

Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

SULLIVAN COUNTY REC

P.O. Box 65
Forksville, PA 18616
570-924-3381
1-800-570-5081
Email: info@screc.com
Website: www.screc.com

STAFF

John Lykens, CEO
Dennis Klem, Manager,
Finance and Administration
Todd Molyneux, Manager,
Electric Operations
Diane E. White, Executive Assistant

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*Credentialed Cooperative Director
**Board Leadership Certificate
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OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Here to Provide You with Education, Training and Information




LATE LAST YEAR AND EARLIER this year, the cooperative posted a series of communications focused on our seven cooperative principles. While each of these principles is listed on our cooperative's website, we highlighted each of these principles on our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter social media platforms. I would like to take the time to highlight and talk about our fifth cooperative principle — education, training, and information.

Your cooperative is dedicated to providing education and information to all members through a variety of platforms, such as *Penn Lines*, our website, social media, in person, or over the phone. We use these various communication platforms to educate and inform members about many areas of our business, such as electrical energy use and conservation, electrical safety, maintaining a clear right of way, alternative energy options, and more. We take pride in engaging with you, our members, and are especially appreciative when we can speak and interact with you face to face.

Prior to 2019, when we held our annual meeting of the members in person, members would have the opportunity to have some face time with cooperative directors and employees at this annual event. Since transitioning to an online annual meeting, we have decided to get more face time with the membership through attendance at the Lycoming and Sullivan county fairs. Hopefully, members were able to interact with cooperative personnel during the Lycoming County Fair, as this fair has already concluded. Cooperative personnel will be present at the Sullivan County Fair during the weekdays.

Cooperative personnel will be available to assist members and answer questions members may have concerning their bills, alternative energy options, ways to conserve energy, new smart technologies, electrical safety, or any other electrical-related issues. In addition to addressing members' questions or concerns, numerous items will be on display for educational purposes. Smart-meter technology, home smart-plugs, and a smart-home energy monitoring system will be some of the items displayed to help members become informed on their use and application. A safety display, along with safety apparel and personal protective equipment, will also be at the cooperative booth.

Your cooperative is member focused. We believe that sets us apart from the regulated electric utilities surrounding our service territory. We are interested in hearing your thoughts and getting your feedback, including the things you feel we can improve. Your input and feedback are extremely important and crucial to the success of your cooperative.

I hope those who attended the Lycoming County Fair had the opportunity to engage with us during your visit. For those planning to attend the Sullivan County Fair, we will be set up on Aug. 31 and Sept. 1. This is a great opportunity to learn more about your cooperative and meet some of the individuals responsible for helping to bring safe, reliable, cost-responsible electrical energy into your household. We look forward to seeing familiar faces as well as those for the very first time. *Semper Fidelis.* 

JOHN LYKENS
CEO

One Man's Scrap Metal Is Another Man's Derby Car

SARAH PARRISH, COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATOR

BOYS WILL BE BOYS. Ain't that the truth? Playing with trucks and cars, covered in grease and mud, everything is a competition, and did we mention mud?

If all that wasn't enough separately, someone long ago had the great idea to combine all of those things together, and the output was every country boy's dream — a demolition derby.

Thankfully, the Sullivan County Fair caters to local folks who want to wreck cars, get covered head to toe in mud, and vie for the coveted trophy and title of that year's fair demolition derby winner.

These cravings, and an encouraging nudge from team mom Jackie Sznaider, are what drove three high school boys — Darrin Denmon, Ray "Badly Bent" Greene Jr., and Wes "Half Nutz" Sznaider — to start the County Boys demolition derby team in 2002.

The early days of County Boys

Most mothers would detest wrecked vehicles, shattered glass, and worn-out parts in their yards, driveways, and flower gardens. But Jackie was different. She encouraged her son and his two friends to compete in their first demolition derby 21 years ago.

But life has a way of taking sharp turns at unexpected times, and three weeks before the boys' first race, Jackie died in a car accident. Since then, every race has been dedicated to her memory. While those original boys are getting up in age, they pride themselves on getting kids involved, because that's what Jackie did for them. Over the years, more than a dozen teenagers have gotten their chance to fulfill their demolition derby dreams through the County Boys.

"You can't complain about kids not doing anything when

you're not going to give them anything to do," Darrin says. "So, we get them involved and teach them about cars, hard work and responsibility. We're just trying to be there for these kids ... to be who we needed when we were kids just starting out."

Since the original three teenage boys made their demo premiere, the County Boys team has had nearly 30 people drive for them, ranging from 3-year-olds in Power Wheels to a 51-year-old mother. The friends are passionate about promoting the sport and getting people involved. And it's not just boys in County Boys — girls have driven for them and won trophies, too.

