

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

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Vice President

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Manager of Information Technology

Douglas E. Glessner,

Manager of Outside Operations

Jonathan Hillegas,

Director of Finances

Emily Baer,

Director of Marketing and Member Services

Phil Stern,

Manager of Metering

Office Hours

Monday through Friday

7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Emergency Outage Number

814-445-4106

800-443-4255

Guest Column



Hello, it's your cooperative calling

By Emily Baer, *Director of Marketing and Member Services*

MOST OF US have called a wrong number or gotten the dreaded, automated message: “This number is no longer in service,” or “This number has been disconnected.” At the cooperative, we work to maintain effective communication between our members and staff. To achieve this, we need valid phone numbers, mailing addresses and email addresses.

Recently, we have experienced some difficulties when attempting to contact members because of invalid phone numbers. If you have eliminated your landline, please reach out to the cooperative to update your contact information. If we need to contact you about a scheduled outage, past-due electric bill, outstanding HVAC invoice, service entrance letter or right-of-way maintenance, it is essential we have your up-to-date contact information. Here are a few examples that explain why this is important:

Your electric bill is mailed at the beginning of the month and due on the 25th of the month. If your electric account is past due, a final notice is mailed on the 12th of each month, notifying you of your past-due amount. When the new bill processes after the 25th and there is a past-due amount, members will get a courtesy phone call reminding them of their past-due balance, which must be paid to avoid disconnection. Also, when a renter moves out and cancels electric service with Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), we attempt to call the owner to verify the situation.

If you receive a service entrance letter, it is because our employees discovered a safety hazard, and you must follow through with the required action. Typically, the letter addresses an electrical issue that only has a certain amount of time to be resolved. If the issue is not taken care of by the due date, the meter will be disconnected. Examples of these safety hazards include a rusty meter base that needs to be replaced, a service that needs to be relocated or a frayed entrance cable that needs to be repaired. Valid contact information from the member is necessary to avoid disconnection.

The Operations Department is another place where your contact information comes in handy. In the event of a scheduled outage, we attempt to notify members who will be affected of the date, start time and length of outage. Also, members are informed when Somerset REC crews and contractors will be performing routine right-of-way maintenance in their area.

Lineworkers are on call 24/7 to keep the lights on. We can improve outage restoration times if members provide us with a phone number so we can contact them directly if the on-call dispatcher needs to verify specific information.

So, the next time a cooperative employee dials your phone number, sends you a letter or drafts an email, we hope you are on the receiving end of it. To update your contact information, please call 814-445-4106 or email service@somersetrec.com. ☀

Annual meeting comment card responses

THE FOCUS OF Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) has always been to provide safe, affordable and reliable electric service to our members. Another focus has been to keep the members informed and provide an “open-door” policy. By mailing comment cards to our members, we provide you with an opportunity to express your thoughts, questions or concerns.

Your general manager, Ruston Ogburn, provides responses

Right-of-way maintenance

“We need more trees cleared from the power lines.”

“I was told trees on my property are too far from the lines to be cut by Somerset REC crews. I think this would be a good preventive measure and would like it to be done please.”

Currently, our right-of-way maintenance is on a six-to-seven-year cycle. The number of trees we’ve cut over the last six to seven years is significant, but that doesn’t mean we can cut every tree that a member wants removed. Sometimes, a tree leans away from the line and is otherwise healthy, so it becomes a judgment call. It is important that we prioritize our efforts to remove trees and vegetation that are most impactful to system reliability.

Spraying has also been an important part of our vegetation management. Any time we apply herbicides on rights of way for vegetation management, it’s done by experienced and trained employees and contractors, who are licensed to spray in contained and focused areas.

Most herbicide spray applies to two different scenarios:

1. After a tree is cut, herbicide gets applied to the stump to prevent sprouting. This significantly improves the efficiency of cutting to diminish the amount of regrowth.
2. After mowing an area, crews treat the area to prevent woody vegetation from growing, which ultimately promotes grasses and ferns to grow in the right of way.

