

# 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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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Manager of Outside Operations*

**Emily Baer**

*Director of Marketing and Member Services*

**Phil Stern**

*Manager of Technical Services*

**Jessi Ditzler**

*Executive Assistant*

## OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday  
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

## EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBERS

814-445-4106  
800-443-4255

## Guest Column

# A Year of Safe Success: Celebrating Electrical Safety Month



**AMBER HEFFLEY**

**EACH MAY, WE CELEBRATE** Electrical Safety Month. It's a time when we give extra attention to keeping our members, the public and our employees safe. Proudly, Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) has once again passed the one-year milestone with no lost-time accidents.

With that said, I would like to take a moment to thank all of those who helped make that possible. It takes time, diligent training and everyone working together to constantly put safety in the forefront.

A big part of reaching this milestone is communication because at the end of the day, it's what keeps everyone safe. It's easy to assume we're all on the same page, but that assumption can lead us in the wrong direction. Communication and following procedures are a crucial part of working safely.

Speaking of communication, one area I would like to communicate with you about is our right-of-way program. Many of us enjoy the beauty that trees add to our countryside, especially during this time of year when we transition from brown to green.

At Somerset REC, we are committed to providing you with safe and reliable power. Unfortunately, there are some things we can't control, such as high winds, ice storms, hurricanes and lightning. Some cooperatives report that up to 83% of their outages are due to trees or branches coming down from the wind, ice, thunderstorms, lightning or heavy snow.

By cutting back on potential tree-related problems, we help reduce the number and duration of most outages. We are also able to reduce our exposure and your exposure to safety-related issues. On any given day, we may have a crew and/or contractors performing right-of-way maintenance. They are looking for potential hazards that could cause an outage, such as vegetation growing under lines, overhanging branches, leaning or dangerous trees, and trees crowning into the wire zone.

We currently have right-of-way maintenance contracts with B&L Tree Service and Ridgetop Tree Service. Each contractor, when awarded right-of-way work, is tasked with making an honest effort to touch base with landowners, especially if the work is considered to be extensive. If you ever question who is knocking on your door for right-of-way work, please call the co-op office to confirm that crews are in your area.

Over the years, the results of right-of-way clearing has been more noticeable, and we understand it can feel like a big change in certain areas. That said, this work is vital for providing safe and reliable electrical service. Our goal moving forward is to stay on a routine maintenance schedule so the lines stay open, and we don't need to do large, one-time clearing projects that some areas have seen in the past.

With right-of-way maintenance being a large part of our work here at the cooperative, we appreciate your cooperation in clearing our lines. A very sincere thank you goes to all of you who have already worked with us on right-of-way projects in the past. We also need your help going forward for future clearing and maintenance. We all will benefit from having a safe, reliable system.

Summer is around the corner, so stay safe and enjoy! 🍷

**AMBER HEFFLEY**  
OPERATIONS ASSISTANT

# 2026 DIRECTOR NOMINEES

## DISTRICT 2: Russ Hillegas



**RUSS HILLEGAS** currently represents District 2 on the Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) Board of Directors and resides in Allegheny Township, Somerset County. He has completed the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) director training program, receiving his Credentialed

Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certificates. He has also obtained Director Gold status.

He graduated from Berlin Brothersvalley High School and continued his education at Williamsport Area Community College, where his focus was on the electrical

field. Russ is retired from the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, where he was a foreman and facility manager.

He is married to Jeanne (Paul) Hillegas, and they have two sons, Brandon and Kyle. Russ is a member of Trinity United Church of Christ in Berlin and a board member for the Berlin Area Historical Society. He is also a member of the Somerset Masonic Lodge 358, the Berlin Sons of the American Legion and the New Baltimore Sportsmen's Club.

Russ operates a beef cattle farm in Allegheny Township and enjoys helping his son at Hillegas Sugar Camp. He also likes hunting, golfing, traveling and spending time with his five grandchildren.

## DISTRICT 3: Douglas Black



**DOUGLAS BLACK** is a director nominee from District 3, residing in Jenner Township, Somerset County. He attended Turkeyfoot Area School District until his sophomore year and graduated from Somerset Area High School in 1967. Doug received an associate degree in auto technology

from Williamsport Area Community College.

In January 1983, Doug and his wife, Peggy, started their own business, Black's Specialty Service. For more than 38 years, they owned and operated an auto electric repair business. Prior to owning his own business, Doug was employed as an auto, diesel and electrical mechanic.

The couple have two adult daughters, Jennifer and Deborah. Doug has been active in his community for many decades. Now retired, he enjoyed serving as a 4-H

leader and was a past member of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and Somerset County Chamber of Commerce.

Doug has donated his time to judging numerous skills contests for vo-tech events and previously served as a Pennsylvania State Vocational Industrial Clubs of America judge. Through hard work and a genuine concern for his community, he supports the Berlin Brothersvalley Tech-Ed Program, helping instill an interest in small engines and auto electric repairs. Doug volunteers his time with these students and has taught them how to use a solder gun, heat gun, crimp wires, and more.

In retirement, he enjoys spending time with his three grandchildren and tinkering with race and antique cars. He is also still involved in automotive repair. When they aren't in the shop, Doug and Peggy can be found at the gym or riding bikes on the bike trail.

