, to unload old equipment, return unused parts and collaborate with the storeroom attendant to prepare for the next challenge.

When the workday finally ends — if it ends — lineworkers cherish precious moments at home, caring for the loved ones who motivate them to return home safely each day. Yet, even in these calm hours, they remain on call. A late-night phone call could mean another emergency: a storm rolling in, winds howling against the house, or a car accident snapping a pole. Downed power lines and hazardous roads are all in a night's work. While the rest of the community sleeps, safe from the fury of Mother Nature, these men and women get up once more, ready to brave the elements for the sake of others.

The quiet heroes

To all the lineworkers who do their jobs tirelessly behind the scenes, we convey our heartfelt appreciation. Your selfless service, resolute courage, and constant commitment keep our homes bright, our families safe, and our communities connected. You are the quiet heroes who answer the call — no matter the time or the weather — and your devotion does not go unnoticed. Thank you for being the backbone of our power and the heart of our community. 🇺🇸



BRAVING THE ELEMENTS: Lineworkers work tirelessly behind the scenes and in the field, through good and bad weather, to ensure the reliability of your power. They are Northwestern REC's first line of defense as they restore power and safety when disaster strikes.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

TIP OF THE MONTH

As we prepare for the seasonal shift, remember to set your ceiling fan rotation accordingly. In winter months (or whenever your home heating system is running), fan blades should rotate clockwise, which produces an updraft that pushes warm air down. In summer months (or whenever your home cooling system is running), blades should rotate counterclockwise, which produces a downdraft or windchill effect that makes you feel cooler. When used correctly, ceiling fans can boost comfort and allow you to adjust the thermostat a few degrees for energy savings.

Source: energy.gov



COFFEE & CONVERSATION

2026 DATES:

ENJOY COFFEE OR BREAKFAST, ASK QUESTIONS, AND GET TO KNOW THE NORTHWESTERN REC TEAM!

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100 WATER ST.
CONNEAUT LAKE
RSVP BY JUNE 16

JULY 22: BEAN & BEAR CAFE
222 W. PLUM ST. #500
EDINBORO
RSVP BY JULY 14

AUG. 19: COUNTRYSIDE GRILLE
10 S. MAIN ST.
UNION CITY
RSVP BY AUG. 11

SEPT. 17: FACTORY RESTAURANT
201 MAIN ST.
SAEGERTOWN
RSVP BY SEPT. 9

DATES ARE STILL BEING ADDED

MORE INFO:
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April District Meetings Reminder

Each event begins with registration at 6 p.m., followed by dinner, presentations, and a business meeting.



District 8 - The Harper Event Venue
13635 Dickson Road, Meadville, PA 16335
RSVP by March 25



District 7 - The Oaks Event Hall
11951 PA 618 Conneaut Lake, PA 16316
RSVP by April 7



District 6 - The Titusville Mill
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Power of Liquid Gold

ANNE M. KIRCHNER

PHOTOS BY ANNE M. KIRCHNER



EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL (EVOO) is a prized possession in many kitchens. Known for its rich, golden color and many health benefits, EVOO is often called “liquid gold.” A quality EVOO has high polyphenol levels, which help balance cholesterol. A simple taste test will identify what to buy. When you experience a peppery or spicy sensation at the back of your throat, search no more!

You can use your chosen EVOO to cook many dishes. Marinated olives offer a refreshing twist for a vegetable tray or charcuterie board. Spanish garlic shrimp showcases liquid gold with a savory, saucy finish. Citrus olive oil cake is easy to make and presents a moist, healthy dessert. 🍷

ANNE M. KIRCHNER focuses her writing on human connections, travel and culinary arts, researching food origins, exploring cooking techniques, and creating new recipes.

MARINATED OLIVES

- 10 ounces queen whole green olives
- 3 cloves garlic, sliced
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil

Drain the olives. Using a small sharp knife, make a cut lengthwise through the pit of each olive. Place the olives in a mason jar. Add the remaining ingredients. Seal the jar and shake to mix. Store the olives in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days. The olive oil will thicken during storage time. Bring the olives to room temperature, about 2 to 3 hours. Drain the olives before serving. *Makes 8 to 10 servings.*



SPANISH GARLIC SHRIMP

- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon dried mustard
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 2 pounds shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 8 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
- 2 teaspoons lemon zest

