

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

Linda King, Managing Editor

From the President & CEO



Committed to a co-op culture for all

Seeking your input

By Bill Buchanan, *president & CEO*

IT HAS already been two years this month since I became your president & CEO. And in those years, you've heard me expound on why and how Northwestern REC is different — because we're a cooperative. Our business model sets us apart from other utilities because we adhere to seven guiding cooperative principles that reflect core values of honesty, transparency, equity, inclusiveness and service to the greater good of the community.

Electric cooperatives, including yours, have a unique and storied place in our country's history. We democratized the American dream by bringing electricity to rural areas when for-profit electric companies determined the effort was too costly. Back then, cities were electrified, and rural areas were not, creating the original rural-urban divide. Northwestern REC was the first electric cooperative to do this in Pennsylvania. Newly established electric lines helped power economic opportunity in rural areas. Today, that spirit of equity and inclusion is a vital part of our co-op DNA.

Equal access for all

When our electric co-op was founded, each member contributed an equal share in order to gain access to electricity that benefited individual families as well as the larger local community. Each member had an equal

vote in co-op matters. That sense of equity and inclusion is still how we operate today. Northwestern REC was built by and belongs to the diverse communities and members we serve. Membership is open to everyone in our service territory, regardless of race, religion, age, disability, gender identity, language, political perspective or socioeconomic status.

By virtue of paying your electric bill each month, you're a member of the co-op, and every member has an equal voice and vote when it comes to co-op governance. This ties back to our guiding principles of equitable economic participation and democratic control of the co-op.

We encourage all members to vote in Northwestern REC's director elections that begin in June, and we invite all members to participate in co-op meetings to weigh in on discussions that set co-op policies and priorities, such as high-speed internet, community solar, and electric vehicle programs.

We know members of our community have different needs and perspectives, and we welcome diverse views on all issues under consideration by the co-op. The more viewpoints we hear, the better we are able to reflect the needs of all corners of our community. Please send questions and concerns to info@northwesternrec.com, and I will personally address these concerns.

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Director nominations for Districts 3, 5 and 10

By Amy Wellington, *manager of communications*



DEMOCRATIC CONTROL: One member equals one vote. When there isn't a pandemic to cancel the event, traditional director elections included in-person voting during the annual meeting, as seen above.

CO-OPS RISE to the occasion time and time again. In 2020, Northwestern REC had to cancel the traditional spring nominating meetings due to COVID-19. The staff and board had to create a new way of accepting director nominations in a relatively short period of time.

The board consulted Northwestern REC's bylaws and in accordance with the guidelines, created a Nominating Committee that received nominations by email. This committee was comprised of four of your fellow co-op members. Their job was to receive nominations by email and then confirm the nominator and nominee were both members. This method will once again be utilized for the 2021 nomination season.

If you are interested in running for your district, or would like to nominate another member for any of the districts, there are a few qualifications you must meet (this is not a complete list):

- ▶ Your primary residential home (within that district) must receive Northwestern REC electric service for at least one year prior.
- ▶ You must be a member in good standing with no outstanding balances for at least one year.

- ▶ You cannot be an employee of any cooperative or association within the past three years.
- ▶ You cannot be a close relative of an employee or current director.
- ▶ You cannot be convicted of a felony within the past five years.
- ▶ You cannot be a candidate or incumbent for elected public office at a county-wide level or above.

For a complete list of qualifications, please review the Director Position Description and Director Qualifications found online at northwesternrec.com/content/running-board before submitting your nomination.

Any member, regardless of their district, can nominate another member for any of the districts up for election. It is required for the nominee to live within the district of which he or she is being nominated. Here is a breakdown of Districts 3, 5 and 10:

District 3 - Amity, Union, Wayne, and Concord townships, and Elgin and Union City boroughs in Erie County, and Spring Creek Township in Warren County.

District 5 - Cussewago, Hayfield, Venango, Cambridge, and Woodcock townships, and Woodcock and

Saegertown boroughs in Crawford County.

District 10 - Wayne Township in Crawford County; Jackson, Plum, Oakland, Cherrytree, and Canal townships in Venango County; and French Creek Township in Mercer County.

Nominations should be emailed to nominations@northwesternrec.com by the May 23, 2021, deadline.

Once all nominees are certified by the Member Panel for Director Elections, voting will begin on June 22, 2021, with online, electronic and mail-in ballots. Election results will be announced during the 85th annual meeting currently scheduled for Sat., Aug. 21, at the New Beginnings Church of God on Leslie Road in Meadville.

If you have any questions, feel free to call us at 1-800-352-0014 or chat with us online at NorthwesternREC.com. ☀

From the President & CEO

(continued from page 12a)

Inclusion

While our top priority is providing safe, reliable and affordable energy, we also want to be a catalyst for good in our community. Because we are your local electric cooperative, co-op revenues stay right here in our community. In turn, we invest in our diverse community base through scholarship programs, charitable giving, educational programs and more. We strive to make long-term decisions that improve and enrich the communities we serve.

