

MARCH 2026

# PENNLINES

## More Than a Meal

Co-op Communities Deliver Help for the Hungry

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KaTona Loncar, a volunteer with New Hope Ministries in Dillsburg, York County, stocks the food pantry's shelves with donations.

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Kati Miller, right, a Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) employee, delivers a donation of meat to Shawnel Toomey of the Center for Family Services in Meadville. Northwestern REC is among the cooperatives statewide helping to put food on community members' tables.

# Affordability and the Cooperative Mission



**STEVE BRAME**

**THE PRICE OF ENERGY TOOK CENTER STAGE** in Gov. Josh Shapiro's recent budget address — and for good reason. Electricity costs are squeezing families and small businesses across Pennsylvania.

The governor's point: Affordability has to be more than a talking point. He wants utilities — specifically, for-profit investor-owned and private power companies — to be more transparent about what's driving their bills. He also wants them to face tougher scrutiny of charges, profits and add-on fees that can quietly push costs higher so Pennsylvanians aren't paying for anything that doesn't directly support reliable service.

While this may be a new approach for these utilities, driven by a directive from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's rural electric cooperatives have been practicing this members-first, cost-conscious way of doing business — voluntarily — for nearly 100 years.

Serving members is the primary reason electric cooperatives exist, and it shows up in their day-to-day decisions, where three things are fundamental. Electric service has to be safe. It has to be reliable. And it has to be affordable because electricity isn't optional for any household, farm, or small business trying to make ends meet.

The co-op model is built this way and continues to thrive in the 21st century for one good reason: Electric cooperatives are owned by the very people they serve. Boards are elected from the membership. Directors live in the communities they represent. Many employees are co-op members, too.

That local accountability has always been at the heart of the cooperative story. It shapes how cooperatives do business, how they serve their members — and how they work together to keep electricity affordable.

In the early days, local electric cooperatives across the state faced numerous challenges in bringing power to their communities. Instead of going it alone, those local co-ops formed the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association in 1942 to represent their shared interests, strengthen their collective voice, and provide services that would help each cooperative operate more efficiently.

Eighty years ago, they took that cooperation a step further and created their own generation and transmission organization, Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny) in response to the excessive wholesale rates private, for-profit power companies were charging them. By banding together to procure their own needs through Allegheny, they ensured that decisions about power supply were made with local interests in mind. That structure continues today, with affordability — not profit — driving those decisions.

In fact, for decades, cooperatives have been doing all the things the governor recently urged electric distribution companies to work on, including planning responsibly, operating efficiently, and staying accountable to the people at the end of the line.

In the co-op world, every electric bill represents a real household making real choices. This is a fact cooperative leaders understand deeply, and it's why affordability remains front and center, even when the path is complicated and it results in market-driven rate increases.

Affordability may be getting more attention in 2026, but for electric cooperatives it has always been part of the mission. Serving members is the purpose. Local accountability is the foundation. And the focus stays the same: safe, reliable electricity at the lowest, reasonable cost.

That is what members deserve — and that is what electric cooperatives work to deliver. 📧

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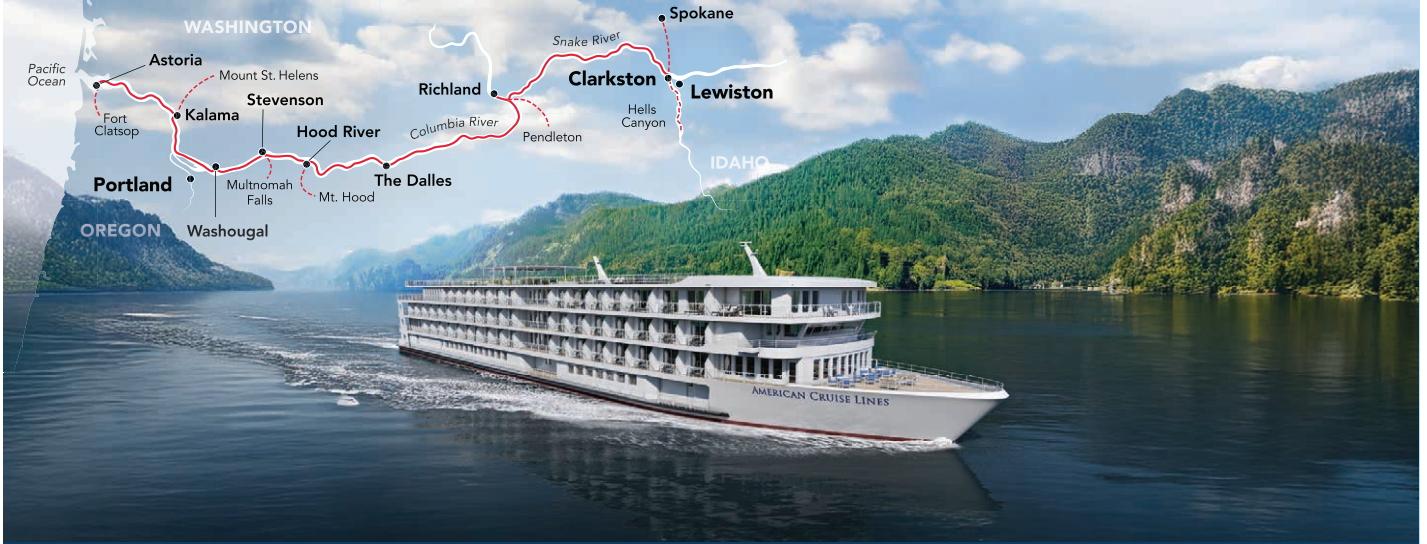
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## TURN THE PAGE ON DOOMSCROLLING

My mother loves flipping through magazines, especially if the Royal Family is involved. Unfortunately, even *Penn Lines* takes a back seat to the House of Windsor. Lately, though, she's been doing less page-turning and more scrolling, thanks to a new tablet.

Recently, that scrolling left her a little shaken after she came across a story about a devastating earthquake in California. Only, there was no earthquake. Somewhere in her social media feed, she had clicked on an AI-generated video made to grab her attention. After a bit of searching, I had to gently explain to my 85-year-old mother that not everything on the internet is real.

My mother's experience reflects a habit that has quietly taken hold of many of us:

doomscrolling – that act of compulsively flicking through our social media feeds, consuming one alarming story after another, unable to stop. We tell ourselves we're just checking the news, but before we know it, we've spent an hour spiraling through content that leaves us anxious and exhausted.



As a survival instinct, humans are hardwired to pay attention to threats and bad news. Social media platforms have tapped into this evolutionary trait, using it to keep our attention fixed on a relentless stream of outrage, disaster, and controversy – something our brains and bodies were not meant to handle. Add autoplay videos, AI-generated stories, and infinite scrolling, and we find ourselves trapped in an endless cycle of anxiety and compulsive clicking that's hard to escape.

Recent studies suggest roughly two-thirds of Americans admit to this digital habit. Health experts warn that prolonged exposure to distressing content contributes to declining mental and physical well-being. They suggest establishing digital boundaries: turning off notifications, limiting screen time, or putting the phone away. They also recommend seeking out local or community-focused news, which tends to be more uplifting and less gloomy. Better yet, pick up a magazine and read without digital distractions.

And there's a great place to do just that: *Penn Lines*. Sure, it might not feature the House of Windsor (*sorry, Mom*), but holding a magazine can have a ritual, calming effect. It's intentional reading, where the simple gesture of turning the page moves you forward, one story at a time. Scrolling, on the other hand, too often just pulls you down.

**PETER A. FITZGERALD**  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



**NO CHANGE – YET:** The Pennsylvania Game Commission recently voted to tentatively keep the start date for firearms white-tailed deer season as the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Some have asked to move it to the Saturday before Thanksgiving. The commission will make a final decision on the issue in April.

### ON THE HUNT

#### Pa. Game Commission eyeing same start date for upcoming deer season

The Pennsylvania Game Commission recently voted 6-3 to tentatively keep the start date for firearms white-tailed deer season where it has been in past years — the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Before the vote, there was hope among hunters that the date could be moved a week earlier — or the Saturday before Thanksgiving; however, commissioners decided they would like to examine more data and revisit the proposition before making a final decision.

As a result, the public is invited to submit comments on the move before the commission's next meeting, April 10 and 11, during which it is slated to finalize the 2026-2027 hunting seasons and bag limits. If the commission decides to not change its mind in April, the dates for white-tailed deer season would be Nov. 28 to Dec. 13.

Hunters attended the meeting to urge an earlier start to the season, arguing the current timeline forces

them to choose between spending time with their families or spending time hunting. Since the vote, many have taken to voicing their opposing opinions online.

#### NO. 1 WITH A BULLET Report: Pennsylvania grabs top spot in buck harvests per square mile

Pennsylvania hunters rejoice: The Commonwealth is one of the best places in the country for deer hunting.

According to a 2026 report from the National Deer Association (NDA), Pennsylvania took the nation's top spot for most antlered bucks harvested per square mile. The report states that in the Keystone State, 3.9 bucks were harvested. Nearby Maryland finished with 3.3 per square mile.

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania was listed as second in the country for antlered buck harvests with 175,280. Texas took the top spot with 424,529, and Wisconsin ranked third at 162,336.

The NDA works with wildlife agencies across the country,

including the Pennsylvania Game Commission, to compile the report. To learn more about the study, visit [deerassociation.com/2026-deer-report](http://deerassociation.com/2026-deer-report).

### ALL CLEANED UP

## Once polluted, Conestoga River transforms, earns prestigious title

A once-polluted river recently earned 2026 River of the Year honors after a public vote that included thousands of participants. The Conestoga River, a 61.6-mile-long tributary that primarily flows through the center of Lancaster County, received 2,510 out of the 5,604 total votes cast.

