

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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From the President & CEO



We want to hear from you

By Bill Buchanan

WE LIVE in a device-driven world. Our smartphones, tablets, laptops and an assortment of other devices help us communicate and connect. Companies spend billions pushing out a steady drumbeat of messages and information, and we are constantly bombarded with one-way communication. But is anyone listening on the other end?

At Northwestern REC, we are not only listening, we are eager to hear from you. Whether you text us, respond to a survey or social media post, send an email, or simply stop by and chat in person, we thrive on your feedback. Connecting with you helps us keep pace with our community's priorities and needs.

Because we are a cooperative, we have a different way of operating. Northwestern REC exists to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy to you, the members of the co-op. Equally important is our mission to enrich the lives of the members we serve. We hope you will consider us more than your energy provider, but instead as a local business that supports this community and powers economic development and prosperity for the people.

You will notice that throughout the year, we create opportunities for you and other community members to attend co-op gatherings and events in order to hear from you. These include our annual meeting and spring member meetings (see next month's

issue for dates and more details), as well as events like the annual Member-to-Member Golf Outing (this year on June 17).

We also conduct an annual survey to gather feedback so we can plan for new initiatives, technical upgrades and improvements on existing co-op programs and services. Our planning is led by local members just like you who understand the needs of the community and are looking out for the long-term interests of the larger community. In addition, we host "News from the REC" on our website, NorthwesternREC.coop, and social media channels as additional ways of obtaining your feedback.

Northwestern REC works to continually learn from our members about their priorities so we can better serve you – because your electric co-op was built by the community, for the community. But we can only improve, adapt and effectively plan for the future if we have two-way communication.

For our co-op and community to thrive now and in the future, we depend on hearing from you. I hope you will connect with us and let us know your perspective. You can always reach me directly at bbuchanan@northwesternrec.com or 800-352-0014 – I'm listening.

Cooperative yours,

Bill Buchanan

President & CEO

New year, new co-op billing service

NORTHWESTERN MEMBER SERVICES is excited to announce a new billing feature that allows members with three or more metered accounts to combine them into one bill. *Still considered to be in test mode, this service is currently only available*

to businesses but will eventually include residential accounts.

When the co-op launched its new bill design in July 2019, the next step was to offer invoiced group billing. Under this new service, members will receive one electric bill with one due date. Often times, members with multiple accounts receive bills with different due dates requiring multiple monthly payments. Members have long requested this group billing service from the co-op.

There are some requirements that must be met before the co-op will enroll a member in this program. First and foremost, the member must have three or more accounts under the same name and billing address. And secondly, all accounts must be in good or better standing with the co-op.

There is no fee for this new service and it is considered completely voluntary, which means it can be terminated by the member or the co-op at any time without penalties. Members cannot be enrolled in budget billing and invoice group billing simultaneously.

As mentioned earlier, there will be one due date for all accounts under invoice group billing. The total amount due for the combined invoiced bill must be paid in full by the specified date. This payment will then be distributed among all the accounts as specified on the invoiced bill.

Other benefits of invoiced group billing include using less paper and less postage. Payments can still be made by check, recurring bank draft, credit card, online or by phone. All SmartHub features are also still available with invoice group billing.

For more information, please call Member Services at 1-800-352-0014, M-F, from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. You can also chat with us online during those same hours at NorthwesternREC.coop.



Did You Know?

Electric cooperatives have retired \$15 billion to members since 1988 - \$1 billion in 2016 alone. Because electric co-ops operate at cost, any excess revenues (called margins) are allocated and retired to members in the form of capital credits.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation

\$15
BILLION
SINCE 1988

\$1
BILLION
IN 2016

CHECK YOUR MAILBOX
THE 2019 CAPITAL CREDITS
CHECKS WILL BE MAILED ON
JAN. 6, 2020.

Following his father's footsteps

By Amy Wellington, *manager of communications*

JUSTIN SULLIVAN started working for Northwestern REC as a service technician. He was barely out of Maplewood High School, where he excelled in Rod Frazier's electrical program at the Crawford County Vo-Tech School.

Historically at the co-op, when someone wants to become a lineman, he starts off in the load management department installing and servicing electric water heaters for Northwestern members. Then he works his way up to dock/storeroom attendant before he's considered a lineman apprentice.

Justin was a service technician for only a short while before he suffered a severe fall during hunting season and had to put his dreams of becoming a lineman on hold. This happened during his probationary period at Northwestern, unfortunately, and the co-op needed to fill his position.

After his body mended, however, Justin was able to rejoin the co-op several months later, again as a service technician. During his years moving up in ranks, as all apprentices do, Justin successfully completed the lineman apprenticeship program and has been a journeyman lineman for five years now.

