

Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

SOMERSET REC

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Manager of Metering Services

Jessi Ditzler

Executive Assistant

OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106
800-443-4255

A Strategic Plan to Reach Our Goals



RUSTON OGBURN

STRATEGIC PLANNING IS AN ORGANIZATION'S process of defining its direction. The recent completion of several major operational initiatives created a unique opportunity to review our cooperative goals to ensure we dedicate our resources in ways that best serve our members. Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) strategic planning process included our board of directors, key employees, and a facilitator who led us through a discussion on topics covering the entire spectrum of our mission to provide safe, reliable, and efficient electricity and remain engaged with our members.

This process enabled us to develop goals that address issues directly impacting our members, allow us to work more efficiently and can be completed in three years. The strategic planning committee adopted the following five goals:


- ▶ Implement operational technology;
- ▶ Strengthen distribution system reliability;
- ▶ Broaden member and employee engagement;
- ▶ Update building and storage facilities; and
- ▶ Clarify Somerset REC's involvement in broadband initiatives.

My columns over the next several months will focus on the details of each goal.

The implementation of operational technology will improve our operational response by using recent upgrades in meter communication. We believe the reliability improvement for our members will come through a proactive response to operational issues. In the past, outages or short disruptions — often called “blinks” — would be communicated to our office via a phone call. For isolated outages, sometimes the call would not occur for days. The cooperative would respond to the call by dispatching a crew to find and fix the problem. This type of reactive communication simply lengthens the response time for our crews.

Today's improved meter technology can inform our dispatchers within seconds of an outage and allows us to determine the pattern of blinks more precisely. We can then respond and correct issues more quickly — sometimes before members even know there is an outage.

Improved communication with our meters also allows us to more closely align each member's bill with their electric use. We've always prioritized this alignment, and it has become even more important as electric demand grows to a larger part of the overall cost of electricity. As we get insight into each member's electric demand, we plan to update our billing policies to include demand charges. Any changes would likely be rolled out to our members based on rate classes and the size of their electric service because members with larger transformers have a more significant impact on this component of our power supply. As with any change of this nature, we will communicate the impact before we make any changes.

Implementing this goal will help us meet your expectations for a proactive response to your electric service. As always, if you have any questions about this goal or anything else, please call or stop by the office. 

RUSTON OGBURN
GENERAL MANAGER

The Warmth of Your Heart Will Glow in the Home of a Member in Need

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

WITHIN THE MEMBERSHIP OF Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), there are those who face crisis situations beyond their control, leaving them with financial hardships. There are also cooperative members who generously contribute monetary donations to help those struggling to keep the lights on. And there are some who have fallen into both categories.

Two member-funded programs are available to help those who have hit hard times and need a little assistance. The Lights On fund is promoted each year in December with an insert in your monthly electric bill. This is typically a one-time donation during the season of giving.

The other member-funded program is called Pennies from Heaven. Members who participate in this program round up their monthly electric bill payment to the next whole dollar. As of November 2023, cooperative members had contributed \$4,914.30 by rounding up their payments during the past year. This money is donated to the Lights On fund.

Since 2000, your generosity has helped 565 members keep the lights on. A total of \$220,890 has been paid toward members' electric bills and/or to update unsafe electric service situations.

A few members who have recently benefited from these programs wanted to express their gratitude and appreciation for members, like you, who humbly contributed to help make a difference.

Applause for Lights On program

"Members of Somerset REC can give a helping hand to the members who need a little help. I should know, as I was very fortunate to be on the receiving end of such kindness earlier this year when I suddenly lost my husband. When that happens, you truly do not have a clear mind as to supporting the household and keeping an even keel. I, like many others, remember receiving the Lights On insert every year with my electric bill and never moved forward with contributing. After being a recipient of the money to help pay my electric bill, I felt the gift of help from this program and trust others have been helped during a financial hardship. My hope is others will consider contributing to

such a great program and reach out to the cooperative with any questions."

— *Betty Chaney, Fairhope*

A kindness and a comfort

"The Lights On program isn't a program: It's a kindness, a good deed, a comfort and an act of giving. I had been a member of Somerset REC for nearly 17 years and never heard of the Lights On program. I learned of it when I was a recipient. I was off work due to surgery and prior to the surgery, I had missed many more days of work from the same health condition.

"My co-op billing representative, Mindy, shared the details of Lights On and that is when I became aware that [Somerset] REC had just alleviated a greater portion of my January bill. I was completely humbled by the generosity of REC members donating to grant such a gesture of human kindness.

"It was important to me to learn how to keep this good thing going. The answer: Pennies from Heaven, and I signed up immediately.

"To date, I continue to appreciate the staff at Somerset REC and let them know regularly they're my REC family. God bless you all."

— *Stacey Renna, Rockwood*

A financial and medical blessing

"For the last couple of years, I have been dealing with heart problems. My last heart test in May 2023 revealed some bad news, and the doctors decided I needed to go to Pittsburgh immediately. On May 22, I went to the hospital, and they put me on a heart pump as well as a heart transplant list. For over a month, my family made the journey to Pittsburgh to visit and be by my side. On July 1, I received the news that a donor heart was available, and I was a candidate for the transplant! After the transplant, I remained in the hospital for 10 more days while I recovered and was finally sent home. I'm doing very well and have recovered better than they imagined — thank goodness. While in the hospital, the bills didn't stop. We received a generous donation from Somerset REC's Lights

On program. The Lights On program is a program I wasn't aware of that helps families in life-changing events. This program helped us out for a few months by paying our electric bill, and it was a real blessing."