“This river is an example of what can happen when we prioritize clean, healthy waterways,” said Cindy Adams Dunn, secretary of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). “Its transformation has made the Conestoga a hub for outdoor recreation, providing a boost to the region and demonstrating that rivers build thriving communities.”

The Lower Schuylkill River,

which runs from Phoenixville to Philadelphia, finished in second place with 2,312 votes, while Chillisquaque Creek in Montour and Northumberland counties received 782 votes for third place.

As a result of the win, the Conestoga River Club, which nominated the waterway, will receive a \$15,000 grant to fund activities throughout the year.

### NO BABIES ON BOARD

## Warren General Hospital ends labor, delivery services

With the announcement that Warren General Hospital in Warren County ended in-patient labor and delivery services in January, there are now eight counties in northwestern Pennsylvania without a hospital where women can give birth.

The decision to end the services at Warren General came after one of its two OBGYNs decided to leave the practice, and officials spent more than a year trying to fill the position. Warren County, part of Warren Electric Cooperative’s service territory, is now the latest addition to the region’s expanding maternity-care desert. 📍

## TIME LINES



MARCH 2016

A decade ago, *Penn Lines* examined both the future and the reliability of the nation’s electric grid. In doing so, the magazine looked back at some of the most important blackouts in North American history, including the Great Northeast Blackout of 1965 and a blackout in 2003 that affected more than 50 million people in the Northeast and Midwest. Ten years later, it serves as a reminder of how important grid reliability continues to be in the modern day.



CIMLG.ORG



### GO BACK IN TIME

Have you ever wanted to experience frontier life? The Revolutionary Homestead in Mercersburg, Franklin County, has you covered. The program – held 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each Saturday in March at The Conococheague Institute – focuses on hearth cooking, sewing, leatherwork and indoor crafts. Learn more at [cimlg.org](http://cimlg.org).

### LUCK O’ THE DRAW

Learn about leprechauns at the Dietrich Theater in downtown Tunkhannock, Wyoming County, with storyteller Hal Pratt. He’ll be answering all questions about these mischievous faeries from Irish folklore starting at 11 a.m. March 14. Admission is free. Learn more at [dietrichtheater.com](http://dietrichtheater.com).

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### SATURDAY SIPS

Wine, whiskey and brews will be available at 25 locations in downtown Bedford as part of the Wine and Spirits Walk from 1 to 5 p.m. March 21. Advance tickets are \$25 and \$30 the day of the walk. For more information, go to [downtownbedford.com](http://downtownbedford.com).

### HAIL TO THE HOME SHOW

Celebrate the arrival of the spring home improvement season at the Erie Home Show, March 20 to 22, at the Bayfront Convention Center. Children 10 and under are free, while an adult day pass is \$7. Among the event’s features is a Master Gardener’s seminar series. Learn more at [eriepromotions.com/erie-home-and-garden](http://eriepromotions.com/erie-home-and-garden).



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# MORE than a MEAL

## Co-op Communities Deliver Help for the Hungry

**PAULA PIATT**

*Penn Lines Contributor*



### **AMBER TILL CHERISHES HER \$20 BUNCH OF BASIL.**

The director of communications for Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative in Crawford County, Till will often roll up to one of the area's Pay-What-You-Can Farmstands and ... pay what she can.

To some, \$20 for a handful of basil may seem outrageous. Not in this case, she says, noting the operators of the farmstand network use the money they make to buy fresh produce from local farmers and then provide affordable — sometimes free — food to the public.

"I'll go and get what I need and then give them whatever cash I have in my wallet," Till says, recognizing her responsibility to do what she can to make sure others — children, in particular — aren't going hungry.

She's been one of those kids.



**CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY:** When it comes to feeding the hungry in their communities, it's a group effort for co-ops and their members. Above, Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) member Stephanie Thauer, center, started the Pay-What-You-Can Farmstand network to offer affordable locally grown produce in the region. At right, Tri-County REC employee Joseph Kyler unloads potatoes at the Mansfield Food Pantry that were donated by board Chair Valery Robbins and her husband, Chris, owners of Barnett Farms in Potter County.



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“I grew up as a food pantry kid. My folks didn’t have a whole lot of money, and I remember eating spaghetti rings out of a can,” Till says. “We were free-lunch kids when I grew up in the ’80s and ’90s. And so, for me, food insecurity is huge.”

As it is for so many Pennsylvanians.

## A growing hunger

According to the nonprofit Feeding America, a nationwide network of food banks, food pantries and local meal programs, there was a 40% increase in food insecurity in the Keystone State from 2021 to 2023.

“That’s pretty significant,” says Lauren Duff, chief public affairs officer for Feeding Pennsylvania, a Feeding America partner. “We’re back up to levels of food insecurity from the worst of the pandemic.”

Things were already at crisis levels, Duff says, before last year’s interruption of funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Cuts were also made to two critical federal food assistance programs. The cancellation of \$6 million in Emergency Food Assistance Program shipments meant the loss of more than 1 million meals in Philadelphia alone. And a \$13 million cut in the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program not only impacted local food pantries, which were unable to purchase fresh food, but also affected the farmers who produce and supply it.

Even as SNAP benefits have returned, food banks and pantries throughout the state are seeing more clients.

“The demand is still higher than it was before [SNAP benefits were halted],” says Duff, theorizing that people have now discovered the additional help. “Folks who were just like barely scraping by with their SNAP benefits are now realizing they can supplement with help from their local pantry.”

One in eight Pennsylvanians experiences food insecurity — a government term used to describe those who don’t have enough to eat and don’t know where their next meal will come from, according to Feeding Pennsylvania. The organization helps by annually distributing more than 230 million pounds of food to 2,750 agencies and food pantries in all 67 counties. It is, to be sure, an important foundation for feeding Pennsylvanians.

Look a little more closely, however, and you’ll see an almost invisible network of other helpers. Throughout the

state, rural electric cooperatives — already designed to reach into the nooks and crannies of Pennsylvania’s 46,000 square miles — are bringing more than electricity to homes. With





**NEW DONATIONS FOR NEW HOPE:** Above, as part of its 85th anniversary celebration in 2025, Adams Electric Cooperative asked members attending its drive-thru events to bring food and other donations to support its charitable partner, New Hope Ministries, based in York County. Employees, from left, are: Dan Leonard, Alexis Coscia-Kranias, Georgie Drowsky, Max Rinehart, CEO/General Manager Steve Rasmussen, Tony Spangler, Lisa Willet, Adam Willman and Dan Seibert. At right, New Hope Ministries Program Manager Sue Fornicola works closely with the co-op staff on a handful of community service projects.

“concern for community” as one of seven core cooperative principles, they and their members are leading food initiatives in every corner of the Commonwealth.

### **‘The cooperative always wants to give back’**

In south-central Pennsylvania, Adams Electric Cooperative in Gettysburg has built a unique partnership with New Hope Ministries that provides multiple opportunities to help people in the co-op’s service territory, which covers Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, York and Perry counties.

“They have a passion and a heart for the communities we work with,” Program Director Sue Fornicola says of the group’s relationship with Adams Electric. In 2024, for instance, the co-op created a Hardship Fund through New Hope Ministries that’s supported by donations from the utility and its consumers. The financial assistance, up to \$500 a year, helps eligible co-op members pay their electric bill, freeing up funds for other necessities like food.

And the cooperative helps with that, too.

Last year, as part of its 85th anniversary celebration, Adams Electric asked members attending its drive-thru events to bring food and other donations.

“New Hope has been a huge partner of ours in the community,” says Kami Noel, Adams’ communications/member relations coordinator. “This was a way that we could finally give something back to that organization.”

Additional donations and sponsorships from the co-op have helped LifePath Christian Ministries in York County

provide food for holiday meals and other resources for families. They have also allowed the Adams County Farmers Market to offer shoppers free or reduced-price resources.

Statewide, similar scenarios are playing out.

“Being part of a small community, the cooperative always wants to give back,” Sullivan County REC CEO John Lykens says of his employees’ food drive last year. He and 18 other staffers not only fed a family at Thanksgiving, but they also gathered items for the Sullivan County Food Pantry.

In neighboring Tioga County, Tri-County REC collected food and monetary donations to support the Mansfield Food Pantry and provided manpower for deliveries. The potatoes included in the donation were supplied by Board Chairman Valery Robbins, who owns and operates Barnett Farms with her husband, Chris.

Last year, Indiana, Pa.-based REA Energy gave financial donations to several area food banks, and Somerset REC asks members to bring food donations to its Member Appreciation Day, held each October. Staff then delivers the items to community food banks. Nearby New Enterprise REC invites members to bring non-perishable food to its annual meeting drive-thru, which also supports local food pantries.

### **A group effort**

These acts of giving are a normal part of cooperative life that also trickle down to co-op members, who are just as committed to embracing the concern for community principle.

As the saying goes: It's a group effort.

When the Tussey Mountain girls varsity basketball team in Bedford County hosted an open practice to kick off the 2025-2026 season, players encouraged the public to bring non-perishable food items.

The donations stocked the school's pantry, which is open to students on weekends and over long school breaks to supplement food needs. Like many school districts around the state, Tussey Mountain, located in territories served by New Enterprise REC and Valley REC, also offers a Weekend Backpack Program for elementary students that helps fill the gap when school meals aren't available.

"This was right before Thanksgiving, so it worked out great," says Brianna Gabrielson, a 17-year-old senior and team captain, whose parents, Angie and Eric, are Valley REC members. "And it's just a really great example of the kind of values that have been instilled in us and the values we want to carry with us after high school and into the real world: being generous, being compassionate, and thinking of other people before yourself."