"Justin is a hard worker," says co-op President & CEO Bill Buchanan. "He knows the job extremely well and is always willing to lend an extra hand wherever he can."

Even his coworkers know they can count on Justin both on and off the job. Chief Lineman Jim Reagles, who helped train Justin from the beginning, says, "I know I can call 'Sully' any time to help gather sap or unload a truck full of wood during maple season, and he'll be there."

Reagles owns a maple syrup operation, The Willows at Conneauttee, in Cambridge Township.

I, too, have called on Justin for help outside the co-op. When my house was struck by lightning last summer (see October *Penn Lines* for the article), I was worried about the electrical system inside my home after a surge protector

started to smoke. Justin was the first person I thought to call and within minutes, he was at my door.

He quickly determined there was a problem with one of the neutral wires in the service entrance outside. Knowing the electric wires inside my home were not going to cause a fire, I was relieved. I did not, however, expect Justin's father to show up moments later to help his son fix my entrance cable.

In early November 2019, Justin was awarded the Winston Donaldson Community Service Award by the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA). This award is presented to a co-op employee who demonstrates exemplary service to his/her community.

The seventh cooperative principle, concern for community, is the heart and soul of every cooperative. And Justin Sullivan puts his heart and soul (and many times, his blood, sweat and tears) into his community every single day.

At only 34 years of age, Justin serves as fire chief for the Townville Volunteer Fire Department, where he has been a volunteer firefighter and ambulance dispatcher for over 16 years. Justin is also a Townville Borough council member.

One of his most memorable fire calls was when the Riverside Inn in Cambridge Springs burned to the ground. The camaraderie and teamwork displayed at that event, where fire departments from all over the region joined together in an attempt to save the historic hotel, was so admirable and methodical, Justin was awestruck and proud to serve alongside each and every one of them.

When he's not fighting fires for the community, working for the co-op,



SOME BIG SHOES TO FILL: Justin Sullivan and his wife, Jessie, above, accept the Donaldson Award in Hershey, Pa. They reside in Townville, Pa., with their three children.

or being a father of three, Justin also volunteers his time for the Crawford County Fire School. Part of that training occurs at the co-op with a hot line demonstration, where firefighters learn electric safety for first responders.

"Let it burn," is Justin's advice to all first responders when an electric device, such as a transformer or substation, is on fire. "The device will need to be replaced anyhow, so there is no reason to risk your life trying to put out the flame."

At the award ceremony, held in Hershey, Pa., Justin thanked the crowd and his wife, Jessie, for the warm reception. But to Justin, he has only been doing what he grew up knowing. In his own words, he is "following his father's footsteps."

He remembers as a child running around the Townville fire station while his father, Richard, was serving as fire chief. It is funny how history does repeat itself over and over again. Because today, if you ever visit the Townville fire station, you will find 5-year-old Henry running around the station, perhaps hoping to one day fill his own father's boots as fire chief. 🌟

When power goes out, we are working hard to restore it

WE HATE it when the power goes out just as much as you do. When there is an outage, we work hard to resume service as quickly and safely as possible.

Many times, the reasons for outages are beyond our control. Here are the main reasons the power goes out:

1. **STORMS** — Conditions brought on by storms such as high winds, ice and lightning can interrupt service. Lightning itself does not impact outages as much as people think, but it can strike trees and cause branches or even whole trees to fall on distribution lines. Lightning can cause a problem, however, if it strikes substation equipment, such as a large transformer. Strong, high winds and ice that accumulates on lines can also impact distribution.

2. **TREES AND VEGETATION** — Branches, limbs, or trunks can fall on lines and vegetation (such as vines) can grow around poles, lines, or other equipment. Ice and wind can make matters worse. This is why we work so hard to keep power lines and equipment clear.

3. **ANIMALS** — It is estimated that 11% of all outages are caused by our furry friend, the squirrel. They love to chew on the weather-

proof coating around lines. Other critters like turkeys, snakes and seagulls can interfere with service, too. Where

possible, we put non-harmful devices on our equipment and lines to make it less comfortable for animals to perch, rest or make a nest. A bird on a wire is harmless and safe for the bird as long as it touches the line and nothing else.

4. **ACCIDENTS** — Cars, trucks and farm equipment that have a run-in with a utility pole can cause an outage.

5. **PUBLIC DAMAGE** — Unsafe digging, equipment, or line damage, vandalism or theft can all cause interruptions in the energy chain.

6. **OVERLOAD** — This happens where demand spikes, such as when too many air conditioners run on a hot summer day, causing blackouts or brownouts.

7. **EQUIPMENT ISSUES** — We maintain and inspect all of our lines and equipment regularly; however, sometimes equipment malfunctions. We strive to address any problem as soon as it happens.

