

Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Sullivan County REC

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Staff

Craig A. Harting, CEO
Dennis Klem, Manager, Finance and Administration
Walt Tubach, Manager, Electric Operations
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Credentialed Cooperative Director
 **Board Leadership Certificate
 ***Director Gold Certificate

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

From the CEO



‘Too soon old’

By Craig A. Harting

THE PENNSYLVANIA Dutch have a saying, “We grow too soon old and too late smart.” I didn’t understand that when I was young, but I sure get it now.

They also said, “The older you get, the faster time goes.” I’ve also found this to be true as the time has flown by since I was chosen to be your CEO in September 1989.

And so, the time has come for me to retire on June 1 of next year. What’s the plan for replacing me and how will it work?

The board has engaged a search consultant from our national organization, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, and a process has been developed. A nationwide search will be performed, beginning with accepting applications from now until Feb. 1, 2022.

After the consultant conducts the screening process and background checks, the board will meet in March to select the finalists for interviews in early April. At that time, a candidate will be selected and negotiations will be held. The plan is to have a several-week overlap and transition period in late May.

The board’s job

The board’s most important job is to hire the CEO to run the cooperative’s daily operations. The CEO reports to and works for the board, as a whole. There are monthly board meetings as well as special board meetings. There is an annual review and evaluation of the CEO by the board.

The CEO hires the employees and is responsible for overseeing the entire operations of the cooperative. The CEO presents an annual budget to the board for its consideration and will make policy recommendations from time to time.

Unlike a public corporation with stockholders, the CEO does not have a vote on any board matters. Additionally, I will not be involved with the hiring process at all, other than to provide information to the board and consultant and facilitate meeting arrangements.

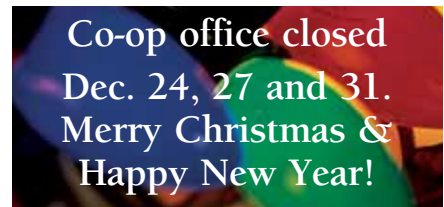
My job

My job in this process is to be as helpful as possible, but to stay out of the process itself. You can be assured it will be a smooth transition and all will go well. I have confidence in the board to make a good selection of the appropriate leader going forward.

In the coming months, I will be reviewing the progress of the cooperative over the years and will take a trip down memory lane, remembering former employees and directors I’ve had the pleasure of working with over the years.

Meanwhile, as the old people say, live every day and don’t take it for granted.

We at the cooperative wish you and yours a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year. ❁



Sharing a love of horses with others

By John Zelewicz
Penn Lines Writer

MANY OF US have hobbies or a passion for something in particular. It's extremely rare that someone can take their love of something and turn it into a business. But for Amber Benjamin, owning a farm and horses and being able to share her love of them became a reality.

Growing up in New Jersey, Amber was fortunate to have an uncle who owned a farm in Towanda. She would visit on weekends, holidays and during the summer. Spending time on her uncle's farm ignited the spark for her love of horses.

"He got me my first pony, Miss Mary, and taught me how to ride," she says. "Where I grew up, we couldn't have horses, but my parents got me a horse and boarded it. I always wanted a farm ... now I'm living the dream."

Amber and her husband, Kurt, spent some time looking for a place to keep horses.

Originally, they didn't consider looking in Sullivan County.

"At first, we were primarily looking for a place in Tioga or Bradford County," Amber explains, "because there are lots of wooded areas, but then we found this place in Sullivan County. There wasn't anything but a house. There weren't any outbuildings or horse fences ... it's been a work in progress."

The Benjamins purchased the property on Wampole Run Road from the Bahr family in 2018. It included a house and 10 acres of land. Since then, the Benjamins have expanded their property by purchasing another eight acres.

Once they settled in, they opened their property, Free Rein Farm, LLC, to others. They're currently boarding 13 horses, although they would like to keep around 10 horses at a time. The farm is more than a place to board horses. The couple also provide lessons and training for those interested in riding.

Amber uses the Method Ambassador



LEARNING TRICKS: Amber Benjamin purchased her horse Sigmund, nicknamed "Sig," before taking him to the Clinton Anderson Academy. Sig is now an endurance horse and is also learning tricks, such as rearing on command and lying down.

training technique she learned by attending the Clinton Anderson Academy. Clinton Anderson was born and raised in Australia, and his love of horses led him to find the best way to train them. Anderson's method focuses on natural horsemanship. His philosophy centers on learn, train and teach.

"He has a method for training horses," Amber notes. "He had a time learning how to train horses, and eventually came up with this system. It's very step-by-step, and everything he's done with horses is on video."

A lot of time and effort involved

Deciding to learn Anderson's method of training horses isn't simply a matter of running into town and signing up for a class. Amber felt that the sacrifices she would have to make were worth what she would get out of the training.

"It seemed out of my reach due to time and cost, but then he began offering different levels of certification," she says. "It would take six months, but I just decided to go ahead and do it. I had to purchase two green, broke horses for me to train. I had to leave my family, travel to Arkansas and stay in a hotel."