When the evening was over, food filled the tables.

"It was an eye-opener when we got all the food together in the center of the gym," junior Hillary Horton says. "We got to see how many people we'd be helping; we know that a lot of people struggle, and we wanted to take the opportunity to use what we were given to help people."

It was an opportunity, says Gabrielson, that might not have been obvious.

"It wouldn't have been my first thought," she says of using a basketball practice to support others, "but there's always a way to help somebody else. Sometimes, it takes a little bit of creativity."

Just ask Stephanie Thauer, a Crawford County farmer and Northwestern REC member who wanted to provide the public with fresh, affordable food while also helping area farmers.

"There are a lot of areas in the City of Erie and in nearby rural communities that just don't have grocery stores or fresh food vendors," says Thauer, adding that one barrier local farmers face is being able to work on the farm while still having time to sell their goods.

She, along with fellow farmer Stephanie Ciner, created the Pay-What-You-Can Farmstand network in Erie County. Volunteers collect the produce from farmers and distribute it among seven sites — six in the City of Erie and one in Edinboro. Last year, 30,800 pounds of produce went to 4,300 people, all using the pay-what-you-can model.

The farmstands, according to the network's website, "allow individuals the dignity of contributing if they can, and freely sharing with those who cannot." In addition to access to fresh locally grown food, the farmstands offer seedlings (and growing instructions) so people can raise their own veggies. Thauer and Ciner also encourage local gardeners to share their overabundance.

Each stand accepts vouchers, SNAP benefits, cash and credit/debit cards. The average donation is about \$2, and

*Continued on page 27*



**STOCKING THE SHELVES:** More than 425 Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative members donated an abundance of non-perishable items for the Confluence Food Bank during last year's Member Appreciation Day. Above, co-op employee Jarrod Putman, left, and food bank volunteer Charles Younkin fill up carts of donated items.



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## Distribution Automation Keeps Power Flowing, Outages at Bay

CATHY CASH

**STAYING ONLINE**, uninterrupted by a power glitch, seems more important than ever, and today it's even more possible, thanks to advanced energy technologies that can instantly rearrange electricity flows to areas hit by storms or other disturbances.

Distribution automation (DA) refers to a powerful set of tools that includes automated sensors, communications systems, and data analytics, enabling electric utilities to monitor power lines, field equipment, and generation facilities in real time. You may have read about systems that use DA, such as SCADA — supervisory control and data acquisition — in previous issues of *Penn Lines*.

Several Pennsylvania cooperatives have started adopting some of these tools, which help them detect an outage and isolate it in real-time from their control rooms before sending out field crews.

“Distribution automation helps electric co-ops deliver reliable, high-quality service to members when today’s world demands it most,” says Ravindra Singh, senior principal of DA for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Some call DA a “self-healing electric grid.” Through its FLISR application — that’s fault location, isolation and service restoration — the network of power lines and substations can automatically reconfigure in response to disruptions.

When power lines are damaged or shorted by storms, critters, or some disaster, DA systems can reroute electricity from the power source to unaffected infrastructure. This allows electric service to continue uninterrupted to a community that would otherwise suffer an outage.



STACY HILLIARD, REA ENERGY COOPERATIVE

**HELPFUL AUTOMATION:** REA Energy Cooperative employees monitor the electric distribution system from their control center in Indiana, Pa. With distribution automation technology and its analysis of network data, cooperatives can see their system’s assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability. Shown, from left, are: Nick Hartman, manager of engineering; Zachary Barrett, electrical distribution design engineer; and James Horwat, electrical engineer.

DA not only has a hand in preventing outages, but this suite of technologies can save electric cooperatives and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatus, such as transformers, substations, and power lines.

With real-time field measurements from DA technologies, a cooperative gains situational awareness of its electricity network and can minimize unnecessary maintenance activities, truck rolls, and crew dispatches to examine lines, locate damage, or make repairs.

“Power distribution grids are evolving from being a passive network to a more active network,” Singh says. “With DA technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system’s assets, how they are operating, and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability.”

Without DA, a cooperative may not know where electric vehicles (EVs),

rooftop solar, residential batteries, generators, and other distribution resources are being added or operated on its system by members. This can be a challenge when it comes to managing peak demand and having to curtail energy to sustain reliability.

Electricity demand is only going to grow because of new types of loads, such as data centers, crypto mining and EVs, according to industry forecasts, so it makes sense for utilities to optimize the use of their existing infrastructure and equipment to keep costs in check.

With DA, electric cooperatives can better manage and grow their systems and respond to crises safely and efficiently while their members enjoy reliable electricity without hiccups. 📺

\*\*\*

**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.

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## Should I Upgrade My Appliance?

MIRANDA BOUTELLE

**BUYING A NEW APPLIANCE** can feel daunting. Before you hand over your hard-earned money, here's how to choose one that will help you save money over time.

When shopping, keep in mind that not all new appliances are high efficiency and not all old appliances are inefficient. The less efficient your current appliance, the more you will save with an upgrade. The yellow EnergyGuide label on new appliances shows the yearly energy cost, kilowatt-hour (kWh) electricity use and Energy Star® logo, if certified.

Let's look at some appliance examples to see how the costs and savings stack up.

**Refrigerators** have seen major efficiency improvements over the years. New refrigerators use up to 73% less energy than 1970s models

and about a third less than 20-year-old models.

On a visit to my mom's house, she proudly showed off her 1980s refrigerator she bought when her 1970s harvest gold model died. If her '80s fridge uses 2,000 kWh per year, at 14 cents per kWh, it costs \$280 per year to operate. New Energy Star-certified refrigerator prices start at \$500 with yearly energy costs ranging from \$38 to \$122. If mom buys a new Energy Star-certified refrigerator for \$1,000 with \$100 yearly energy costs — saving her \$180 per year — it will pay for itself in about 5½ years.

If you intend to keep your old appliance, be sure to weigh the additional energy costs. Maximize efficiency and keep your food safe by setting your refrigerator to 37 degrees and your freezer at 0 degrees.

New Energy Star-certified **clothes washers and dryers** are also more efficient than older models. Use the Energy Star Product Finder at [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) to compare products. The integrated modified energy factor measures the washer's energy efficiency. A higher number is better. The integrated water factor measures water efficiency. A lower number is better.

I recently bought a new washing machine when my old front-load machine died. I was considering a top-load machine, but I changed my mind when I compared Energy Star-certified top loaders to front loaders. Energy Star-certified front loaders use about 50% less energy and water than top-load agitator washers and about 25% less energy and water than top-load impeller washers that don't have an agitator.

My new washer cost \$698. According to the appliance's EnergyGuide, based on six loads of laundry a week and an electricity cost of 14 cents per

kWh, the yearly energy cost is \$15. The energy cost for a similar non-Energy Star-certified model is \$48 per year.

Then I had to make the decision about buying the matching dryer. My dryer was functional but had features I didn't like. At 14 cents per kWh and running roughly six loads a week for an hour each, my old dryer used energy that cost \$131 per year.

The new matching Energy Star-certified dryer cost \$698 and uses an estimated 607 kWh per year, which is \$84.98 per year at 14 cents per kWh. With an estimated savings of \$46 per year, the dryer would take 15 years for the savings to cover the price. That's a long time and not worth the cost.

To improve your washer and dryer efficiency, wash in cold water, don't over-dry clothes, and clean your lint trap between every load.

Just like the lightbulbs in your home, **LED televisions** offer increased efficiency. Energy Star-certified televisions are 34% more efficient than conventional models. If you have a working LED television, swapping to an Energy Star model is more efficient but may not make up for the cost of a new TV. Instead, check the efficiency settings on your TV or buy a smart power strip that turns off other connected devices when not in use.

Whatever appliance you are upgrading or replacing, make an informed decision by comparing the cost of operation and shopping Energy Star models to help lower your electric bill. 📺

**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 nearly 900 electric co-ops.



**TUNE INTO SAVINGS:** If you're looking for a new TV, Energy Star-certified models are 34% more efficient than conventional models.

MARK GILLILAND, PIONEER UTILITY RESOURCES

# Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## NORTHWESTERN REC

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www.northwesternrec.com

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## OFFICE HOURS

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7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

## LOCAL EDITORS

Amber Till  
Emily Sonntag

## When \$5 Changed Everything



RYAN MELLER

**GERTRUDE MCCRAY WASHED CLOTHES** by hand on a washboard. Even after washing machines were available, this modern convenience was not available to her.

After Gertrude and her husband Clarence were married in June 1937, they looked into getting electricity. The power company told them it would cost \$500 per pole, and the McCrays needed three. The cost alone put electricity out of reach: \$1,500 in 1937 is equal to about \$34,000 in 2026.

When a representative of Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) knocked on the McCrays' door and asked if they would like to receive electricity for an investment of \$5, they leapt at the chance. Their story was among those chronicled in the 1986 book, "Darkness to Daylight, An Oral History of Rural Electrification in Pennsylvania and New Jersey."

"We said YES!" Gertrude told the author. "We pretty near knocked him down, I guess, we were so ticked."

### Barriers to building a cooperative

"Washington was pretty skeptical that a bunch of farmers out here could build electric lines and run a power company," said A.D. Stainbrook, one of the founding members of Northwestern REC. "They kept their eye on every move we made."

Stainbrook made what he said were hundreds of trips to Washington, D.C., while working to set up the cooperative. In his mind, sacrificing time, talent and treasure was worth bringing electricity to local communities.

The road to electrification was not easy, but the determination of the rural communities is what made it all possible.

