

SEPTEMBER 2025

PENNLINES

Trading College for the Trades

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SEPTEMBER

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"We don't need American idols. We need American icons. Icons of work."

Mike Rowe, creator and host of "Dirty Jobs"



ON THE COVER

Jade Kelsey, a welder at R&S Machine Co. Inc. in Punxsutawney, is among a generation of young adults turning to the trades, which have a growing need for skilled employees.

PHOTO BY KAYLIN ACRI

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The 'Fun Job'

Penn Lines Starts a New Chapter



PETER A. FITZGERALD

LAST MONTH, JEN PAWOL MADE history as the first woman to umpire a Major League Baseball game. This month, we're making a little history of our own: We're proud to name Jill Ercolino as the new editor of *Penn Lines* — the first female editor in the magazine's nearly 60-year history.

An award-winning writer, Jill joined the *Penn Lines* team in May 2021 as senior editor. From the start, her reporting brought fresh energy to the magazine, guiding us through the challenges of the pandemic and helping lead a major redesign in 2022. Most recently, she served as managing editor.

Now, as editor, Jill will shape the future of *Penn Lines*, and we're thrilled to have her in this role. She brings deep experience and a passion for storytelling. Jill began her journalism career at *The Record Herald*, a family-owned newspaper in Franklin County, where she covered everything from township meetings and county fairs to domestic violence and a tragic plane crash in the community. She then moved on to the *Pennsylvania Township News* magazine, where she was a writer and an editor for more than two decades. Jill studied at Penn State and has a degree in journalism.

I'm excited about this transition. It reminds me of my own start. When I took over as editor of *Penn Lines* nearly 20 years ago, I remember receiving one piece of advice: *Don't mess with the recipes*. It sounded simple enough at the time.

I didn't give it much thought — until I did mess with the recipes. It was during a previous redesign, when we swapped out the old "recipe card" graphics for a cleaner layout. That's when the letters started rolling in. Turns out, many readers had been clipping and saving those recipe cards for years, neatly filing them away for use in their kitchens.

People are serious about their recipes. Don't get me started about the time we ran a recipe with raw eggs.

I learned a couple lessons from that experience. First, people really read *Penn Lines*. While our readership surveys confirm this, I had plenty of first-hand feedback from readers over the years letting me know how they felt about the magazine, especially when we'd done something they didn't like. The day we retired the Earl Pitts column comes to mind. Even my wife hasn't forgiven me for that.

Second, *Penn Lines* is more than an energy industry magazine. Often, industry colleagues tell me that I have the "fun job." Yes, we cover serious topics — grid reliability, electric safety, power costs — but we also tell the stories of rural Pennsylvanians, and that has been immensely rewarding.

The job has taken me from the Mason-Dixon Line to the shores of Lake Erie, and everywhere in between. I've been to turkey farms, rural wineries, and even the home of Punxsutawney Phil. I've visited local schools and volunteer fire departments and have been welcomed into the homes of Gold Star families to tell their story.

At its heart, *Penn Lines* is really about your local cooperative community. The magazine serves as a voice, telling the story of rural communities across the Commonwealth. It's been an honor to help tell that story over the past two decades. It's also been fun. I want to thank you for welcoming *Penn Lines* into your homes.

I'm confident the magazine is in excellent hands with Jill at the helm. If I could offer her any advice, it would be this: *Don't mess with the recipes*. And have fun. 🍷

PETER A. FITZGERALD

EXECUTIVE EDITOR, *PENN LINES*

VICE PRESIDENT - PUBLIC AFFAIRS & MEMBER SERVICES,

PENNSYLVANIA RURAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION AND ALLEGHENY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Peter A. Fitzgerald

EDITOR
Jill M. Ercolino

SENIOR TECHNICAL EDITOR
Michael T. Crawford

LAYOUT & DESIGN
Kaylin E. Acri

ADVERTISING & PRODUCTION
COORDINATOR
Michelle M. Smith

CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS
**John Kasun, Anne M. Kirchner,
Yvonne Butts-Mitchell,
Steve Piatt**

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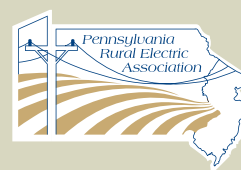
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BACK TO (TRADE) SCHOOL

Pennsylvania has a rich history of building things. I was reminded of that on a recent visit to Bethlehem in Northampton County. There, along the Lehigh River, stand the rusting remnants of the once-mighty Bethlehem Steel mill – an almost-forgotten monument to America's industrial past.

At its height, the mill was one of the world's largest steel producers, earning Bethlehem the nickname "the city that helped build America." It provided the steel for iconic landmarks like the Golden Gate Bridge, Hoover Dam and the Empire State Building. It also played a critical role in national defense, supplying the armor, guns and battleships that helped win two world wars.



The plant once employed 30,000 workers and operated 24/7. But by 1995, a combination of foreign competition and labor unrest brought its nearly 150-year run to an end.

Today, the site is home to a casino and entertainment complex, but the mill's hulking blast furnaces still stand as a stark reminder of the country's industrial might. Visitors can explore the plant's past along a mile-long walking tour.

I pondered that past while reading this month's feature on trade schools, wondering what became of our tradition of building things. But a trip to Jefferson County reassured me we are still quite capable of craftsmanship.

In Punxsutawney, I toured R&S Machine Co. (featured in this month's *Penn Lines*) and met with machinists who still work with steel. Using mills, lathes, grinders, and drill presses, they create precision parts and components for commercial and industrial use across the Commonwealth – and around the globe.



Many of the R&S employees got their start in trade schools. Their work not only powers industry, it sustains local families. And the shining steel components on the shop floor remind me that Pennsylvania is still building things.

PETER A. FITZGERALD
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



COOLING DOWN: "The Old Farmer's Almanac" claims most of the Northeast, including Pennsylvania, will experience cooler temperatures this autumn than in recent years.

COOL WEATHER AHEAD

Almanac predicts lower than average temps for autumn

Fall is just around the corner, and the "The Old Farmer's Almanac" is predicting a cool and dry season throughout Pennsylvania.

The almanac's prediction for much of the northeastern part of the country indicated Pennsylvanians should expect cooler and drier conditions than they typically experience this time of year. According to the almanac, September's average temperature will be 59 degrees, 2 degrees below what has been reported in recent years.

October, meanwhile, is on track for an average of 46 degrees, which is 3 degrees below what has been reported in recent years.

The forecast for the Northeast differs from elsewhere in the country, with the almanac predicting many other areas will experience warmer-than-average temperatures.

FUN FOR EVERYONE

Pa. amusement parks among best-ranked attractions in America

Three Pennsylvania amusement parks are among the highest

ranked attractions in the United States, according to the Travelers' Choice Awards list of the "Best of the Best Things to Do" compiled by Tripadvisor.

The highest ranked Pennsylvania park was Elysburg's Knoebels Amusement Resort, which ranked No. 3 behind Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World, which took the No. 2 spot, and Tennessee's Dollywood, which finished No. 1.

Other Pennsylvania parks that made the list included Erie's Splash Lagoon Indoor Water Park Resort, which came in at No. 15, and Hersheypark, which finished in the 18th spot.

MODERNIZING HISTORY

State Museum building to receive largest upgrade since opening

The State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg is set to receive an upgrade as the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission recently announced a \$55 million infrastructure revitalization project for the facility.

This will be the largest and most comprehensive upgrade to the complex since the museum and tower opened in 1964. While the project is

expected to begin in spring 2026, the museum will remain open through July to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

After that, the museum is expected to be closed from August until early 2029.

Roughly half of the exhibits in the museum's 105,000 square feet of gallery space will be redesigned and rebuilt. In addition, the 16th and 17th floors of the archives tower will be combined into an observation floor, with large windows providing views to the east and west.

BACK IN BUSINESS

Raystown Lake reopens campgrounds after filling personnel shortages

Raystown Lake's campgrounds are open for business again.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) announced last month that three of the lake's campgrounds in Huntingdon County would reopen after being forced to close due to federal funding cuts earlier this year that led to staffing shortages.

Two of the three campgrounds — Susquehannock and Nancy's Boat-to-Shore — reopened Aug. 15, while the third, Seven Points, is set to open its gates Sept. 5.

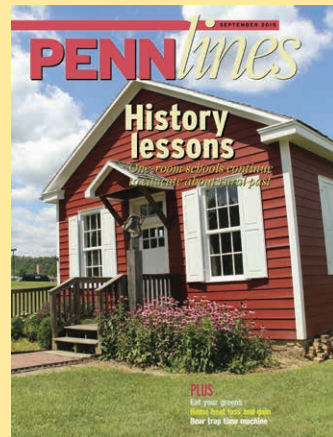
"Raystown Lake is a paramount provider of outdoor recreation opportunities in Pennsylvania," Baltimore District Commander Col. Francis Pera said in a news release. "Our staff is prepared to assist visitors in creating lasting memories."

USACE received final approval in early August to fill the personnel shortages. New hires have since taken the mandatory safety training to ensure the campgrounds could reopen before summer's end.

Campground reservations can be made at recreation.gov.

Raystown Lake, located in Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's service territory, is home to the William F. Matson Hydroelectric Plant, operated by Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc., the wholesale energy provider for the 14 rural electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. 🇺🇸

TIME LINES



Ten years ago, *Penn Lines* highlighted one-room schools and the work that some cooperative members conducted to preserve their history. From a woman in Clearfield County who bought the schoolhouse in which she attended grades 1 through 6 to the Somerset County one-room schoolhouse that was donated to a church in the 1930s, the article served as a reminder of how important it is to keep the history of education alive.



