

Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Northwestern REC

P.O. Box 207
22534 State Highway 86
Cambridge Springs, PA 16403
www.northwesternrec.coop

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Lisa Chausse, District 9
Board Vice Chair

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Board Secretary

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Kevin Hindman, VP – Operations/Engineering

Linda King, VP – Communications &
Energy Solutions

Connie Sovisky, VP – Member Services

Kerri Fleet, HR Manager

Clarissa Schneider, Executive Secretary &
HR Assistant

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1-800-352-0014

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814-398-8064

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Monday through Friday

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

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Linda King, Managing Editor

From the President & CEO



A year of change

By Bill Buchanan

THE PAST YEAR has been a year of change for me, as well as my family. At times, the year seemed to go by faster than previous ones, and at other times, it seemed to slow to a near standstill. Although life's changes could be an entire focus for another *Penn Lines* article, I want to take a moment to highlight some of the career changes. The biggest change was the change from the telecommunications industry to the energy industry. That brought changes in processes, changes in policies, changes in priorities, and changes in the people I have the opportunity to work with.

Early in the year, I had the opportunity to go out in the field with our lineworkers on storm outages and see the challenges our people face when working in unfavorable conditions. Midway through the year, I witnessed the change of our annual meeting venue and location and the work that went into pulling it all together. I also saw a great amount of teamwork by our member services and communications groups to put together a new bill print, bringing more information to our members about their electric use.

As the electric vehicle (EV) continues to gain popularity, and in our case, load, our energy services people researched various EVs and chargers, purchasing our first all-electric fleet vehicle and installing a charging station at our office. Our engineering group continued to implement new

technology to improve safety and reliability on the lines. They spent time with a number of members helping them assess solar to see if there were benefits in installing panels at their homes. At the end of the latter part of the year, we engaged a group of members to identify the current broadband options (or lack of) and what role Northwestern REC could take in expanding that service to our membership.

Looking back on the year, I believe I have adapted well to many of the changes and will likely continue to do so for the next year.

With all of the changes in my life and career, one thing has remained constant, and that is the benefit that cooperatives bring to their members and their communities. The cooperative principles are consistent from one co-op to another and the culture is unique to the cooperative business model. I am thankful for the consistency of the cooperative, and through the changes, all of the help from coworkers, directors, members, and other peers in the industry. Without the help, I would likely still be "in the dark." I look forward to serving you all in 2020!

Cooperative yours,

Bill Buchanan
President & CEO

YOU'RE INVITED

2020 Spring Member Meetings

District 6 Nominating Meeting

6 p.m. on March 30
Miller Station UMC, Cambridge Springs
* Dinner provided; door prizes

District 8 Nominating Meeting

6:30 p.m. on April 22
The Movies in Meadville
* Popcorn, soda & dessert, movie gift cards

District 7 Nominating Meeting

6 p.m. on April 23
Centerville UMC
* Dinner provided; door prizes

District 9 Nominating Meeting

6 p.m. on May 6
Smith's Country Gardens, Blooming Valley
* Dinner provided; door prizes

Member Resource Meeting

6 p.m. on May 13
Edinboro/McKean VFW 740, Route 98
* Dinner provided; door prizes

Call ahead for reservations
800-352-0014

Eat, greet and nominate

YOU ARE INVITED! Once again, your board of directors and staff invite you to attend a member meeting. Nominating meetings are scheduled for Districts 6, 7, 8 and 9. An informational meeting has also been scheduled (see above). These meetings follow the same agenda and allow you an opportunity to learn about the cooperative, to ask questions or to offer suggestions.

During each meeting, presentations will be given by Kathryn Cooper-Winters, board chair, and Bill Buchanan, president & CEO. Four of the five meetings will begin at 6 p.m. with a meal, and generally wrap up by 8 p.m.

The nominating meeting held at the Movies in Meadville on April 22 will begin at 6:30 p.m. All who attend this meeting will receive a movie gift certifi-

cate after the presentations. *No meal will be provided.*

Members can attend any of the meetings regardless of their district. However, members can only be nominated for a board seat at their respective district meeting.