While rural electrification was the key to bringing modern life to farmers and other folks who lived in remote areas, it required an investment that was often out of reach. The Great Depression's toll on agricultural communities was significant.

In the book, one of Northwestern REC's first connected members, Merle Gaut of Conneautville, shared the Depression's impact on his family's farm, recalling only being able to get 65 cents per 100 gallons of milk. For folks like Gaut, signing onto the co-op required an investment of \$5, equivalent to nearly 770 gallons of milk.

Financial difficulties were compounded by the public's distrust of the government, hesitation to borrow money from the federal Rural Electrification Administration (REA), politicalization of the New Deal and widespread skepticism.

Everett Fitch, an early member of Northwestern REC, had moved to Cambridge Springs from Meadville. The move resulted in Fitch losing access to electricity.

"I do think there were people who thought [Northwestern REC] was just a passing fancy," Fitch recalled, sharing that some of his neighbors were concerned they'd fill their homes with electric appliances only to have the cooperative fall apart before they could receive electricity.

However, early adopters ignored the skeptics, and the idea caught on.

"After it really started, there wasn't any stopping it," Stainbrook said. "When [folks] found out we was really building these lines and they was going to get electricity out there, you didn't have to encourage them."

While the barrier of local support was broken, other barriers became evident.

*Continued on page 16D*

# Wired for Growth: Balancing Data Center Demand and Reliability

EMILY SONNTAG, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

**DATA CENTERS ARE OFTEN ASSOCIATED** with big cities, but an increasing number of them are appearing in rural communities like ours — and for good reason. Rural areas provide what data centers need most: affordable land, space for expansion and access to robust transmission lines capable of delivering large amounts of power.

Unlike other large businesses, data centers have an exceptional demand for electricity. Operating 24/7, their services must always remain online, making uninterrupted, highly reliable power essential.

For electric cooperatives such as Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), serving data centers brings both significant opportunities and notable challenges.

On the positive side, data centers can drive steady, long-term load growth that supports investments in the local grid. With careful planning and policy support, upgrades like new substations, stronger lines, and smarter technology could benefit all Northwestern REC members and help maintain stable electricity rates.

However, powering data centers also poses challenges. While these large facilities can become operational in

as little as a year, providing the necessary infrastructure, equipment, and electricity often requires much longer lead times and substantial financial investment. Strategic planning, strong partnerships and comprehensive long-term power supply strategies are critical to meeting these demands.

Although Northwestern REC does not currently serve any data centers, electric cooperatives across the country are receiving increasing inquiries from tech companies. We expect to see similar requests in our area soon.

As a member-owned cooperative, our responsibility is twofold: to listen to the communities we serve and provide reliable, affordable electric service to all Northwestern REC members. Balancing these responsibilities can be challenging, especially as new, large-scale energy users like data centers enter our local landscape. Regardless of what the future brings, our priority will be to support growth while ensuring that large-scale energy users contribute their fair share to keep residential bills stable and that our local communities remain engaged and invested.

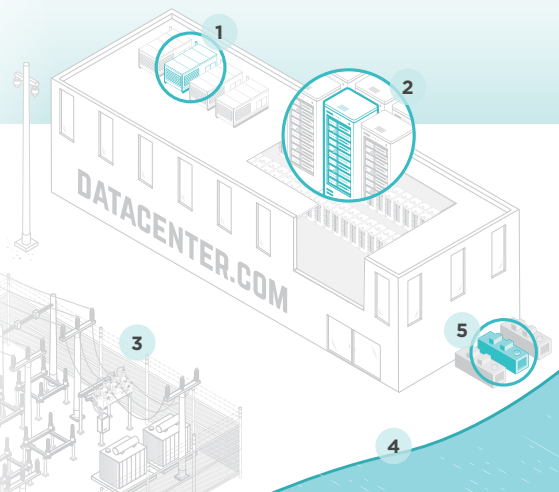
The energy landscape is rapidly evolving, bringing both new opportunities and complex challenges. We remain dedicated to actively listening, communicating, and collaborating with our members and community partners, ensuring that every decision is made with the best interests of those we serve in mind.

If you have questions or concerns about data centers, your energy bills, or any other co-op matters, we encourage you to stay engaged and reach out — your voice truly matters at Northwestern REC. 🗣️

## Big Data, Bigger Demands

Many companies are choosing rural areas for their data centers because of cheaper land, available power and potential tax breaks. Data centers require huge amounts of electricity to operate, which presents new opportunities and challenges for electric co-ops.

- 1 HVAC:** Constant cooling is needed to ensure the servers function properly.
- 2 Servers:** Servers run applications and process data 24/7. One server rack can consume enough electricity to power a small home. A large data center can house thousands of server racks.
- 3 Infrastructure:** Data centers often require new electrical infrastructure to meet their power needs.
- 4 Water Source:** Many large data centers are deploying evaporative cooling, which is more efficient than compressor-based systems.
- 5 Backup Power:** On-site generators keep data centers running during power outages and can also be used to help lower demand when electricity use spikes.



# 2026 District Nominating Meeting Dates and Locations

**AMBER TILL**, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

**YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS** is made up of members just like you. As a cooperative, Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is owned and controlled by its members.

Your opportunity to participate in the democratic process in 2026 begins at the District Nominating Meetings, which are held in each district with a director seat up for election. Typically, board members serve three-year terms. Due to redistricting in 2025, five of the nine districts will be included in this year's election. In 2027, the remaining four districts will hold their elections. Beginning in 2028, three directors will be elected each year.

Director candidates are nominated by the members in the district they will represent, if elected, and their primary residence must be within that district. Candidates must be members in good standing who meet the qualifications outlined in the bylaws. Those bylaws are available on our website, [northwesternrec.com/our-bylaws](http://northwesternrec.com/our-bylaws).

Nominations can be made in person at the District Nominating Meetings or by circulating a petition and recording 15 signatures from members residing in the district. This year, petitions are due May 7.

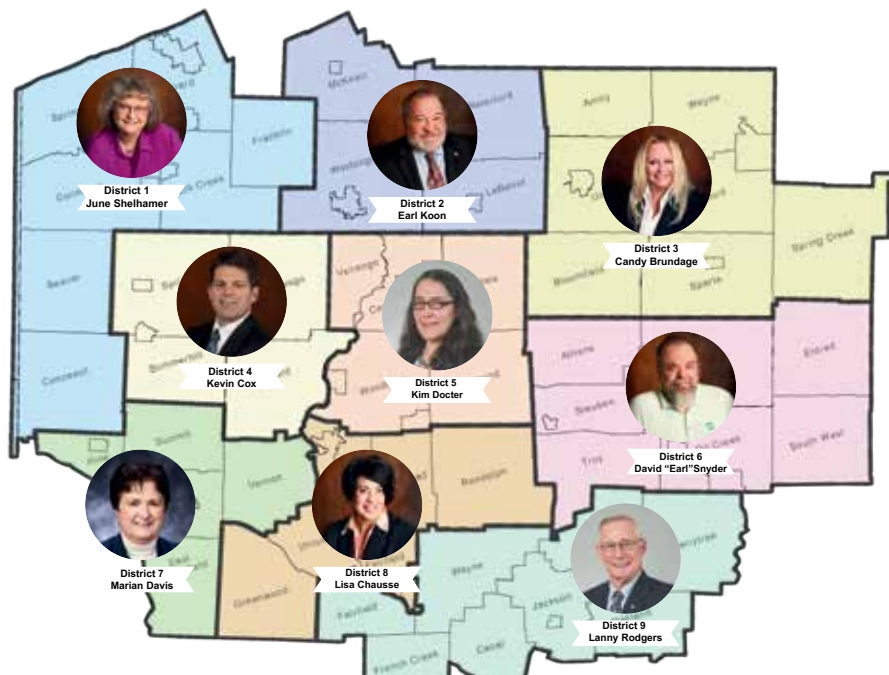
Any member may attend any district meeting. However, **ONLY** members who live in the district can nominate and vote at that district's meeting.

Each meeting will begin with registration at 6 p.m. Dinner will follow, along with the district meeting, and presentations by board Chair Lisa Chausse and President & CEO Dr. Ryan Meller. Door prizes will be drawn, and members will have the opportunity to purchase tickets supporting the cooperative's Member-to-Member fundraisers.

There is no cost to attend, but RSVPs are required by the dates listed below. To RSVP, please call 800-353-0014 or email [communications@northwesternrec.com](mailto:communications@northwesternrec.com).

We look forward to seeing you soon!

- ▶ **Thursday, March 19 — District 5** — Kelly Ballroom at Riverside Golf, 24537 U.S. 19, Cambridge Springs, PA 16403; RSVP by March 12
- ▶ **Tuesday, March 31 — District 2** — Nick's Place, 12250 Edinboro Road, Edinboro, PA 16412; RSVP by March 16
- ▶ **Thursday, April 9 — District 8** — The Harper Event Venue, 13635 Dickson Road, Meadville, PA 16355; RSVP by March 25
- ▶ **Tuesday, April 21 — District 7** — The Oaks Event Hall, 11951 PA 618, Conneaut Lake, PA 16316; RSVP by April 7
- ▶ **Thursday, April 30 — District 6** — The Titusville Mill, 221 S. Monroe St., Titusville, PA 16354; RSVP by April 15



**Your Northwestern REC Board of Directors**

**FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO**

*Continued from page 16A*

**A David vs. Goliath moment**

The cooperative was supported by 13 groups in Crawford and Erie counties. The first REA-funded pole was set in a pasture on the Stainbrook farm — where Woodcock Dam is now — and community members worked together to construct the first 124 miles of line in Crawford County. This progress — and what happened next — is detailed on the Rural Electrification, Crawford County Historical Marker page on ExplorePAhistory.com.