A TASTE OF SCOTLAND

A fiddle workshop. The caber toss and stone throw. The National Harp Championship. You can find all that and more at the 31st PennWest Edinboro Highland Games Sept. 4-6 at PennWest Edinboro's campus, Erie County. The celebration will feature Celtic vendors, traditional Scottish foods and family-friendly fun. Admission is free. Learn more at pennwest.edu.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Outdoor enthusiasts will unite at the Wild Alleghenies Outdoor Adventure & Sportsman's Expo Sept. 13 at PNG Field in Altoona, Blair County. The event will feature more than 300 vendors. Learn more at wildallegheniesoutdooradventureexpo.com.



WILDALLEGHENIESOUTDOORADVENTUREEXPO.COM



SEPTEMBER SIPPIN'

Pennsylvania wines will be flowing Sept. 20 at the Wyalusing Valley Wine Festival in Bradford County. The event will spotlight 12 local wineries and is open to adults, 21 and older. Learn more at wyalusingwinefestival.com.

FALL FUN

Embrace autumn at the Fall Fling Oct. 4-5 at the Portersville Steam Show Grounds in Butler County. The event will feature everything from a cider press and an antique car rally to farm animals and train rides. For more, visit portersvillesteamshow.com.



PORTERSVILLESTEAMSHOW.COM

A POWERFUL DECISION: Alex Mazanowski left college to study a trade. Today, he's found success and a stable career as a journeyman lineman at Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative.





TRADING COLLEGE FOR THE TRADES

More Young Adults
Are Taking a
Hands-on Approach
to Their Future

PAULA PIATT

Penn Lines Contributor

ALEX MAZANOWSKI WILL BE THE first to tell you he's more of a lunch-bucket guy than a backpack guy. Carrying books around a college campus wasn't for him; after a year at a state school, he realized his "heart was just never in it."

That's not the case today.

A decade into his career as a journeyman lineworker, Mazanowski has never looked back on his decision to grab some trade-skills training and join the workforce. He started as a sheet metal worker in the volatile aerospace industry but longed to be outdoors in a stable job he could find anywhere in the country. A high school friend suggested lineworker school.

"He highly recommended it, and so when more layoffs were coming, I just decided to leave on my own terms," Mazanowski remembers.

Later that year, with 10 weeks of lineworker pre-apprentice training behind him, he took a part-time summer job at Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC); a full-time job offer followed in the fall. He's been with the co-op ever since, nearing his 11-year anniversary.

"I'm a huge fan of trade schools," Mazanowski says. "Trades are everywhere ... there have to be electricians, there have to be plumbers ... and there have to be lineworkers out working in a storm."

Industry has known it all along.

"Everyone is telling us there is a need, that they don't have enough

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

people to fill the current jobs,” says Jody McCarty, the workforce program administrator with the Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission (NTRPDC), which covers five counties, a region also served by Claverack REC, Tri-County REC and Sullivan County REC.

Rob Bair, president of the Pennsylvania State Building & Construction Trades Council, agrees: “The bedrock of our industry, and the strength of our future, lies in the hands of the next generation of skilled workers. With a retiring workforce and increased demand, investing in the training and development of young talent isn’t just an option — it’s imperative for the continued growth and innovation of the building and construction trades and many others.”

McCarty says introducing students to their options at an early age is critical to filling these hands-on professions. That’s why she and Renae Chamberlain, the commission’s business education program manager, put together the Manufacturing and Trades Career Camp.

“We want to give the students an idea of the careers that are available,” says Chamberlain of the three-day summer camp. Mornings introduce sixth through ninth graders to the trades, and afternoons offer on-site tours and demonstrations at various employers, including Claverack REC in Wysox, Bradford County.

“We want to catch these students before they’ve made their career plans,” she adds. “We provide them with

information on programs available through our career and technical center here in Bradford County as well as the Apprenticeship Training Office.”

A changing mentality

Students are starting to take notice.

McCarty has seen enrollments at Bradford County’s Northern Tier Career Center nearly double in the last decade, and NTRPDC’s career coaches work with more than 10,000 students a year. This trend, occurring nationwide, is being driven by factors like rising college costs, concerns about job security in some white-collar professions and a growing demand for skilled tradespeople, experts say.

“That ‘college-for-all’ mentality has really changed in the last 10 years,” McCarty says, “and the educational system has started to change the rhetoric ... college is not for everyone, and we need short-term training options.”

It hasn’t always been that way, though. The “vo-tech” stigma is real — very real.

“We heard all that — that the vocational school kids were the ones who didn’t try as hard or they went there because they didn’t care,” says Tim Burkett, a 1979 graduate of Punxsutawney High School and Jefferson County Vo-Tech. “Nothing was further from the truth.”

Today, Burkett not only owns a busy machine shop in Punxsutawney but is also vice chairman of the

board for DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative as well as the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA), the statewide advocate for co-ops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Unfortunately, though, the vo-tech stigma has created a “massive skills gap” in our country, says television personality Mike Rowe of “Dirty Jobs” fame. To right that wrong, he created the mikeroweWORKS Foundation, a nonprofit that champions skilled trades and has provided more than \$16 million in scholarships for teens since 2008.

“Pop culture has glorified the ‘corner office job’ while unintentionally belittling the jobs that helped build the corner office. As a result, our society has devalued any other path to success and happiness,” according to the foundation’s website. “Millions of well-intended parents and guidance



STEVE PLATT

THE NEXT GENERATION: Ryan Chamberlain, communication technician for Revolution Broadband, a subsidiary of Wysox-based Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, introduces local students to equipment he uses on the job. The students visited the co-op as part of the Manufacturing and Trades Career Camp, sponsored this summer by the Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission.



SOMETHING IN COMMON: Tim Burkett, center, owner of R&S Machine Co. Inc. in Punxsutawney, attended Jefferson County Vo-Tech and has found success hiring other graduates from his alma mater. They are, from left: Mike Kennedy, Jay Fox, Burkett, Derek Elkin, Jeff Pennington and Brian Shean. Burkett is vice chairman of the board for DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative as well as the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, the statewide advocate for co-ops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

counselors see apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities as ‘vocational consolation prizes,’ best suited for those not cut out for the brass ring: a four-year degree.”

This thinking has been going on for decades. Just ask Burkett, who says his decision to pursue a trade as a new high school graduate 46 years ago was a tough one for his family.

“My decision was not difficult for me, but it was for my parents. They strongly wanted me to go to college,” he says, noting neither of his parents had the opportunity to pursue higher education. “The deciding factor for me wasn’t necessarily the monetary expense, but the time involved. Through high school, I was working and then at graduation, I could hit the ground running.”

As a young man, he worked at a local machine shop, working his way up to foreman, and eventually bought R&S Machine Co. Inc. The small operation has grown under Burkett’s leadership and now employs almost two dozen workers — about a third of them coming from his tech-school alma mater.

Fellow PREA Board member Wayne Farabaugh, who is vice chairman of the REA Energy Cooperative Board in Indiana, Pa., took a similar route, spending two years in the machine shop curriculum at Admiral Peary Area Vocational Technical School in Cambria County. Facing a

tight job market at graduation, Farabaugh enrolled at what is now the Pennsylvania College of Technology (Penn College), where he studied machine tool technology.

After completing the program, he found his first — and only — job at Indiana Tool & Die Co. In the past 42 years, he’s performed just about every job at the company and is keen to give young people an opportunity.

“We’ve always leaned toward hiring younger people,” Farabaugh says. “I know what I went through personally; I always enjoy helping them get started and passing along what people gave to me.”

Filling a need

Businesses are also taking an active role in crafting curriculums at local career and technical education schools. REA Energy is among them.

Nick Hartman, the co-op’s manager of engineering, sits on the advisory committee for the River Valley STEAM Academy, a workforce development initiative of the River Valley School District in Indiana and Westmoreland counties. He says he knows what he needs from young graduates.

“We’re really looking for someone who can — and knows — how to learn,” Hartman says. “The field of staking

engineers [those who physically design the power grid we all live on], for example, isn't something that's taught, but if you have someone with a solid understanding of electricity and how things are constructed, we can teach them on the job."

At River Valley, Hartman has helped to build the curriculum for the Electrical Occupations and Powerline Program, which provides basic skills and works with post-secondary partners, including Penn College and the cooperative, to prepare students for work in the electrical, construction and powerline industries.

Enrollments at Pennsylvania's tech schools are climbing. The 2022-2023 academic year had 1,415 approved programs at 88 career and tech centers around the state, with an enrollment of 59,838 — a 4.6% increase from 2021-2022. As numbers continue to grow, the state continues to increase program funding. It's provided \$65 million in the past two years and included another \$5.5 million in Gov. Josh Shapiro's 2025-2026 budget proposal.

Sam Schuss, a career counselor at the Bedford County Technical Center (BCTC) and a Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative member, can also attest to the growth.

"While our population of students, as a whole, is dropping, our enrollment percentages [at BCTC] are up," he says. "Technology education is taking off nationwide because we have the need. The people who do those jobs ... plumbers, electricians, masons ... are trying to retire. That's one of the reasons we're looking at expanding our programs."

'I knew where I wanted to be'

Layne McCormick, whose family gets service from Sullivan County REC, says hands-on experience early on — a key part of most career and tech school curriculums — is crucial to helping students understand exactly what they're signing up for.

"It teaches you a lot about yourself because the first month will be the hardest," McCormick says, remembering his summer at Georgia's Southeast Lineman Training



SUPPORTING THE TRADES: From the board of directors to the staff, REA Energy Cooperative, based in Indiana, Pa., supports the trades. Vice Chairman Wayne Farabaugh, standing, who's worked at Indiana Tool & Die for 42 years, is committed to giving young adults a start in the business. Farabaugh also serves on the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association Board, the voice for cooperatives statewide. Meanwhile, Manager of Engineering Nick Hartman is helping to develop the Electrical Occupations and Powerline Program at River Valley STEAM Academy.

