

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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OFFICE HOURS

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

EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106
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A Strategic Plan to Reach Our Goals - Part Two



RUSTON OGBURN

AS I DISCUSSED IN last month's column, strategic planning is an organization's process of defining its direction. This column discusses the second of the five goals listed below.

- ▶ Implementation of operational technology;
- ▶ **Strengthen distribution system reliability;**
- ▶ Broaden member and employee engagement;
- ▶ Update building and storage facilities; and
- ▶ Clarify Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) involvement in broadband initiatives.

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

For more than 40 years, Somerset REC has been converting our system from 7,200 volts to 14,400 volts. More than 99% of this work has been completed, so last year provided a unique opportunity to transition from this conversion work to the next phase of our plan to improve the reliability of our distribution system.

Our work will begin by prioritizing the replacement of equipment that has reached the end of its useful life as it begins to be more difficult and costly to maintain. This includes the obvious core components, such as poles, insulators, and wires, but also extends to the breakers and communication equipment that allows our system to operate safely.

Contractors will begin working in the northern portion of our system this spring to inspect and treat approximately 10% of our poles. The vast majority of these poles will pass inspection and remain viable for many years without any intervention. However, this process allows us to proactively identify poles that need to be treated or replaced and prioritize the work that will have the greatest impact on safety and reliability.

One aspect of a distribution system is the idea of resiliency. The countless issues that challenge the operation of the grid — changing load demands, weather events, animals, vegetation, vehicle accidents, etc. — all can disrupt the flow of electricity. A well-designed system can isolate these issues to a localized area and maintain or automatically restore power to the rest of the system. The ability for our grid to “bounce back” after a disruption ultimately leads to better service for our members.

New technology plays a major role in resiliency. We take a cautious approach to implementing technology by only adopting equipment and strategies with a proven track record of increasing reliability. As we develop our plans to implement more automation into our distribution facilities, safety for our crews and reliability for our members will remain the top priorities.

Implementing this goal will help us meet your expectations for the most important part of our work — maintaining safe and reliable electric service for you. As always, if you have any questions about this goal or anything else, please call or stop by the office. 📞

RUSTON OGBURN
GENERAL MANAGER

'It's Time': Retired Manager of Operations Ready to Live Life to the Fullest

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

In 1982, Doug Glessner was sponsored by Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) and selected to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. At 16, he never dreamed Somerset REC would be the place where he would spend almost 40 years as an employee — or of the journey it would lead him on.

IT WAS SUMMER 1983, and Doug was graduating high school. He received a call from Larry Shober, an employee at the co-op, asking if he was interested in a summer job on the right-of-way crew. For the previous five summers, Doug had worked on his neighbor's farm and helped his dad on construction sites, so he was excited for this new opportunity.

Doug agreed to work the summer with plans to attend Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) in the fall to major in criminology. He completed two semesters at IUP, and the following summer he went back to work again on the cooperative's right-of-way crew. His



COSTA RICA: Doug Glessner, then a staking engineer with Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, lends a hand to lineworkers during his 2006 visit to Costa Rica.



IN THE OFFICE: Doug Glessner, the cooperative's recently retired operations manager, prioritizes appointments with members and service orders that need to be completed.

full-time cooperative journey began Sept. 9, 1984, with a job in Somerset REC's metering department.

Doug started as a meter technician: He installed load control devices, tested and repaired meters, gathered meter readings, collected payments, and performed area surveys, which included noting potentially dangerous trees on the line, loose guy wires, and faulty equipment in need of maintenance.

He transitioned to the staking department in 2002 as a senior staking engineer. Off and on, Doug would fill in for the manager of operations. In 2007, he took over the position when the late Reed Miller announced his retirement.

Being a veteran at the co-op, Doug understood what the operation manager's role was, but didn't receive any specific training before taking over the position. In this new role, he became the safety adviser and supervisor of line, construction, and right-of-way crews and third-party contractors. He also inherited a very large budget. Since he was familiar with the service

territory, Doug also gave board tours to co-op directors every fall. It was quite an eye-opening and overwhelming experience.

"It was on [my] mind 24/7," Doug explains. "If the phone didn't ring, you were wondering why it didn't ring, and if it did ring, you were worried somebody had gotten hurt. That was always my biggest fear: that someone would get hurt — or worse."

He continues by reflecting on the differences between each position he filled at the co-op.

"As a staking engineer, I got to meet a lot of members, and they wanted to meet with you because they needed power," Doug recalls. "They were happy to see you. It was nice to build the line on paper and see the final physical project accomplished. When I was promoted to operations manager, those conversations changed. They turned into 'Why is my power out?' and 'Why is the co-op cutting my trees?' It was a never-ending cycle ... and it mentally wears on you. It was a big transition."

Doug's favorite job at the co-op was

as a member of the summer right-of-way crew.

“You came to work, you did your job, and you went home,” he says. “It was physical work, but I enjoyed working outside, and I didn’t take my work home at the end of the day.”

As far as technology, Doug saw a lot of changes in his 39 ½ years of employment. When he started in the metering department in 1984, the meters were going on 30 years old, and they did their job. In the last 10 to

“The co-op is a business with a personal touch,” he says, “and I hope that touch is never lost with the members.”

15 years, the co-op has transitioned through three metering technologies to better serve the membership.

Doug also helped to implement the co-op’s geographic information system. Every pole connected to Somerset REC’s electric system has a metal tag with a barcode and five-digit number. This breakthrough mapping technology allows the co-op to search pole by pole and find useful information, such as the pole was installed and what communication attachments are on it.