Despite that growth, a new issue emerged. The same electric companies that had refused to connect farms due to cost were now refusing to sell power to the cooperatives — and if they did agree to sell it, they sold it at prohibitively high prices. It seemed investor-owned utility companies were purposefully trying to keep co-ops from getting their projects off the ground.

Once again, Crawford County played an instrumental role. In December 1936, REA Deputy Administrator John M. Carmondy traveled to northwestern Pennsylvania to investigate. Carmondy announced to the press that if Pennsylvania Electric Company wouldn't sell electricity to the cooperative, the federal agency would build a generation power plant for the cooperative in Meadville.

By Jan. 12, 1937, an agreement was reached with Pennsylvania Electric Company to sell wholesale electricity to cooperatives in the Commonwealth.

On May 17, 1937, 14 miles of line were electrified, empowering 92 Northwestern REC members — farm families — for the first time.

As we celebrate 90 years of cooperation, I hope you'll join me in reflecting on how those 92 families felt when they first flipped a switch to electrify their homes. I imagine it must have seemed like a hard-fought miracle for the farmers who could now use "electric hands" to ease their chores, the housewives who could finally retire the washboard, and the families who were able to light their homes without the smoke and ding of gas lamps.

As a member of Northwestern REC, you're part of that magical history — one that I'm honored to share with you. 🍵

Cooperatively yours,

**RYAN MELLER**  
PRESIDENT & CEO

**ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

**TIP OF THE MONTH**

As spring arrives, take advantage of milder temperatures to save energy at home. Open windows on pleasant days to bring in fresh air instead of running your HVAC system. It's also a great time to replace dirty air filters, which helps your system run more efficiently and improves indoor air quality. As daylight increases, turn off unnecessary lights and rely on natural sunlight when possible. Small seasonal adjustments like these can reduce energy use, lower monthly bills and help keep your home comfortable as winter transitions into spring.



**COFFEE & CONVERSATION 2026 DATES:**

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

**9 - 10:30 A.M.**

**MARCH 18: MANDY'S DUTCH TREAT  
339 MAIN ST., SPARTANSBURG  
RSVP BY MARCH 10**

**APRIL 22: ENLISTED COFFEE  
207 HIGH ST., WATERFORD  
RSVP BY APRIL 14**

**MAY 28: PARKSIDE RESTAURANT  
118 N. FRANKLIN ST., COCHRANTON  
RSVP BY MAY 20**

**JUNE 24: VACAVI CAFE  
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**

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## Local Lore

### Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

#### Let Them Eat Cake!

**WHAT DOES THE** French Revolution and Bradford County, Pa., have in common? Marie Antoinette.

Or, well, kind of.

In the late 1700s, investors Steven Girard and Robert Morris bought land along the Susquehanna River in Bradford County — a region now served by Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) — and developed it into a community known as French Azilum. Spread over 300 acres, the makeshift town for French refugees featured a chapel, a town square and a large home.

That home, as legend has it, was called “La Grand Maison” and was built for Queen Marie Antoinette as a safe haven after fleeing Europe. When the escape was foiled, the French

settlers used the home to host parties and dignitaries, including Louis Philippe, who ultimately became the last king of France.

The community was short-lived; by the late 1790s, settlers began moving to more established parts of the country, like New Orleans. In 1803, Napoleon declared amnesty for French aristocrats and the settlement was left desolate. Come 1830, there was almost nothing left of French Azilum.

These days, a few log cabins remain, and tourists can visit them to learn about life in the community. To honor the former queen’s connection to the county, the Marie Antoinette Overlook was built in Wyalusing in the 1920s. From its location across the Susquehanna River, visitors can see not only Bradford County at its finest, but also the remains of French Azilum.

And so, while she was never able to eat cake in the Keystone State, Marie Antoinette can rest knowing there was



**BUILT FOR A QUEEN:** French Azilum, a long-abandoned community in Wyalusing, Bradford County, featured “La Grand Maison,” which was built in the late 1700s by French refugees for Queen Marie Antoinette.

a hideaway in the northeastern Pennsylvania wilderness that would have been happy to accommodate her. 🍷



**Main Office:** Wysox, Pa.  
**Consumer-members served:** 19,124  
**Website:** claverack.com

## A Sight to See

This month’s artwork comes from Olivia Kelly, 5, daughter of Shawnee and Brenton Kelly, members of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative. Her drawing is based on a photo of grazing deer that accompanied a recent article in *Penn Lines*. She liked it because, as she said, “We see deer grazing in our yard in the evenings.” Thank you, Olivia, for sharing your artwork with us!

*Olivia Kelly, age 5, Valley Rural Electric Cooperative*



### 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 or seen 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](mailto: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.

# ALWAYS STEER CLEAR OF OVERHEAD AND UNDERGROUND POWER LINES



Always look up and look out for overhead power lines. If you or an object you are touching contacts or gets too close to a power line, you could be seriously injured or killed.

Regardless of the task, always keep a 10-foot minimum clearance between you or an object you are holding and an overhead line, including the drop-down service line.

Power lines are buried and run underground as well. Always call 8-1-1 or visit [call811.com](http://call811.com) before digging to get underground utilities marked.



 Safe  
Electricity.org®

## BE MINDFUL OF POWER LINES WHEN COMPLETING THESE TASKS:

- Home maintenance: Examples include cleaning gutters, being on the roof or using extended tools to wash windows or skim a pool.
- Yard work: Examples include trimming trees, carrying ladders and digging.
- Transporting tall objects: Ladders are not the only extended objects people use outdoors. Be careful any time you move a tall object or tool.
- Contracted and DIY projects: If you are planning any project that requires digging, ensure underground utilities are marked.

Look up and look out for overhead power lines and think about what is below them. Contact can happen in an instant.

If there is a damaged/downed power line or padmount transformer (green box), do not go within 50 feet of it.

# Love Those Spuds

ANNE M. KIRCHNER

PHOTOS BY ANNE M. KIRCHNER



**CREAMY MASHED POTATOES.** Hearty shepherd's pie. Savory potato pancakes. These are a few of my favorite potato dishes, which stir up valuable childhood memories. My resourceful mother taught me how to grow, harvest and cure potatoes. We often called them "spuds." Potatoes were a staple in our home, a practice I continued into adulthood.

My kitchen is stocked with a variety of spuds — white, red and sweet. I appreciate this root vegetable — it's inexpensive, absorbs flavor and fills the tummy. Potatoes can be boiled, baked or fried. I also use potato starch as a thickener. With so much versatility, who doesn't love spuds? 🥔

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

## CREAMY MASHED POTATOES

- 2 pounds gold Yukon potatoes, peeled & diced
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup whole milk
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 to 2 teaspoons garlic salt
- 1/2 teaspoon coarse black pepper

Place the potatoes in a large pot and cover with water. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer. Cook for 20 minutes or until the potatoes are fork tender. Drain, then place the potatoes in a large bowl. Add the butter, milk and sour cream. Mash the potatoes while combining all ingredients. Add more milk and sour cream for desired consistency. Season with garlic salt and black pepper. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*

## SHEPHERD'S PIE

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon dried parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup beef broth
- 2 large carrots, peeled & diced
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1/2 cup frozen corn
- 4 to 5 cups mashed potatoes

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place the ground beef in a large skillet and cook on medium heat. Using a wooden spoon, crumble the beef as it cooks. Add the onion and garlic; cook until tender. Stir in the parsley, black pepper, Worcestershire sauce and tomato paste. Mix in the flour. Add the broth and bring to a boil. Add the carrots, peas and corn then reduce heat to a simmer. Cook for 5 minutes. Pour the filling into a 9-by-9-inch baking dish and spread into an even layer. Spoon the mashed potatoes over the meat mixture, carefully spreading into a second layer. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*

## POTATO PANCAKES

- 2 cups mashed potatoes
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/4 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon coarse black pepper
- 2 green onions, finely diced
- 1/3 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- Sour cream, optional garnish

Preheat griddle to 325 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, combine the mashed potatoes, eggs, flour, salt, black pepper, green onions and shredded cheddar. Brush the griddle with melted butter. For each pancake, spoon 1/3 cup batter onto the griddle. Cook until the batter is firm and the bottom side is brown. Flip the pancakes and cook until the second side is brown. If desired, serve with sour cream garnish. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*



**AMERICAN  
GOLD RESERVE**

# IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY, FOLLOW HISTORY, BUY GOLD



In times of economic uncertainty—when inflation rises, markets fluctuate, and long-term financial stability feels less predictable—many investors turn to gold as a dependable store of value. By holding a portion of your wealth in gold, you can help safeguard your portfolio and preserve long-term financial security, even when broader economic conditions are unclear.

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# Umbrellas, Shark Teeth and One Tiny Toad

MITCHELL KYD

**IN THE MIDDLE OF PRACTICALLY NOWHERE** — along the road “up the valley” from me — tire tracks and flattened grass in front of a rustic, roofed stand verify that visitors stop there regularly and year-round. A hand-painted sign proclaims “Free,” and I’ve seen the table stocked with glassware and household goods, kids’ toys, and small tools. A box labeled “Food Pantry” encourages visitors to take what they need, including in-season garden produce that’s been donated.

A handmade cabinet with a glass door sits alongside, bearing the sign “Free Library.” It’s an unexpected spot for readers to browse, take, borrow or donate books. Who initiated this rural outreach is a mystery to me. With no businesses or churches nearby and no seeming connections to any home within view, it simply exists out of kindness.

Places that create deep roots for the people who live there seem to inspire that kind of action. I see it all the time. When people feel connected, they aren’t afraid to treat strangers as friends.

