

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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Office Hours

Monday through Friday

7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

From the CEO



So what about solar?

By Craig A. Harting

DO ROOFTOP solar systems actually work in our area? Are they a good deal? Are they something you should consider? The answers are: yes, it depends and maybe. Over the last 10 years, we have connected 14 systems to our grid.

This month, I'd like to answer some general questions and give you an update about rooftop solar systems. Yes, they do work in our area; however, just like real estate, it's all about location, location, location.

Trees, mountains, valleys, direction and pitch of the roof all affect rooftop performance. Ground-mounted systems improve electrical production (with manual and automatic tracking) but they use up real estate and can cost more.

Net metering

The cooperative currently allows for net metering, which means you can bank power for later use. These systems must be sized to only displace some or all of your annual electric use. There is no fee for this service, and monthly reports are generated showing your use and generation.

Note that the Facilities Charge is still billed each month (as long as you are connected to the grid). Our power supplier, Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc., pays any generation remaining in the bank in June of each year at the average wholesale rate.

The process

The process is straightforward. A

system is designed and a contract put in place. Most members have a contractor design and install the system; however, a few members have done it themselves.

Then the system is installed and inspected by an electrical inspector. At that point, the cooperative changes the meter and the system is ready to go. There are a few more details involved, but those are the basics.

The big question

Now for the big question — is it worth it and should you consider it? The answer really depends upon what your goals are. You really need to do your homework. These systems require a substantial upfront payment, and they take a number of years to pay back.

There is no question solar technology continues to improve, but there is still a payback to consider. Technology related to batteries also continues to improve, but they are an added cost and only one of our members currently has them.

If you are only looking at lowering your electric bill, investments in insulation, windows and heating systems may pay back sooner. However, these are all decisions for you to make. We can help by giving you information, but ultimately it is your decision.

Please call us if you have any questions or if we can help you. We will try to be a resource for you. Meanwhile, think Spring! ☀️

Christmas Village brings holiday cheer

By John Zelewicz
Penn Lines Writer

THE SUN shone brightly down upon the snow-covered ground at the Sullivan County Fairgrounds on Dec. 7. Tinsel, garland, holiday inflatables, Christmas music and Christmas trees greeted those attending the first-ever Christmas Village. All monies raised went to the Sullivan County Fair barn revitalization project.

“We’ve done a 4-H Easter Egg Hunt as a community project for the last two years,” says Kim Phillips, office assistant for Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative. “We wanted to do something else and chose to do something for Christmas. The Sullivan County Fair members decided to do a fundraiser to help pay for the needed repairs to the barn. The barn needs a new roof, the support columns need repairing; it just needs some general upkeep.”

Phillips, who is very involved in the community, was quick to point out that this event wasn’t a one-person show. The Christmas Village wouldn’t have been possible if it were not for Tamara Heess, Jody Lambert, Hope Verelst and others. Once they agreed on what they wanted to do, they had to approach the fair



board to make sure it would be possible to hold such an event at the fairgrounds.

“When you have an event on the fairgrounds, you have to take it to the fair board for approval,” she says. “This wasn’t something that happened overnight. This was about a year in the making.”

As you can imagine, planning for such an event is not an easy task, especially if you’ve never done anything like this before. The fairgrounds had buildings where some events could be held indoors, but only one building had heat, so vendors had to bring heaters with them to help keep warm.

One of the first things they had to decide was the name of the event.

“When deciding what to call it, the name that came to mind was Christmas Village,” Phillips says. “It seemed to fit what we had in mind. We had Christmas decorations, vendors and, of course, Santa.”

Another consideration was all of the seasonal events going on around the county during December. When planning the Christmas Village, they had to look for a date that wouldn’t interfere with anything else, which is why they chose Dec. 7.

FIRST EVENT: Kim Phillips, right, is among a group of people who organized the first-ever Christmas Village and made it a reality. Held at the Sullivan County Fairgrounds, the event raised money for needed repairs to the fairgrounds barn.

“There’s so much going on at that time of year, and we wanted to make sure we didn’t interfere with anything else going on locally,” Phillips says. “We knew we couldn’t hold it on Dec. 14 because that’s when Dushore had its Christmas event.”

Weather cooperates for event

And while you can plan for many things, the one thing you can never predict is the weather. Unfortunately, it rained on Dec. 14 and the Dushore parade and outdoor activities were canceled due to the weather. But those attending the Christmas Village on Dec. 7 couldn’t have asked for a nicer day.

“We were very fortunate as far as the weather is concerned; we got a lucky break,” Phillips recalls. “We had the perfect day for it.”

It was a good thing that the weather cooperated because there were no alternate dates planned for the



REINDEER PHOTO: The opportunity to have a photo with a “reindeer” turns out to be one of the main attractions.

Christmas Village.

Once the event was named and the date was set, the next job was to line up vendors. The event was announced in the newspaper and on Facebook, and it wasn't long before vendors began contacting Phillips.

"We let everyone know that we'd only be charging \$10 per vendor to help pay for electricity," she says. "The vendors who contacted us were local. We had two from Troy, one from Canton, and the rest were from Forksville, Dushore, and Muncy Valley."

In the end, 20 vendors were on hand to participate in the Christmas Village. People attending the event had the opportunity to purchase items for themselves or as Christmas presents. Items such as handmade pillows and aprons from JGR Enterprise, custom painted signs from Lambert Designs, handmade hats by Connie Hatch, High Mountain Coffee, honey from Freegrazer Farms, and the list goes on and on.

And of course, what kind of event would it be if there weren't fun things for the whole family to participate in and enjoy?