While today's world is radically different than it was when Northwestern REC was founded in 1936, our cooperative values have stood the test of time and remain just as relevant today. We recognize that today's co-op members expect more, and my pledge to you — the members we proudly serve — is to promote a cooperative culture of inclusion, diversity and equity for all.

Cooperatively yours,
Bill Buchanan
President & CEO

Considering solar? Know before you go!

By Stephen Miller, *engineering manager*

NORTHWESTERN REC occasionally receives applications from members interested in applying for renewable energy interconnections, with the majority being for solar systems. In Northwestern Pennsylvania, there are a few solar installer/contractor companies that our members can utilize as their solar company.

But how do you start? Northwestern REC would like to make members aware of how the process should go to avoid costly investments.

1. If you want to install solar to save money, invest instead in ...

While installing solar panels is very appealing as a cost-saving measure, did you stop to consider simpler undertakings such as adding insulation, sealing air leaks and completing other basic fix-it projects that could cut your energy costs immediately? Even if you are not the do-it-yourself-type, a call or visit from our knowledgeable energy solutions representative could reveal some easier and more affordable options that can make as much of an impact long term and often cost less than installing solar panels.

2. Check your contractor once. Check your contractor twice.

As with any major home improvement project, purchasing from the right installer/contractor is every bit as important as the product you are purchasing. Due diligence is critical to ensure you get the best system, for a fair price, installed correctly and on time.

We encourage our members to not be swayed by one particular contractor and instead, obtain two to four bid options. A good contractor will be fully licensed and insured, have extensive installation experience, and be willing to answer all your questions and communicate with Northwestern Electric Cooperative.

Finally, it never hurts to contact



your local Better Business Bureau or attorney general's office to corroborate the credibility of a specific contractor.

3. Communicate with us!

We are here for you! Northwestern REC should be one of your first contacts when it comes to installing solar. Our experts at Northwestern REC can answer basic to detailed questions and provide research material on what we as an electricity distributor require for interconnection. Our staff can also review your past energy use, and help you determine how any projects you have undertaken have improved your energy efficiency.

4 A solar primer – how does it all work?

Once selected, an installer will proceed to conduct a feasibility study to determine your property's ability to harness solar power, the possible size of the system, and determine how much the system will provide you in terms of generation. A reputable con-

tractor would also take steps to communicate with Northwestern REC and obtain your use history to aid them in crafting a successful system, as well as obtain any required interconnection forms to ensure our system is capable of allowing a new solar system.

Next, a contract will be drafted to explain and detail the specifics of your system. At this point, it's a matter of signatures, installation and inspections before we can call the process finalized.

Although installing solar panels on your home or business is an exciting new trend, don't lose sight of doing your research, asking questions, carefully scrutinizing any contract before signing an agreement, and keeping an open line of communication with Northwestern REC so we can ensure that you, the member, are taken care of.

Give us a call at 1-800-352-0014 or visit NorthwesternREC.com to get a preliminary understanding of net metering and the generation interconnection process. ☀️

Co-op members are not immune to scams

By Amy Wellington, *manager of communications*

AS AN owner-member of Northwestern REC, you may be surprised to learn that you, the members, can be susceptible to utility scams and other similar dangers. Even the wariest member can be duped. The scammers are developing new tactics every day.

Here's a story from one co-op in Florida:

When a scammer called Florida pet clinic operator Cindy Evers last year and demanded immediate payment on an overdue electric bill, it sounded real.

"They knew my account number and gave me a figure that I owed that's close to what I usually pay on my electric bill," Evers said.

She paid, even though, in the back of her mind, she knew her payment wasn't late.

"I have pets under sedation, and I'm taking care of animals," she says. "I think I just panicked, thinking they were going to shut my electricity off. I did what they told me to do."

Evers lost \$900 because the call was a scam.

We have received a handful of reports from our members over the years regarding this so called "past due" scam. Thankfully, none of these calls resulted in lost money.

The "past due" scam goes something like this: A customer gets a call from an 800-number that looks like a valid utility company phone number. Widely available

**Suspect a scammer?
Here's what to do if the
call seems suspicious:**

- 1 Hang up.
- 2 Call your utility provider at the phone number on your bill.
- 3 Call the police.



DO NOT pay over the phone if immediate payment is demanded to avoid a disconnection.

DON'T FALL FOR THE CALL!



spoofing software allows crooks to display what appears to be an official number on caller IDs. The caller threatens to cut off power if the customer doesn't pay.