If your district is listed above, and you are interested in running for the board seat, there are a few qualifications you must meet before becoming a director (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 visit NorthwesternREC.coop.

You must be nominated by another member at the nomination meeting held within your district. Petitions with at least 15 member signatures can also be submitted as nominations.

All nominees must meet the qualifications as outlined in Article IV, Section 4, of the bylaws (found online) and are considered tentative until validated by the Member Panel on Director Elections. 

More than just your electric company

AT NORTHWESTERN REC, we are more than just your electric company, and you're more than just our customer. We are your rural electric cooperative (REC), which means we are a not-for-profit electric distribution company owned by you, our members.

As your cooperative, we not only provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity, we're here for you in so many other ways. Why? Because we are governed by you, the members, and without you, Northwestern REC wouldn't exist.

You, as a member of Northwestern REC, have access to many additional benefits. Here is a brief summary of many of those extras:



- ▶ **Multiple Payment Options:** Use SmartHub online or via a smart device; set up automatic payments or schedule payment; Pay-by-Phone; pay with MoneyGram; pay at the co-op 24/7 using the kiosk.
- ▶ **Special Billing Options:** Co-op Courtesy Plan, Budget Billing, Invoice Group Billing, Third-Party Notifications and Gift Certificates.
- ▶ **Operation Round Up:** Members allow their monthly electric bills to be rounded up to the nearest dollar amount, then donate the change to Member-to-Member, Inc.
- ▶ **Member-to-Member, Inc.:** A voluntary program whereby co-op members, directors and employees help struggling members keep their electric bills paid.
- ▶ **PrePaid Electric Service:** With PrePay, you pay for your electricity in advance. You can purchase electricity as much and as often as you desire.
- ▶ **Outdoor Lighting:** Optional outdoor lights are offered to members for a small monthly fee.
- ▶ **Water Heating Service:** When you sign up for the Load Management Program, you receive FREE electric water heater service 24/7 and

- a FREE electric water heater when necessary. "Go Electric. It's the SMART Choice."
- ▶ **Electric Heating Options:** Northwestern REC offers its members three types of electric heating options and three special electric heating/cooling rates. "Go Electric. It's the SMART Choice."
- ▶ **Energy Audits:** Your co-op offers you three levels of energy audits to fit your needs and budgets.
- ▶ **Co-op Connections:** A free membership card gives you discounts on everyday expenses.
- ▶ **Rebate Programs:** While funds last, we offer rebates for new attic insulation and various electric appliances. Restrictions apply.
- ▶ **Various Alerts:** Text, email or push notifications inform you of billing details, outage info and updates, peak alerts, and more.
- ▶ **Youth Tour:** A free program offers high school juniors the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., and experience the beauty and history of the nation's capital.
- ▶ **Clearly Brighter Teacher Grants:** Each year, your cooperative awards \$4,000 in grants to local teachers/educators.
- ▶ **Scholarships:** Through Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, your statewide organization, there are two scholarship opportunities available to college students.
- ▶ **Member \$en\$e:** This is a member-exclusive program that includes classified advertisements from the members to the members. It is free to residential accounts.
- ▶ **Electric Safety Demonstrations:** Currently, your co-op offers two types of free electric safety demonstrations.
- ▶ **Safety Hazard Repair Program:** This program is designed to help qualifying residential members repair their hazardous service entrance wires.
- ▶ **Penn Lines:** Your cooperative magazine is delivered monthly.

For more information on any of these services, please visit our website at NorthwesternREC.coop or call us at 800-352-0014.

Hey [insert name], what's my electric bill?

NOW YOU can connect with Northwestern REC through SmartHub and your smart home device like your Amazon Echo or Google Home. Pay your bill, get payment history, check your electric use and more anytime. Here are some tips on how you can interact with your electric cooperative through your smart home device.

What devices are supported? All Amazon Echo and Google Home devices are supported. This includes: Amazon Echo, Echo Dot, Echo Plus, Echo Show, and Echo Spot, or Google Home, Home Hub, Home Max, and Home Mini.

