

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

Kathy Cooper-Winters, District 5
Board Chair

Lisa Chausse, District 9
Board Vice Chair

Michael Sample, District 3
Board Secretary

Earl Koon, District 2
Board Treasurer

Karl Ebert, District 1
Robert G. Agnew, District 4
Kim Docter, District 6
David Rectenwald, District 7
Marian Davis, District 8
Lanny Rodgers, District 10

Staff

Bill Buchanan, President & CEO
Thomas Dimperio, VP –
Information Technology
Kathy Lane, VP & CFO

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

Main Access Number

1-800-352-0014

Emergencies/Outages

1-800-352-0014

FAX

814-398-8064

Office Hours

Monday through Friday
7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Amy Wellington, Editor

Linda King, Managing Editor

From the President & CEO



Let's talk

By Bill Buchanan

THE ENERGY industry is undergoing rapid change, and technology is paving the way for innovation in the way energy is used, produced, stored, and shared. Consumers are interested in more green energy alternatives while smart homes and apps make managing energy use more convenient than ever.

While the changing energy market has created more options for consumers, it has also resulted in more utility scams. That's because of two factors.

Utility scams are common because of the vast number of utilities that exist. Second, new products and services in the energy industry provide an opening for scammers to provide misleading information or shoddy products.

Avoid phone scams

A typical phone scam begins with a phone number that appears to be from a valid utility company. The scammer will claim you have a past due account and threaten to disconnect service. The scammer may demand that you use a prepaid debit card or money order, often within a very short, urgent time frame to pay the "past due" amount.

You can combat this scam by being aware of the status of your account. Never give your banking or personal information over the phone to someone you did not call. If you have a question about your energy bill, call us directly at 1-800-352-0014. Do not use the phone number given by the scammer.

Avoid solar scams

Homeowners with rooftop solar may

receive a sales call offering an accessory, upgrade or extended warranty to their solar array. The calls could be from crooks claiming to represent a solar company. Again, if you are not expecting the call, don't be fooled. These calls are likely a scam. Call the company that installed the solar array if you think there may be a problem. Other than occasional cleaning, rooftop solar (if installed correctly) is virtually maintenance-free.

Use trusted sources

If you're considering solar, make sure you are working with a reputable company. Because this is still an emerging industry with evolving technology, there has been a proliferation of pop-up companies. Representatives of rooftop solar companies may have more sales experience than knowledge of the energy industry, and their primary goal may not be what's in your best interest.

Northwestern REC can offer a candid assessment to determine whether rooftop solar is right for you. After all, we have a different "bottom line" that is not directly tied to the sale of a product or service. We take a more holistic, objective view of how to achieve energy and cost savings for our members, and that may or may not include solar.

In this ever-changing environment, it's important to remember you have a trusted energy adviser — your local electric cooperative. We are a community-focused organization that works to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable and safe energy to our members. 

16th annual M2M Golf Outing still on for June 17, 2020

Shotgun Start — 9 a.m.

Cost per player — \$70, Cost per team — \$280

Skins included in entry fee.

Golfer fee includes \$15 donation. Thank you.

50/50, Chinese Auction and other special events available.

Line Prizes & Team Prizes to reward superior skills.

Door Prizes, lunch and dinner will be provided — perhaps in take-out containers. TBD

The Member-to-Member, Inc. program collects contributions to help Northwestern REC members with financial difficulties keep their electric bills paid.

Sign-up deadline is June 10.

Register by calling Northwestern REC
at 1-800-352-0014

Sponsorship Opportunities

\$1,500 Substation Sponsor: Four golfers, top billing PLUS food, beverage or hole-in-one sponsor (you pick!), inclusion in Member \$en\$e as available, Facebook & Twitter ads, personal recognition at the event, event exhibit available and inclusion in all advertising to promote the event.

\$1,250 Power Line Sponsor: Four golfers, top billing, inclusion in Member \$en\$e as available, Facebook & Twitter ads, personal recognition at the event, event exhibit available and inclusion in all advertising to promote the event.

\$600 Bucket Truck Sponsor: Two golfers, premium billing, one-year inclusion in Member \$en\$e as available, Facebook & Twitter ads, personal recognition at the event, event exhibit available and inclusion in all advertising to promote the event.

\$300 Water Heater Sponsor: High profile listing, personal recognition at the event, Facebook & Twitter ads, event exhibit available and inclusion in all promotional advertising.

\$150 Transformer Sponsor: Hole sponsor. Signage on a tee will recognize your support.

Meter Sponsor: We appreciate any monetary donation or door prizes you can offer to help make this event a success and to promote your business.

ANNUAL MEETING

Annual meeting will be held on August 22, 2020

NO MATTER what comes our way between now and then, within reason, the 84th Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting will be held on Sat., Aug. 22, at the New Beginnings Church of God on Leslie Road in Meadville. It may be virtual, but it WILL happen. So please mark your calendars. We won't know more about the "how" until we get closer to August.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, there are several upcoming events that will still occur. As usual, you will receive the annual report to the membership in your July issue of *Penn Lines*. There you will find important facts and figures regarding the financial state of your cooperative, as well as interesting tidbits of information that will help answer any questions you may have.

On June 23, the official annual meeting notices will be mailed to all active co-op memberships. Along with this notice, you will receive information about the board nominees, a ballot and instructions regarding how to cast your vote. This year, there will be three voting options for Districts 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Option 1: as soon as you receive your annual meeting notice in the mail, you can complete the paper ballot and return it in the envelope provided. The co-op has contracted with a third-party survey company to compile all the votes up until Aug. 19.