Center, an education he was able to pursue thanks to a scholarship from the cooperative. "There were a lot of kids who quit that first month."

But McCormick was already locked in. He not only found a mentor at Sullivan County REC but also job-shadowed at the co-op during his senior year at Hughesville High School to learn as much as possible about line work.

"You can't lose track of your goal. Trade school is a big investment, and it's easy to get comfortable with stepping stones," he says, explaining he could have taken a job trimming trees or installing communications lines rather than pursuing line work. "But I knew where I wanted to be in the end and that was working for a power company."

For those like McCormick who dream of climbing utility poles, lineworker's school is usually the first step.

"We call it a lineman's boot camp," says 50-year veteran Ken Bilek, founder and director of training at Global Powerline Academy in Blair County, which has a 92% graduation rate for its 10-week school. "The general rule of thumb is that it takes 10 years before you are fully capable of handling what you're going to see out there; it's that diversified. We're giving them the fundamentals."

In the past dozen years, 500 students have completed the pre-apprentice program, including Somerset REC's Alex Mazanowski. And now, past the 10-year mark himself, Mazanowski has his own apprentice — and a lifetime career, something he's always wanted.

"[Trade] jobs," he says proudly, "aren't going anywhere." 📢

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Local Lore

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative

Breaking the Ice

Summer ice that melts in the winter? A mysterious silver ore? Scientists claiming it's the "Eighth Wonder of the World?"

This isn't some random, far-away tourist destination; this is the Coudersport Ice Mine in Potter County, an area served by Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative.

The story of the attraction at 176 Ice Mine Road dates back more than a century. As legend has it, in the late 1800s, a Seneca Nation Indian appeared in Coudersport to present onlookers with a silver ore he claimed he found in the woods. The tale sparked inspiration in would-be prospectors hoping to find similar ores in the area.

Enter John Dodd, a Potter County farmer, and farmhand Billy O'Neil, who set out together to discover their fortune. O'Neil arrived with a divining



TIP OF THE ICEBURG: The Coudersport Ice Mine in Potter County is one of Pennsylvania's most interesting tourist attractions. Open between Memorial Day and Labor Day, its history dates back to the late 1800s.

rod that he said would point the pair to the riches.

Instead of hitting the jackpot, however, O'Neil's shovel hit something else: ice.

More curious to the men was the fact that they found this ice on a hot summer day. That winter, Dodd returned to the site only to find the ice was melting. Fast-forward to the following summer: Dodd found the ice reforming.

Turns out, the oddity is the result of air currents traveling through the mountain's cracks and loose rocks. In winter, cold air is drawn into the cave, which forces out the warm, summer air, melting the ice. In spring, the warm air returns, forcing out the colder air and forming ice.

Today, the Coudersport Ice Mine — open Wednesdays to Sundays, Memorial Day to Labor Day — welcomes about 10,000 visitors per season. Admission is \$5.

As for Dodd and O'Neil, they never did come across any of the silver ores they coveted. Instead — and perhaps as the next best consolation — they managed to discover one of the coolest summer hideaways Potter County has to offer. ❄️



Main Office: Mansfield, Pa.
Consumer-members served: 19,780
Website: tri-countyrec.com

Meet the 'Pennsylvania Python'

This month's artwork comes from William Cote, son of Timothy and Christa Cote, members of Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative. While William draws other things, such as cars, he said he drew this snake because he's a good artist. Plus, the serpent's length — some 20 feet — makes it "awesome." It's so awesome, in fact, William named his creation the "Pennsylvania Python." Thank you, William, for sharing your art with us!

William Cote, age 9

CALLING ALL KIDS, ages 5 to 17:
Show off your artistic skills!

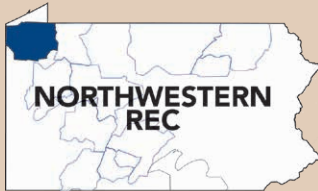
Each month, we'll feature the artwork of our young readers (or our readers' youngsters), inspired by something they've read in *Penn Lines*. Paints, pencils, crayons, clay, sand — any physical medium is OK! You may send digital photos of the creation to CommunityCorner@prea.com, but please: no digital artwork.

Please include the artist's name, age and electric cooperative, plus a 25- to 50-word description of the art.



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.com

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814-398-8064

OFFICE HOURS

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

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Amber Till
Emily Sonntag

COOPERATIVE CONNECTION

Construction Project Focuses on Growth



RYAN MELLER

NORTHWESTERN RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC) is owned by the members we serve. This cooperative business model helps us avoid chasing profits and instead allows us to focus on service to our members and the community. Any profits — we call them margins — are reinvested in the cooperative or returned to our members as capital credits at the end of each year.

While the physical footprint of our service territory cannot expand, we grow by strengthening our systems as well as the grid that delivers electricity to your home. We can ensure this growth continues by providing the team at Northwestern REC with quality tools, equipment and facilities to do their jobs well.

When you think of our equipment, you likely think of a bucket truck. With advances in technology and equipment, the size of these trucks has increased. Because of that, the size of the facility where they're stored has grown, too. Our garage, which was first built in 1961, has expanded nine different times throughout its life, growing each time our fleet — or the trucks themselves — have grown.

And now it's time for another transition.

A new solution for an ongoing problem

Several years ago, we found ourselves facing a shortage of space. As we ordered new trucks to replace retired equipment, we were no longer able to find bucket or digger trucks that fit inside our garage. While the buildings had many garage bays, only one of them was large enough to fit a full-sized truck.

As the size of trucks grew, we turned to buying custom trucks. On the north side of the building, the issue was the length of the trucks. When parked, our largest trucks had only inches between the front bumper and the garage door.

On the south side of the building, we worried about the safety of employees who had to maneuver oversized trucks into undersized bays.

In 2022, we realized ordering custom trucks to fit our antiquated building was no longer the answer. Custom trucks cost about \$100,000 more than standard ones and take twice as long to build, which resulted in significant delivery delays, a problem that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To avoid the backlog and additional cost of ordering custom trucks, we discussed expanding the garage for the 10th time, but we faced significant issues. The garage needed a new roof, and estimates to replace it were close to \$500,000. As we explored our options, we realized the best solution was to rebuild the garage with an expanded footprint.

The new garage will now allow us to better meet the needs of today and tomorrow. You'll find more information about the process and anticipated final product on page 14B.

We're looking forward to the upgraded facility that will keep our equipment, supplies and dedicated employees safe from the elements while at our headquarters — and allow us to better serve you, our members. 📍

Cooperatively yours,

RYAN MELLER
PRESIDENT & CEO



BIG CHANGES: Early bucket trucks were much smaller than modern-day equipment that serves the same purpose. When the garage at Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative was first built, these smaller vehicles made up the fleet. The evolution of bucket trucks resulted in larger equipment that outgrew the cooperative's garage.

Building for the Future

Garage Rebuild offers Room to Grow

AMBER TILL, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

THOUGH IT MAY BE DIFFICULT to see while driving by, the landscape at Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) headquarters is undergoing a transformation.

Piles of rubble, heavy storage containers, construction dumpsters and large equipment have been on-site since demolition of the garage attached to the office building began in late May. The project makes way for a new building that will be larger, expanded on two sides, and taller than the previous structure.

The garage is home to our fleet vehicles: trucks of various sizes used in line maintenance as well as vehicles used to transport team members and materials. The building also houses rooms for working on meters and transformers, space for storage, as well as restrooms and showers for lineworkers.

Working with architects and builders, members of the Northwestern REC team began planning this project in fall 2022. Space constraints in the existing garage were causing issues — particularly with parking trucks necessary to construct, maintain, and repair electric lines. After thoroughly weighing options, the decision was made to demolish and rebuild most of the existing garage because it made better financial sense. The cooperative's board of directors and management team settled on working with the design-build firm Associated Contractors, Inc.

"It's a different process, working with a design builder," Purchasing and Maintenance Manager Jamie Rockwell explains. "They let the project out for bid, but we required multiple bids for each trade and ensured that companies who are members of Northwestern REC had

the opportunity to bid on the project."

By mid-July of this year, the project was underway. The site survey, asbestos testing and remediation, water line relocation, grading and excavation, and most demolition were completed. This month, the site prep, along with foundations and underground utility work, will likely be finished. The goal is to have the roof built by November before winter weather arrives.

The project, which includes erecting a customized, prefabricated building, will be finished next spring. The result will be a larger building with a taller, sloped roof, larger garage doors, improved lighting, in-floor hot-water heat, better insulation, overhead fans, and two overhead cranes to load and unload trucks.

Rockwell explains a major reason for the project was to create more space for bucket trucks, which have increased in size since the garage was first built more than six decades ago.

"It will allow us to have better equipment," he says. "We will no longer have to order custom trucks, which will be less expensive and require less lead time."

According to Rockwell, the lead time for ordering custom-sized bucket trucks increased from two to four years. This, along with increased prices, affected both the operations and finances of Northwestern REC.

The project has other benefits, too, including additional storage space. Currently, supplies are stored in multiple buildings, making organizing and tracking inventory difficult.

The larger warehouse space will include taller shelves. In addition, the new garage will have a pitched roof, eliminating the maintenance issues

AMBER TILL/NORTHWESTERN REC



PROJECT BEGINS: Demolition of the old garage took place in May, June, and July, when walls, floors, and the concrete dock were knocked down. The concrete was ground up and will be used as fill for the new building, which will have a slightly larger footprint.

that come with flat roofs.