The one that matters

The County Boys' passion for participating in the fair's derby stems from a homecoming feeling they can only find there.

"Once a year, we get together with our buddies and do battle in front of our friends and neighbors," Darrin reminisces. "It's special there: the unique track set-up, the familiar faces and the lack of cell service makes it feel timeless. We've gotten older but haven't grown up: things haven't changed. If you have a rough year, but a good run at the fair, it can make the whole year a good one."

County Boys have been represented at every Sullivan County Fair derby since 2002. They've also branched out from their stomping grounds; they've won from Harford, PA, to the state championship in Honolulu, HI. And they'll wreck just about anything that will run, from sub-compact Kias and V-8 old-iron Chryslers to Power Wheels, Jeeps, minivans, F-150s, and everything in between.

"We've been doing it for so long that everyone just knows what to do, and we rally around each other," Darrin says. "That's not unique to the County Boys though — it's the entire sport. It's funny to think of us breaking each other's cars, then immediately helping each other fix them, but that's just how it works."

One of the newest County Boys — Evan Smith, 17 — already has a year of competition under his helmet.

"It is very scary seeing your son out there, but knowing this is something that he truly enjoys and works so hard for is very rewarding," says Evan's mother, Lisa. "I will never forget the Sullivan County Fair derby last year. I was so nervous and scared watching. There were so many cars out there. I had to close my eyes several times, but witnessing Evan make the top four in his heat and seeing the excitement he had was so amazing. Even though he didn't win, I know he had the time of his life."

DARRIN DENMON



COUNTY BOYS: You can take the boys out of the county, but they'll all just come back Labor Day weekend. Pictured, from left, are Darrin Denmon, Dustin Denmon, Wes Sznaider, Ray Greene, Jr., and Guy McCarty.

Getting derby ready

Half the fun of a derby doesn't even include the derby. It's the hours and days spent searching back roads and hedgerows for cars, hauling them home, then stripping them down and building them up.

Derby cars need to have all the glass stripped out of them, and anything breakable or flammable needs to be removed. The battery and gas tank (sometimes) need to be moved inside the driver's compartment, and if you have an extra piece of metal, you can weld it in behind the driver's seat for protection. The original County Boys have learned lots of little tricks over the years they've passed down to other drivers. Some for safety, some for durability. Modified classes allow you to do more, like welding doors closed, installing heavy-duty bumpers, using aggressive off-road tires, etc. The long summer evenings (all-nighters), bruises and cuts (stitches), and hustle (the day before the derby) are what make memories for the County Boys.

Prepping their cars is one thing, but the parade through the county, from Route 220 in Dushore to Route 87 in Forksville, then down the straight stretch on Route 154 to the fairgrounds, is their chance to show off their Frankenstein creations.

"There's probably not a truck or car trailer in Sullivan County that isn't at the fairgrounds for the derby; and if there is, let us know and we'll find something for it to haul down," Darrin says.

It's not just about the derby

If you ask anyone who competes in demolition derbies, they'll be quick to tell you it's not just about the derby.

"I love the sport and the adrenaline, but the friendships, new and old that have been made, are even better," Wes says.

The entire community chips in to make sure each Labor Day weekend the fair's demo derby goes off without a hitch, rain or shine, and it's those moments that make "derbying" worth the stitches, aches, and broken bones.

The boys still remember their first wins. Wes's best derby memory is winning the 2009 Troy Fair derby in the V-8 class, or during their very first derby in Forksville when someone told Ray Greene to never put the car in reverse, and he went right over the block barricade (they'll never let him live that down). Wes has only ever missed four Sullivan County Fair derbies, and for each of those, he was still there watching. He's been in roughly 40 derbies.

Darrin's favorite memory is winning his first derby at the 2008 fair.

"The best night of my life," he says. "Jackie had said, 'Get on the roof if you win, but only get on the roof if you win,' so any time I win, I get on the roof for her. Those are great memories."

He's only missed the fair three times, all because of military commitments.

"Dad says I could have been president if I wanted to be,"



DARRIN DENMON

GETTING KIDS INVOLVED: The next generation of derby drivers, shown from left – Tucker Evans, Landon Young and Evan Smith – with original County Boy member Darrin Denmon, second from right.



DARRIN DENMON

ON DISPLAY: Ready to do battle before the Sullivan County Fair are the derby cars of Darrin Denmon, 38; Wes "Half Nutz" Sznajder, 11; and "Doctor Pretty" Guy McCarty, 44.

he adds, "but I just want to wreck cars with my buddies in Forksville on Labor Day weekend."