The movie "Frozen" played throughout the day. There was a Christmas tree-decorating contest, outdoor reindeer games with Sven and a gin-



SANTA AND FRIENDS: What would a Christmas Village be without a visit from Santa? Santa even had a few friends on hand throughout the day to welcome attendees.

gerbread house contest, along with, of course, the ugliest sweater contest! According to Phillips, Heess, who has done event planning for the Troy Fair, came



WIDE VARIETY: A wide range of vendors and activities offers something for everyone attending the Christmas Village.

up with suggestions for the events.

It's time to eat

Walking around, checking out vendors or playing reindeer games can make one hungry, so Sullivan County 4-H Livestock was on hand to offer gourmet grilled cheese and soup, the Sullivan County 4-H Cooking Club had baked goods for sale, and the Sullivan County 4-H County Council made cookies.

One of the highlights of the event was the Christmas tree raffle. Trees offered during the raffle were provided and decorated by Pioneer Campground, Lambert Farms Inc. and Forks Mountain Farm.

"Each business sponsored a \$20 tree," Phillips explains. "They brought their own decorations and decorated their individual trees. Later, the trees were raffled off and the winners were able to take home a tree with all of the ornaments."

Those who didn't win one of the decorated trees had the opportunity to purchase a blue spruce Christmas tree for only \$15. The trees came from Middleburg and were sold by the Sullivan County 4-H Livestock Club. The Christmas tree sale was so popular that they only had 12 out of the 50 trees left by the end of the day.

There was no charge for admission

to ensure that anyone who wanted to attend the event could attend. By the end of the day, \$250 was raised for the barn revitalization project.

Anyone who decorates for the holidays can understand all the time and effort that goes into making everything look festive. Everyone involved with the event put in a long day working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Friday and helping at the event on Saturday. Thankfully they had a little help getting everything ready.

"On Friday night, seven kids from the Red Rock Job Corp helped, and nine from Red Rock helped on Saturday," Phillips reports. "They were a huge help with decorating and took part in the live nativity; we are so thankful for their support."

If you missed the Christmas Village this year, don't worry, the team is already thinking about next year.

"We plan to do this again next year," Phillips says. "The vendors seemed happy with the turnout. I didn't have one unhappy vendor, not even the ones who were out in the cold. But there are some things we might change, like getting heat in the other buildings and perhaps hold it later in the day. Christmas lights and decorations look so much prettier when it's dark out." ❄️

From the Operations Department

By Walter Tubach

OUR LINE crews have been very busy with rebuilding the single-phase line along Slacks Run Road in Cascade Township to a three-phase line and also building a new single-phase line along Duncan Road to serve three new gas well pads. We have contracted Everhart and Hoover, a line construction company, to help us with this project. There is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be completed and done safely. Sometimes we schedule an outage to rebuild these lines, but most of the work is done while the line is energized. The completed work will be a great asset for the co-op because there will be more sales on the line. Over the past 15 years, the co-op has lost some accounts because homes and cabins that flooded could not be rebuilt because they were in the flood plain. Any new members we can add will certainly improve sales, which helps us continue rebuilding and moving numerous lines to improve reliability. This is a constant conversation at staff meetings because we are always looking for ways to make the system better.



Walter Tubach
Manager, Electric
Operations

We understand the value of tree trimming and tree removal on the system. The cooperative is spending close to \$800,000 annually to keep rights-of-way cleared. The outage time per member dropped to six hours per member last year, considerably less than the outage times of the 1980s and 1990s when it was over 35 hours per member. Last year alone, the contract crews cut over 15,000 trees that were either in the 40-foot rights-of-way or were outside the rights-of-way but were dangerous, dead or dying. Preventive maintenance is what helps us reduce outage issues, and we are constantly looking at our system to find, fix, or remove any issues that could cause an

outage. We had Spako Tree Service add a skidder/bucket machine to help trim and remove trees faster and more safely. This piece of equipment will be used on all terrains when feasible, but will not be used in areas that will cause yard ruts. Your cooperation with the use of this equipment is appreciated.

Despite the fantastic hard work our lineworkers and contract tree crews do cutting trees, we still had 25 trees that fell or blew over, causing an outage. I can only imagine what the outage time might have been if we had not worked diligently over the past years removing all the dead and dying trees along the line. I hope we never see those big outage hour numbers again.

We are hoping to resume the 14,400-volt line conversion this summer in the Heilman to Huntersville area. This is another big improvement to your electrical system that will help in the event of a storm or if there is a need to backfeed the Laporte Substation. Running the higher voltage on our lines will help keep the voltage more constant to your homes. I will keep you up to date on this improvement as the year goes along.

There was one auto accident that broke a pole, causing an outage. We are very thankful the driver had only minor

injuries. Our own equipment failures caused six outages to the members, and the members' own equipment caused two outages. In the quarter, 11 outages were due to causes not found on the line.

Penelec, our power supplier to the Laporte and Dushore substations, had the power off on Nov. 14. The Laporte Substation power feed was only out for a few minutes, but the Dushore Substation had to be backfed from the Estella Substation. This reduced the outage time to those members to only 35 minutes.

On Dec. 2, Penelec had our Estella Substation out of power. I immediately sent the lineworkers out to switch the feed to another substation, so our members were only out of power less than two hours. What wonderful options we have with all of our substations. We now have the capability to backfeed from one substation to another. It may take us some time to switch the feed from one substation to another, but it is always shorter than waiting helplessly for the power supply to be restored.

I hope you have enjoyed reading my article about your electric system and the causes of outages. Please remember we are only a phone call away and remember to be safe! 🌳