The right-of-way cleanup process falls into separate categories. If the cutting is in a yard or a maintained area, crews

will typically chip the brush and haul it away. If cutting in a wooded area, crews move the trees and brush to the side of the right of way to allow access for our lineworkers. We do not remove the logs or brush in this situation.

Broadband

“How is broadband internet availability coming?”

“I’ve completed several surveys regarding broadband. Is there a timeline?”

Broadband surveys were mailed to determine the needs and wants of broadband in our service territory. The cooperative had a feasibility study done to determine the cost of a broadband build-out and how long it would take to pay it back. This study found such a project would be uneconomical, and it was decided the co-op did not want to commit to a broadband build-out at that time.

Congress passed an infrastructure package last year that had a lot of money dedicated to broadband. The Pennsylvania Legislature created the Broadband Development Authority, which is developing rules about what criteria needs to be met and how those funds will be dispersed across the state. Somerset REC management will monitor this progress. It is unlikely that Somerset REC will provide the broadband, although we may allow broadband providers to use our poles and space on our poles to supply this service to our members.

Our electric grid and solar information

“How prepared are our local power

below to the comments we received at our recent drive-thru annual meeting. Thank you to our members who submitted questions and comments.

“I appreciate all of the members who took the time to come through and vote for a new director,” Ogburn says. “It’s a sign of a healthy membership that members are willing to come out and have their voices be heard. Hopefully, we will see everyone again next year.”

lines if a large number of electric vehicles join our system?”

Our system is designed to handle peak conditions and over the years, we have built substations and lines and sized them to allow for growth. Our current overall substation capacity is at about 50%. We could handle a significant increase in overall load, if it is applied uniformly.

If there are many electric vehicles in a particular area, that area may need to have lines upgraded or voltage regulations upgraded, and that’s a slightly different situation. We do not see that being a major issue in the coming years.

“What are the prospects of an attack on the grid and how will it affect Somerset REC?”

There is a possibility of a grid event happening in the Eastern Interconnection. Somerset REC is part of this region, which covers most of the area from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. The event that happened in Texas is certainly something that can happen here. That outage was caused by extremely cold weather conditions, but the grid could also be disrupted by a cyber-related event. Grid operators constantly monitor all of this. In any case, if the grid or a portion of the grid goes down, all the distribution lines in that area would not have power because they are served by the transmission system.

As far as individual preparation, it depends entirely on your situation. We recommend home generators, if you are completely dependent on electricity for medical equipment, heating your home, etc.

se – comments, complaints and thanks

“What education can the co-op provide about solar power and technology?”

There are more than two dozen solar interconnections across our system. If solar is something you are interested in, the cooperative advises members to get multiple quotes from solar contractors and talk to solar experts or developers to determine what aligns with your needs. You can also contact a cooperative employee for solar references before signing an agreement.

Operations and reliability

“Why does our electric shut off sporadically for several seconds, flickering on and off? And what effect does this have on electric appliances?”

Comments were also received from members about checking transformers, poles and other equipment.

Somerset REC's distribution system is designed with breakers, like those in your home. Breakers in your home trip once and need to be manually reset. On our distribution system, many of our breakers will automatically reset after a falling branch hits the line or a lightning strike occurs. The system automatically resets, the power comes back on and you experience the blink, but not a long-duration outage. If a blink happens, in general, the system is working as designed.

Members who notice equipment that is in disrepair or needs attention, please contact the cooperative. By being proactive, we can find problems and fix them before an outage occurs.

Complaints and thanks

Several comments noted the wait time associated with the drive-thru election and asked about changes that can be made next year to decrease it.

“We like the drive-thru election. It's more convenient than the in-person meeting. Keep up the good work.”

With each drive-thru annual meeting, our numbers increase. This year, more than 820 members passed through the

stations in a little over three hours. Some members waited in line for over an hour, and we have taken notes to decrease the wait time for next year and will plan accordingly. There is a high

likelihood that next year's annual meeting will be a drive-thru event again. As always, the door is always open for comments, questions and concerns from our members. ❁

Vought joins Somerset REC Board

AT THE 83rd annual meeting, a drive-thru event, P. Timothy “Tim” Vought was elected by the membership to represent District 6 on Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) Board of Directors.