What functionality is available? Below is a list of the current functionality included in SmartHub voice assistant:

Account Balance (If prepaid, device will give days remaining)

- ▶ What is my balance?
- ▶ What's my payment amount?
- ▶ When's my due date?
- ▶ How much do I owe?
- ▶ What's my electric bill?

Most Recent Billing and Payment History

- ▶ What was my last payment amount?
- ▶ What was my prior billing?
- ▶ What is my payment history?
- ▶ What is my last bill?

Payments

- ▶ You can make a one-time payment with a previously stored payment option.

Current Outage Information

- ▶ Is there an outage?
- ▶ Do I have any outages on my account?
- ▶ Is my power out?

Account Number

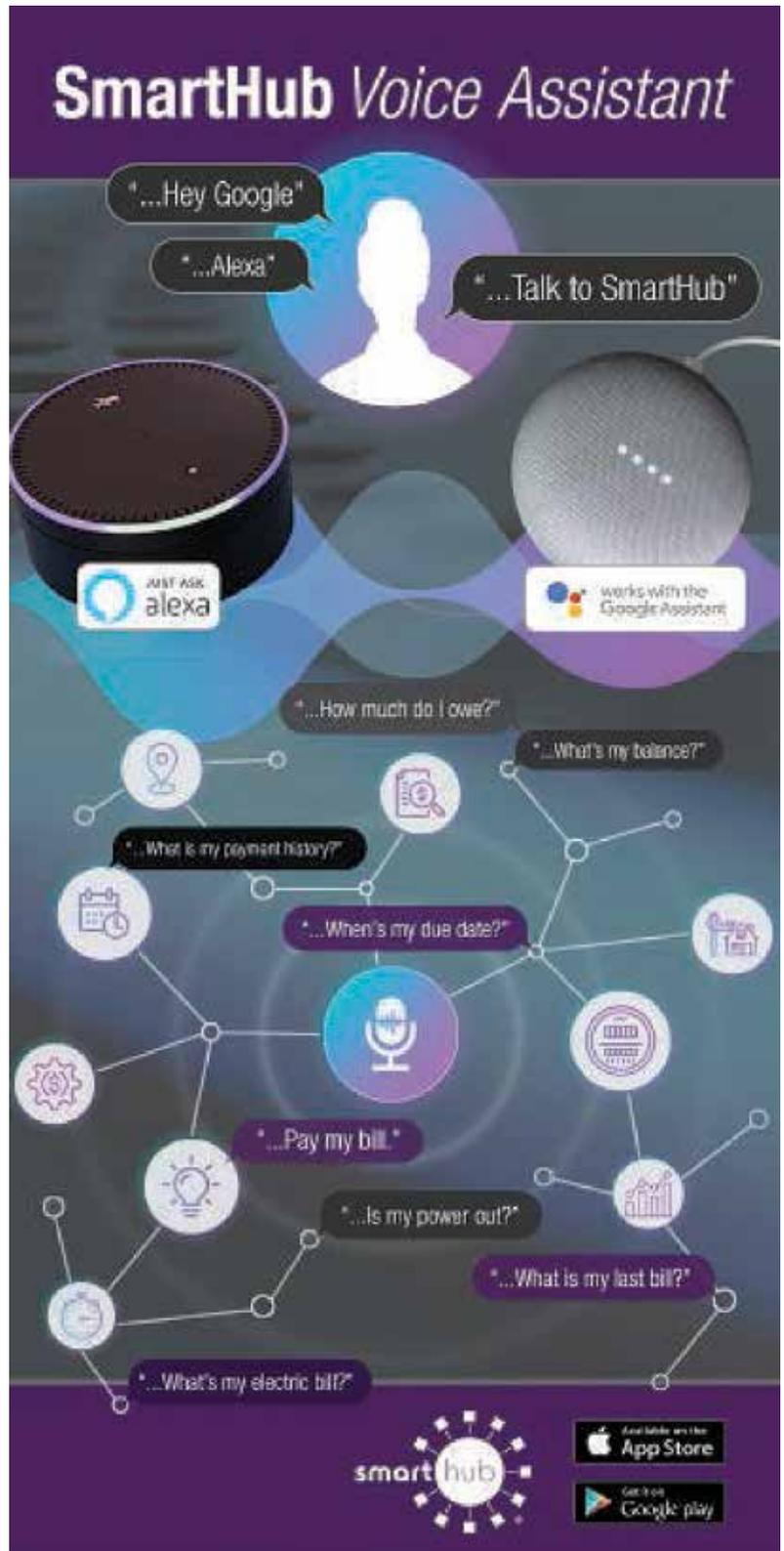
- ▶ What's my account number?
- ▶ Account number?

