

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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Guest Column



The Year of the Ox and new connections

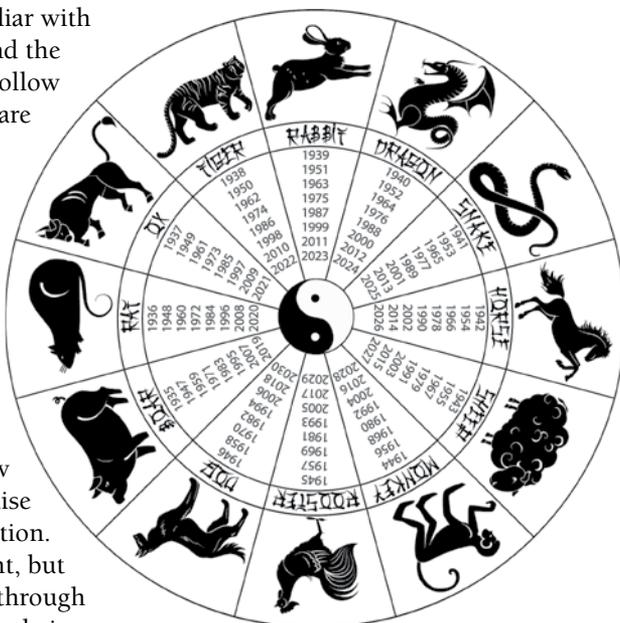
By Emily Baer

SOME of you may be familiar with Chinese zodiac symbols and the Chinese New Year. If you follow the Chinese calendar, you are aware that it operates on a 12-year cycle of animal signs and their ascribed attributes, based on the lunar calendar. This year, 2021, is the Year of the Ox.

Those born in the Year of the Ox often group family and work together, are honest and reliable, low key, and never look for praise or to be the center of attention. Oxen often hide their talent, but they will gain recognition through their hard work, rarely lose their temper, and they think logically and make great leaders. After recently reading about this year's zodiac animal, I could not help but compare the ox to employees of the cooperative who served you over the past year and a half. And a busy year and a half it has been.

Due to the recent increase in the price of materials and the issue of the availability of contractors, most people would assume that new connections at the cooperative would be slow. This, however, is not the case.

Cooperative employees have been busier than ever helping members who are applying for a new service. Office staff and engineers work together to assist in members' initial requests. In addition to yard light repairs, line maintenance, and outage restoration



work, lineworkers have a revolving door of new connections to build. Yet every employee performs his or her job professionally and efficiently and then moves to the next member in line waiting for a service. While many of the jobs are quite similar, each new connection provides a new challenge.

In 2020, 72 members applied for a new connection, with 43 members who followed through with paperwork and had a new service hooked up. However, through June 2021, 81 members have already applied, and 50 have been connected. Most of these new connection applications are for cabins, campgrounds and garages. Due to the pandemic, an increase in outdoor recreational activities, such as all-terrain vehicle and side-by-side trail riding,

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New buzz for veterans – join a bee brigade

By Emily Baer

AFTER 24 years in the U.S. Army, cooperative member Justin Broadwater is ready to trade in his combat uniform for a beekeeping suit to lead a new brigade.

In 2019, the 1998 graduate of Meyersdale Area High School was living in New Jersey with his wife and two young children, and he knew he would be retiring from the military soon. Broadwater was interested in farming and beekeeping, so he started searching for available farms across the United States in hopes of finding something that would be a perfect fit for his family.

He was in luck. He found a farm in rural Somerset County that would be perfect for his plans. After navigating the U.S. Department of Agriculture loan process, on Sept. 23, 2019, he became the owner of a 33-acre horse farm near Buffalo Mills. Interestingly, Sept. 23 was also the day Broadwater joined the U.S. Army.

