

# Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## SOMERSET REC

223 Industrial Park Road  
Somerset, PA 15501  
814-445-4106  
800-443-4255

Email: e-mail@somersetrec.com  
Website: www.somersetrec.com

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### President

Clarence B. Waltermire, District 5

### Vice President

Jerry L. Engle, District 4

### Secretary/Treasurer

Lowell L. Friedline, District 3

Floyd T. Lehman, District 1

Russ Hillegas, District 2

P. Timothy Vought, District 6

Jason Huston, District 7

Joshua C. Sechler, District 8

Harvey W. Reckner Jr., District 9

Ruston Ogburn  
General Manager

## STAFF

Gary Gindlesperger

Manager of Information Technology

Jonathan Hillegas

Director of Finances

Andrew Phillippi

Manager of Outside Operations

Emily Baer

Director of Marketing and Member Services

Phil Stern

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 – Part Four



RUSTON OGBURN

**CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE** by providing access to broadband has been a topic of conversation for policymakers, private sector enterprises and at Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC). The fifth strategic goal developed by our board of directors and staff — as highlighted below — is to clarify our involvement in broadband initiatives.

- ▶ Implementation of 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.**

You may remember the Broadband Over Power pilot program adopted by our cooperative more than 10 years ago. Unfortunately, that effort was short-lived; the technology ultimately could not match user expectations.

Somerset REC recognizes high-speed, reliable internet service is a priority for some of our members. Conversations with members most interested in broadband led us to look for a solution that would align with their needs while continuing our commitment to remain financially viable.

We want to clarify our involvement in broadband initiatives and explain what we plan to do and why it is the option that best serves our members.


We reviewed the broadband options available to our members and explored grants to help us fund broadband infrastructure. We also met with cooperatives that are already deploying broadband in other parts of the state to see how their experience would apply to our members. Our guiding principle throughout this review is to serve the needs of our members in a fiscally responsible way.

Cooperative staff developed four options for the board to review: do nothing; build and operate broadband service; partner with other internet providers; or develop a process to support members trying to find the best broadband service for their home or business.

After reviewing both partial and complete system options, we found the cost of building and operating an independent broadband service would be too high, even with grant funding offsetting a portion of the costs. The board and staff agreed this new endeavor would not be fiscally responsible given the needs of our members and the costs of such a project.

The board also considered potential partnerships with a range of broadband providers. This would have been a true partnership with shared services, facilities, and decisions related to building and operating broadband. These options did not bear the same financial risks as operating broadband on our own; however, we did not believe a clear partner who would share a similar objective toward our members was available at this time.

The option most in alignment with the needs of our members was to create a service where cooperative staff would offer an internet evaluation to help those who are trying to find the best broadband service for their address. The information on the following pages outlines this unique service that launches this spring.

We continue to support our members who still need broadband service while staying focused on our core business of providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity. As always, if you have any questions about this goal or anything else, please call or stop by the office. 

RUSTON OGBURN  
GENERAL MANAGER

# We're Here to Help Point Members in the Right Direction

## Broadband options that work for you

**EMILY BAER**, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

**OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS**, your electric cooperative has looked for ways to improve broadband availability in our area. The cooperative has engaged in feasibility studies, member surveys and grant exploration. Ultimately, however, our leadership came to the conclusion that being a safe and reliable electric company was our No. 1 focus. But, as a cooperative, we exist to support our members. Through conversations, we've learned many of you are now working from home, streaming TV and movies, depending on a reliable Wi-Fi connection for your security cameras or have school-aged children taking classes online.

