

# 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  
800-443-4255

## Building Our To-Do List



**RUSTON OGBURN**

**EACH DAY THE WINTER WEATHER** kept our family close to the fire, we seemed to add another idea to our spring to-do list. It now includes a lot of fishing, camping, garden plots, baseball and many other outdoor activities that will likely not be fully completed.

The cooperative's to-do list has grown, too. Several members have informed us of sizable projects planned for this summer. These will be added to our roughly 240 miles of cycle right-of-way work and planned maintenance on our lines and substations.

The value of our continual maintenance work was demonstrated again this winter. We dealt with several severe windstorms and two doses of ice weighing down our lines and the trees surrounding them. Throughout these events, outages were isolated and our crews were able to restore power to members within hours, instead of days.

These same storms caused major disruptions to the north, east and south of us. Large parts of the southern U.S. experienced widespread outages from ice, with some lasting several weeks.

Our to-do list includes finding new and better ways to control peak demand across our system. Peak demand is the short-term power (kilowatts) used by our members. Monthly, seasonal and annual peaks all play a large role in the cost of power we need to purchase to supply our members.

Our traditional load control systems have helped curb these costs, but as the impact of hourly peak continues to grow, it increases the incentive to find new solutions.

If you have seen any headlines in the past year, you know we are not alone in our efforts to control power costs. We are glad we have the chance to participate in conversations about costs at the state and national levels.

However, we know that the biggest impact on our members will happen due to the actions we take locally. I will be discussing this more in future *Penn Lines* articles.

A big part of our operational work will be completed by new employees this year. We were fortunate to find people locally who can bring their recent work experience to the cooperative.

We are equally fortunate to have a group of veteran employees who will guide and train them through the next several years of on-the-job training required to meet the expectations of our members.

With the recent glimpses of warm weather, we have started on our to-do list at home with games of run-down. We've also been checking the trout stocking schedule. I hope you experience a similar jumpstart to your busy schedules, as well.

As always, please call or stop by the office if you would like to see us add something to our to-do list. 🐟

**RUSTON OGBURN**  
GENERAL MANAGER

# Father and Son: Family on the Line

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

**FOR SOME, LINEWORK IS A CAREER PATH** discovered later in life. For others, it's practically woven into their DNA. For Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) Lineman Brian Marker and his son, Sam, the trade is more than a profession — it's a shared calling built on faith, grit and a deep respect for the responsibility that comes with keeping the lights on.

Brian's journey into linework began unexpectedly. After he and his wife built their home, he was laid off from his job. Each day, while driving into the Somerset REC office, a former co-op manager noticed Brian's determination and work ethic as he landscaped his yard. One day, the manager stopped and offered Brian an opportunity to become a lineman.

"I've always been thankful to the good Lord for the opportunity he presented through a layoff," Brian says.

## From setback to Somerset REC

What first seemed like a setback became the start of a fulfilling career serving members and neighbors. In September, Brian will celebrate 30 years as a cooperative lineman.

Meanwhile, for Sam, linework wasn't just something he

chose — it was something he grew up understanding.

"As a kid growing up, no matter how many events or Christmas mornings my dad missed, it never bothered me because I always knew he was working hard to keep the lights on for someone else," Sam says. "I could see the pride he took in his job, and I would often think, 'I hope I can find a job one day that I can take satisfaction in the way he does.'"

Years later, when Sam shared that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps, Brian felt two emotions at once: pride and apprehension.

"I was proud," Brian admits, "but yet apprehensive as it's a dangerous job."

That understanding of risk has shaped both of their careers. Brian made sure Sam knew from the beginning that there are no "off days" in linework.

"There can be no days when one's focus is skewed," Brian notes. "One hundred percent attention is required for a safe day."

These days, Sam carries that mindset with him.

"A piece of advice from my dad that has stuck with me is to work safely," Sam says. "It can be very easy to rush through your work and not do your best, but in this job, slowing down can be the difference between going home to see your family at the end of the day or not. There is never a job that is so important that it should not be done safely."

That lesson started long before lineworker's school; instead, it began on the family farm.

"My dad taught me at a young age that so many things can go wrong at any moment," Sam says. "It's very important to always pay attention and fully understand what you are doing."

## 'You never stop learning'

During his senior year of high school, Sam decided to pursue linework and at age 17, he began climbing under his dad's instruction and high expectations.