A LOVE OF HORSES: Amber Benjamin's love of horses led to a dream come true. Amber, her husband, Kurt, and their daughter, Reilly 4, opened Free Rein Farm, LLC, in 2019.

Those attending the training sessions soon learned that it wouldn't be a walk in the park.

"They really test you when you're there," Amber says. "For instance, they would teach you something on Monday, and you had to have your horse proficient in it by Tuesday."

How difficult is the training? It can be challenging, and isn't for everyone. Currently, there are only 59 Clinton Anderson clinicians and ambassadors — in the entire world.

Amber is happy to be able to put her training to work by helping others train and grow closer to their horses.

Suppose you're interested in getting a horse to ride. What type of horse should you get? According to Amber, those just starting out or who only have a little experience should buy a horse that's been trained or that they can train themselves or pay someone else to train. Amber is a horse-by-horse type of person, not a breed person. One of her favorite types of horses is a free-moving one, not one you have to constantly work to keep moving.

"When I'm doing training here, I'll put in 150 hours of riding in an eight-week training period. You don't necessarily have to get an older horse, but one that's trained. The type of horse a person buys really comes down to what they're planning on doing with it," Amber says.

Choosing a horse is only the beginning. Amber says the first thing you have to do is earn a horse's respect. Horses are herd animals and depend on the herd for safety. They're looking for a leader, she says, so they'll look to their rider/owner to fill that role.

"You've got to gain their respect, get their feet moving ... forward, backward, left and right ... you have to show the horse that there's nothing to worry about."

Horses are an investment

Any animal requires special care. They require food, vaccinations, and most of all, they require attention and time. And like any other animal, owning and taking care of horses involves costs.

"Horses are an investment — they're maintenance with legs," Amber explains. "Horses can be as expensive or inexpensive as you make them. It depends upon the type of feed that you give a horse as well as tack. Some horses are easy to keep, and some



READY TO RIDE: Amber and Kurt Benjamin's daughter, Reilly, shares their love of horses and riding. Here, Amber helps Reilly get ready to go for a ride on her horse, Sage.

require more of an investment."

When Amber, Kurt and daughter Reilly, age 4, opened the business in 2019, Amber didn't realize how big it was going to be. It is more involved than just running the farm; it also requires travel. Those interested in riding lessons can bring their horse or use one of the five horses the Benjamins have on hand for lessons. This is helpful for people who don't own a horse but want to learn how to ride.

Amber offers private lessons and clinics with up to four participants.

"When we hold a clinic, we all move along at the same pace," she says. "When doing private instruction, we move along at the student's pace.

Most people prefer to ride Western-style because it seems to be the most popular, although there are a surprising number of people that want to ride English-style lately."

As Amber points out, the main thing to keep in mind is that like anything else in life, you have to be committed to something for it to be successful.

"It's like anything else ... football, soccer or skiing," she says. "You're only going to get out of it what you're willing to put into it."

Anyone interested in lessons can get more information by visiting [facebook.com/FreeReinFarmLLC](https://www.facebook.com/FreeReinFarmLLC), emailing abenjamin@downunderhorsemanship.com or calling 570-507-3276. 🌟

From the operations department

By Walter Tubach

NO MATTER what I do — or try to do — or where I feed the power from, it seems this year I cannot keep a reliable



Walter Tubach
Manager, Electric
Operations

source of electric to the members in Gamble, Cascade and the parts of Plunketts Creek Township served by the Kellyburg substation. These members have experienced 43 hours of outage time from July 1 to Nov. 1.

If I have the electric coming from the Kellyburg substation, I lose the power feed from Penelec, our supplier, or a tree will fall and tear our lines down. If I have the feed come from the Estella substation, then I have issues in this area that will cause an outage there. If I feed the line from the Mill Creek substation, something always happens to cause another outage in the Rose Valley area.

I know most of you are very patient with these outages, and we are forever grateful, but I want you to know we work very hard each day to make the electric reliable in your area and every area we serve in the three counties.

It upsets me knowing we have tried extremely hard to lessen the outages, but they still keep occurring. The severe rain, high winds and downbursts have battered the system and caused healthy trees to fall from outside of our rights-of-way. The ground is saturated from rain, and the leaves on the trees act like a big umbrella, so when the wind blows, the trees just topple over.

Across the system to date, we have cut more than 10,000 trees and trimmed more than 16,000. We have applied a broadcast spray chemical to control tree growth along more than 45 miles of rights-of-way. We have also applied a spray on each tree stump along roughly 90 miles of line. I just hope that the weather will change for

the better, and either dry up or freeze up so these issues will cease.

Your electrical system has experienced 443 total outages during the past few months. We had several severe storms rock the system, June 30 to July 14. High winds, lightning and falling trees broke seven poles and brought the power lines down. We also had 10 transformers that were damaged and needed to be replaced.