"The open design will allow us to do more work inside the building before pulling trucks outside," Rockwell explains. "There will be so much more room for activities."

Although much of the building has been demolished, portions remain intact, including the meter room, restrooms and showers for the lineworkers.

"The evolution of the bucket truck itself is the main reason we're doing this," Northwestern REC President & CEO Dr. Ryan Meller says. "I'm sure in 1961, when they first built the garage, they had 10 feet of extra space around the bucket truck. The first poles the co-op set were probably 30 feet, and now everything is set on a 45-foot pole."

As bucket trucks grew, that room to grow shrank. Even smaller maintenance trucks didn't fit into the building well.

"If the jib wasn't stored correctly, we'd have damage from hitting the top of the door," Meller notes, adding the additional space will now allow indoor storage of more trucks and other equipment, which is essential during winter to reduce rust damage.

Allowing more room to grow is a great way to start the 90th year of Northwestern REC, an anniversary made possible by our members. 🎉

Look Out for Safety While Working Outdoors

THE THIRD WEEK OF SEPTEMBER is National Farm Safety and Health Week, an opportunity to focus attention on safety awareness for farmers whose work brings them close to power lines.

During harvest season, large equipment moves throughout the countryside as the farmers who feed us harvest the fruits of their labor. As hardworking farmers put in long days in the fields, it's important for them to look up and look out.

Incidents involving contact with energized electric lines or equipment kill about 60 farmworkers a year.

According to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), incidents involving contact with energized electric lines or equipment kill about 60 farmworkers a year. With large equipment entering fields, it's important to keep in mind the clearance of power lines compared with the height of farm equipment — especially equipment with buckets, booms and jibs that extend vertically.

But asking farmers to look up is not enough on its own.

The public must also look out for farm equipment on and along our roads.

It's also essential for property owners to look down before digging. Pennsylvania residents are required to call the Pennsylvania One Call System (PA1Call) and request lines be marked before digging. Making that call prevents accidental damage to underground utilities — including electric lines. To reach PA1Call, dial 811 or visit pa1call.org.

Taking the time for safety not just in September, but all year, helps prevent dangerous situations in the long run. 📞

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Take advantage of "shoulder months," which refer to the transitional periods between peak heating and cooling seasons. During the fall, these milder weeks typically occur between September and November. Shoulder months offer a great opportunity to reduce home energy consumption as the need for extensive heating or cooling is reduced. Look for simple ways to boost indoor comfort without running your heating and cooling system. Use ceiling fans and open windows on breezy days to ventilate your home. On cooler days, add a layer of clothing and avoid running the heat.

5 Tips for a Safe Harvest

Electrical safety during harvest season requires vigilance and proactive measures.

Follow these tips to reduce the risk of electrical accidents.

1. Maintain at least a 10-foot distance from power lines when operating equipment like grain augers, elevators and other tall machinery.
2. Use a spotter to navigate safely around power lines and other electrical equipment.
3. Ensure all farm workers are trained on electrical safety procedures.
4. Regularly inspect all electrical equipment and machinery for signs of wear and damage.
5. Keep first aid kits and emergency contact numbers in an easily accessible location.



Powering Our Lives: Unraveling the Complexities of the Electric Grid

EMILY SONNTAG, COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING SPECIALIST

ELECTRICITY PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE in everyday life. It powers our homes, offices, hospitals and schools. We depend on it to keep us warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It also allows us to charge our phones and binge our favorite TV shows. If the power goes out, even briefly, our daily lives are disrupted.

The grid that delivers your electricity is often described as the most complex machine in the world. Transmission and distribution lines span millions of miles across the continent. More specifically, the grid is comprised of transformers, sensors, software, communication systems and other equipment that connects electric generators to customers.

Everyone uses different amounts of electricity throughout the day, so the supply and demand constantly changes. We typically use more electricity in the mornings when we're starting our day, and in the evenings when we're cooking dinner and using appliances. Severe weather and other factors also affect how much electricity is needed.

The U.S. Department of Energy is continually developing programs and initiatives to modernize and transform the nation's electric grid, but demand is growing every day, and we must grow with it.

The challenge for electric providers like Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is to plan for, produce and purchase enough electricity so it's available when we

need it. Too much or too little electricity in one place can cause problems. To ensure the system stays balanced, the electric grid must adjust to changes and unforeseen events in real time.

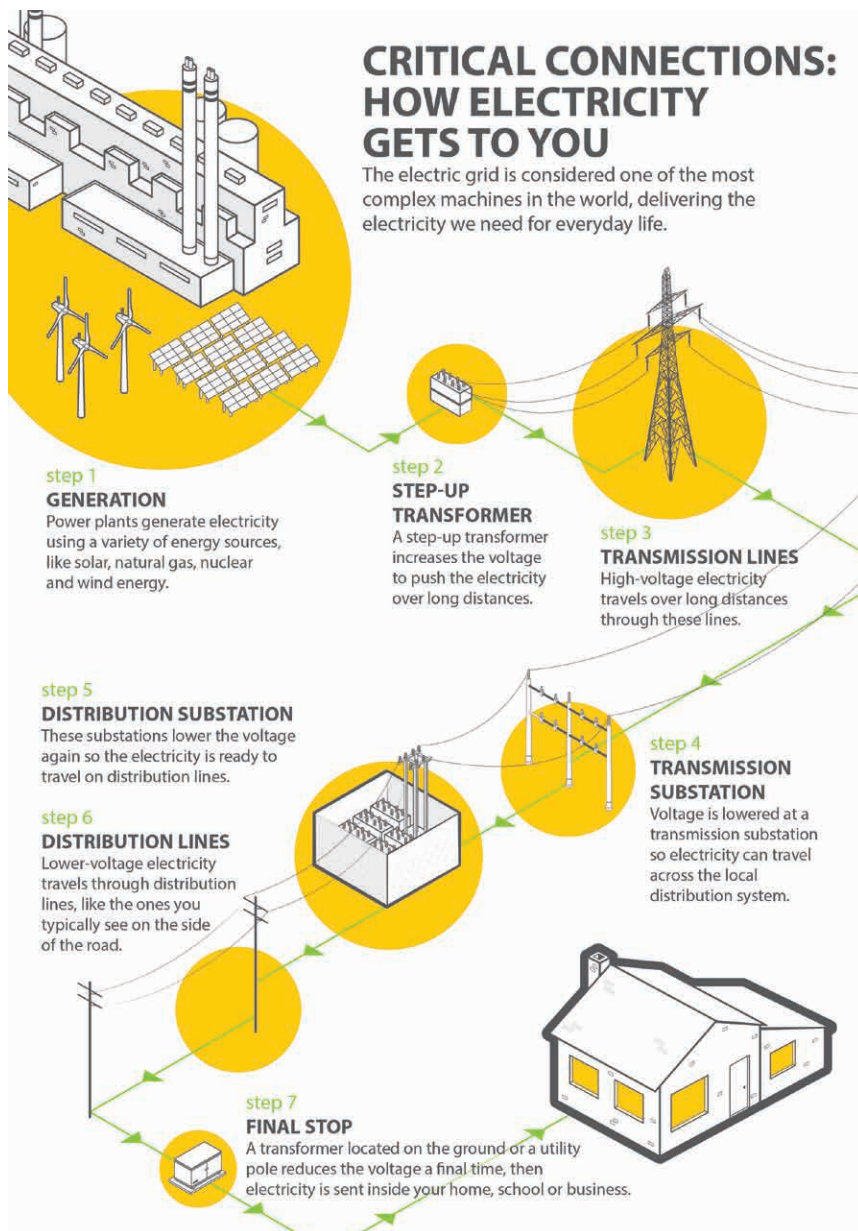
At its core, the electric grid is a network of power lines, transformers, substations and other infrastructure that spans the country, but it's not a singular system. The grid is divided into three major interconnected systems: the Eastern Interconnection, the Western Interconnection and the Electric Reliability Council of Texas. These grids operate independently; however, they are linked so electricity can be transferred between regions to meet demand.

Within the three regions, seven balancing authorities, known as independent system operators (ISOs) or regional transmission organizations (RTOs), monitor the grid and signal to power plants when more electricity is needed to maintain a balanced flow. ISOs and RTOs are like traffic controllers for electricity.

The journey of electricity begins at power plants

Power plants can be viewed as factories that make electricity using various energy sources, like natural gas, solar, wind and nuclear power. Across the U.S., more than 11,000 power plants deliver electricity to the grid.

Northwestern REC receives power from our generation and transmission cooperative, Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny). We're proud to partner with Allegheny to provide electricity at the lowest cost possible, while ensuring our members have reliable power even when demand is high. This



arrangement benefits our members by placing ownership and control in the hands of your cooperative, which prioritizes affordability and reliability, supports local economic development, and works to foster a sense of community.

To get electricity from power plants to you, we need a delivery system. High-voltage transmission lines act as highways for electricity, transporting power over long distances. These lines are supported by massive towers and travel across vast landscapes, connecting power plants to electric substations.

Substations are like pit stops along the highway, because that's where the voltage of electricity is adjusted. They play a crucial role in managing power flow and ensuring electricity is safe for use in homes and businesses.

Once the electricity is reduced to the proper voltage (7,200 volts), it travels through distribution power lines, like the ones you typically see on the side of the road, to homes, schools and businesses. Distribution transformers, which look like metal buckets on the top of utility poles or large green boxes on the ground, reduce the voltage to levels suitable for household appliances and electronic devices (120/240 volts).

After traveling through transformers, electricity reaches you to power everyday life.