— Dwayne Miller, Garrett

Forever grateful for our members

"I have the unique situation of being a member who is also an employee at the cooperative. Quickly after I started working here almost 20 years ago, I learned about the Pennies from Heaven program and Lights On program. It's the same program with two different ways to donate. I thought immediately what a wonderful program it is because it helps so many people who have faced many hard situations, and it's so easy to contribute! I chose to sign up for the Pennies from Heaven program, where I have my bill rounded up to the nearest dollar each month. Easy and effortless.

"Fast forward 18 years where, at the age of 41, I was hit with the horrifying diagnosis of triple negative breast cancer. I was shocked at the diagnosis, and once the tornado of doctor appointments started along with chemo treatments and medication pick-ups, I was equally shocked at the generous donation from the Lights On program! I can't thank all the members enough who contributed to this program for what they did for me. They lightened the load in the darkest of times."

— Kristi Burkett, Rockwood

Old-fashioned kindness and concern

"We've been [Somerset] REC customers for about 40 years and never thought at this point in our lives that we would be struggling with our budget and need to use the Lights On funds. We've always been a payday-to-payday family, but being reduced to a one-income family because of health issues has been hard. We thought we had our budget and savings worked out to get through this, but we never even dreamed how long it might take dealing with Social Security to request disability. It's been two years, and unfortunately, we're still waiting through each process. We're not sure how much longer it could take.

"We're managing to stay on top of things for the most part, though at one point, we did need to pay past the due date. We let [the cooperative] know that we would be late and why. A staff member responded to us and told us about the Lights On program and offered to help. She was so kind and comforting as to why and what this fund is all about. We have never asked anyone for help, but she never once made us feel bad about accepting it. The fund helped with the current amount due and then gave us a

credit that helped with approximately two extra months. It was awfully hard accepting help, but also it was such a nice relief from stress and anxiety — not having to worry about the electric bill for a while and working on paying other bills.

"We realize that many think that people are always looking for a hand-out! In our situation and probably most REC members, that is not the case. We have always worked hard and paid our bills on time. The old saying that we must believe is, 'We're not looking for a hand-out, but a hand-up!' Hopefully, in the future we can give back and help others with a hand-up! All we can say is THANK YOU to [Somerset] REC for establishing this wonderful fund and to their members for donating to help others. Your generosity is truly appreciated.

"Anyone who may be struggling or slightly struggling, please reach out to [the cooperative]. They truly want to use this fund to help as many people as they can. No judgment at all, just good old-fashioned kindness and concern. Your heart will feel relief, and theirs will feel joy!"

— Anonymous

Thankful for my co-op

"My husband and I knew about the Lights On program; in fact, we contributed. I never really knew how impactful it was until I was chosen to be the recipient of Lights On money. My husband was in a fire and lost both his legs and then passed away from COVID-19. [Somerset] REC graciously picked me to receive help that year with my electric bill. I am so thankful to belong to the REC family. They really do care about their members."

— Denise Peck, Rockwood

If you or someone you know is experiencing similar situations and is not familiar with this program, contact the cooperative for more information. Each year, the generosity and kindness of our members continue to amaze cooperative employees. And although you don't always hear about your financial donation at work, we have seen you make a positive impact on many lives, and we thank you for making a difference. 🙏





ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS!

The Rural Electric Youth Tour gives high school juniors an opportunity to learn leadership skills, hang out with peers from across the United States and travel with other PA, NJ and NY students and have FUN while doing it!

WHAT TO EXPECT

An all-inclusive trip to D.C. June 16-21. Tour Capitol Hill. Learn about electric cooperatives. Perhaps catch a show at the Kennedy Center. Visit monuments and memorials. Stop at the Smithsonian museums. And so much more!

APPLICATIONS

Applications are available at somesetrec.com and due Jan. 22. Please contact Emily Baer at ebaer@somesetrec.com or 814-445-4106 for more information regarding this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

YOUTH TOUR 2024 - APPLY BY 1/22/24 FOR TRIP OF A LIFETIME!



A Little Jingle in Your Pocket

NOW THAT CHRISTMAS IS OVER, you may or may not have noticed an extra jingle in your pocket. Our members, however, deserve a credit for helping build and sustain our local electric cooperative. In December, Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) returned \$460,000 to members across our co-op service territory.

When you signed up to receive electric service from Somerset REC, you became a member and owner of an electric utility. While investor-owned utilities return a portion of any profits to their investors, electric co-ops operate on a not-for-profit basis. Instead of returning leftover funds, known as margins, to investors who might not live in the same region or even the same state as you do, every December we issue capital credits based on how much you paid the co-op for electricity during a specific period.

If you were a Somerset REC member in 1999, you should have noticed a credit on your electric bill last month. People who were a cooperative member in 1999, but no longer live in the cooperative territory received their capital credit check in the mail. This reflects your ownership of the cooperative during that year. During that time, Somerset REC saved part of what was paid by the members to cover emergency expenses and to build and maintain a reliable electric delivery system.

If you were a recipient, we hope you enjoyed the extra jingle sent your way this holiday season! If you established a membership after 1999 and are wondering when you will receive capital credits, the current capital credits payback timeframe is 22 to 24 years. 🎵

You still have time to spread cheer...

Co-op Cheer!

If you already donated, we appreciate your kindness. Donations will be accepted through Jan. 12 at the cooperative office. Items will be dispersed to nursing homes and non-profits in our community.

Thank you!