Though Sam had watched his father his entire life, the trade still surprised him.

"What surprised me the most [about line work] is that you never stop learning," Sam says. "I'm five years into my career, and every day I encounter something new."

Today, Brian serves members at the cooperative level, while Sam works as a lineman for an investor-owned utility. Though these linemen cover different territories, their paths frequently cross — especially during storm response.

In April 2025, severe weather in Addison, Listonburg and Confluence kept both men busy. Brian and Sam's bucket trucks passed each other often as they restored power, a quiet but powerful reminder of their shared purpose.



**ONE MISSION:** Following in his father's footsteps, Sam Marker, right, proudly carries on a family tradition of service, dedication and keeping the lights on. He is shown here with his dad, Brian, a lineman with Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative for nearly three decades.

“Since we both do the same type of job, when we get together, we always have work-related things to talk about,” Sam says. “We have even called each other during work to ask questions about situations that have us stumped.”

The hardest parts of the job aren’t always visible to the public. Long hours mean missed birthdays, graduations, holidays and sporting events. In this line of work, plans can change quickly when the phone rings.

“This job requires a lot of sacrifice,” Sam explains, “but working with good men and having a supporting family makes a huge difference. For me, the most rewarding part of this job is turning the lights back on when people need it. It can be hard to leave an event or family gathering when the phone rings, but it makes it all worth it when you get the lights back on for people who are counting on you.”

For Brian, working at a local electric cooperative adds even deeper meaning.

“Working for members makes co-op work just a bit different,” he says. “Members are family, friends and neighbors. It’s why our men always push to keep the power on or restore it as quickly and safely as possible.”

## Safety first – always

Safety, above all, is the common thread between generations. Tailgate discussions before every job — reviewing energized versus de-energized lines, wire movements and each step from start to finish — are non-negotiable.

Pennsylvania law prohibits employees from hot-gloving high-voltage lines exceeding 7,600 volts to ground or 13,200 phase-to-phase, requiring that such work be performed via approved hot-stick methods.

Sam works with hot gloves almost daily, performing work on lower-voltage energized power lines while wearing specialized insulated rubber gloves and sleeves that protect him from electrical contact.

In contrast, Somerset REC operates at 14,400 volts and 24,900 phase-to-phase; therefore, Brian and fellow co-op lineworkers do not perform hot gloving work. Power is de-energized before repairs begin.

“I have always instilled in Sam the importance of having a plan to safely complete a job,” Brian notes. “This helps reduce the chance of ‘just winging it.’”

Sam agreed — but he also credits his dad for teaching him how to balance seriousness with camaraderie.

“I learned from my dad that making work fun is important,” Sam states. “This job can include very hard tasks and long hours, but if you are able to enjoy your work, it can make for a very happy and rewarding career.”

Another lesson Sam has learned is that there is time for work and time for play.

“Linework is a job that you can have fun with, but it can also be dangerous, and you must know the difference,” he says.



**WATCHING DAD:** The future of linework starts with those who lead by example. Sam Marker, left, and his younger brother, Eric, right, enjoyed watching their dad, Brian, as children.



**LEADING THE WAY:** Brian Marker, far right, speaking to linemen and cooperative directors while out in the field.

Both Markers are known for being focused, strong and determined. Sam describes his dad’s work style as disciplined, adaptable and personable — traits he strives to emulate.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going by trying their best every day, he adds.

“Dad always said ‘Can’t means don’t want to,’” Sam says. “Watching my dad be an accomplished lineman and good role model made me want to do the same thing with my life and career. I’m sure there are other families in the industry doing the same thing to keep this profession strong.”

There’s room for friendly competition, too. If the two climbed head-to-head today, Sam jokes he might have the edge — though he admits he’s not sure how fast his dad was in his younger years.

As for lunches, Sam laughs, saying that if they were packing their own, he’d win, “but my mom packs my dad’s

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## FATHER AND SON

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bucket, so he has the better lunches.”

If linework hadn't called their names, Sam says he would likely try to be a professional fisherman or hunter, while he's certain his dad would be a farmer.