In a small bowl, combine the sugar, salt and spices. Pat the shrimp dry and season with half the spice mixture. Let the shrimp rest for 10 minutes. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and remaining spice mixture; sauté until fragrant. Add the shrimp and stir often to coat with the spiced oil. Cook the shrimp about 3 minutes; remove from the heat and stir in the lemon juice. Garnish with parsley and lemon zest. Serve with crusty bread to dip in the juices. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*



CITRUS OLIVE OIL CAKE

- 3 large eggs
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 3 teaspoons lemon or orange zest, divided
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup milk
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 4 tablespoons lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Using a mixer, beat the eggs on medium speed. Add the sugar, 1 teaspoon citrus zest and vanilla. Whip until the mixture is smooth and pale yellow. Reduce the mixer speed and slowly add the olive oil and milk. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, baking powder and salt. Add the flour mixture to the eggs and combine on low speed. Pour the batter into a greased 8-inch cake pan. Bake for 45 minutes. Cool the cake for 10 minutes. Invert the cake onto a serving plate. Whisk together the powdered sugar, lemon juice and remaining 2 teaspoons of citrus zest. Brush the top and sides of the cake with the glaze. *Makes 12 to 16 servings.*

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The Art of Letting Go

ABIGAIL ZIEGER

“BYE, BUDDY,” I CALLED to our teenage son with a wave and a smile. He was leaving on a band trip, traveling 18 hours away with nearly 100 other kids. I got in the car, knowing how happy I was for him and honestly not feeling too worried. But as I drove out of the parking lot with the passenger seat empty beside me, I found myself fighting back tears. I berated myself a bit: Why are you crying? He’s been away from home before, and he’s done just fine.

It took me some time to realize that though I would certainly miss him, my tears weren’t about the trip itself. They were about the bigger picture — our son’s inevitable transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The time has gone so quickly, just like all those older women at the grocery store told me it would. Wasn’t it just yesterday I was rocking him in the nursery? Wasn’t it not all that long ago that he rode his bike down the driveway without training wheels? How did we get here, to where he could be perfectly sufficient without us for a week? How could he possibly be so close to being an adult?

The strange part about parenting is we spend 18 years teaching our kids how to leave. Almost everything we teach them is, in some way, about how to be a kind, responsible adult who can manage themselves. Independence is indeed the goal, but in that moment of watching my son get ready to board the bus, I didn’t like it at all.

You can be simultaneously happy for your child while also dying a little bit on the inside. You know these moments of increased independence are all checkpoints along the path to them leading their own lives. Our roles gradually shift. You were once the sole provider who managed minute details about your child’s life, and now you’re a sideline supporter who hopes to maintain some tiny shred of influence.

There are fears that come with letting go, of course. What

kinds of decisions will my child make? How can I prevent the bad stuff from happening? How can I make sure they land on their feet?

And then there’s the sense of loneliness: The house will be too quiet. No more shuttling kids from place to place. No more late-night talks. All my years of caretaking will be over and then what? Where do we go from there?

It would be easy to get lost in the spiral of all the emotions.

And yet, I also firmly believe there is a world of good to come even after our kids grow up and leave the house. Our relationships with our children will evolve and take on new life.

I was reminded of some simple truths: We can’t get time back, but we can be here for our kids now. We can’t control outcomes, but we can love and support our kids no matter what. Our roles may change, but launching our kids into adulthood isn’t a loss — it’s a fulfillment of the work of parenting.

When the bus full of band kids pulled back

into the high school parking lot, and a horde of sleepy teenagers tumbled out, I found our son. “Hey, buddy,” I greeted him, grinning. I felt my perspective shift from worry and loss to hope and pride.

I know there will be more goodbyes to come, and yes, they will be hard. I’ll have to keep waving and smiling and letting go, again and again. But there will also be joy. This is exactly what we’ve been preparing for all this time, and I have these kids to love, no matter how old they are or where they end up. 🎶



ABIGAIL ZIEGER is a music teacher and singer by trade, but also enjoys capturing life experiences through writing. When not singing, teaching or typing, she can be found working in her kitchen, helping her kids with school or consuming copious amounts of coffee. A member of Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, Abigail lives with her husband and four children in northeast Pennsylvania.



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KEEPING THE LINES OPEN: A Conversation Between the Generations



BRANDON HURLEY

2024 Youth Tour Student and Former
Youth Leadership Council Representative,
Pennsylvania

***Editor's note:** In celebration of Penn Lines' 60th anniversary, we asked a recent Youth Tour student to interview a former participant. The result is this article written by 19-year-old Brandon Hurley about Michael Knapp, both of whom represented Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative on the trip — one in 2024, and the other in 1975.*

WHEN YOUNG MICHAEL KNAPP STEPPED off his bus into our nation's capital, his "eyes popped" at seeing the difference between his hometown in rural Pennsylvania and the "beautiful town of D.C."