Traveling back and forth from New Jersey to the farm got tiring. When the pandemic hit, Broadwater's job allowed him to telework. With little knowledge of the type of farmer he



TESTING THE HIVE: Justin Broadwater, owner of Broadwater Bee Brigade, opens one of his beehives to peek at honey production. Fun fact: Bees are thieves; a strong hive will steal honey from a weak hive.

would become, he moved to the farm and started the cleaning process. He also started acquiring animals.

“It all started with here’s an animal, there’s another animal, let’s buy more animals,” he recalls.

In addition to preparing the farm for the animals and his family, Broadwater

remembers, “My wife was expecting with our third baby in June 2020. In May 2020, I returned to New Jersey to finalize packing and was driving back to the farm for the weekend when my wife went into labor a month early. It was a wild week, but at that point we both agreed it was time to really get the farm started.”

Broadwater was initially interested in beekeeping as a hobby because of the stress and anxiety he experienced with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He says there is a therapeutic effect that being on the farm and working the beehives has on him.

“Do I occasionally get stung by a bee? Yes. But it is a bee sting, not a bullet wound,” he says.

He hopes to offer this therapy to other veterans who may be suffering with PTSD or service-related trauma.

While there are many hunting retreats for veterans, Broadwater notes, “I want to create a year-round, out-of-the-box stress reliever. You have to find the place that you can go to in July, because you aren’t in the woods turkey or deer hunting then. If other



INSIDE THE HIVE: Honeybees make a product called propolis, which is a super sticky substance like glue. Aside from honey byproducts like candles, wax, lip balm and hand lotion, there is also a product called Propolis Tincture. When you combine propolis with pure alcohol, it creates a formula that is known as a natural remedy ointment for cold sores, ulcers, scratches and burns.

veterans can find their inner peace by beekeeping, chicken wrangling or helping on the farm, that is what I want to provide.”

At the beginning of fall in 2020, Broadwater had approximately 120 hives. Because winters in Pennsylvania can be too harsh for hives to survive and produce honey the following year, he transferred some of his hives south to Georgia (as most commercial beekeepers do in the winter months). Approximately 70 of those hives were ruined by skunks and raccoons.

“Do I occasionally get stung by a bee? Yes. But it is a bee sting, not a bullet wound.”

—Justin Broadwater

Many of the hives Broadwater kept on the farm were lost, also.

“It comes down to do you want to keep the bees or do you want to keep the honey,” he says. “Last winter, I was new to the area and did not know what to expect from winter snowfall or temperatures. I kept some hives at the farm, and they took a beating. It’s definitely a rebuilding year for me.”

Beekeepers typically start pulling honey in July, but unfortunately, with the loss of his hives, this year Broad-



TINY FARMERS: Justin Broadwater enjoys teaching his children about each animal he cares for. Currently, his farm has chickens, ducks, turkeys, guineas, pot-bellied pigs, horses, Texas longhorns and of course, the bees. “When I get mad at a bee for stinging me, I can go to the cows. When one longhorn swings its head and the horns knock food out of my hand, I can go to the pot-belly pig and she just squeals and rolls over to pet her. That’s the various opportunities my place can provide,” says Broadwater with a smile.

water will focus on building healthy beehives heading into winter. He has a five-year goal of reaching 1,000 hives.

Because beekeeping can be quite challenging, Broadwater says, “I recommend pairing up with a beekeeper who’s been around and let them mentor you the first year or two. There are

so many intricacies to beekeeping that if you do something wrong, you’ve wasted your time.”

In the months leading up to Broadwater’s retirement, the Army provided an opportunity for him to prepare for the workforce through a career skills program. He is interning with cooperative member Milroy Farms, a maple producer and crop farmer in Salisbury. He is also working toward a master’s certification in beekeeping

through Cornell University.

Jason Blocher, owner of Milroy Farms, and Broadwater work together labeling and packaging maple products so Broadwater can gain knowledge for use in his honey production business. He is also learning about other aspects of farming.