Although my friend, Teresa, worked in downtown Pittsburgh, she grew up and got anchored in a quiet, wooded neighborhood outside the city. She buys and carries extra umbrellas in her car for soggy strangers anywhere, whether waiting in the rain at bus stops or slogging their way home with their groceries.

My rock guy, Tom, gives bags of tumbled stones to kids, assortments that often include a few shark teeth. A retired teacher, he knows it might be more than a moment’s amusement; his gift could fire up a future geologist or jewelry designer.

My computer guy, Don, runs a small business with a tiny footprint but heavy foot traffic. As a kindness, especially for all the harried delivery drivers who face each day as a race, he plunked down a fridge just inside his shop door. It’s always stocked with cold drinks for anyone popping in.

My friend, Lynn, lives in the only house at the end of a long lane off a country road. For years, she’s been leaving bags of candy for the crew who picks up her trash as a “thank you” for making the trek. She also hands out

wrapped candy to traffic flaggers and others she sees stopped along her way. It wipes away the weary for a bit, I suspect. When she shared her roadside tales with a friend, he started his own kindness crusade in Minnesota.

“It’s such a tiny thing,” Lynn says, “but it’s such an investment. You can see instantly how one small gesture like that can change the direction of someone’s day, including your own.”

Sometimes, changing the direction of a day means picking up strangers, even if they’re not the same species.

One sweltering August morning, I walked into a local pharmacy to find two employees fussing over the contents of a discarded ice cream dish. One woman held the dish while another slowly poured water into it, one gentle drop at a time. I had to ask why.

When they opened for business that Monday morning, they said they found a little toad that had been stuck between the glass doors all weekend, trapped in that awful heat. They were doing their best to rehydrate the tiny critter, which I swear was wearing a look of relief and gratitude when I peered in.

It’s funny how familiar things resonate differently over time. While rewatching Peter Jackson’s movie adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s “The

Hobbit” recently, one scene instantly reminded me of my friends. The wizard Gandalf was asked why he chose Bilbo, a tiny hobbit, to be part of a dangerous journey to end an encroaching darkness. Others thought overcoming great evil demanded great power.

“That is not what I have found,” was Gandalf’s cinematic reply. “I’ve found it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk, that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love.”

I agree. To all the ordinary folk quietly offering kindness in our world every day, thank you. 🐸

YVONNE BUTTS-MITCHELL



**YVONNE BUTTS-MITCHELL** celebrates the joys and poignant moments of rural living under the pen name Mitchell Kyd. Her stories from the Path Valley Hotel were hatched by encounters with contractors, critters and creepy crawlies while rehabbing the family cabin after its 17-year stint as a giant closet.



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## While We Were Away

STEVE PIATT

IT'S NOT EASY to find true wilderness these days, at least from the standpoint of losing all contact with the outside world. Those places exist, but so does cell service via satellite or contact via Garmin InReach communications.

I guess that's not a bad thing; emergencies can and do happen out there. But there's a big difference between being able to call for help if you're lost or injured and checking your phone to see if the Phillies won last night.

It didn't used to be that way. When Paula and I began our wilderness adventuring by canoe — and even once by dog sled — there really was no contact with the outside world. Cellphones were in their infancy and about the size of a stick of firewood. And even in town, service was spotty at best.

So when we paddled from lake to lake in northern Ontario and Minnesota, flew into a Newfoundland moose camp or a Canadian fishing spot, we were truly disconnected from the outside world for a week or longer.

And typically, when we returned to civilization, we learned that *something* had happened while we were away.

Maybe it was simply that the world didn't stop turning while we were checked out from it, but it seemed the timing of our adventures coincided, incredibly, with some fairly major world events. Or maybe we just sought these special places so often, the odds were good that big news awaited upon our return.

In July 1990, Paula and I emerged from the bush to word that the stock market was in the throes of a "mini-crash," as the economists labeled it. We were young and didn't much



CHAD VOLANTE

**GETTING AWAY:** Steve Piatt disconnects from the rest of the world to focus on the beauty of the wilderness and the thrill of the hunt for mountain goats in British Columbia.

blink at the 401(k) losses. Instead, we simply planned another trip a month later.

Paula and I then enjoyed an arduous paddle-and-portage canoe trip through Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park. As we always did, we exited the wilderness in search of pizza and huge glasses of milk, as well as lengthy hot showers, and learned the U.S. was at war — as in, the Gulf War.

Sometimes, we headed off the grid knowing full well we were going to miss some major events, at least to a sports junkie like myself. A Canadian outing in June to hopefully photograph big bull moose overlapped with the U.S. Open golf championship, which was to be the last for the great Arnold Palmer. But there was more: As we plunged into the wilderness, O.J. Simpson was riding in a white Ford Bronco on a Los Angeles freeway. We got some great photos of moose, lost some blood to the black flies and mosquitoes, and learned the outcome of the chase a few days later.

These days, we've accepted and even embraced the technological advancements that allow us to connect with the outside world. It's especially

useful when Paula is back home while I'm hunting or fishing in Alaska, British Columbia, Newfoundland, and other special places to which we gravitate.

I've listened to a high school football game while tucked away in a tent on a mountain in Washington state during an elk hunt in the massive Pinchot National Forest; kept a fairly steady commentary with Paula while tagging along on a buddy's Newfoundland moose hunt, using a satellite connection on the cellphone; and when I downed a mountain goat high above Alaska's Prince William Sound, my guide sent along a brief InReach message: "Big billy down." Paula received it in the middle of the night and spread the word to my hunting friends in the morning.

When we're out there, as we so often are, we try to avoid connecting with the outside world, even though we know we can.

I can check golf scores and baseball standings when I get home. 📶

**STEVE PIATT** is a veteran newspaper editor and outdoor writer who along with his wife, Paula, has hunted and fished across North America. He is most at home on the water and in the fields of the Keystone State. He lives in Bradford County.

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**GIVING BACK:** Last year, Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative employees participated in a Thanksgiving Meal Food Drive for the Sullivan County Food Pantry. Front row, from left, are employees Lindsay Fitch, Heidi Roupp, Kim Phillips and Diane White with the food pantry's Barb Davis. Back row, from left, are employees Tyler Worthen, Kevin Johnson, Shane Kline, Tom Livezey, Dave Kepner, Darrick Higley, Josh Heess, Kendall Achey, Lori Williams, Jeff Spako, Nolan Chase, Alex Laudermilch and Todd Molyneux.

it all goes back to buying more produce from local farmers for the next week.

### Year-round giving

In the same corner of the state, Northwestern REC works with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

“They’ve been great partners, and they’ve done a great job of supporting our pantry network,” Second Harvest Executive Director Greg Hall says. “They do everything ... the big things during the holiday season ... they donated \$5,000 to local pantries [eight, in all] ... and there’s a lot of fundraising and food support. They really lean into the communities they serve.”

Amber Till, still relatively new to the co-op’s staff, is excited to be able to give back.

“That was one of my roles I was really excited about: that I could jump right in with our sponsorships and donations; that’s how we show our concern for the community,” she says.

The co-op routinely buys livestock at the annual Crawford County Fair 4-H Auction, processes the meat and holds a raffle for members, with the proceeds going to its Member-to-Member program that helps with electric bills. Last year, a portion of the meat from a second purchase went to local food pantries. The cooperative’s

back-to-school supply drives also help free up family budgets for food, and year-round financial donations to community organizations keep pantry shelves stocked beyond the holiday “giving season.”

“You’re not just hungry at Thanksgiving. You’re not just hungry at Christmas. It’s easy to think about those big-feast events, but it’s essential that there’s food available all the time,” says Till, who is organizing donation events in conjunction with the co-op’s 90th anniversary celebration this year. “We’re continuing to raise funds for our Member-to-Member fund, which is available year-round. It doesn’t necessarily help with food, but if we can alleviate the need to put all of your money toward your electric bill, that leaves money for the grocery store.

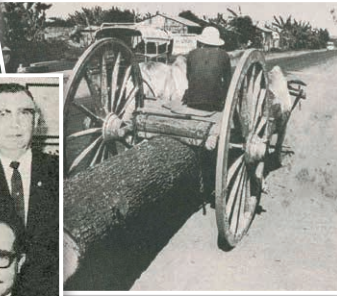
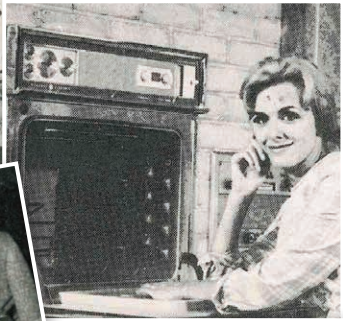
“We’ll also continue to support organizations in the community that help with food insecurity.”

Personally? She volunteers with the Pay-What-You-Can Farmstands when she can.

“It’s a beautiful, beautiful project,” she says. “I’m grateful for what I have now and grateful that I’m in a position where I can help. That’s so important, particularly for people who have great jobs working at a cooperative. It’s important to remember that not everybody has that and to give back as much as we can.”

Even if it’s just one bunch of basil at a time. 🍅





# 60 Years of *Penn Lines* in FOCUS

WITH A SINGLE PHOTO, we can show in an instant what might otherwise take an entire page of words to tell. With 60 years behind us, *Penn Lines* has amassed a treasure trove of stories — nearly all accompanied by photographs that capture the essence of each tale.

As these images have been gathered and archived over the decades, they reveal — in black and white and color, too — the growth of rural electric cooperatives and the communities they serve. They also trace the evolution of *Penn Lines* itself, from a newsletter focused on energy and politics to a news magazine celebrating and reporting on rural Pennsylvania, its people, and places. Much has changed over the years, but one thing remains the same: *Penn Lines* will always be the magazine you come home to.