From the time it's created to the time it's used, electricity travels great distances to be available at the flip of a switch. That's what makes the electric grid our nation's most complex machine — and one of our nation's greatest achievements. 🌱

CLEARLY BRIGHTER TEACHER GRANT: TOGETHER WE CAN IGNITE A PASSION FOR LEARNING

At Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) we recognize the children of today are the members of tomorrow. The Clearly Brighter Teacher Grant Program was designed to reach kids by helping teachers afford innovative and effective educational curriculum that is not covered by traditional school financing.

Individual teachers can apply for grants up to \$250, while teams of two or more teachers can apply for grants up to \$500. Each year, Northwestern REC awards a total of \$4,000 through this program.

Educators in public and private schools, pre-k through 12th grade, as well as home-school organizations in Northwestern REC's service territory, are eligible to participate. Teachers and schools are not required to receive electric service from Northwestern REC. Grants are awarded for projects in any discipline and are intended to help teachers bring special, hands-on projects to the classroom. Projects for special needs adults will also be considered.

In 2024, Northwestern REC granted funding to 12 applicants at 12 different schools. Projects included purchasing 3D printer supplies, supporting a schoolwide science center, creating a reading nook, supporting units for robotics and supporting homeschoolers.

Grants are awarded annually in a competitive evaluation process. **The deadline to submit grant applications is 5 p.m. Sept. 15.** Recipients will be notified in October.

How are recipients chosen?

A volunteer panel of judges will review and rank applications based on the number of students served, educational value, project sustainability, and geographical location. Because the evaluation process is competitive, partial funding may be awarded to support more students. If you are awarded partial funding and this affects your ability to complete the project, please reach out to us to discuss additional options.

When will I know if I am a winner?

Awards will be announced in October, and all applicants will be notified if their project has been approved or declined. News releases will also be distributed to various media outlets.

If a teacher leaves the school after supplies are furnished, who do the items belong to?

If a winning teacher leaves the school, the supplies and/or equipment purchased with a Clearly Brighter Teacher Grant are the property of the school. Because the grants are based on need and number of students benefited, items purchased with Clearly Brighter funds must be left at the school where the grant originated.

Visit northwesternrec.com/teachergrants for more information or to apply.

You will need the following information to complete your Clearly Brighter application:

- ▶ School and personal contact information
- ▶ Valid email address
- ▶ Project title
- ▶ Population served (grade level and number of students who will benefit)
- ▶ Start and end date
- ▶ Amount requested
- ▶ Collaborating personnel
- ▶ Project description
- ▶ Needs and benefits
- ▶ Evaluation
- ▶ Budget details

General tips

Please make sure your email address is entered correctly. Also, call Northwestern REC if you do not receive an email verifying your application is under review. Applications submitted after the deadline – 5 p.m. Sept. 15 – will not be considered. Teachers requesting technology or equipment for their classroom must outline the project idea and needs.

At Northwestern REC, a top priority is to enrich and invigorate the communities we serve and call home. Our Clearly Brighter Teacher Grant is just one of many ways we support our valued members throughout our service territory. For more information, contact Amber Till, director of communications, at communications@northwesternrec.com or 800-352-0014. 🌱

**Clearly
Brighter
Teacher
Grants**



SCHOOL BUS SAFETY TIPS

School buses are among the safest vehicles on the road — but the greatest risk comes when children are getting on or off the bus. **Whether you're a driver, parent or student, knowing these safety tips will help keep everyone safe.**

FOR DRIVERS:

- **Slow down:** Reduce speed in school zones and near bus stops.
- **Keep your distance:** Stay back at least 10 feet from a school bus — this is the most dangerous area for children.
- **Know the signals:**
 - Yellow flashing lights: bus is preparing to stop. Slow down.
 - Red flashing lights + stop arm: bus is loading/unloading — stop and wait until the bus moves again.
 - Never pass a stopped bus on an undivided road — it's illegal in most states.
- **Stay alert:** Watch for kids who may unexpectedly enter the road, especially near bus stops.
- **Respect the zone:** When flashers are blinking in a school zone, stop for pedestrians at crosswalks and take extra care to look for children near playgrounds, parks and residential areas.

FOR PARENTS:

Teach your child to arrive at the bus stop at least 5 minutes early, and how to play it SAFE:

- **Stay back at least 10 feet**, or five giant steps, from the curb.
- **Always wait for the bus to stop** and the driver to signal before boarding.
- **Face forward** and buckle up if seat belts are available.
- **Exit carefully**, look both ways and cross in front of the bus — never behind. Make eye contact with the driver before crossing.

As students head back to school, remember: **a moment of caution can prevent a lifetime of regret.**

Learn more:

 **Safe
Electricity.org®**

What Sets Co-ops Apart from Other Power Providers

SCOTT FLOOD

TRAVEL ANYWHERE IN THE UNITED States, and you'll be able to find a place to plug in your phone charger. Whether you're on the East Coast or in the Pacific Northwest, you'll encounter the same wall socket. But while the power charging your phone may be identical, the organizations delivering it are not.

Electricity is delivered by three types of providers: investor-owned utilities (IOUs), public systems and rural electric cooperatives. Two-thirds of American homes and businesses receive their electricity from an IOU. Public power companies serve 15%, and co-ops deliver power to 13% of the nation's consumers.

Service over profit

The single, biggest difference between the three is the profit motive. Public power systems and electric co-ops are not-for-profit organizations. That means their primary motive is to deliver electricity at the most reasonable cost. In other words, their first objective is service.

Compare that with investor-owned utilities. As the name implies, IOUs are owned by investors, who hold shares of stock in the utility. The goal of the IOU is to earn profits to raise the value of the stock and provide income, or dividends, to shareholders.

Public power systems are owned by municipalities and other forms of government, which means they're technically owned by — and accountable to — the taxpayers they serve. Similarly, co-ops are owned by the rural home and business owners they serve, and their primary motivation is to keep the cost of electricity as low as possible.

Decision-making is another differentiator. Investor-owned utilities are large corporations, often

headquartered hundreds of miles away from the folks who pay the bills. If one of those consumers has a concern, they may have difficulty reaching the utility's management.

For public power, the same officials who manage things like streets and parks oversee the utility's operations and work with consumers when they're unhappy with the service.

Cooperatives, on the other hand, are managed by a volunteer board of directors that's made up of members elected by their neighbors. A co-op member who has questions about rates or concerns about service can turn to their local directors for answers.

Focused on community needs

Public power providers and IOUs also tend to serve areas like cities, suburbs and larger towns, which have higher population densities. Most co-op service territories cover rural areas and smaller communities. Co-ops average just 7.98 members per mile of power line, while the others average 32.4 consumers per mile.

As a result, co-ops have to do more with less. Despite this, they are inherently focused on meeting members' needs and supporting local communities by initiating economic development initiatives, employing more than 73,000 Americans, and paying \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes annually.

IOUs generally have little direct competition in the areas they serve, but they compete with other public companies and IOUs for attention from investors and Wall Street, making them less eager to share ideas and innovations. In comparison, electric cooperatives work closely with neighboring co-ops and their counterparts across the U.S. That's because they're committed to the seven

SULLIVAN COUNTY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



COMMUNITY FIRST: Co-ops play active roles in strengthening the communities they serve through supporting local youth programs, economic development initiatives and volunteer efforts. Above, an employee with Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative teaches local children about electrical safety.

cooperative principles, one of which calls for cooperation among co-ops. These close relationships improve all co-ops' ability to serve their members.

The bottom line is that all three types of power providers do business in different ways. For cooperatives — the model all of us know best — people are the priority, and that's where another co-op principle comes into play: concern for community. Co-ops take that mission very seriously and it drives everything they do, from providing reliable, affordable energy and lending a helping hand with electric bills to considering consumers' needs and developing policies to meet them. Cooperatives are different — and they wouldn't have it any other way. 🌱

For more than four decades, business writer **SCOTT FLOOD** has worked with electric cooperatives to build knowledge of energy-related issues among directors, staff and members. Scott writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 electric co-ops.

ALLEGHENY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC., based in Harrisburg, Pa., is the wholesale energy provider for the 14 rural electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The cooperative has a proud history of investing in sustainable energy solutions to benefit the communities it serves while providing reliable energy at an affordable price.

IT'S CONTEST TIME!

Penn Lines has a big birthday coming up, and we want you to be a part of our 60th anniversary celebration. Before the confetti flies in 2026, though, **we're kicking off a handful of photo contests this year**; enter one — or all three.

CONTEST NO. 1 – OLDEST ISSUE OF *PENN LINES*! If you have an oldie but a goodie around the house, take a photo of it with you. Please make sure the publication date is visible.

CONTEST NO. 2 – MOST WELL-TRAVELED *PENN LINES*! Take your favorite copy of *Penn Lines* beyond the borders of the Commonwealth. Send us a photo of you holding the magazine at your destination in front of a recognizable landmark or a sign that shows where you are. Also include a 50- to 100-word essay about where you were and why you brought that issue.

CONTEST NO. 3 – A DATE WITH *PENN LINES*! We'll be honest: We like it when we get to go to some place nice. Take your favorite issue of *Penn Lines* to a special place in your community and take a photo of yourself with it.

