

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

Amy Wellington, Editor

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From the President & CEO



We have the power to do this

By Bill Buchanan, *President & CEO*

NORTHWESTERN REC members and employees have seen many changes in the last year. From COVID-19 to remote work so employees and members alike stay safe and healthy. What has remained steadfast is our ability to continue to serve the members as we always have — by putting them first.

The 85th annual meeting, held Aug. 21 at the New Beginnings Church of God in Meadville, marked the second time the event was closed to the public and held virtually. Members and the public were able to view the meeting on the co-op's Facebook page and YouTube channel. More than 680 members participated in the drive-thru event from 9 a.m. to noon, in which all participating memberships received an electric bill credit and a \$25 voucher booklet to use at the 75th Crawford County Fair.


Although this was an excellent opportunity to connect with the members and support our local fair, it is our hope to be back in person at the next annual meeting.

Electronic and mail-in voting, first introduced to Northwestern members in 2019, was again used this year for the director elections. Results show that more than 7% of the membership voted in this election versus the typical 1% previously recorded with in-person-only voting. Members were able to vote from June 22 to Aug. 18. Re-elected to three-year terms at the

2021 annual meeting were Michael Sample, representing District 3; Kathryn Cooper-Winters, representing District 5; and Lanny Rodgers, representing District 10.

In her prerecorded presentation, board Chair Cooper-Winters noted, "although it was an uncontested election, it is still important for members to participate in electing their local board of directors. It's a key cooperative principle," referring to Principle 2, Democratic Control.

Cooper-Winters also shared many of the positives that happened during 2020, such as learning new ways to connect with one another and the "Rural Rocks" community initiative, involving Cambridge Springs, Edinboro, and Titusville. Groups from each of these communities worked together remotely to reimagine their communities, formulate plans and have now started implementing the plans.

Northwestern REC has been identified by Touchstone Energy®/TSE Services Best Practices as the leading cooperative in the nation on member engagement. Northwestern REC is a not-for-profit electric distribution cooperative providing service to more than 21,000 locations in Crawford, Erie, Warren, Venango, and Mercer counties in Pennsylvania and Ashtabula County, Ohio. To learn more about Northwestern REC, visit our website at NorthwesternREC.com. 

October is all about us. Why? It's National Co-op Month!

By Amy Wellington, *director of communications*



ACE Hardware, State Farm, REI, Land O'Lakes and Northwestern REC all share something in common: We're all cooperatives.

We may be in different industries, but we all share a passion for serving our members and helping our communities thrive. In fact, all cooperatives adhere to the same set of seven principles that reflect our core values of honesty, transparency, equity, inclusiveness and service to the greater community good. October is National Co-op Month so this is the perfect time to reflect on these principles that have stood the test of time but also provide a framework for the future. Let's take a look at the first three cooperative principles.

Voluntary and open membership

Just like all co-ops, Northwestern REC was created out of necessity — to meet a need that would have been oth-

erwise unmet in our community. So in 1936, a group of neighbors banded together and organized your electric co-op so everyone in our community could benefit. For a modest membership fee, any farmer could get electricity brought to the farm. Neighbors came together to tackle a problem that they all had, but couldn't solve alone. They worked together for the benefit of the whole community, and the newly estab-

lished electric lines helped power economic opportunity in our community.

While this history may be forgotten, key parts of that heritage remain — the focus on our mission and serving the greater good. In this, we include everyone to improve the quality of life and economic opportunity for the entire community. Membership is open to everyone in our service territory, regardless of race, religion, age, disability, gender identity, language, political perspective or socioeconomic status.

Democratic member control

Your co-op is well suited to meet the needs of the members, because we are locally governed. Each member gets a voice and a vote in how the co-op is run, and each voice and vote are equal. Northwestern's leadership team and employees live right here in the community. The members of your board of directors, who help





85th annual meeting in photos:
All images are from the 2021 annual meeting, which took place on Saturday, Aug. 21, at the New Beginnings Church of God on Leslie Road in Meadville.

set long-term priorities for the co-op, also live locally on co-op lines. These board members have been elected by neighbors just like you. We know our members have a valuable perspective, and that's why we are continually seeking your input and encourage you to weigh in on important co-op issues and participate in co-op elections.

Our close connection to this community ensures we get a first-hand perspective on members' priorities, thereby enabling us to make more informed decisions on long-term investments, such as equipment and technology upgrades, electric vehicle programs, etc.