Tim graduated from Meyersdale Joint High School and continued his education at Penn State University, earning a Bachelor of Science degree and master's degree in agricultural science education.

He retired from Rockwood Area High School, where he was employed as an ag science teacher and as the varsity rifle coach. Currently, he is semi-retired and working on his family farm.

Tim enjoys volunteering at many local organizations throughout the county. He is a member of Amity United Church of Christ in Meyersdale, where he serves as an elder and is president of the consistory. He is also a life member of the NRA, Penn State Alumni Association and Pa. Young Farmers. Tim is also an annual member of the Rockwood Young Farmers organization and Somerset County Farm Bureau.

His first cooperative experience dates to 1964, when he was selected to represent Somerset REC at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.

Vought recalls the trip: “As a previous Youth Tour representative, thanks to the co-op, I was able to have a wonderful experience and meet other people not only from Pennsylvania, but also the entire United States. My friend, Jim Will from Berlin, also attended, and we were members of the Future Farmers of America. We were asked to present at the national



DOC'S BOYS: Tim Vought, right, and cooperative member and friend, Mike Hardwig, enjoy performing together in the band, Doc's Boys.

meeting and talk about agriculture in Pennsylvania. It's a memory I will never forget and hope to encourage youth in Somerset County to apply for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour.”

Vought and his wife, Shirley, live on Old Mule Trail Road in Garrett. In his spare time, Tim enjoys hunting and target shooting. He also plays the trumpet in the Penn State Alumni Blue Band, Somerset County Community Band and Doc's Boys. Together, he and Shirley have raised four children and are the proud grandparents of 12.

“It's an honor to be elected to serve, and I hope to do a good job for the membership,” Tim says. “I see it as a continuation of a job well done by the previous directors and hope to continue their leadership and provide a happy place for the employees to work and members to receive affordable and reliable electric service.”

Tim will expand his knowledge about the cooperative by participating in director training in the upcoming months. ❁



SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS: Eleven Somerset County students have been selected as recipients of the 2022 Somerset REC Scholarship Award. A brief ceremony was held recently at the cooperative, where staff recognized these outstanding, well-rounded individuals. Front row, from left: Rylee Pongrac, Shade-Central City; Kaitlyn Pletcher, Rockwood; Madison Putman, Rockwood; and Laci Fetterman, Conemaugh Township. Back row, from left: General Manager Ruston Ogburn; Daniel Conn, Turkeyfoot; Kahara Snyder, Meyersdale; Reagan Lynch, Somerset; and Abby Kniss, Conemaugh Township.



VIKING AND MOUNTAINEERS AWARDED: For those scholarship recipients who couldn't attend the ceremony, Emily Baer, co-op director of marketing and member services, presented their \$1,000 scholarship awards at their schools' awards ceremonies. They are: Rylee Snyder, above, a 2022 graduate of Shanksville-Stony-creek High School, and Hartley VanGilder and Alivia Coughenour, below, 2022 graduates of Berlin Brothersvalley High School.



FOR THE 21ST CONSECUTIVE YEAR, SOMERSET REC IS PROVIDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL STUDENTS WHO ARE SEEKING TO ADVANCE THEIR EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL. THIS ASSISTANCE RECOGNIZES WELL-ROUNDED HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS FOR OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC CAREERS, SCHOLASTIC ACTIVITIES AND SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE, NOT FINANCIAL NEED. SOMERSET REC AWARDED 11 \$1,000 SCHOLARSHIPS. THE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE CONSISTED OF THREE SOMERSET REC DIRECTORS AND THREE SOMERSET REC EMPLOYEES. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL RECIPIENTS FOR YOUR INCREDIBLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS!

KAITLYN PLETCHER	RYLEE PONGRAC
MADISON PUTMAN	ABBY KNISS
RYLEE SNYDER	REAGAN LYNCH
LACI FETTERMAN	DANIEL CONN
KARAH SNYDER	HARTLEY VANGILDER
ALIVIA COUGHENOUR	

