

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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Guest Column



Rural communities rock!

By Linda King, *VP Communications & Energy Solutions*

SOME MAY FIND the title of this article odd, but it is actually quite fitting. Why? Rural communities are the lifeblood of our area and frankly your electric cooperative. We have seen the numbers in recent census surveys impact our local communities, not just in population changes, but also in grants and other financial support for the entities that serve our communities. It is with this premise your cooperative enlisted Zach Mannheimer, CEO of Atlas Community Studios, to assist in creating a rural community movement helping launch the Rural Rocks Contest in 2019. This kind of outreach demonstrates a cooperative principle — Concern for Community. We invited local municipalities in our service area to submit an application to receive one of three grants for Creative Placemaking for their community.

In January 2020, three communities got the call that they were the lucky recipients of a grant for the Creative Placemaking consultant assistance enlisted by Northwestern REC. This group, Atlas Community Studios, is based in Iowa but taps resources in any location or skillset that is needed. Early February 2020 marked the first trip to the area for Libby Crimmings, president of Atlas, to tour the three communities and meet with the respective Steering Committees from each community.

Little did we know that would be the only time Crimmings would be able to travel to the area. What is remarkable to me — with only one in-person

meeting, the work that these committees would normally go through sitting across the table from one another was all done virtually through Zoom meetings, conference calls and emails. Crimmings and the Steering Committee from each community were also assisted by Kate Greene, redevelopment director at Atlas, as well as their support staff.

What is Creative Placemaking? As described by Crimmings, “Placemaking is a people-centered approach to building strong, vibrant communities. It’s a holistic approach to help communities identify the long-term vision and lay out a realistic, step-by-step ‘roadmap’ to achieve these goals through catalytic project opportunities.” She further identifies the overarching goals as economic and social development, increasing population and/or tourism, and improving the overall quality of life. These goals are in sync with your cooperative’s mission to “... improve the quality of life in our areas of influence.”

Each community was able to choose what it wanted for a project focus within four categories of the scope of work: housing, public art, downtown revitalization, and branding and marketing. In addition to the branding and marketing strategy for each community, they were each able to add one additional item of focus.

Now you know why we are involved, so let’s get to revealing the results of all this hard work that was done during COVID-19!

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The Steering Committee consisted of Beverly Alward, Sandy Pude, James Byers, Zach Hale, Justin Moyar, Linda King, Brian Harmon, Dave Matejczyk, Delores Hale, Beth Ryan, Marci Dickson, Jeremy Ball, Randy Gorske, Tamra Boylan, Jodie Ellis and Marc Frazier VanDoren. This group of diverse community leaders received community feedback through both a public survey and stakeholder input in an effort to reimagine the future of their town.

Through this process, items identified were: downtown revitalization and amenity creation, public art, housing strategy, and branding and marketing. The goals for Cambridge Springs

that were identified are: create a more vibrant downtown, inspire a sense of community pride, capitalize on French Creek and expand tourism strategy.

Key takeaways

Strengths

- ▶ Rich history around water (creek and mineral springs)
- ▶ French Creek running through town
- ▶ Welcoming small town culture and feel

Challenges

- ▶ Negative/discouraged community outlook
- ▶ Inability to attract/retain young families/outdated/needs more vibrant downtown
- ▶ Blight/properties need updating
- ▶ Food desert

For details of the action plan, visit cambridgespringsplacemaking.com.

Here you will find details on the visioning, revitalization, housing, public art and branding plans.

As you can see by the logo above



and branding created for Cambridge Springs, the future is built around the same water that gave it life once before. People are re-engaging with nature in ways they haven't in a long time, and Cambridge Springs is in a position to leverage its assets as a playground to residents and visitors.

In addition to the branding of the town, the Cambridge Springs Steering Committee selected an online site for

Get smart about electrical safety.
May is National Electrical Safety Month.



Tree trimming improves service for all

By Amy Wellington, *manager of communications*

ONE OF the things I love best about our community is the natural beauty that surrounds us. We are fortunate to have so many trees that offer beauty, shade, and a habitat for all sorts of birds and other wildlife. We know that you appreciate our community for many of the same reasons.