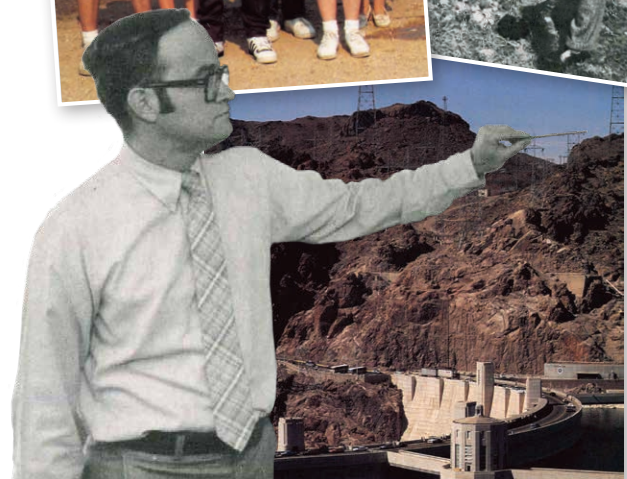


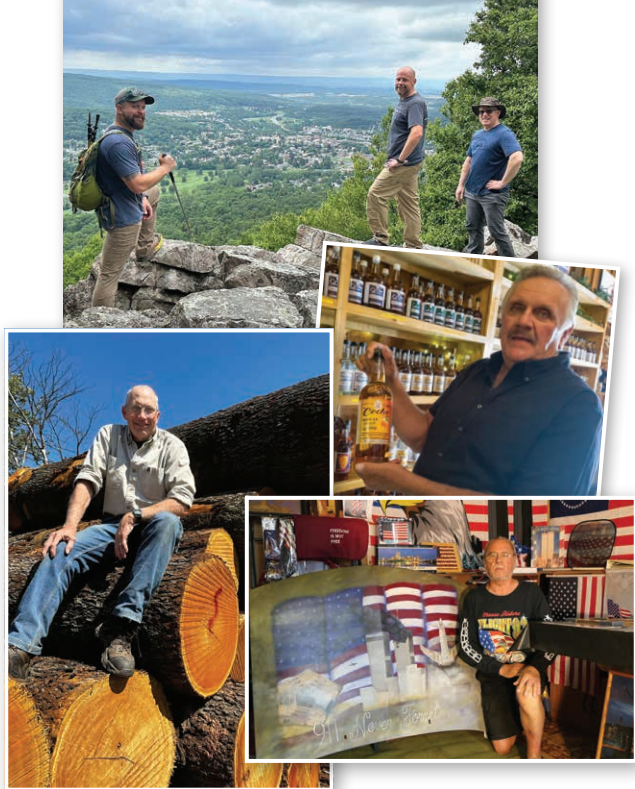
**1960s** The earliest issues of *Penn Lines* focused on the politics of rural electrification and efforts to level the playing field for rural communities, not just in Pennsylvania, but across the nation and even around the globe.

**1980s** The pages of *Penn Lines* during this decade reflected on the history of rural electrification, as well as new efforts from both the distribution cooperatives and Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc., the wholesale energy provider for cooperatives.



**1970s** In its second decade, *Penn Lines* began showing more of the communities and the members at the end of the line.





**2020s** Early into this decade, *Penn Lines* went through another redesign. We're only halfway through, and we've already shown rural life during a pandemic, explored the best-kept secrets of the Commonwealth and gotten ourselves into some crazy competitions. But even with a new look and new stories to tell, we still draw strength from remembering where we've come from and what our rural communities have been through the past 60 years.

**2010s** *Penn Lines* maintained its look and feel throughout the second decade of the 21st century, covering emerging technologies, such as electric vehicles and broadband deployment, while taking a look back at how rural traditions, like beekeeping and volunteer fire companies, were keeping up with the times.



**2000s** This decade, marking the end of the 20th century, brought more photos into *Penn Lines* as the magazine highlighted stories about growing industries and timeless attractions.



**1990s** *Penn Lines* became more colorful, adding feature stories ranging from member hobbies and conservation efforts to political representation. And, of course, photos printed regularly in full color.



# Clean Up on Aisle 5

JOHN KASUN

MY WIFE AND I HAVE ALWAYS shared the responsibilities of being married. I try to help around the house, and she helps me when I need an extra hand on a project. But there are also things we each take care of individually as well. One of those is shopping for groceries, and for that, my wife is in charge. Once you get past milk, bread, butter, or ketchup, I always seem to get the wrong brand, wrong size, or wrong color produce that is too ripe or not ripe enough. I was born at night, but not last night, and I learned early in our marriage not to do the grocery shopping unless my wife provides a list with specific details — including pictures, if possible.

Recently while running errands, my wife added a quick stop at the grocery store to the list. I decided to tag along, hoping to learn firsthand from an expert the things I always seem to get wrong. I like to say I was grocery shopping; however, my wife might describe it differently as I believe she would just as soon leave me in the car. According to her, I tend to be a giant version of a 5-year-old, constantly wandering away and causing her to spend most of her time searching for me.

In one of those intimate conversations men and women have in the privacy of their bedroom, she once confided in me that every time she hears, “Clean up on Aisle 5,” her only thought is, “What did he do now?” If they were not so hard to push, I think she would make me ride in one of those carts designed for kids that look like a fire truck so she could keep track of me.

She also says I am always talking to people, and I must admit I am guilty as charged. The problem is if I am not stopping other people, they are stopping me, and that is exactly what occurred on this trip.

As we entered the store, my wife stressed, “Now, stay with me, and don’t start talking. We have a lot to do today, and we need to keep moving.”

Working our way down the first aisle, a woman walked past and by the look she gave me, I knew she recognized me. We had only made it a few steps when I heard a voice behind us saying, “Excuse me.”

We hesitated as she turned her cart around and blurted out, “Are you the man who writes that column in the local paper? I want you to know that I just love it. I told my husband you should be published nationally, but I am so glad we have you all to ourselves.”

Turning to my wife, she added, “You’re so lucky. He must be a real joy to live with.” I appreciated her comments and thanked her but could hardly stop from laughing out loud as I could see the wheels inside of my wife’s head spinning out of control.

A short time later, as my wife pushed her cart toward the checkout, she looked at me and said, “That woman has no idea how confusing living with you can be. I never know what you are thinking, what you are going to say or what you may do next. Every time I see that little smirk on your face, I know something weird is going on inside your

head. As a matter of fact, I see that look right now! What are you thinking?”

Barely able to contain myself, I said, “Actually, I was just wondering if patients in a nudist colony hospital have to wear one of those stupid hospital gowns?”

“What am I going to do with you?” she replied with her eyes rolling back in her head. Just then, as if it were a message direct from heaven, the loudspeaker blared, “Clean up on Aisle 5.” Turning toward me, she demanded, “What did you do?”



**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.**

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SPECIAL OFFER - BOTH COOKBOOKS FOR \$12. "Country Cooking" - \$5, including postage. "Recipes Remembered" - \$7, including postage. Both cookbooks are a collection of recipes from electric co-op members of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Payable to: Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108. Write Attention: Cookbooks.

## HEALTH INSURANCE

DO YOU HAVE THE BLUES regarding your health insurance? We cater to rural America's health insurance needs. For more information, call 800-628-7804. Call us regarding Medicare supplements, too.

## HEATING & COOLING

GARY & SONS, INC. - SAVE MONEY on fuel oil, propane, or your electric bill without sacrificing comfort - add a heat pump! Heat pumps make heating systems more energy efficient. Contact Gary & Sons, Inc. of Falls Creek, Pa., for a FREE estimate. We are a Lennox® Premier Dealer and Mitsubishi® Diamond Elite Contractor, and we service all brands. We service a 45-mile radius around Falls Creek, Pa. Visit us online at [garysinc.com](http://garysinc.com) or call 814-204-2633. Payment plans offered. PA192811.

## MEATS

ANGUS FREEZER BEEF. \$3.50/LB. HANGING WEIGHT, plus processing. No antibiotics or hormones, grass-fed, grain-finished, excellent marbling. By the quarter, half or whole - discount for halves and multiple quarters. Allison Farmz, Alexandria, Pa. 814-669-4014.

FREEZER PORK - NO HORMONES, NO ANTIBIOTICS. All hogs are born and finished on our farm. \$3/lb. hanging weight, plus butchering. Drenkhahn Family Farms LLC. Rural Valley, Pa. 724-354-3677. [drenkhahnfamilyfarms@gmail.com](mailto:drenkhahnfamilyfarms@gmail.com).

## MISCELLANEOUS

FOR SALE: BUCKETS, FORKS, THUMBS, grapple buckets and pallet forks for skid loaders, backhoes, and excavators. Tires for backhoes, rubber tire loaders and excavators also. Call 814-329-0118.

EXERCISE CLASSES - MONDAYS, 5 P.M. - POWER BALL; Tuesdays, 5 P.M. - Cardio Step; Thursdays, 5 P.M. - Zumba. \$8 per class or \$40/8 classes for a limited time! Private studio with certified instructor. For mature adults, all levels welcome. Please call ahead to confirm! 127 School Street, Boynton, PA 15532. Eve Schott: 814-233-8597.

## MISCELLANEOUS

COIN CLUB STARTING at Faith Baptist Church, Altoona, Pa. If you have any interest in coin collecting and for more information, call Harold at 814-414-7030.

## MOTOR VEHICLES & BOATS

WANTED: INTERIOR PARTS for 1973 or 1974 Nova 2-door coupe, or entire car for parts. Call 814-856-2504.