Members' economic participation

As a utility, our mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy to our members. But as a co-op, we are also motivated by service to the community, rather than profits. Members contribute equitably to and democratically control the capital of Northwestern REC. At least part of that capital remains the common property of the cooperative. Members allocate surpluses for co-op programs, initiatives, capital investments and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Because we are guided by seven

cooperative principles, it's not just about dollars — it's about opportunity for all and being fair when engaging with our members. The cooperative way is a values-based business model.

Northwestern REC is a reflection of our local community and its evolving needs. We view our role as a catalyst for good and making our corner of the world a better place. And by the way, that sums up the seventh co-op principle, "concern for community," which I'll elaborate on in a future article. 🌞



Get familiar with cyber basics

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month

AT A time when we are more connected than ever, being “cybersmart” is of the utmost importance. This year has already seen more than a fair share of cyberattacks and breaches, including the high-profile attacks on the Colonial Pipeline and other critical infrastructure.

Furthermore, as has been underlined by these recent breaches, cyberattacks are becoming more sophisticated with more evolved bad actors cropping up each day. Luckily, there are several steps that we can take daily to mitigate risks and stay one step ahead of malefactors. Here are a few quick tips:

Enable multi-factor authentication

Multi-factor authentication (MFA) adds that necessary second check to verify your identity when logging into one of your accounts. By requiring multiple methods of authentication, your account is further protected from being compromised, even if a bad actor hijacks your password. In this way, MFAs make it more difficult for password-cracking tools to enable attackers to break into accounts.

Use strong pass phrases and passwords

This may seem obvious, but all too often securing strong pass phrases and passwords is overlooked. People spending more time online during the pandemic has certainly contributed to more bad actors prowling for accounts to attack. Using long, complex and unique passwords is a good way to stop your account from being hacked, and an easy

way of keeping track and remembering your passwords is by using a password manager.

Perform software updates

When a device prompts that it’s time to update the software, it may be tempting to simply click postpone and ignore the message. However, having the latest security software, web browser, and operating system on devices is one of the best defenses against online threats so don’t wait — update.

Do your research

Common sense is a crucial part of maintaining good online hygiene, and an intuitive step to stay safe online is to do some research before downloading anything new to your device, such as apps. Before downloading any new learning app on your device, make sure that it’s safe by checking who created the app, what the user reviews say, and if there are any articles published online about the app’s privacy

and security features.

Check your settings

Be diligent. Double check your privacy and security settings and be aware of who can access your documents. This extends from Google docs to Zoom calls and beyond. For meetings on Zoom, for example, create passwords so only those invited to the session can attend and restrict who can share their screen or files with the rest of the attendees.

Being cybersmart and maintaining stellar online hygiene is the best way to protect yourself and others from cyberattacks. No single tip is fool-proof, but taken together they can make a real difference for taking control of your online presence. Following these tips is also easy and free. By taking preventive measures and making a habit of practicing online safety, you can decrease your odds of being hacked exponentially — and prevent lost time and money as well as annoyance. 🌟

PASSWORD DOS AND DON'TS

A strong password can make all the difference in protecting your personal information. Follow these tips for stronger passwords.



DO:

- Change the manufacturer’s Wi-Fi password on your router.
- Use two-factor authentication.
- Use unique phrases (like lyrics to your favorite song) to remember passwords.

DON'T:

- Don’t use common words or numbers like “password” or “1234.”
- Don’t use personal details like your date of birth in a password.
- Don’t use the same password for multiple accounts.

October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month.

Do Your Part. #BeCyberSmart

Time to charge your ETS room heaters

ELECTRIC THERMAL STORAGE (ETS) heat is quiet, odorless, extremely comfortable and very affordable. It's based on a concept of heating that originated in Europe.

In an ETS system, a heating medium (usually very dense ceramic bricks) is combined with electric heating elements running through this medium. The elements are turned on during off-peak hours when rates are lower. The bricks heat up and then store the heat for hours inside the insulated cabinet. During on-peak hours, we cut off the heating elements, and you heat your home by operating a small fan that circulates

air over the bricks, heating it and your home. By shifting the energy use to off-peak hours, we help keep

Our approximate ETS control hours are as follows:

September 15 – May 15
7–11 a.m. & 5–10 p.m.

May 16 – September 14
Noon–7 p.m.

Control periods are in effect Monday through Friday.

overall rates to our members low and help the environment by reducing the amount of energy consumed during peak times when demand for energy is highest.

Soon, we will be entering the heating season. The amount of heat stored in the brick core of the heater is regulated, manually or automatically, according to seasonal weather conditions. For older units, there is a dial to select charge levels (I-II-III). Level I offers minimal stored heat capacity, and Level III sets the unit to maximum charge. Knowing where to properly set the charge level can be a process of trial and error. ☀



**Community born.
Community led.
Focused on YOU.**

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