Custom Alerts

- ▶ Any news?
- ▶ Any alerts?
- ▶ Is there any information available?

Help

- ▶ You can request your current balance, get information about your last payment, check for outages on your accounts, read your account number, and get information or alerts. We are always adding new features to better serve you! 🌟





Lower your electric bill

YOUR ELECTRIC bill is made up of many appliances, devices and electronics. Your heating and cooling system and water heater contribute significantly to how much you pay each month, but lighting and appliances use a lot of energy as well. The growing number of devices that plug in are also starting to make a sizable impact. Fortunately, your electric bills are not set in stone. There are a number of ways to help lower them while also improving convenience and comfort.

SIMPLE YET EFFECTIVE ACTIONS

One of the most straightforward habits you can build to save energy is to shut off appliances, electronics and lights when they are not in use. Some electronics draw power even when turned off, so completely unplugging them helps even more. A related solution is to add these devices to a power strip that can be easily switched off and on.

Along with turning off your lights, consider replacing the bulbs with more efficient LED ones. They last 20 to 30 times longer than incandescent bulbs while being at least 75 percent more efficient. They are also more desirable than CFLs, which contain mercury.

With heating and cooling making up such a large portion of electric bills, keep an eye on your thermostat. Leave it at the warmest comfortable temperature in the summer and the coolest comfortable temperature in the winter. This will make your heating and air conditioning system have to work as little as possible. Also consider a programmable thermostat to automatically set temperatures throughout the day.

Furthermore, be sure the thermostat fan is on “auto,” so it runs only when the system is heating or cooling. During summer months, use a ceiling or space fan to supplement cooling and increase the thermostat setting a bit. Just remember to turn the fan off when you leave the room – unless you are within the fan’s airflow, there is no cooling effect.

HIGHER SAVINGS, LONGER PAYBACK

In addition to the approaches above, there are more advanced steps you can take if you want to continue to increase your home’s efficiency. These measures tend to take more time, money and effort, but they can go a long way toward

reducing your electric bill.

1. Have your HVAC system tuned by a contractor at least once every year will help to ensure that it is working effectively, safely and efficiently.

2. Air seal holes and cracks to help prevent outside air from entering your home and heated and cooled air from leaving it. Check exterior doors and attic access points to make sure weather-stripping is intact and working properly. Cobwebs and pest droppings can signal areas that may need help. Additionally, inspect attics and crawl spaces for holes and chases that can be capped and sealed. Having an open chase in an attic is similar to having a window open year-round.

3. Adequate insulation helps regulate heat flow in your home. If you have a crawl space or an open attic, check the insulation at the floor and ceiling. If you notice falling insulation in the crawl space or thin or missing insulation in the attic, it will pay to adjust it or add more. Air sealing before insulating your attic will optimize performance, help to more quickly recoup the cost of the improvement and noticeably enhance comfort.

4. Repair ducts. Your HVAC system works hard to keep your home comfortable. In all, about 20 to 30% of the air moving through your ducts may be lost in the attic or crawl space because of leaks and holes in ductwork. Sealing duct boots with mastic-type sealant can ensure conditioned air cools or heats your home, increasing comfort and costing you less as air stays inside.

Upgrading your home can seem like a daunting task, but there are many ways to make a difference depending on how much time and money you want to invest. The measures discussed here may not be cure-alls, but they can be good places to start if you’re looking to lower your electric bill and improve your comfort. Be sure to check with us at Northwest REC, your local electric co-op, for advice, programs, rebates and incentives. If you are unclear on what measures make the most sense, our reputable energy solutions department may be able to point you in the right direction.

Call us at 800-352-0014 or visit us online at NorthwesternREC.coop. 