## NURSERY & GARDEN

TREES AND SHRUBS for all your landscaping needs. Rare, unusual, amazing. Bloomfield Nursery, 167 Sproul Mountain Road, Roaring Spring, PA 16673. 814-224-4508.

## PLUMBING/WATER SYSTEMS

WATER ISSUES? IT'S TREATABLE! GARY & SONS, INC. can install a HALO® Water System to solve chlorine or hard water problems. All natural and environmentally safe, HALO systems do not require mountains of salt and allow healthy minerals to remain in place. Installed by our experienced plumbers, call 814-204-2633 for details or go online to garysinc.com. We now offer residential plumbing services within a 45-mile radius of Falls Creek, Pa. PA192811.

## POWDER COATING

ALMOST ANYTHING METAL can be powder coated: auto parts, lawn furniture, wheels, etc. Restores, protects, preserves. 1,200-degree manifold coating. Arthurs Powder Coating, 263 Sexton Road, Indiana, PA 15701. 724-349-3770.

## REAL ESTATE

VIRGINIA'S EASTERN SHORE. Fishermen and beach lover's paradise. Access Chesapeake Bay or Atlantic Ocean within minutes. Waterside Village 3/4-acre homesites Near Marina from \$21,900 with fenced and locked RV/camper storage available. Beach access nearby. Waterfront Sites available on bayside and seaside starting at \$115,000. Many free boat ramps within minutes. Low, low taxes. Kirkwoodontheshore.com. 757-678-7631.

## REAL ESTATE

LOOKING TO BUY OR SELL? Timberland Realty specializes in land, sporting properties, camps, cabins, farms, waterfront, exquisite second homes and timberland since 1987. Call our office at 716-962-9935 or agents by region - Western Pa.: Ron Westover, 724-422-5525. Central Pa.: John Rudy, 717-319-0082. Northern Pa.: Dave Anderson, 585-808-5696. Brian Bullard, Managing Broker, 716-499-5608. www.timberlandrealty.net.

CLEARFIELD COUNTY - 25 ACRES, 3,240-sq. ft. office building with living suite, two garages, sawmill, \$489,000. Near Cook Forest - two acres, \$59,000. Cambria County - 18.2 acres, field, gas well, \$99,000. Near Glendale Lake - Newly built cabin with utilities on 2.48 acres, \$238,000. Clearfield County - 502 acres, timber, streams, \$1,399,000. www.timberlandrealty.net. Ron Westover: 724-422-5525, 716-962-9935.

## TIMESHARE CANCELLATION

STOP BEING A TIMESHARE VICTIM! TimeShareBeGone will get your timeshare legally cancelled. 100% money-back guarantee. A+ BBB rating, 17 years in business. Low payment plans. Call 800-214-4460, timesharebegone.com.

## TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

HEAVY-DUTY 15-AMP DEWALT 13" THICKNESS PLANNER, corded. Model 735X. Two speeds, three knives, in/out feed tables, and mobile thickness planer stand. \$650. Gettysburg, Pa. 240-678-8886.

## TRACTOR PARTS - REPAIR/RESTORATION

ARTHURS TRACTORS. Specializing in vintage Ford tractors, 30 years' experience, online parts catalog/prices, Indiana, PA 15701. Contact us at 877-254-FORD (3673) or www.arthurstractors.com.

## TRAVEL & TOURISM

NEW SMYRNA BEACH, FLORIDA, oceanfront condo rental. Two-bedroom, two-bath, deck overlooking beach and pool. \$995/week or \$3,600/month. No pets. Not available Jan. - Mar. Call 814-635-4332 or 814-979-8058.

BEACH VACATION! HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SC! CONDO: Two bedrooms, two baths. Economical getaway! Complex amenities: private beach access, pools, hot tub, clubhouse, tennis, pickleball. Snowbirds: spring or summervacations! Call 814-431-5540.

## WANTED TO BUY

ANTIQUe AND CLASSIC American and foreign cars, motorcycles, trucks, Broncos, Blazers and Scouts. Any condition. Will buy entire car collections. krmiller1965@yahoo.com. 717-577-8206.

ANTIQUe AND CLASSIC motorcycles wanted. All makes and sizes. BSA, Norton, Triumph, Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Kawasaki, etc. krmiller1965@yahoo.com. 717-577-8206.

COLLECTORS BUYING PRE-WAR AND POST-WAR Lionel® trains, accessories, Plasticville® buildings, Transformers®, etc. Buying pieces to entire collections. Call Mick, 814-656-1634 or John, 814-937-9052.

WORLD WAR II MEMORABILIA wanted by a private collector and veteran. Medals, helmets, hats, uniforms, knives, swords. American, German, and Japanese. Call 814-341-0354, leave a message.

STATUE OF LIBERTY. Preferably metal. Five to seven feet tall. Will give it a good home. 717-385-9791.

LOOKING TO BUY ADVERTISING ITEMS such as signs, clocks, thermometers, globes and gas pumps. Gas and oil, soda, beer, etc. Please call or text 814-952-5449.

# GENERATOR

## Safety

FOLLOW THESE TIPS TO ENSURE EVERYONE'S SAFETY:

- Make sure there is **nothing plugged into the generator when turning it on**. Use a **heavy-duty** extension cord to connect appliances to the outlets on the generator.
- Always operate the generator on a stable, dry surface **outside the home**—out and away from the garage, doors, windows, and vents into your home. The carbon monoxide the generator produces is **DEADLY**.
- **Never** connect your portable generator to the home directly. This can result in **potentially deadly backfeed**, which happens when electricity is fed back through the electrical system onto power lines, creating a hazard for line workers and others.

Learn more at:  Safe Electricity.org



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



# JODY LOUDENSLAGER SCHOLARSHIP

for the 2026-27 academic year.

## ATTENTION FORMER YOUTH TOUR STUDENTS:

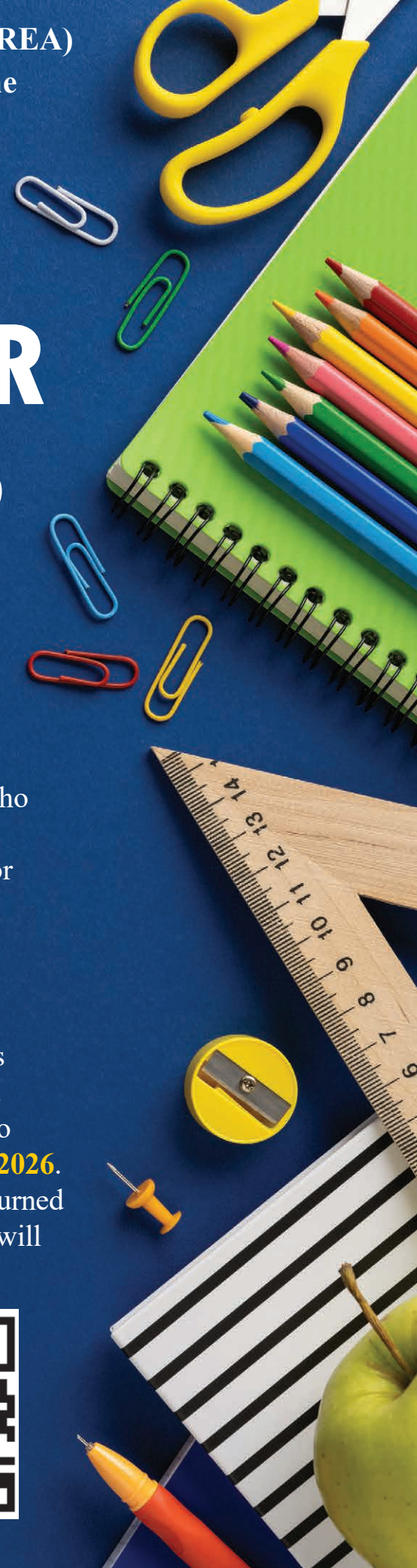
The **JODY LOUDENSLAGER SCHOLARSHIP** is available to any college-bound or current college student who was selected to participate in the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association Youth Tour program. Scan the QR code below for more information about the scholarship and the application.

## REQUIREMENTS & DATES TO REMEMBER:

Applicants are required to furnish necessary aptitude test scores and transcripts (high school or unofficial college, if applicable). All applications and required documentation must be emailed to Steph Okuniewski (email address below) no later than **May 4, 2026**. Finalists will be sent a follow-up questionnaire that must be returned by **June 8, 2026**. Scholarship recipients, notified in July 2026, will be featured in the October 2026 *Penn Lines* issue.

## QUESTIONS:

Steph Okuniewski  
Member Engagement Specialist  
[Stephanie\\_Okuniewski@prea.com](mailto:Stephanie_Okuniewski@prea.com)  
717.982.1455



# Goodbye, Winter

AS WE OFFICIALLY BID ADIEU to winter this month, there's no denying that it left us with a bevy of memorable scenes. Be it chilly walks in the snow or a dog and cat finding time to cuddle away the cold weather, the last few months have left quite an impression. Now, as the season fades from winter to spring, take some photos and submit them to our 2026 Rural Reflections contest. 📷



MARY CARLSON • UNITED EC



KYLIE MANNING • REA ENERGY



ANGELA HOCKENBERRY • VALLEY REC



SUELLEN WALLS • NEW ENTERPRISE REC

## How to enter

**TO SUBMIT ENTRIES**, email your photos (no more than five digital images per person, per year) to [photos@prea.com](mailto: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.

**ADDRESS CHANGES:**

For change of address, please contact your local electric cooperative. For cooperative contact information, please visit [www.prea.com/member-cooperatives](http://www.prea.com/member-cooperatives)



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