And what do they win? A plastic trophy, a nominal check that typically doesn't cover expenses, and most important: bragging rights.

"Don't get started in the sport thinking you're going to make money," Wes says. "I could win every derby from now until the end of time and still not come close to breaking even."

2023 derby season

As of mid-July, the County Boys are off to a great start in the derby season. The team won eight trophies in the first three derbies they competed in, including Wes's second win ever, Jason Evans's first win in his first try, and his kids, Tucker, 12, and Gabby, 14, finishing second and third in the youth derby. (Tucker knocked his sister out of the competition.)

This writer is far too scared to drive a derby car, but will be at the 2023 Sullivan County Fair on Labor Day weekend supporting all the County Boys (and girls) who do battle in front of a packed house and standing-room-only crowd on Saturday, Sept. 2. I encourage you all to do the same.

"We don't have football to rally around at Sullivan, so it's like a reunion every year when we go down there," Darrin says. "People think it's about the cars and the race, but it's really about being around friends." 🍷

The Power Behind Sullivan County REC: Our Employees

A Monthly Spotlight

SARAH PARRISH, COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATOR

THE NEXT EMPLOYEE INTRODUCTION to our readers is Jeff Spako, operations assistant I.

Jeff lives outside of Estella with his wife, Jennifer, and three children, Olivia, Allen, and Landon. There aren't many quiet evenings or weekends in the Spako household.

"I spend most of my free time attending my children's sporting events," Jeff says.

Olivia, an honors student, competes in softball and cheerleading and participates in 4-H. Allen participates in soccer, basketball, cross country, and 4-H, and Landon also does 4-H. He's just starting kindergarten, so his sports career will be up and coming soon.

Jeff admits he's a bit of a gear head, and he likes to pass that knowledge along to Allen. Together, the duo has

undertaken the father/son project of restoring Jeff's RS Camaro. So far, they've rebuilt the 350 motor; bumped compression 11:1 to add horsepower, and changed the rear gear ratio to 3:77 for a better launch.

Before coming to the co-op, Jeff had previously been employed in the automotive and diesel field and in right-of-way maintenance, which is what got him interested in line work.

Jeff was hired as the last tree trimmer at Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative (SCREC) in October 2009. Over the years, he progressed to apprentice lineman and then to journeyman lineman, attending numerous advanced lineworker training courses.

It was during this time that, after only having been at the co-op for two years, Jeff faced one of the worst floods the area has ever seen — the flood of September 2011. His morning commute, which typically only takes roughly 10 minutes, took two and a half hours due to detours. And that was only the beginning; 4,000 of the co-op's 6,000 members were without power.

The line crews spent the next few weeks with little to no rest. It took days alone just to sort out the mess of broken poles and line, then the crews had to fix them. A lot of poles had to be replaced, and entire sections of line had to be moved because where they had once been was now a washed-out creek bed.

In 2017, Jeff applied for the position of operations assistant I. With his natural leadership ability and background knowledge as a journeyman lineman, it seemed natural to step into that position and help the co-op move forward.

Everyone at the co-op wears

many hats, and Jeff's position is no different. As operations assistant, he oversees the herbicide crews, maintains a safe workplace for all workers, plans and designs the layout for all new power-line construction, and schedules outages (just to name a few of his daily tasks). He's also continuously learning, especially with new technology, but serving members (you!) is Jeff's favorite part of the job.

"I love the interaction with the members," he says. "Being someone who they can rely on when they have an issue and getting that solved is the best. We're working for the members!"

Co-ops are special, in that they are owned by our members. Cooperatives are not here to make a profit, and Jeff aims to manage costs for our members.

There have been difficulties over the years, especially in the supply chain with lots of shortages of hardware and materials. Transformers, before COVID-19, used to have about a one-month lead time. Now they take up to six months. Wire is hard to get, too, so Jeff needs to plan his orders and line construction accordingly.

Over the past year, the co-op has seen five long-time employees retire with more than 145 years of combined service to SCREC. Since then, two lineworkers have been promoted, meaning that seven employees have had to assume new responsibilities in a co-op with only 19 employees, but Jeff says the transition has gone flawlessly.

I hope you all enjoy getting to know our employees on a more personal level as much as I enjoy getting to know my co-workers even better. Check back in September to see who you'll meet next! 📍



SPAKO FAMILY: Jeff Spako, operations assistant at Forksville-based Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative, stands with his wife, Jennifer, and children – Landon, Allen, and Olivia.