Please contact Northwestern REC at 1-800-352-0014 with questions about outages or to learn more about the steps we take to provide reliable service. You can also follow our outage center on our website at NorthwesternREC.coop. For more information about electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org. 

WHY IS MY POWER OUT?

A storm or a squirrel may be to blame






When the power goes out, we work hard to resume service as quickly and safely as possible.

Here are some common reasons the power goes out:

	STORMS: Mother Nature can interfere with power delivery.
	TREES AND VEGETATION: This is why we work so hard to keep power lines clear.
	ANIMALS: Curious animals can cause damage, especially squirrels.
	ACCIDENTS: Run-ins with a utility pole or other equipment can cause an outage.
	PUBLIC DAMAGE: Unsafe digging, equipment or line damage, vandalism or theft can all interfere.
	OVERLOAD: This happens when demand spikes, like on a hot summer day.
	EQUIPMENT ISSUES: We maintain and inspect equipment regularly, but sometimes malfunctions occur.

Thank you for your patience during outages.

Three DIY efficiency projects to do this year

A NEW YEAR brings new opportunities to save energy — and money. You may think energy efficiency upgrades require a great deal of time and expense, but that's not always the case.

If you're interested in making your home more efficient but don't want to break the bank, there are several do-it-yourself (DIY) projects you can tackle to increase energy savings. Let's take a look at three inexpensive efficiency upgrades that can help you save energy throughout the year.

Trim dryer vent

Level of difficulty: easy. Supplies needed: tin snips, gloves, measuring tape and masking tape. Estimated cost: about \$25 depending on the supplies you already have.

If your dryer vent hose is too long, your dryer is working harder than it has to, using more energy than necessary. The vent hose should be long enough for you to pull the dryer out a couple feet from the wall, but the shape of the hose should form a line — it should not have a lot of slack, with twists and curves. A shorter, unobstructed vent hose increases the efficiency of your dryer, dries clothing faster and reduces lint buildup, which can create potential fire hazards.

Simply measure, mark, and trim the hose to the desired length, then reattach the hose to your dryer and exterior vent. If you're unsure about

the hose length, check out YouTube.com for a quick video tutorial.

Seal air leaks

Level of difficulty: moderate. Supplies needed: caulk and caulk gun, weather stripping, gloves, putty knife, paper towels. Estimated cost: \$25 to \$50 depending on the materials you purchase.

Sealing air leaks in your home can help you save 10 to 20% on heating and cooling bills. Apply caulk around windows, doors, electrical wiring and plumbing to seal in conditioned air. You should also weather strip exterior doors, which can keep out drafts and help you control energy costs. Types of caulking and weather-stripping materials vary but ask your local hardware or home store for assistance if you're unsure about the supplies you need. For more information, the Department of Energy provides step-by-step instructions for caulking and weather stripping at <https://bit.ly/2Kesu6W>.

Insulate attic stairs opening

Level of difficulty: moderate. Supplies needed (if you build the box yourself): rigid foam board, faced blanket insulation, tape for foam board, measuring tape, utility knife, caulk and caulk gun, plywood. Estimated cost: \$50 to \$100.

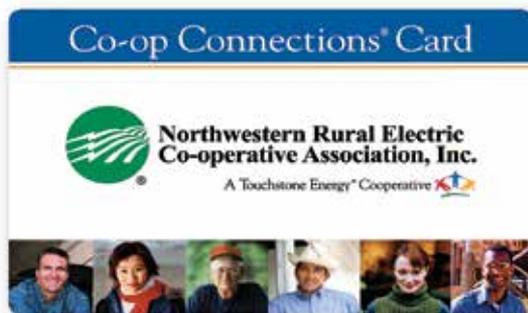
A properly insulated attic is one of the best ways to optimize energy savings and comfort in your home, but many homeowners don't consider insu-



lating the attic stairs, or the opening to your attic space. Even a well-insulated attic can leak air through the stair opening, but luckily, there's an easy fix.

An insulated cover box can seal and insulate the attic stairs opening. You can build your own insulated cover box or purchase a pre-built box or kit from a local home improvement store like Home Depot or Lowe's for about \$60. If you decide to build your own, check out these step-by-step instructions from the Department of Energy at <https://bit.ly/36YNCYQ>. It should also be noted that if your attic opening is located in a garage you do not heat and cool, this upgrade will not be as effective.

Saving energy doesn't have to be hard. With a little time and effort, you can maximize energy savings and increase the comfort of your home. To learn about additional ways to save, contact Northwestern REC's energy solutions department at 1-800-352-0014. ☀



We're a participating business



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Call Amy Wellington at 1-800-352-0014.

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Visit our website at
NorthwesternREC.coop