The system was again rocked in all of the counties we serve starting Thursday, Aug. 12. High winds, which included downbursts, smashed another dozen poles and tore lines down. At one point on Friday, we had only half of our 900-mile electrical system working. I immediately called our statewide association in Harrisburg to get us help from other electric cooperatives in the state. These people are a godsend when it comes to getting help for emergencies or any other situation. Not long after I called, the statewide association responded with news that additional crews would be able to help as early as Saturday morning. I was overwhelmed with gratitude when the extra crews arrived.

The two-man crews came from Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) in Huntingdon, Somerset REC in Somerset and Wellsboro Electric in Wellsboro. The contract crew of Everhart & Hoover from Hustontown was already here helping us with other construction work. As always, we called in the three Spako Tree Service crews to help clear the lines and assist our lineworkers in restoring service.

These crews gave us tremendous help in the restoration process, and without them, it would have taken twice as long to restore power to all of our members. On Sunday afternoon, I called our neighboring cooperative, Claverack REC in Wysox, to see if I could get two more two-man bucket crews to help finalize the restoration on Monday. These men were more than willing to help us and arrived on Monday

morning to join one of our crews with restoring power to Worlds End State Park in Forksville and support several other jobs throughout the day.

This August event was devastating to the cooperative and to our members. This was a storm we had not experienced in almost 20 years, and I hope it is a tremendously long time until it happens again.

Heavy and extreme rain, lightning and wind caused 209 outages in the last four months. That is a high number of outages, but the weather was brutal all summer. The extreme heat caused six different outages that overheated transformers and burned another three. We experienced outages 28 times that we could not find a cause for. We had eight different outages caused by broken ceramic fuse cutouts. For some reason, these cutouts just broke and fell apart. Unfortunately, they have been out on the line for many years, and all we can do is replace them once they break. If we see one that is cracked, we replace it to save an outage.

I had planned a dozen outages on the lines so that we could do a lot of work in a faster time frame. Doing work in an energized environment is something that our lineworkers do, but depending on the amount of work and the number of jobs, it is faster and safer to just shut the power off for a couple hours and perform a lot of work at one time.

Trees falling caused us 126 outages. No matter how many rights-of-way we clear, this will always be a problem. This outage number would be two or three times that amount if we were not aggressive with cutting rights-of-way.

Animals and birds getting into the lines caused 27 outages. Squirrels climbing the poles and getting into the high-voltage bushing, bats getting into the gap of the lightning arrestors, and birds landing on top of the poles and touching the wires are what cause these types of outages.

Power supply to our Estella substation went out on June 30 at midnight.

The lineworkers immediately backfed the line from our Dushore substation, so the outage time was just less than two hours. On July 7, Penelec lost the power feed to Sullivan County around 8 p.m. We were able to backfeed the Laporte substation from the Mill Creek substation in just under an hour, but our Estella and Dushore substations were not able to be backfed because we had issues on our line as well. Penelec finally made repairs to its system and restored power to our Estella substation at 4:30 a.m. This allowed us to backfeed the Dushore substation to restore power to all of our members.


Penelec again lost all power to Sullivan County on July 15 at 5:30 p.m. This outage only lasted for a short time, and we did not do any backfeeding. Penelec again lost service to our Laporte and Estella substations on July 16. The lineworkers immediately backfed Laporte from the Mill Creek substation and Estella from the Dushore substation.

Penelec lost power to our Dushore substation on Friday, Aug. 13, from 8 that evening until 10 a.m. Saturday. We were unable to backfeed the Dushore substation from Estella because we had issues on our lines as well. On Aug. 18, Penelec lost power to our Laporte substation for 15 minutes. Penelec backfed our substation to keep the outage time to a minimum. Penelec again lost power to our Laporte and Estella substations on Sept. 7 around 9:45 p.m. for approximately 45 minutes. We did not have enough time to assemble the crews and do any backfeeding on this outage because power was restored quickly.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading my article about your electric system, the outages we encounter and the problems we face.

As always, the employees at Sullivan County REC will do our best to deliver reliable electric to you and to serve you.

Call the office with your new phone numbers when you change them and remember we are only a phone call away if you need assistance. Please stay safe! ❁



Wishing you a very merry Christmas!

We have been through a lot of adversity these last few years. It is important now — more than ever — to appreciate our lives and the people in them.

We at the cooperative appreciate our members, their understanding, and their support, and it's not just during storms when we are trying to get the power restored as quickly and as safely as possible for you. We appreciate you all year long. You are the reason the cooperative was formed 85 years ago.

The board of directors and employees of Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative would like to wish our members a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

Board of Directors

Ann Henderson (District 1)
Jim Lambert (District 3)
Jeff Hamilton (District 4)
Kathy Robbins (District 5)
Jay Lewis (District 6)
Dave Rakestraw (District 7)
Dave Aumen (District 8)
Steve Brady (District 9)

Employees

Kendall Achey
Nolan Chase
Diane Cusson
Tom Eberlin
Craig Harting
Darrick Higley
Dave Kepner
Dennis Klem
Alex Laudermilch
Tom Livezey
Todd Molyneux
Chad Phillips
Kim Phillips
Jeff Spako II
Walt Tubach
Diane White
Lori Williams
Tyler Worthen
John Zelewicz