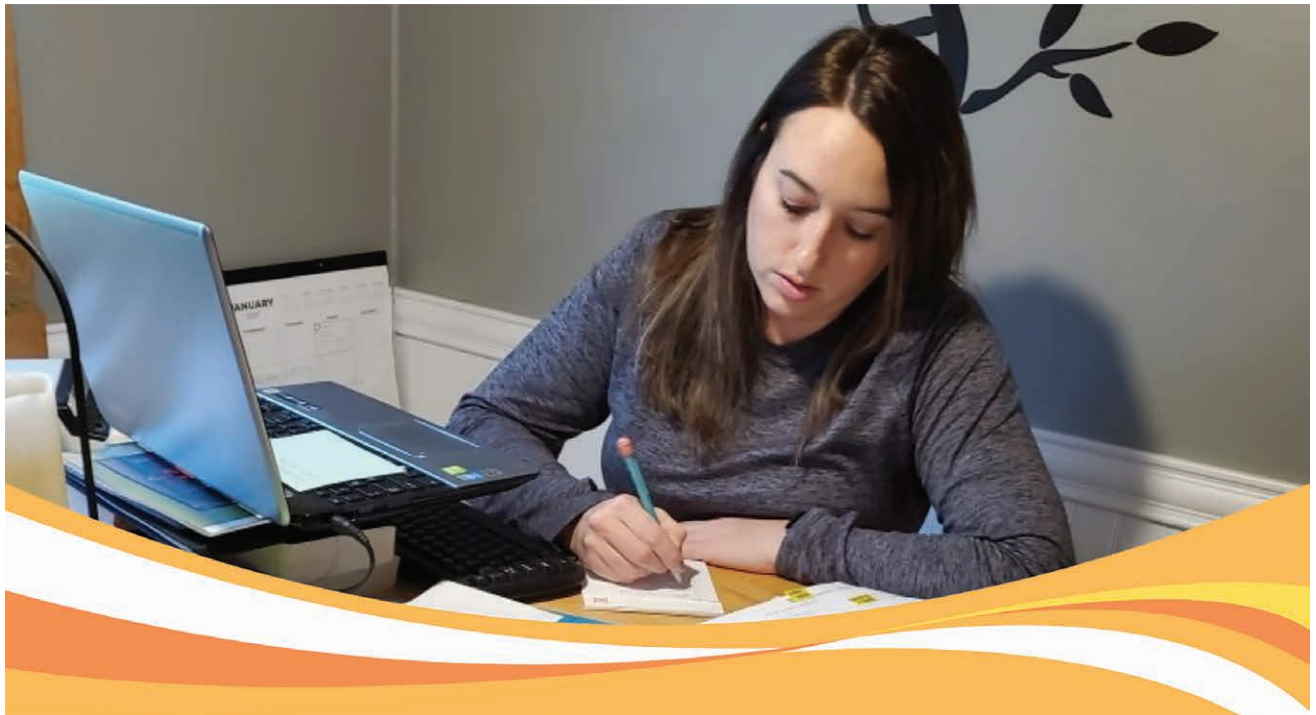
As part of our service to you, for a limited time, we are offering an in-home internet service evaluation as a courtesy to our members. This service is targeted to members who have no internet or a very poor internet connection.

Upon arrival, a cooperative employee will perform on-site speed testing of three mobile hot spot devices — Verizon, AT&T and T-Mobile — and one device that can be mounted on a structure, Starlink. The tested download and upload speeds will be noted for each of the three tiers to find the best solution.

Internet evaluations can be scheduled by calling the co-op office at (814) 445-4106. Please remember: This service is intended to provide useful data to help you choose a service or enhance the quality of internet at your home or business. Therefore, it is not intended to serve as a recommendation of a specific provider.

Many members already have access to the internet, but aren't aware of their options. By spot checking service addresses, we were able to determine how many members were unserved, underserved or served by a home internet connection. We found less than 1% of the addresses did not have internet access. In these rare instances, a satellite internet service, such as Starlink, is typically available for these remote locations.

If you are a member of the cooperative and you are not satisfied with your current internet service at your home or business, we may be able to help you find a better solution. Please contact the co-op to schedule a complimentary internet survey appointment. This evaluation will provide quality feedback and a reliable review of your internet needs. 📍



**WORK FROM HOME:** Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative Billing Clerk Kristi Burkett takes notes while working from her home office. Cooperative employees and members depend on a reliable internet service in rural areas of Somerset County. Many members have transitioned to working from home, streaming TV and movies, and opted for online education instead of in-person instruction.