“Being mentored by Jason through this internship has been such an awesome opportunity,” Broadwater says. “I helped on a farm as a kid, but that was pretty much just getting on a tractor and driving. I am now seeing the behind the scenes of farming — how dry the hay needs to be, how tall before cutting and so on. Now that I own a farm, I need to understand the why.”

Broadwater’s vision for his farm and beekeeping business is to not only provide a home for his family, but also to establish a stress-free retreat.

“I’m a very personable person and love to share my goals and help others reach their goals,” he says. “I’m a veteran who has served in Iraq and Kuwait, and after 24 years, I’ve decided it’s time to spend time with my family and create a place where fellow veterans come to relax and recharge.”



LEAN MACHINES: The Broadwater family has a herd of about 20 Texas longhorns. Longhorns are known for their extremely lean meat. Their horns grow outward from the sides of their head and can reach more than 7 feet wide.

Guest Column

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camping, and water activities including boating, fishing, and swimming, created a need to expand availability to our members.

If you are considering applying for a new service, please contact our office at 814-445-4106 and ask to speak with Kara. She will explain the application process and required documents. After the application process is complete, an engineer will schedule a site visit to determine the best route to get electricity to your location.

Whether it is the Year of the Ox or any other zodiac animal, I would like to think that every year is the “Year of the Somerset REC Employee.” It is the goal of every employee to work together to provide safe and reliable electric service to the members we serve.

Looking ahead at the Chinese calendar, 2022 will be the Year of the Tiger. I am eager to see what next year brings. 🌞



SAFETY FIRST: Somerset REC is a host cooperative for some of the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) training courses. In June, four training weeks were held for employees of Pennsylvania and New Jersey rural electric cooperatives. These training weeks included Basic Rubber Glove, Intermediate Rubber Glove, Basic Hot Stick and Intermediate Hot Stick. Carter Engleka, an apprentice lineman at Somerset REC, participated in Basic and Intermediate Hot Stick training.

Here's the sticky from the Brigade...

Importance of taking care of a hive
 Keeping the bees free of mites and other diseases is vital. Bees rely on dandelions and they are their number one source to make honey. Justin asks that if you plan to spray weeds or for insects, to wait until 8 o'clock at night when the bees are already in bed. By the morning, the dandelion is dead and the likelihood of a bee to land on that dandelion before morning is not very high. To help with safe pollination and production of honey, Justin plans to place some of his hives at Bedford area fruit orchards in 2022.

Common types of Honey Bee species
 Many people do not realize that there are many kinds of bees such as Russian bees, Saskatraz (Canadian) bees, and Italian (Caucasian) bees. Russian bees are mean, sting hard, are quick to protect their hive, are mite resistant and hardy in the winter. These bees are not suitable for a beekeeper with kids and a family. Saskatraz (Canadian) bees are hardy in the winter and less aggressive. Italian or Caucasian bees are the friendliest bees you can get, but not hardy in the winter or at keeping mites away.

I got stung by a bee, now what do I do?
 It is important to keep in mind that after a bee stings, it lets off a pheromone, or smell, to alert other bees to sting or attack. When you see a bee, or get stung, do not start swatting because then you are spreading the pheromone. Normally, when you get stung once, another bee is close by to sting again because of the pheromone. Once a honeybee stings, the stinger can remain stuck inside the skin. Worker bees have stingers with barbs on the end to stay inside your skin once the bee flies away, while the queen bee does not have barbs and rarely stings. The honeybee will die after it stings. If you do get stung while working or playing outside, grab some dirt or grass and rub on the bee sting to get rid of the bee pheromone.

Starting your own hive
 Are you interested in starting your own hive? Do you have a swarm on the side of your house or in a nearby tree? Time out. The Broadwater Bee Brigade is here to help! Justin recommends not going near the swarm as it could be aggressive, and the average person is not equipped to handle the hive. You can find the Broadwater Bee Brigade on Facebook or by calling Justin at 814-442-6970.

NATIONAL SAFE DIGGING DAY

8.11

Safe Electricity.org