## SOMERSET REC ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE — JUNE 11, 2026



- 5 p.m. Registration
- 6 p.m. Call to Order – Jerry Engle, Board President
- 6:05 p.m. Reading of Minutes & Financial Report
- 6:15 p.m. Report of Nominating Committee/Voting Period/ Collection of Ballot Boxes
- 6:35 p.m. Manager's Report - Ruston Ogburn, General Manager
- 6:50 p.m. Stephen M. Brame - PREA/Allegheny President & CEO
- 7:10 p.m. Unfinished Business/New Business
- 7:15 p.m. Report of Tellers
- 7:20 p.m. Adjournment & Awarding Gifts/Grand-Prize Items



**DISTRICT 3: M. Scott Zimmerman**



**M. SCOTT ZIMMERMAN** is a director nominee from District 3, residing in Lincoln Township, Somerset County. He is a graduate of Somerset Area High School and Somerset County Technology Center. Scott received a Bachelor of Science in electronics engineering technology and a Bachelor of Science in automated manufacturing from ITT Technical Institute in Pittsburgh and Indianapolis, Indiana.

He is the owner of Zimmerman Electronics, ZE Wireless, Repeater-Builder and ICS Controllers. He was previously employed as an electronics engineer at Xelatec LLC and Ritron, and as a radio technician for Baer's Electronics.

Scott lives on his fourth-generation family farm and has

been a local business owner for 26 years, specializing in custom-built amateur radio repeaters, radio-to-computer interface modules and repeater controllers.

He is a lifetime member of Christ Casebeer Lutheran Church, where he formerly served on church council as treasurer and as property committee chairman. Recently, Scott served on the cooperative's Credentials & Elections Committee. He is the former president of the Cambria Radio Club and a former Cub Scout assistant troop leader.

His hobbies include amateur (ham) radio, programming and displaying an annual Christmas light show at his residence, woodworking, cooking, traveling, and spending time with his wife, Elisha, and their three children, Avery, Addison, and Lincoln.

**DISTRICT 7: Jason Huston**



**JASON HUSTON** currently represents District 7 on the Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) Board of Directors and resides in Northampton Township, Somerset County. He has completed director training through NRECA, where he earned his Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate.

Jason graduated from Meyersdale Area High School and received an associate degree in architectural design from Thaddeus Stevens College in Lancaster, Pa.

He has been self-employed as a residential contractor for 29 years.

He and his wife, Julie, have four children, Keegan, Cooper, Ellery and Maverick. Jason volunteers on the Somerset Vo-Tech Occupational Advisory Committee for carpentry. He is also a member of Berlin Brethren Church, the Pennsylvania Builders Association and the Berlin Fire Department.

Jason enjoys spending time on the family farm, Cider Valley Farm, in Northampton Township, where he raises grass-fed beef and pigs.



# Making the Workplace Feel Like Home: Celebrating the Career of Tawnya Zorn

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES



TAWNYA ZORN

**SOMERSET RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC)** bid a heartfelt congratulations and farewell to Operations Assistant Tawnya Zorn on her retirement, March 27, after more than 30 years of dedicated service.

Tawnya began her career at the co-op on April 4, 1994, and over the years became a familiar and dependable presence in many roles throughout the organization. Upon her initial hiring, Tawnya worked as the billing representative for members whose account number began with a three or four.

In 2008, Tawnya was promoted to the operations assistant position. In that role, she helped the operations manager, lineworkers and engineers with daily tasks and service orders as well as outage dispatch during office hours.

During the last five years, Tawnya also inherited the role of safety coordinator, where she scheduled annual trainings, such as CPR and first aid, hearing tests, fire extinguisher training and on-the-job-training. She also organized the pesticide meeting that Somerset REC hosts annually.

Her willingness to step in wherever she was needed, combined with her strong work ethic and positive attitude, made her an invaluable member of the cooperative team. She was a familiar face at the gift table during the annual meeting and Member Appreciation Day.

Throughout her career, Tawnya built lasting relationships with co-workers and members alike. Known for her kindness and approachable nature, she naturally became the “work mom” to many of the younger employees. Whether it was offering advice, lending a listening ear, or simply checking in to make sure everyone was doing OK, Tawnya has a way of making people feel supported and cared for.

Tawnya’s dedication, knowledge, and steady presence helped keep daily operations running efficiently, and her impact on the cooperative will be felt for a long time. More importantly, the friendships and mentorship she provided have left a lasting mark on those who had the privilege of working alongside her.

“Tawnya has played a crucial role in the operations department behind the scenes by always keeping things running smoothly and supporting everyone around her,” Operations Manager Andrew Phillippi says. “We’ll miss her hard work, kindness and genuine care she gave to the cooperative.”

In retirement, Tawnya plans to spend time with her family and grandkids. She enjoys reading and hopes to visit the Meyersdale and Somerset libraries more often.

As Tawnya begins this well-deserved next chapter, her Somerset REC family wishes her all the best in retirement. She will be greatly missed, but her legacy of hard work, compassion, and teamwork will always remain part of the co-op.

Congratulations, Tawnya, and thank you for more than 30 years of service. 🎉



**MEMBER CONNECTION:** Tawnya Zorn, who retired in March from Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, was a committed employee who you could often find manning the gift table or welcoming members at member engagement events.



**GREATLY MISSED, WELL DESERVED:** Operations Manager Andrew Phillippi and his assistant Tawnya Zorn enjoy a moment together at a recent Member Appreciation Day.