It was the mid-1970s, and Knapp, a high school junior from Somerset County, had arrived in the city for the Rural Electric Youth Tour.

Little did he know that trip would have a tremendous impact on his life, and the city would become central to his life.

'Very fortunate'

Youth Tour, an annual trip for high school juniors who live in cooperative communities, has been around for almost 70 years with the goal of sending rural students to the nation's capital to learn about government and rural electrification. In that time, nearly 100,000 students have gotten the chance to participate in this experience and witness where history is made.

In 1975, Knapp was given the opportunity to attend

Youth Tour through Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC). When his guidance counselor at Shade-Central City High School handed him the application, his first thoughts were that it would be "a good trip to spend a week, all paid, to learn about Washington, D.C., government and to meet a bunch of people from across the country."

He was one of four students chosen from 12 applicants, something he felt "very fortunate about."

Lobsters and learning

With such a long-running program, shifts and changes are bound to happen. However, one thing that has remained the same is that students still travel to D.C.

Knapp left the cooperative headquarters in Somerset for Breezewood, where he boarded a tour bus that eventually took him and his fellow Youth Tour students to the nation's capital.

One thing that stuck out to him? Having lobster for the first time. Under the instruction to "order whatever you want," Knapp and his peers chose to dine on lobster at Phillips Seafood House. He described the experience as "fun and enjoyable" — and that was just the beginning of his experiences in D.C.

"There were all kinds of mixers and events and dances," he says. "I saw a lot of good in our nation's capital: in things to do, places to go and things to see."

At these events, Knapp met students from across the

country, something he spoke quite highly about, noting that many different people from many different walks of life were there.

“You learned, though, that they weren’t that different,” he says.

A camaraderie developed, Knapp says, and there was a sense that even though students differed in some ways, they were similar and united in others — another thing that hasn’t changed about Youth Tour.

Much like today’s Youth Tour, students in 1975 were given opportunities to explore the city and learn about the very cooperatives that sent them there. Then and now, students are educated about the importance of cooperatives to our nation and how the federal government stepped in to help farmers and their neighbors take rural America out of the darkness.

“Rural electrification really helped to improve the lives of residents,” he says.

A defining fact about the 1975 Youth Tour is that it occurred before the age of cellphones. That meant students had no contact with their family back home during the week. Knapp found that helpful in connecting with others.

“You had to have face-to-face conversations,” he says.

Life after Youth Tour

Knapp has since applied the skills and lessons he learned during Youth Tour to his life, both professionally and personally.

After returning from Youth Tour, he entered his senior year of high school, and thus, his senior football season. Being the oldest of 10, he was told by his father that “if you are going to make a better life, you need to go get an education.” Knapp worked extremely hard for that, receiving scholarship offers from around the country before settling on the U.S. Military Academy, more commonly known as West Point.

When he graduated from West Point, he worked on getting his flight training, which then allowed him to fly reconnaissance and command the border pilots along the Iron Curtain as an Army Aviator. Knapp was also an Airborne Ranger and earned the Master Army Aviator distinction. From there, he became a flight instructor and later pursued a master’s degree and doctorate in chemistry from Penn State University. He then taught at West Point, his alma mater.

In 1994, Knapp was accepted into the U.S. Army’s Army Astronaut Program, a huge achievement considering only one officer is chosen each year. Joining the astronaut office’s development branch, he helped on significant projects, including the International Space Station’s



A TRIP BACK IN TIME: Michael Knapp, right, is shown with fellow Youth Tour students from Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative in 1975. They are, from left, Donna Landis, Wayne Speigle and Joseph Bertdini III.

microgravity science glove box; the alpha-magnetic spectrometer, which continues to fly on the space station today; the repair of the Hubble Space Telescope; and the testing of the space shuttle’s glass cockpit. He later became involved in the Unmanned Space Program, working on military planes and satellites.

Knapp says the benefits of Youth Tour didn’t stop when he left Washington. He used the knowledge he gained on the trip when he would visit the city and even when he lived there. A lesson about lobbying helped when he needed to secure federal funding for many programs, including development of a commercial downlink system.

“It was an incredible exposure,” he says.