Option 2: there will be a link included with your annual meeting notice that you can enter on a computer. The

link will take you to an online voting system where you will be able to cast your vote. This link can also be provided to you with a current email address.

Option 3: using a computer, when you login to SmartHub after June 23, you will find a VOTE button at the top right of your screen. That link will take you to an online voting system where you can cast your vote.

Please note, should you cast your vote electronically (option 2 or 3), the co-op will only be aware that you voted. Who you vote for will remain anonymous.

With the very real possibility that our annual meeting will have to be virtual this year, there will not be paper ballot voting at the annual meeting. Director elections will close at midnight on Aug. 19.

Once the elections close, the member panel for director elections will review all the votes in private. Election results will be presented during the annual meeting by the chair of the member panel.

(The member panel for director elections is made up of five cooperative members whose districts are not part of the current election.)

Many of you are probably wondering about the annual meeting gift and free tickets to the Crawford County Fair we are planning for this year. At the time this article was written, the status of the Crawford County Fair had not been decided.

Regardless of the Fair Board's decision, all memberships registered for the

annual meeting will have the ability to pick up their free gift on Aug. 22 at the New Beginnings Church of God. We are also considering a drive-thru option on Friday, Aug. 21. More information will be forthcoming.

If the Crawford County Fair is a go, we will have free admission tickets to the fair and a \$25 voucher booklet for food, drinks, and rides for each membership that registers for the annual meeting. Like the annual meeting gift, these items will be available for pick up on Saturday, Aug. 22, at the New Beginnings Church of God on Leslie Road in Meadville. Otherwise, these items will be saved and used in August 2021.

Most importantly, the co-op WILL be conducting a canned food drive during the annual meeting on Aug. 22, 2020. This annual event has been so well received by the members of Northwestern REC that the amount of non-perishable food items continues to grow each year.

The food pantries have been hit hard this year by the COVID-19 pandemic; let's help them replenish their shelves. Food items will be accepted when and near to where members are able to register for the annual meeting and pick up their gifts on Saturday, Aug. 22, and possibly on Friday, Aug. 21.

Please watch for updates in future issues of *Penn Lines*, on your electric bills and on our social media pages. Feel free to contact us anytime at 1-800-352-0014 or online at NorthwesternREC.coop. Stay well. 🌞

IT CAN WAIT

AVOID ALL DISTRACTIONS WHILE DRIVING

Our crews often work roadside. Because of that, we ask you to pay attention when approaching a work zone. Please respect and obey orange work zone signs. **Slow down, move over, and follow any other instructions** when approaching and moving through a **work zone**.

According to the **U.S. DOT's National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration**:

- **Nine percent of fatal crashes** in 2017 were reported as distraction-affected crashes.
- In 2017, there were **3,166 people killed** in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers.
- **Six percent** of all drivers involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crashes.
- **Drivers age 15 to 19** have the largest proportion of drivers who were distracted at the time of the fatal crashes.
- In 2017, there were **599 pedestrians, bicyclists, and others killed** in distraction-affected crashes.

 Safe
Electricity.org



Electric co-ops are contributing to a smarter grid

IT'S A FAMILIAR SCENE: poles and wires stretching into the distance alongside a rural highway. This image might appear no different now than it did many years ago. But look more closely.

Invisible to most of us is an overlay of new equipment — chips, sensors and fiber — linking remote distribution infrastructure to the utility's operations center using advanced communications technology.

Those iconic poles and wires are now part of a “smart grid” that can be operated using software and automation.

For electric cooperatives, “digitalization” of electric infrastructure kicked into high gear in 2013 when the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) funded new technology research at 23 electric co-ops across the country. That partnership has now evolved into a robust research program exploring everything from drones and smart solar inverters to cybersecurity training and carbon capture technology.

Here are some of the ways co-op consumer-members are already benefiting from a smarter grid:

- ▶ Fewer power outages. In certain situations, smart feeder switching can reroute power around problems such as downed power lines, which reduces the number of people affected by an outage.
- ▶ Pre-pay programs. Most co-op pre-pay billing programs no longer impose hefty reconnection fees because, thanks to advanced digital meters, the co-op doesn't need to send out a truck to physically reconnect the home.
- ▶ Cost savings from increased efficiency. Many of the new

technologies are improving the efficiency of co-op operations — from reducing the amount of electricity lost in transmission to reducing the need for sending out trucks. These cost savings are passed on to co-op members.

- ▶ Improved safety for co-op workers and the members. The data from smart technologies provide utility operators a more detailed view of what is happening on the electric system. Co-ops have found that the data can help them identify electrical hazards faster.

The research partnership between electric cooperatives and the DOE, including the national laboratories, has enabled co-ops nationwide to increase their total solar energy capacity, install cutting-edge batteries for energy storage and microgrids, develop data analytics tools, and find new ways to capture emissions from coal and natural gas power plants.

This partnership gives electric co-ops in some of the most remote regions of the country access to an amazing network of researchers, including researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, Purdue University and the University of California at Berkeley, to name a few.

In exchange, the researchers can see how these new technologies operate in the real-world.

So, the next time you are driving down a long highway and you see poles and wires stretching into the far distance, know there's more to that system than meets the eye. While the electricity in your home powers the toaster just as it always did, that electricity is more efficient, more reliable and safer thanks to innovation made possible by cooperation. 🌟