### Dedication to job and family

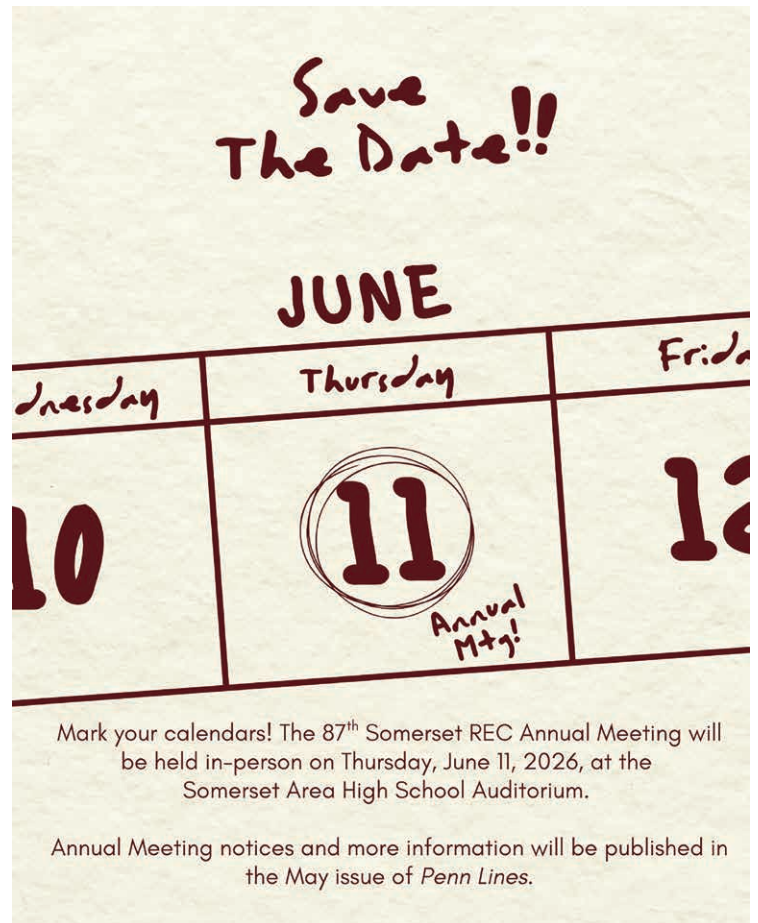
To the Markers, being a lineman is about more than climbing poles and restoring outages.

“Being a Marker lineman means dedication to your job and your family and taking pride in everything you do,” Sam says.

“Being a Marker lineman to me means taking your job seriously and knowing family time will be sacrificed,” Brian adds. “But also knowing what we do on a daily basis or during a storm is essential to our members and customers.”

For Brian and Sam, the climb isn't just vertical — it's generational. The legacy they're building is grounded in hard work, humility and an unwavering respect for the line.

As we celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day this month, we thank them and their co-workers for their dedication and sacrifice to life on the line — and for keeping the lights on. 📌



## New Chief Leads Right-of-Way Management

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

**JACK GUMBERT STARTED AT SOMERSET** Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) on Dec. 8, 2025, mentoring with then-Right-of-Way Chief Phil Read.



**JACK GUMBERT**

Previously, he worked in the right-of-way and tree divisions for Penn Line Service, where he was responsible for climbing and bucket crews. In addition, he also worked for Lewis Tree Service as crew foreman in the Gettysburg and Allentown areas and in Indiana and Cambria counties. Earlier in his career, he was employed with B&L Tree Service, where he served co-ops in vegetation management

in the Huntingdon and Bedford areas.

Jack, a graduate of Berlin Brothersvalley High School, is a certified line clearance arborist through the ACRT training school in Canton, Ohio — the largest licensed

arboriculture training organization in North America. He also has a CDL license.

He is a member of Meyersdale Masonic Lodge No. 554, New Baltimore Sportsmen Club, Tub Mill Hunting Club and Shade Sportsman Archery Club.

Jack's hobbies include 3D and indoor archery, hunting, fishing, kayaking, biking and spending time with his fiancé and dogs. In his spare time, he builds turkey calls for himself and others.

With his extensive vegetation knowledge and a love for the outdoors, we are pleased to welcome Jack as the new right-of-way chief at Somerset REC.

“I'm excited to start this new chapter in my life working at Somerset REC as the new right-of-way chief,” Jack says. “I am hoping to continue the great work Phil Read has done with the co-op. I'd also like to thank the team at Somerset REC for welcoming me on. Everyone has been great helping me get acclimated, and I can't say enough about how professional it is — it feels like a real team!” 📌