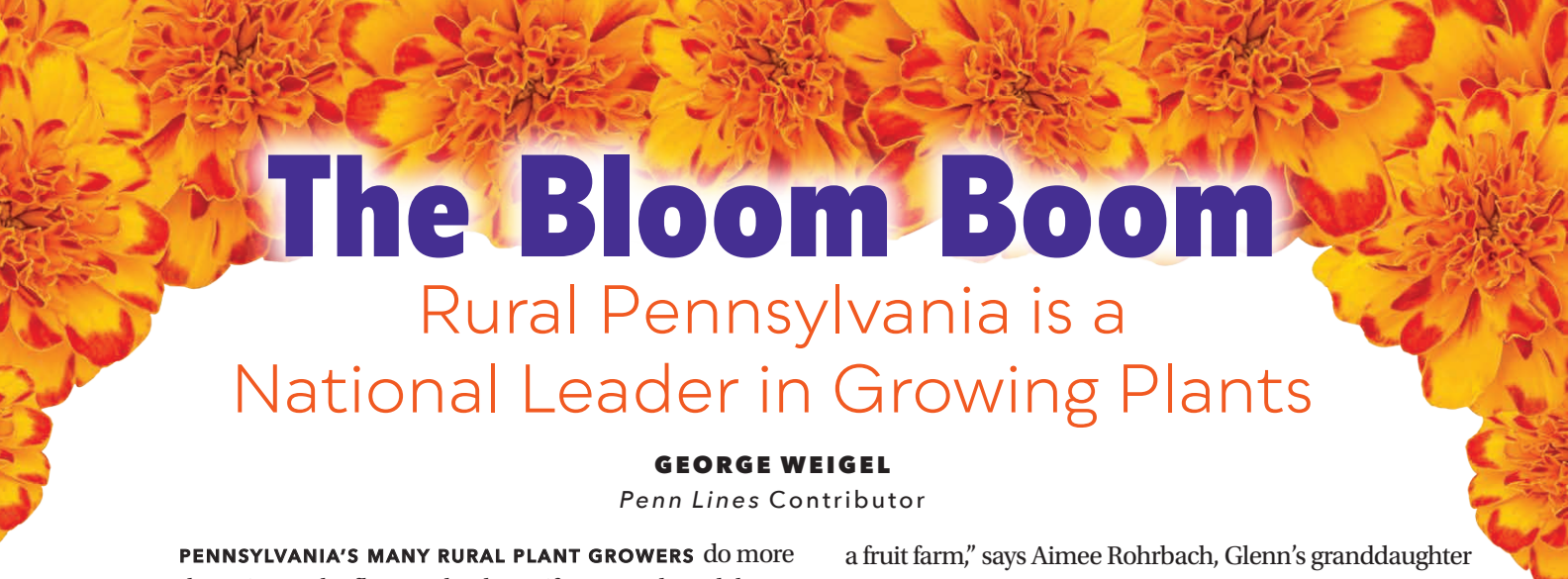
FOR ALL CONTESTS, WE WILL NEED: your name, address, daytime telephone number, the month and year of the magazine, and the name of the cooperative that serves your home, business, or seasonal residence.

PRIZES: \$50 gift card for each contest winner; the winning photos will be featured in a 2026 *Penn Lines* issue.

DEADLINE: Friday, Oct. 31

SEND ENTRIES TO: PennLines@prea.com (put "60 Years of PL" in the subject line) or *Penn Lines* Editor/60 Years of PL, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266





The Bloom Boom

Rural Pennsylvania is a National Leader in Growing Plants

GEORGE WEIGEL

Penn Lines Contributor

PENNSYLVANIA'S MANY RURAL PLANT GROWERS do more than give us the flowers that beautify our yards and the vegetable plants that fill our gardens.

They churn out more than \$1 billion worth of flowers, vegetable plants, trees, shrubs and other plants per year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Census of Agriculture.

Pennsylvania is also No. 2 in the nation in the number of greenhouse flower growers with 702, the department reports. Only California has more. On top of that, a recent report from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (Center) says the state has 2,450 horticulture businesses — most in rural areas and nearly three-quarters run by families or individuals.

These rural growers largely hire locally, buy supplies locally, and often sell locally, fueling rural economies, says Michaela Miller, a data analyst for the Center.

"Horticulture is a major driver of Pennsylvania's agricultural economy, though its impact is often underestimated because many operations are small, family-run businesses," notes Miranda Harple, interim director of Pennsylvania's new Center for Plant Excellence, a collaborative aimed at fostering research, innovation and growth in the state's agriculture industry.

"These businesses," she adds, "are anything but minor in their contributions."

Who are these growers?

According to the 2022 U.S. Census of Agriculture, almost half of the state's plant producers (49%) are primarily farmers, suggesting that plant sales are a sideline for many.

Growers are clustered in the southeastern part of the state with Lancaster County leading the pack with 236 operations.

A typical grower in the region is Musselman Greenhouses (now officially Musselman Wholesale Foliage Inc.), a third-generation, family-owned operation in the Adams County countryside near Cashtown. Glenn Musselman founded the business in 1948 with two greenhouses to supply his retail flower shop.

"My grandfather developed an interest in flowers and flower arranging, so he started a flower shop on what was

a fruit farm," says Aimee Rohrbach, Glenn's granddaughter and a member of Adams Electric Cooperative, who now owns the business with her brother, Andy Musselman. "It was a typical country business — basically on a farmette."

Glenn's son, Dave, expanded into houseplants in the 1970s and began growing wholesale — ranging from annual flowers and vegetables to perennials, herbs, potted blooming plants, and a range of seasonal plants, such as poinsettias, Easter lilies, and mums.

Although the business only grows on an acre and a half under glass and another two in the field, Musselman is one of the region's top poinsettia and foliage-plant suppliers.

"Foliage plants are sort of our niche," says Rohrbach, adding the business is now primarily wholesale (92% of sales) with about 20 full- and part-time employees.

Customers include independent garden centers, landscapers, retail greenhouses, hardware stores and farmer's markets in 10 states (although most are in Pennsylvania).

Another typical example is Musser Forests, a family-owned, woody-plant operation that Fred Musser started as a Christmas tree farm in 1928 in Indiana County.

The business, a member of REA Energy Cooperative, specializes in growing conifers and hardwoods from seed on more than 1,000 outdoor acres as well as rooted needled and broadleaf evergreens under an acre and a half of glass. Musser Forests produces a staggering 35 million seedlings a year, mostly sold bareroot nationwide online and through a catalog.

Operations Manager Tom Gill says the business employs 35 year-round (with another couple of dozen during peak times) and also operates a garden center about 5 miles outside of Indiana.

Growers small and large

Several regions of Pennsylvania sport clusters of small greenhouses that sell flowers and vegetable plants directly to gardeners — many of them operated as farm sidelines by Amish and Mennonite growers.

Lancaster County's eastern section is one example, Mercer County has another pocket, and Somerset County,

served by Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, sports another cluster.

“While many of these growers are small,” Harple says, “that’s not the whole story.”

She points out Pennsylvania is also home to four of the Top 100 largest greenhouse growers in the country, according to *Greenhouse Grower* magazine’s annual count.

Quality Greenhouses is Pennsylvania’s largest operator, growing on 28 acres of greenhouse space in three locations in the Dillsburg and York Springs areas of rural northern York County. That ranks the family-owned, wholesale-only business at No. 45 on the 2024 *Greenhouse Grower* list.

The three others on the Top 100 list are: No. 59 Hoekelen Greenhouses in Schuylkill County; No. 81 Esbenshade’s Greenhouses in Lancaster County; and No. 95 New Leaf Growers in Bucks County.

“That represents over 2 million square feet of environmentally controlled greenhouse space,” Harple says. “So you have this powerful mix of small, community-based growers and nationally recognized large-scale operations playing important roles in our rural communities.”

Why is Pennsylvania such a plant-growing hotbed?

Gregg Robertson, government relations advocate for the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association, says Pennsylvania’s large number of growers relates to the state’s agriculture heritage in general. The state’s nursery industry sprung up alongside its farms as far back as colonial times.

“Nurseries begat other nurseries as nurserymen [and women] learned the trade at the knee of other successful nursery entrepreneurs and went off to start their own operations,” Robertson says. “While there was competition, nursery entrepreneurs often shared their

secrets of success freely with each other.”

Geography is another factor: “Pennsylvania is near major metro markets like Philadelphia, New York City and Washington, D.C.,” Harple says. “That proximity means faster, more cost-effective distribution, which is essential for products grown in greenhouses.”

The recent slide

Despite its many growing operations, Pennsylvania’s total is significantly less than 20 years ago.

Robertson says the 2008 recession took a toll on the state’s growing operations, cutting nursery sales by 17% between 2009 and 2019 and reducing the number of nurseries by 25%. Acres devoted to nursery growing also decreased by 46% between 2007 and 2017.

The numbers haven’t rebounded, largely because land is expensive to buy, start-up costs are high, and in the nursery business, it takes three to five years to produce the first saleable crop, Robertson adds. Age is playing a role, too.

“Many existing growers are nearing retirement,” Harple adds, “and without a next generation ready to take over, their most viable option is often to sell their land. Developers can offer a much more lucrative path over continuing the business. The decline is something we’re actively working to address.”

Harple says these small plant-growing businesses are worth keeping not only for their economic impact but also because of their cultural significance.

“These businesses shape the identity of our rural communities and the character of our landscape,” she says. “Whether it’s a local greenhouse supplying perennials to their community or a multi-acre nursery growing trees for restoration projects, these growers are part of what makes our state a beautiful place to live.” 🌱



RURAL ROOTS: Seasonal flowers are ready for sale at Musselman Wholesale Foliage Inc. in Adams County. Family-owned horticulture businesses like this are helping to fuel rural economies.

MUSSELMAN WHOLESALE FOLIAGE INC.

Pancakes, Any Time

ANNE M. KIRCHNER

PHOTOS BY ANNE M. KIRCHNER



PANCAKES ARE MY COMFORT FOOD, and there are many variations I enjoy matching with seasonal ingredients. Pancakes are easy to make and can be served for any meal. Morning pancakes boost my energy. At noontime, I often layer my favorite sandwich fixings between two pancakes. That includes peanut butter, banana and honey. Pancakes are also my dinner “go-to” after a long day of work.