## TIER 1

**BROWSE THE INTERNET,  
ONLINE SHOPPING,  
E-MAIL, STREAM ONE  
VIDEO AT MEDIUM  
QUALITY, AUDIO  
STREAMING**

**1-2 SIMULTANEOUS  
USERS**

## TIER 2

**EVERYTHING IN TIER 1,  
PLUS STREAMING TWO  
VIDEOS AT MEDIUM TO  
HIGH QUALITY,  
CONNECT 1-2 SMART  
DEVICES, VIDEO  
CONFERENCING**

**1-4 SIMULTANEOUS  
USERS**

## TIER 3

**EVERYTHING IN  
PREVIOUS TIERS PLUS  
STREAMING 3, OR MORE  
VIDEOS AT HIGHER  
QUALITY, ONLINE  
GAMING, 1-4 SMART  
DEVICES INCLUDING  
SECURITY CAMERAS AND  
VIDEO DOORBELLS**

**1-6 SIMULTANEOUS  
USERS**



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By spot checking service addresses, we were able to determine how many members were unserved, underserved or served by a home internet connection. We found less than 1% of the addresses did not have internet access. In these rare instances, a satellite internet service, such as Starlink, is typically available for these remote locations.



*IN-HOME INTERNET SPEED TEST: Phil Stern, Gary Gindlesperger and Emily Baer will arrive equipped with three mobile hot spot devices and satellite internet, Starlink, when testing internet speeds at your home or business.*

If you are a member of the cooperative and you are not satisfied with the current broadband options offered at your home or business, we may be able to help you find a better internet solution. Please contact the co-op to schedule a complimentary internet survey appointment. This evaluation will provide quality feedback and a reliable review of your internet needs.



**814-445-4106**

# SMITH JOINS HVAC DEPARTMENT TO SERVE MEMBERS

Gary Smith joined the co-op family Feb. 5 as an HVAC technician.

His most recent employer was Thompson & Thompson in Pooler, Ga., where he installed and maintained electrical systems in commercial, residential, and industrial settings. Prior to that, he was employed by Wiedenhoft Electric in Jennerstown, where he installed high-voltage transformers, replaced and repaired utility poles for power lines, and diagnosed, tested, and repaired a wide variety of heating and cooling units.

At Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, his responsibilities will include installing and servicing mini-split units, geothermal heat pumps, water heaters, and RFS III systems. He will also aid the metering department on occasion to retrofit power line carrier meters with RF meters during our systemwide conversion.

He is a graduate of Somerset Area High School and holds an associate degree in applied science in HVAC installation and repair. He also has been certified through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and carries a commercial driver's license.

Gary married his high school sweetheart, Jolene, and they have two children and two granddaughters. He is a member of Somerset Church of God, and in his spare time, he enjoys deer hunting, snowmobile riding, and riding side-by-sides and dirt bikes. But what brings him the greatest joy of all? Being a grandpa.

"I love being a pop and spoiling my granddaughters," Smith says. "I am very proud of my entire family and my favorite times are spent with each of them. And my favorite sport to watch is my son playing football for the Somerset Golden Eagles."

We're glad to have your knowledge and experience to serve our members! Best of luck to you, Gary!



## SOMERSET REC 85th ANNUAL MEETING

**Thursday, May 23**

**Somerset Area High School Auditorium  
645 S. Columbia Ave. Somerset, PA 15501**

**Registration begins at 5 p.m.  
Business Meeting begins at 6 p.m.**



2024 Somerset REC Annual Meeting special points of interest:

- Reports of officers, directors and committees
- Election of three directors to the cooperative board
- Scholarship award presentation
- Each registered member will receive a \$10 electric bill credit
- Gift for attending members & grand-prize items

More details will be available in the May issue of *Penn Lines*.



# Celebrate LINEWORKER APPRECIATION DAY



EQUIPMENT UPGRADES FOR INCREASED RELIABILITY



OUR COMMITMENT



NEW CONSTRUCTION ALONG WEST MUD PIKE

APRIL 8 IS A DAY TO SHOW APPRECIATION FOR THE DEDICATED ELECTRIC LINEWORKERS WHO KEEP OUR LIGHTS ON. AT SOMERSET REC, OUR LINEMEN AND RIGHT-OF-WAY CREW ARE COMMITTED TO SERVING THE MEMBERSHIP BY MAINTAINING A SAFE AND RELIABLE ELECTRIC SYSTEM.



THERE FOR YOU AFTER A SUMMER THUNDERSTORM TO RESTORE POWER.



- |         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|
| ROY     | TANNER  |         |
| PHIL M. | SAM     | ANDY    |
| BRIAN   | CASEY   | RICK    |
| GLENN   | ALEX    | PHIL R. |
| BRYAN   | GARRETT | BROCK   |
| ADAM    | CARTER  | DREW    |