At Northwestern REC, we strive to balance maintaining beautiful surroundings and ensuring a reliable power supply by keeping power lines clear in rights of way (ROW).

While we recognize and appreciate the beauty of trees, there are three main benefits to tree trimming in ROW areas. However, before touching on the main reasons, let me explain what a “right of way” is and how it may impact you. A right of way is the land we use to construct, maintain, replace, or repair underground and overhead power lines. Rights of way enable the co-op to provide clearance from trees and other obstructions that could hinder the power line installation, maintenance, or operation. ROW areas are typically on public lands or located near a business or home. Regardless, Northwestern REC must

be able to maintain the power lines above and below the ROW. The overall goal of our vegetation management program is to provide reliable power to our members while maintaining the beauty of our community. Proactive vegetation management benefits co-op members in three tangible ways.

Safety

First and foremost, we care about our members and put their safety and that of our lineworkers above all else. Overgrown vegetation and trees pose a risk to power lines. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members’ yards, they can pose grave danger to families. If children can access those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor like a tree. A proactive approach also diminishes the chances of fallen branches or trees during severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for lineworkers to restore power.

Reliability

Of course, one of the biggest bene-

fits of a smart vegetation management program is reliability. Strategic tree trimming reduces the frequency of downed lines causing power outages. Generally speaking, healthy trees don’t fall on power lines, and clear lines don’t cause problems. Proactive trimming and pruning keep lines clear to promote reliability.

Affordability

As you know, Northwestern REC is a not-for-profit cooperative, and that means we strive to keep our costs in check in order to keep our rates affordable. This extends to our approach to vegetation management. If trees grow too close to power lines, the potential for expensive repairs also increases. Effective tree trimming and other vegetation management efforts keep costs down for everyone.

Our community is a special place. We appreciate the beauty trees afford, but we also know our community depends on us to provide reliable energy. Through vegetation management, we are better able to keep the power lines clear, prepare for future weather events and secure the reliability of the grid. 🌳

Perform your own energy walkthrough

YOU GO to the doctor once a year for a checkup; it's smart to do the same thing for your home with a home energy assessment to help diagnose and stop waste. That's the best medicine to help make your home more comfortable and efficient.

Little bits of energy waste add up, so making sure all the systems in your home are working at peak efficiency matters.

- ▶ Set your water heater temperature at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, which is hot enough for comfortable showers without wasting energy.
- ▶ Energy-efficient LED lighting uses less energy and lasts longer than conventional incandescent bulbs.
- ▶ Use a programmable thermostat to set home temperatures forward or back while you're asleep or away to save up to 10% on your heating and cooling costs.
- ▶ Electronics continue to use energy even when they're fully charged or turned off. Use advanced power strips to stop these vampire loads from feasting on your electricity.
- ▶ Purchase Energy Star-rated appliances and electronics to save on energy and water use.
- ▶ Seal cracks and gaps around your home with caulk or expanding foam. This acts as a windbreaker for your home, helping the insulation work up to its full potential.
- ▶ Check insulation levels; make sure they're up to at least minimum recommendations, which can be found at energystar.gov.
- ▶ Ductwork exposed in unconditioned spaces, like attics, should also be air-sealed and insulated. This will keep you from heating and cooling the great outdoors.



Smart energy savings around your home really add up to making your home more comfortable and efficient.

Northwestern REC offers its members home energy audits. Visit us at NorthwesternREC.com or contact Rian Doubet, energy solutions representative, at 1-800-352-0014. 🌞

Assistance Programs Available to Northwestern REC Members

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

*For those who rent and are on unemployment.

*Money can be used for rent and utilities.

Apply online at www.dhs.pa.gov.

Administered locally by:

Center for Family Services, 814-337-8450
Erie County Care Management, 814-923-5512
Mercer, Venango and Warren Counties,
use COMPASS to apply.

Bridge Builders Community Foundation

*For NREC members who qualify in Venango Co.

*Administered by the United Way of Venango Co.

Apply by calling 814-676-6545

Member-to-Member, Inc.

*For all members with a referral from NREC.

*Administered by several local agencies, visit M2Mfund.org

Contact Northwestern REC at 800-352-0014

pa211nw.org

*Powerful search engine for all available help in your area.

Visit pa211nw.org, call or text 2-1-1

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