If you want an extra fluffy pancake, add ricotta cheese to the batter. The ricotta’s rich flavor and moist texture will tease your tastebuds. Consider serving ricotta pancakes with a sweet peach sauce or making a German pancake topped with warm cinnamon apples. Either way, may you find comfort as the seasons change. 🍴

ANNE M. KIRCHNER focuses her writing on human connections, travel and culinary arts, researching food origins, exploring cooking techniques, and creating new recipes.

RICOTTA PANCAKES

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
- 3 large eggs
- ¾ cup ricotta cheese
- ¼ cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

In a small bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Set aside. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs until foamy. Add the ricotta, buttermilk, vanilla extract and olive oil. Whisk the ingredients until well combined. Add the flour mixture. Gently stir until all ingredients are evenly combined. Heat a large griddle and coat with cooking spray. Drop ¼ cup pancake batter on the griddle and repeat, spacing the pancakes 1 inch apart. Cook until bubbles appear and the bottom is golden brown. Flip the pancakes and cook another 30 to 60 seconds. Serve the pancakes with peach sauce (see recipe below). *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*

PEACH SAUCE

- ½ cup water
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 4 large ripe peaches, peeled, pitted and diced
- ¼ teaspoon almond extract
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

In a saucepan, whisk together the water, brown sugar and cornstarch. Bring the ingredients to a boil. Add the peaches. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 15 to 20 minutes or until the peaches are soft. Remove the sauce from the heat. Stir in the almond extract and cinnamon. Serve the peach sauce over ricotta pancakes. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*

APPLE SKILLET PANCAKE

- 6 tablespoons melted butter, divided
- 6 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3 baking apples, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Powdered sugar for garnish

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Pour 4 tablespoons melted butter in a 10-inch, oven-proof skillet; set aside. Process the eggs, milk, flour and vanilla extract in a blender until smooth. Pour the batter over the butter in the skillet. Bake for 25 minutes or until the edges are golden brown. Meanwhile, combine the apples, 2 tablespoons butter, sugar and cinnamon in a saucepan. Cook and stir over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes or until the apples are soft. Top the baked pancake with the apples. Sprinkle generously with powdered sugar and serve. *Makes 6 to 8 servings.*

Don't Worry - I Know a Guy

MITCHELL KYD

MY DAUGHTER KATY AND I recently spent a great evening in Tom's garage. Tom is our "rock guy." His garage is part museum, part retreat and definitely an ever-changing wonderland for people like us who are fascinated with the natural world and like bringing bits of it inside.

Tom is a "local" — someone we've been visiting for a long time and a guy we met through another local friend. Although Katy and I have traveled to rock and gem shows at major event centers, and despite having answers to nearly every question just a click away, Tom is our guy.

His garage is a frequent destination for a huge crew of collectors just like us who found their way there through friends as we did. At Tom's, we all discovered our fascinating, one-stop source for facts and great stories about all things geological.

When you ask about a particular rock or fossil, Tom knows them as old friends: their composition, their history and their origin. He may have excavated them, too. He is knowledgeable, respected, trusted and always learning more. Isn't that what we all want in our go-to people?

It occurred to me as we were leaving Tom's that evening that "knowing a guy" — or woman! — and being

able to meet face-to-face to make a connection is another gift of small-town and rural living we sometimes take for granted. All businesses depend on referrals, of course, and social media has put that access right at our fingertips. The difference for me is that small communities have turned that business mainstay into an art form.

When we make a referral, it comes from more than knowing the "business." We know the people behind it: the owners, the installers, the technicians.

I never go online for help or services without first asking friends and neighbors for a recommendation. It's rare that someone doesn't come back with: "Don't worry. I know someone." Chances are good our go-to people are the

same ones we share seats with at the high school stadium, serve with on church committees or see volunteering at the fire company carnival.

There may be times when it takes two hops to get to the right connection locally, but that's still a great path to finding what you need. After my tiniest cat decided to bolt out the open porch door, her next move was to panic and race to the top of a towering hemlock. No amount of coaxing or rattling of food cans brought her down. That long day turned into overnight and then into another day, with bad storms on the radar. Thankfully, I knew a guy.

That guy, a former neighbor, arrived with his roofer's extension ladder, but my cat was out of his reach. Fortunately, he knew a guy and within hours, his guy, a stranger to me, was there with his bucket truck, zeroing in at 60 feet above my house. I'm not ashamed to say I cried when I saw him pluck my scared and hungry furball out of the branches.

If you've earned a reputation with your special knowledge, skills or talents, chances are you're already on the radar because you're only a call away. It's a great feeling to be the go-to person, too. For years, my husband was the neighborhood snake charmer, the go-to guy to catch and relocate blacksnakes that weren't always

welcome in garages, shops, and attics.

Last summer, I hosted a young friend who is growing up in an Army family. In her brief 14 years, she has lived in five different places. Change is the life she knows now. As we were out and about during her stay, she was shocked at how many times I ran into someone I knew. I realized then how very different her early memories will be from mine. Her life has had wings, but there will always be deep roots in mine. 🍷

YVONNE BUTTS-MITCHELL celebrates the joys and poignant moments of rural living under the pen name Mitchell Kyd. Her stories from the Path Valley Hotel were hatched by encounters with contractors, critters and creepy crawlies while rehabbing the family cabin after its 17-year stint as a giant closet.



HE'S THE GUY: In Mitchell Kyd's part of the world, Tom's garage is a hub for neighbors and collectors who are fascinated with nature. Every community has "Toms," those local go-to people who are experts on all types of matters.

Find Hidden Energy Users at Home

MIRANDA BOUTELLE

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND. It is easy to overlook the hidden energy users in our homes. Yet, every plugged-in device and ready-to-use appliance can lead to higher electric bills.

Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

Your water heater could be using more energy than necessary. Storage water heaters warm water to a pre-set temperature. When hot water is used, cold water enters the tank, lowering the temperature, and the water is reheated to that pre-set level. If the water heater is set higher than needed, it wastes

energy. Most water heaters are set to 140 degrees at the factory. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting the temperature to 120 degrees. This will save energy and reduce the risk of scalding. However, do not set it lower than 120 degrees to prevent bacteria development in the tank.

Exterior security lights, porch lights and barn lights can use more energy than needed. If they are on every night, all year long, that adds up to 4,380 hours, or half the hours in a year. If those lights use outdated, inefficient technology, they waste energy, too. With that many hours, even a slight increase in efficiency can yield big energy savings. Switch to energy-efficient LED bulbs. If lights need to stay on, consider upgrading to motion-sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night.

Pools and hot tubs can also be big energy users. Because you don't see the pumps or heaters by design,

it's difficult to know when they are operating and consuming energy. Pumps filter water to keep it clean and safe for swimming. EnergyStar®-certified pumps run at lower speeds and can be programmed to match your pool's filtering needs, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. They can pay for themselves in two years, are quieter and can prolong the life of your pool's filtering system. Schedule your hot tub to a lower temperature when you're not using it to reduce energy use.

Plug load is anything in your home that is plugged into an outlet. As we use more and more appliances and technology in our homes, plug load energy use increases. Find what is plugged in around your home. If you aren't using it, unplug it. For computer stations and entertainment centers, consider using smart power strips. These devices sense when energy is being used and turn peripheral devices on or off as needed.

Gaming consoles are another hidden energy user. Gamers often put them in rest mode when not in use. This allows them to complete updates and reduces start-up time for the next session. It also means they are still consuming energy even when they are not actively being used. Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy. It may require a bit more time for updates, but every kilowatt-hour counts when it comes to saving energy.

It's easy to make a habit of powering down and unplugging once you identify everything drawing power in your home. 

MIRANDA BOUTELLE is the chief operating officer at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company. She has more than 20 years of experience helping people save energy at home, and she writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which represents more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

MARK GILLILAND, PIONEER UTILITY RESOURCES



MAKE A POWER MOVE: Upgrade outdoor lights to motion-sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night.

Bumming Around for Trout

STEVE PIATT

IT'S FUNNY HOW WORDS CAN HAVE entirely different meanings when used in pretty similar contexts. If you don't believe that, say "she's hot" instead of "it's hot" when your wife is standing by your side, watching you steal a glance at a girl on the beach.

And take the word "bum," for instance. Certainly, there's connotation attached; you don't want to look like a bum, dress like a bum or live like a bum. Well, maybe you did when you were 12, but it's not something to which you ultimately aspire.

But throw the word "trout" in front of the word "bum," and suddenly a lot of folks — at least those who fish but still never get on the water as much as they'd like — are looking at you with a certain amount of envy. Shoot, you even command a little bit of respect among the hardcore, trout-chasing crowd.

That's happened on more than one occasion when I told fellow fly fishers about my plan to do some serious trout bumming: hitting one stream after another for about a week or longer, not plotting any particular route but instead adjusting the itinerary to the hatches, the quality of the fishing and the availability of a campground shower once in a while.

It's not really trout bumming if, at the end of each day, you're returning to a Jacuzzi, king-size bed and cable television. But if your accommodation involves a futon mattress neatly fitted into the bed of your pickup on state forest land and you're making several meals over a cookstove while wearing a headlamp, you're in full trout-bumming mode.

If you're returning home nightly, checking email regularly and focusing too much on personal hygiene, you're



STEVE PIATT

LIVING THE LIFE: Who needs "fancy" when you're a trout bum? The bed of a pickup works just fine for everything from sleeping to cooking.

not even close to being a true trout bum.