In the past decade, Doug noticed a big need for change. As the operations manager, he was committed to providing reliable electricity to members. In the past, a rehabilitation project started by former Operations Manager, Reed Miller, to convert power lines from 7,200 volts to 14,400 volts received priority over other projects. This improvement allowed the system to handle twice the amount of load on the same wire, just by doubling the voltage. Unfortunately, by prioritizing this project, the right-of-way program fell behind. When outages began to significantly increase because of trees interfering with the power lines, Doug knew it was

important to re-evaluate and focus on right-of-way maintenance.

“It was like putting a Band-Aid on a big wound,” Doug explains. “When the current general manager came, he allowed me to increase the right-of-way budget and hire contractors, such as B&L Tree Service and Ridge Top. These guys have great work ethics and take pride in their work, and I am thankful to have worked with these contractors. I truly believe now that the rights of way are more thoroughly cleared, [and] we are experiencing less outages.”

Because of Doug’s years working with other investor-owned utilities and contractors, he has concluded the cooperative is more than just an electric company.

“The co-op is a business with a personal touch,” he says, “and I hope that touch is never lost with the members.”

In addition to his day-to-day responsibilities as operations manager, Doug has also had numerous opportunities to travel for work.

“Some of the things I appreciated most were the opportunities made available for myself and my family,” he says. “I was very fortunate to be able to travel to Costa Rica, Kentucky, New Orleans and California, to name a few.”

In 2006, Doug’s first international cooperative experience took him to Coopealfaroruz in Zarcero, Costa Rica, an electric co-op founded in



READY FOR RETIREMENT: Doug Glessner, right, and his wife, Melodie, hug their five grandchildren while picking cherries at Ridgetop Orchards near Bedford.



HELICOPTER WORK: Doug Glessner, the cooperative’s recently retired operations manager, discusses aerial right-of-way trimming with helicopter operators. This method of cutting is used in difficult to reach, cross-country terrain.

1972. He traveled there to demonstrate how to operate a truck donated by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

“We shared a lot of ideas and suggestions on how to improve the Costa Rican’s operations, but I also learned a few takeaways from them,” recalls Doug, who forged lasting friendships with the people he met. “If you have the opportunity to do something, do it, because once you have that experience, it is something no one can ever take away from you.”

Doug’s family has always been along for the ride and has endured many sacrifices together.

“Our whole married life has been electrical stuff,” says Melodie, Doug’s wife. “I assisted with taking outage calls, two of our sons are now linemen and all three of our sons attended Youth Tour.”

In his well-deserved retirement, Doug plans to spend time with his family and five grandchildren at their cabin at Indian Lake, work on his hobby farm, relax, and enjoy life.

Doug would also like to thank his coworkers by saying, “Without so many of my fellow employees stepping up to do their part, the cooperative wouldn’t have been able to accomplish all of the things that we were able to achieve.”

Congratulations, and we hope you enjoy a long retirement! Since Doug is also a co-op member, we hope this is not goodbye, but a “see you later!” 🍷

Members, Employees Give Back to Lift Spirits of Those in Need

EACH YEAR, CO-OP MEMBERS generously participate in donating items for the Co-op Cheer Program, while employees volunteer to ring the bell for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Drive. Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is proud to volunteer and support the communities we serve, and these are just some of the ways we help local individuals and families in need of assistance.

Co-op Cheer restocked area nursing homes and not-for-profits with tissues, clothing items, slippers, personal hygiene products, holiday décor, games, puzzles, and so much more, while the bell-ringing shifts benefited the local Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army is dedicated to helping local families who are recovering from many kinds of disasters or personal losses. To give back, Somerset REC matched 100% of the



GIVING BACK: Kathleen Hoffman of Berlin was one of many generous cooperative members who donated to Co-op Cheer. A beautiful, crocheted blanket, one of the donated items, caught her attention.

donations received on Dec. 8, 2023.

We are fortunate to have employees at the co-op who are invested in our local communities and are willing to donate their time and money to the charities and events we take part in each year. These are just a few ways Somerset REC fulfills cooperative principle No. 7: concern for community. 🇺🇸



QUILT OF VALOR: Dean Gindlesperger, third from left, a retired Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) lineworker and veteran, receives a beautiful, handmade patriotic quilt, which was presented at the Employee-Director Banquet in November 2023. Several years ago, the wives of Somerset REC board members collaborated to design and make a quilt to award to a service member or veteran to say, "Thank you for your service and sacrifice in serving our nation." Shown, from left, are: Chris Lehman, Carna Friedline, Gindlesperger, Shirley Sechler, Ida Mae Reckner, Mary Engle, Shirley Glessner and Marie Waltermire.

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) will be awarding \$1,000 scholarships to students who qualify. Funding for this scholarship program comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state. Thanks to the efforts of our political advocates, we can now keep those funds in our communities.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The applicant must be:

- ▶ a graduating high school senior whose parents' or legal guardians' primary residence is served by Somerset REC.
- ▶ a student attending public, private, parochial or home school.
- ▶ enrolled or planning to enroll full time in an accredited post-secondary institution for the 2024-2025 academic year.

HOW TO APPLY

Visit somersetrec.com, click "My Cooperative" and select "Scholarships" from the drop-down menu for a fillable PDF scholarship application. Applications are also available at the Somerset REC main office and in the guidance offices of most Somerset County high schools.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

Applications and all required information must be delivered to the Somerset REC office or postmarked by April 10. Scholarship selections will be made mid-April. Award recipients will be notified in early May. Please direct questions to ebaer@somersetrec.com or call 814-445-4106.