‘You’re part of this’

His message to students considering Youth Tour is one word: “Go,” he says. “It was an exceptional opportunity to learn the value of co-ops and the services they provide.”

Knapp gave the same advice to his own four children, three of whom also participated in Youth Tour. All of them are now in the military, with one being a major, two being captains, and one who just finished flight school.

As for Knapp, he’s come full circle. Now retired, he lives in Somerset County and is once again a member of Somerset REC, which for more than five decades has played an important role in his life.

“You’re not a customer, you’re a member” he says. “You’re part of this.”

And it all started with Youth Tour. 📍



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Brandon Hurley represented Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative on the 2024 Youth Tour, where he was picked by his peers to represent Pennsylvania on the prestigious Youth Leadership Council. Brandon is a student at Penn State University, where he is majoring in cybersecurity, analytics, and operations, with minors in security and risk analysis, information sciences and technology, and film.

Birds and Your Windows

GEORGE WEIGEL

JUST ABOUT EVERYONE HAS HEARD that sudden thud of a bird crashing into a window.

While it may seem like an isolated incident, a new study from Allentown’s Muhlenberg College estimates up to 3.5 billion birds die each year in glass collisions in the United States.

That number could be even higher: Muhlenberg researchers found half of bird-window collisions leave no measurable evidence and only about 14% of such crashes result in immediate bird death.

Although bird-window collisions occur throughout the year, spring and early fall — when migrant birds are on the move — are prime times for injuries and deaths.

In Pennsylvania, the study revealed more than a dozen species of birds, including mourning doves, downy woodpeckers, red-winged blackbirds, northern cardinals, dark-eyed juncos and Cooper’s hawks, struck observed windows.

The basic problem is that birds

don’t “understand” glass.

Depending on the light situation, they see either reflected nature or a transparent opening.

“Shiny glass exteriors, internal plants near windows, glass corners, and greenery close to buildings can all be deadly as birds are unable to distinguish reflection from open flyway,” warns the Audubon Society.

Artificial lighting at night also disorients birds. Nighttime is when birds are often on the move because they use stars to navigate, are at lesser risk from predators and use fewer calories when flying because it’s cooler.

Birds have flexible necks and seldom die of broken necks in window collisions. Rather, birds often die from internal injuries.

Muhlenberg’s research shows that low-rise commercial buildings (four stories or less) account for the greatest number (54%) of bird-glass deaths, followed closely by residential homes at 45%.

The good news is this problem has simple, inexpensive solutions, either by physically preventing birds from flying into windows or treating windows to make them visible to birds.

“If your window can support a window screen, install them for year-round protection,” says Zach Richard, past president of the Appalachian Audubon Society, based in Cumberland County. “If not, you can choose your treatment method based on price, from virtually free options like using a bar of soap to draw lines no more than 2 inches apart on the exterior of your window to more permanent, professional-looking solutions like dot-pattern stickers and tape.”

Exterior window screens are ideally

WHAT TO DO IF A BIRD STRIKES YOUR WINDOW AND IS UNABLE TO FLY AWAY?

The Appalachian Audubon Society advises using a towel to collect the bird and place it in a paper bag or cardboard box with holes. Secure the container and keep it in a warm, dark, quiet place away from activity. After that, contact the nearest wildlife rehabilitation facility. Find more information at appalachianaudubon.org.

installed at least 5 inches from the windows. An alternative is hanging netting in front of windows.

Treatments of existing windows involve a variety of options — mostly quick, inexpensive, do-it-yourself adjustments. The Bird-Window Collision Working Group, which includes Muhlenberg College and the Audubon Society, suggests:

- ▶ Closing blinds or curtains whenever possible/practical.
- ▶ Moving interior plants away from windows.
- ▶ Adding films, stickers, strings or other materials to create patterns on the exterior glass.
- ▶ Painting patterns on windows using tempera paint or paint markers (a fun project for kids).
- ▶ Installing commercial products made specifically to prevent bird-window collisions.

All of these tactics are also helpful for the less-fatal but often-annoying habit of birds incessantly pecking on windows because they see their own reflection and are trying to fend off the “intruder.” 🐦

GEORGE WEIGEL is a retired horticulturist, author of two books about gardening in Pennsylvania, and garden columnist for *The Patriot-News/PennLive.com* in Harrisburg.

GEORGE WEIGEL



BIRD BRAINS: Plants inside and around windows can contribute to birds striking windows.

The Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA)
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The Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) Scholarship Trust Fund proudly presents the

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QUESTIONS:

Steph Okuniewski, *Member Engagement Specialist*
Stephanie_Okuniewski@prea.com
717.982.1455



The Junk Drawer

JOHN KASUN

MY WIFE IS A TRULY GIFTED home decorator and a very fussy housekeeper. She also denies any responsibility for the condition of my home office and insists the door be closed if we have visitors. Because I write on multiple subjects for numerous publications, my office is pretty much filled with reference materials — magazines, newspapers, catalogs, instruction books, and a variety of samples of outdoor gear, including bows, firearms, deer calls, cameras, boots, clothing, and an occasional tree stand.

While my office may appear disorganized to the untrained eye, I know exactly where everything is located (most of the time). However, if something gets misplaced, it can create a problem.

Recently, I remembered receiving the registration for my truck, but my checking account did not indicate I had mailed the fee into the state. Time was running out, and before long I would be driving without a current registration card. I definitely recalled clipping the registration paperwork for my truck to my wife's car registration, along with the new tags for the boat and canoe as well as the boat trailer and utility trailer. I thought it was smart to keep them all together, not thinking that I could also misplace them all together, which is exactly what happened.

It was panic time. I knew I had to go through my office and get organized to find the registrations. The old magazines and newspapers were the first to hit the trash. Next came all the discount coupons for restaurants that I intended to use but never did. Offers from local used car dealers who needed my truck were next. All of this was easy to sort as most had expired in 2025, if not 2024. With all that gone, I was left with stacks of important personal documents — household and business receipts, which I should have filed a year ago. That was not too hard to handle; I just stacked them up and would file them later. Next came numerous scraps of paper, index cards, small notebooks and a beehive of those little, yellow Post-it notes.

I often make numerous notations of facts, quotes, names or phone numbers on any scrap of paper within reach. As I pored through this mountain of information, I stared at names and numbers I did not recognize. At one time, they must have been important, so I put them in a large manila envelope until I get a chance to sort them out. I know I will spend several hours calling numbers I do not recognize asking for names that don't sound familiar in an attempt to put my life back together. If the information on those scraps of paper was important enough to jot down, it must be too important to throw away without investigation.



With everything pretty much sorted, the last place to look was my junk drawer, which was like opening a buried treasure chest. I found two watches needing batteries, an outdated cellphone, several pairs of glasses I intended to donate to the Lions Club when I got a new pair more than a year ago, a box of incorrect address labels and a USB cable for a printer we tossed out months ago. Trapped between a stack of computer screen cleaning pads I couldn't find last week and an old, unmarked hard drive, I spotted a stack of envelopes clipped together —

it was all the new vehicle registrations.

My wife had told me to check my junk drawer three hours ago. I guess she was right. But why do I even have a junk drawer? Do I have so much stuff that I need a special drawer for my junk? My wife pleaded with me to clean up my office and get organized, and I promised to do so. However, first I need to pull all those old magazines, newspapers and other stuff out of the trash to make certain I don't need any of them for future reference.

I guess I could put all the important stuff in my junk drawer. 🗑️

JOHN KASUN, a lifelong Pennsylvanian with more than 30 years of writing experience, looks for the humor in everyday life and then tells a story from that perspective. He is a member of Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.

Spring Has Sprung

NOW THAT THE CALENDAR HAS turned to April, it's (mostly) safe to say that the worst of the winter weather is behind us and warmer, sunnier days are here. Be it a bed of flowers or a precarious pup, signs of the new season are everywhere. Do you have any seasonal scenes you care to share? Submit them to our 2026 Rural Reflections contest. See the entry information below. 📷



JENA SHIPLEY • SOMERSET REC



JOHN HEYLER • TRI-COUNTY REC



LINDA LAKE • ADAMS ELECTRIC



MARY LOU GROSS • WARREN ELECTRIC

How to enter

TO SUBMIT ENTRIES, email your photos (no more than five digital images per person, per year) to photos@prea.com or send prints to Penn Lines Photos, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA, 17108-1266. With your entries, be sure to include your name, address, daytime phone number and the name of the rural electric cooperative that serves your residence, business or seasonal home.

Remember, our publication deadlines require that we work ahead, so send your seasonal photos to us early. We need summer photos before mid-May, fall photos before mid-July and winter photos before mid-September. *Please note:* Starting this year, we will not be returning any physical photos mailed to our office. Therefore, if you mail a photo, please make sure it's a print, not an original.

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