But here's the giveaway: The crook will

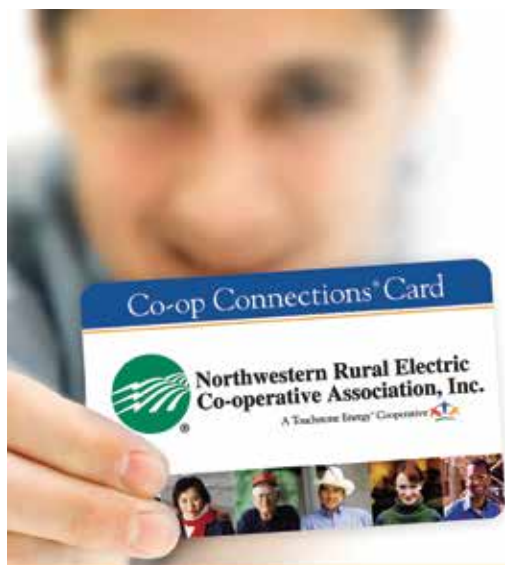
demand payment via a prepaid debit card or money order. And he'll ask for it within a specified time frame — often an hour or less — or power will be disconnected.

Northwestern REC, your electric cooperative, never makes such phone calls.

The scammer may even quote an amount that sounds like your typical monthly bill. That way, the threat has even more credibility.

Here are some tips on how to protect yourself:

- ▶ Do not assume the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate. Caller IDs can be spoofed.
- ▶ Never share your personal information, including date of birth, Social Security number or banking account information.
- ▶ Never wire money to someone you don't know.
- ▶ Do not click links or call numbers in unexpected emails or texts — especially those asking for your account information.
- ▶ Most utilities will NOT require their customers to purchase prepaid debit cards or money orders to avoid an immediate disconnection.
- ▶ If you receive a call that sounds like it may be a scam, or if you believe the call is a scam, hang up, call the police and report it to Northwestern REC at 800-352-0014. ☀



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The dirty secret about clean laundry

By Rian Doubet, *energy solutions representative*

PEOPLE HAVE many reasons for doing the things they do. Sometimes these reasons are based on past experiences, education or a desire to do the best they can. It is with the best intentions that we strive for excellence. One way of doing that in the home is through cleanliness. But these good intentions are not always in our best interest.

During a recent visit to a member's home, laundry quickly became the concentration of our energy-saving efforts. The member, a retiree who has lived and worked in the area since the 1980s, described how her special needs grandson required extra laundering. To maintain clean bedding, clothing, linen and a favorite stuffed animal, she found herself doing up to 12 loads of laundry per day!

She had taken cost-savings steps already – a new high-efficiency washing machine and matching dryer, as well as a clothes rack by the fireplace to dry each load. Admittedly, she used the hot water setting.

"I need these clothes sanitized," she proclaimed.

Unfortunately, this common myth can be a difficult one to dispel.

Hot water tanks come factory set at 125 degrees Fahrenheit. On residential heaters, the thermostat can go as high as 150 degrees Fahrenheit. The Food and Drug Administration recommends poultry be cooked to 165 degrees Fahrenheit to be safe to consume. Water tanks provided by Northwestern REC are left at the factory setting, unless a member requests otherwise. We do not recommend raising the temperature; however, as noted by the burnfoundation.org, "When tap water reaches 140 degrees Fahrenheit, it can cause a third-degree (full thickness) burn in just five seconds."

These temperatures are not enough to sanitize. In fact, for some of the nastiest little bugs out there, these are perfect temperatures to live in



and breed. Washing in cold water is a much more effective option than it used to be. Traditionally, detergents required higher water temperatures to be most effective. But that's no longer the case. Today, detergents are made in a way that allows them to be more effective at lower temperatures.

"Detergents are formulated with enzymes that kick into action even at 60 degrees Fahrenheit," says Pat Slaven, a chemical engineer who has worked as a detergent tester for "Consumer Reports" for 10 years.

Drying laundry by the fireplace was also a cause for concern.

It is true during the winter indoor humidity levels can fall drastically, causing a dry scratchy throat or even a bloody nose. But each load of laundry can have up to 1 gallon of water left to evaporate. The added moisture from so many loads of laundry can be too much for the home.

"Imagine dumping a full gallon of water on the floor every time you wash a load," I said. "Damage is sure to occur, along with mold and bacteria growth that can lower the indoor air quality."

That is why it is so important to vent dryers to the outdoors. Products such as the heat-saver indoor venting solution have been responsible for

many calls to home energy professionals. Worse yet is when this situation occurs in the summer and a dehumidifier is needed to remove excess moisture in another part of the home. This scenario leads to paying for drying the clothes twice.

"The house is a system. Anything done in one part of the home can have serious repercussions in another," I explained as I pointed out mold growth in the next room around an attic hatch. "The home is trying to breathe, and too high of a moisture level is causing condensation on any cold surface."

While this case was extreme, the numbers are applicable in any home. Washing in hot water versus cold can cost an additional \$0.40 per load for a standard washing machine, or roughly half (\$0.20) for an high-efficiency machine. By making the simple switch on the machine — and the arguably harder-to-adjust switch in our own minds — the average home can save \$14 per month, while this member in particular can save up to \$72 monthly! 🌞

Rian Doubet is Northwestern REC's energy solutions representative and is a fully certified home energy auditor. He can be contacted at 800-352-0014 or by email at rdoubet@northwesternrec.com.