Yes, serious trout bumming involves a concerted effort to avoid civilization in favor of a single-minded pursuit of fish. You can actually do that here in Pennsylvania, hiking into wild trout waters that trickle through big state forest tracts where cell service doesn't exist, camping in the wilderness, and evading any connection with the outside world.

That's what trout bums do: fish where they want, when they want, and with little regard to time, date, schedule, or responsibilities. And really, a week might not even qualify. This is something the truest of trout bums does all season.

My regimented ways — one of decades of deadlines — and my sense of responsibility has, admittedly, made me a failure as a trout bum. Invariably, I'm toting along my laptop and popping into cell service once in a while to send along a column and check emails. As an angler who admires and is envious of all trout bums, I'm not proud of this behavior.

Still, I try — albeit in shorter shifts. I'll hop in the pickup and head into Pennsylvania's elk country, where numerous wild trout waters attract me with their gravitational pull. And for a brief time, I am a trout bum — tent camping, rising whenever, fishing wherever, taking a break to eat or maybe nap in the cab of the Dodge Ram, debating if I can go another day without a shower, returning to the tent in the evening and dining on chocolate chip cookies and milk.

I'll repeat that routine for a second day. Then it happens. A switch turns on, and I'm jerked back into my real world, wondering how Paula and our Labs are doing back home, whether my editor received my last column, and if the Pirates won last night. I'm snapped back to attention, back to my world of responsibilities.

But it's OK. If only for a short time, I was a trout bum. 🐟

STEVE PIATT is a veteran newspaper editor and outdoor writer who along with his wife, Paula, has hunted and fished across North America. He is most at home on the water and in the fields of the Keystone State. He lives in Bradford County.

ISSUE MONTH AD DEADLINE

November	September 15
December	October 15
January	November 14

Please note ads must be received by the due date to be included in requested issue month; ads received after the due date will run in next issue. Written notice of changes/cancellations must be received 30 days prior to issue month.

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My Wife's Next Husband

JOHN KASUN

ON AVERAGE, women live longer than men, and although that never concerned me, I take it into consideration when I do anything around the house. I always make sure any repair not only outlasts me but also my wife. I guess that is why I paid extra to install 50-year shingles on the roof when I was 65 years old.

I also realize with her outliving me, the chances are good she might remarry. While I would not want her to live alone, it occurred to me that a lot of the work I do to make her life easier in the future is also making her next husband's life easier. That is when I decided to pay special attention to certain things I do.

For example, occasionally I stay in bed until my wife gets up and goes downstairs to let the dog out and start breakfast, even if I have to pretend to be asleep or fake a bad back. But there is a method to my madness; I always make the bed before coming downstairs. Now, I don't go to all the trouble of tucking in the corners and making sure the sheets are so tight you can bounce a quarter on them, but I do a pretty solid job. We have a big, fluffy comforter and some fancy accent pillows on the bed. I tuck the sheets under the comforter, toss some pillows on top and consider it made. Here is the beautiful part: I occasionally get to sleep in a little longer, and when I am dead and gone, she will remind her next husband that her first one always made the bed in the morning. I figure that will drive him nuts.

We have two patios that border a tropical fish pond, and over time, we have managed to fill them with furniture, large tables, snack tables and numerous flower pots — although there are just the two of us and a dog. If all of our friends came over at once, we would still have extra seating. While the patios look like a page out of *Better Homes and Gardens*, the problem comes when it is time to store all of the furniture for winter.

This year, my wife was really concerned about getting everything into our storage shed without damaging it. "No problem," I assured her. "I'll take care of it." But she continued to fret and worry.

Recently, when she took a day shopping trip, I stored one set of furniture in a friend's manufacturing warehouse and swore him to secrecy. I am sure our friendship plus a case of beer will keep him quiet. I then put all the rest of the furniture and pottery in our storage shed and covered it "for added protection from spying eyes." When my wife returned, she was shocked to see the patios were clean and the furniture and pottery were stored neatly away. She said over and over that she just didn't know how I got all of

that furniture stored in such a small space.

The beauty of this is that she will expect her next husband to get all of that stuff in the same shed, which is physically impossible. I can just hear her telling him as he stands there scratching his head in front of a full shed with four chairs, a table and three large vases still outside, "I don't understand it. My first husband had no problem getting all of that furniture put away for the winter."

I think tomorrow I will re-label the electrical distribu-

tion panel in the basement. If I move everything down one breaker, I will still know which one shuts off what room; however, if my wife's next husband follows the chart, when he shuts off the family room circuit, the appliances in the kitchen won't work. He will not be able to convince my wife that something is wrong with the labeling because, after all, her first husband never had any trouble.

My wife's next husband may have never met me, but I can guarantee he will never forget me. 🍷



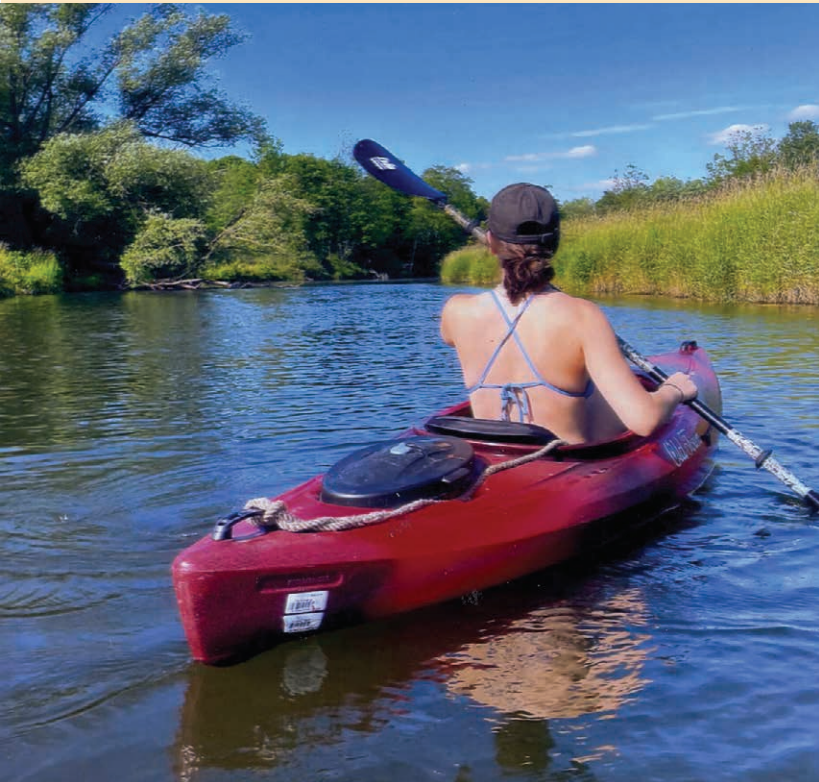
JOHN KASUN, a lifelong Pennsylvanian with more than 30 years of writing experience, looks for the humor in everyday life and then tells a story from that perspective. He is a member of Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.



ABRAM FLORA • SOMERSET REC

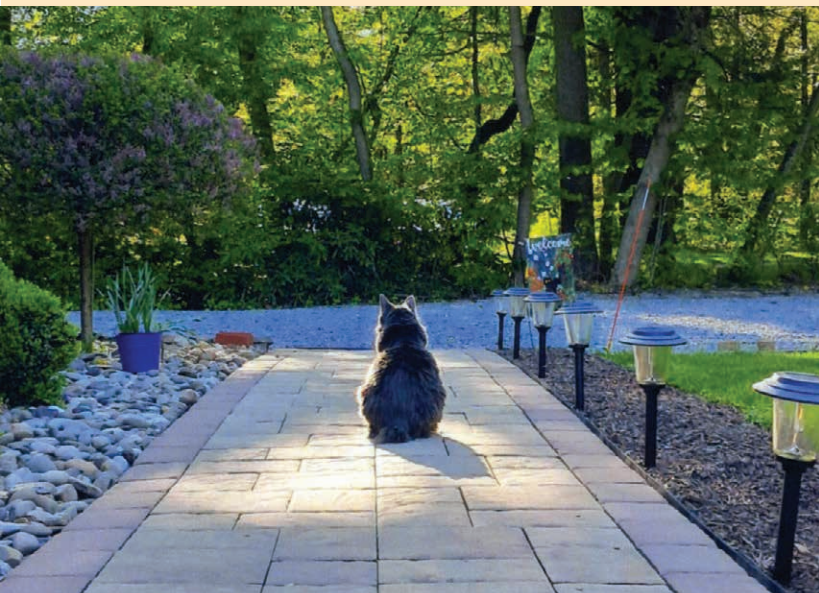
Don't Look Back

SUMMER MAY SEEM like it always slips by too fast, but don't look back at what you wish you had done. As the air begins to cool and the leaves begin to turn, take a deep breath and look forward to the joys yet to come. And when you feel joy the most, remember to take a photo for our Rural Reflections contest. 📷



GEHRED WETZEL • VALLEY REC

JOYCE MELLOTT • NEW ENTERPRISE REC



MEGAN ROLOSON • SULLIVAN COUNTY REC

How to enter

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS are encouraged to send photos for the 2025 Rural Reflections contest (no digital files) to: *Penn Lines* Photos, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266. On the back of each photo, include your name, address, phone number and the name of the electric cooperative that serves your home, business or seasonal residence.

Remember: Our publication deadlines require us to work in advance, so send your seasonal photos in early. Photos that do not reflect any specific season may be sent at any time. Photos will be returned one year after receipt if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is included.

ADDRESS CHANGES:

For change of address, please contact your local electric cooperative. For cooperative contact information, please visit www.prea.com/member-cooperatives



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