

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 & 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 Sweet Way to Connect with Your Cooperative



EMILY BAER

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHO answers your billing questions, helps establish new electric service, processes payments, manages member programs or responds when the lights go out?

The Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) employees you talk to on the phone and those working behind the scenes will be available during the Somerset County Fair, Aug. 23-29, to answer your questions and discuss our services.

As you make your way through livestock barns, enjoy the rides and sample your favorite fair foods, be sure to stop by the Somerset REC booth in Building 3.

Ways to save energy and member opportunities

Looking for practical ways to lower your electric bill? Stop by our booth for energy-efficiency information and handouts that provide simple tips for reducing energy use throughout your home.

One of our most popular displays compares traditional incandescent lighting with modern LED technology. You'll be able to see firsthand how much less energy LED bulbs use while providing the same amount of light. The difference may surprise you.

The fair is also a great place to learn about the many programs and opportunities available to cooperative members. Whether you're interested in load management, youth opportunities, scholarships, or safety information, our friendly staff can explain what's available and how you can participate.

Enjoy a sweet treat while supporting local youth

As part of our commitment to giving back to the communities we serve, Somerset REC will once again be handing out coupons for members to get free ice cream at the Somerset County 4-H Dairy Bar. It's a small way for us to thank our members and community while also supporting the hardworking young people involved in 4-H programs throughout Somerset County.

The Dairy Bar has become a favorite fair tradition, and we're proud to help support an organization that teaches leadership, responsibility, and valuable life skills to local youth. Be sure to stop by our booth and pick up a coupon while supplies last.

As a member-owned cooperative, Somerset REC values your input. We encourage members to stop by, ask questions, share feedback, and learn more about the challenges and opportunities facing the energy industry.

The Somerset County Fair is a tradition that brings our community together, and we're proud to be part of it each year. We look forward to seeing familiar faces, meeting new members and sharing information that helps you get the most value from your cooperative membership.

While you're enjoying everything the fair has to offer, I encourage you to stop by our booth and check out our giveaways, learn something new, meet your cooperative employees and enjoy free ice cream on us. We can't wait to see you at the fair! 🍦

EMILY BAER

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES

Taking to the Sky

EMILY PARKS, GIS AND OPERATIONS ANALYST

SOMERSET RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC) purchased a drone, an Anzo Robotics Raptor T, in August 2025. Equipped with a thermal camera and a 56x hybrid zoom camera, the drone enables us to get a clear picture of our infrastructure at safer distances.

The drone also has a 45-minute flight time and advanced obstacle avoidance so its operator can work more efficiently and safely.

Piloting the drone

When I was hired in May 2024, I quickly realized the benefits and potential of using a drone to inspect the cooperative's equipment and infrastructure.

While earning my bachelor's degree in geography at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, I used aerial imagery captured with drones to create maps for my classes. I gained more experience with drones while

earning my master's degree at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP).

During my time at IUP, I participated in a thermal audit of the campus using a drone. I also studied Part 107, which regulates drone operations, and earned my remote pilot license. Once I joined the cooperative world, I began doing more manual flights, with inspections as the primary objective. While conducting these flights, I collect up-close, single photos of problem areas and videos of facilities with more precise paths, which is much different than the higher-altitude, longer flight plans I was operating during my schooling.

Putting safety first

To ensure safety when operating a drone, pilots must prepare in advance. Flight plans are necessary to take proper steps. The operator should also have knowledge of the area and check sectional charts and warnings to make sure there are no nearby hazards.

Pilots monitor the weather before a flight by paying special attention to wind speeds as high wind gusts can make flying hazardous, especially in the vicinity of power lines. The drone is also inspected to confirm the airframe structure, propellers, batteries and communications to the remote control are satisfactory.

Co-op drone uses

Currently, the cooperative uses its drone for pole inspections. I fly the drone above poles, where it is harder for crews to notice concerns from the ground.

At that height, I look for weak points at the top of the pole, such as split tops or crowning. These issues can weaken the pole by loosening connection points for attached equipment and power lines. They also create openings in the pole that allow moisture to penetrate deeper and contribute to further decay.

The cooperative's drone pole inspections can happen any time of the year but are most frequent after ground pole inspections by our contractors, such as Davey



READY TO FLY: Emily Parks, Somerset REC's GIS and operations analyst and drone pilot, has been using drones to inspect poles for the cooperative since May 2024.

Resource Group. Substation inspections and monitoring are done in part with the drone, too. There, I take videos and photos above the facilities and equipment, which provide a better vantage point and other angles of the location compared with strictly using ground photography.

The drone is useful in other ways, such as assessing lightning damage to a pole and evaluating vegetation in the rights of way. Recently, the drone was used to solve a wildlife-related issue with a bank of transformers. I captured images of the transformer and sent them to a company that manufactures custom guards that prevent wildlife from causing faults on the lines. Steps like these help enhance reliability for our members.

Future uses

The drone has some functions the cooperative hasn't started using frequently yet. For instance, the thermal camera could be used to monitor equipment for preventive and predicted maintenance or to discover something faulty on the lines. The drone can also be used for routine line inspections and to map project areas, which would provide more accurate and up-to-date imagery than what's available online.

B&L Tree Service, one of Somerset REC's right-of-way contractors, has been using drones to spray overgrown vegetation in steep and rocky areas of our rights of way that are difficult for crews to reach.

The incorporation of drones at the cooperative ensures we are taking every step possible to monitor and maintain our lines. The more efficiently we can achieve that, the faster it is to restore power to our members and keep the lights on.

I am proud to be your drone pilot at Somerset REC, and I look forward to patrolling our power lines and service territory from the sky. 🚁



EYE IN THE SKY: This drone image shows a pole with a split top, which causes weak connection points and contributes to the pole's decay.



ASSESSING DAMAGE: Images from Somerset REC's drone help pinpoint equipment and infrastructure issues and enhance reliability for consumer-members.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

August heat can put your air conditioner to the test, making it a great time to check your system's air filter. A dirty, clogged filter restricts airflow, forcing your cooling system to work harder than necessary to keep your home comfortable. That extra strain can reduce efficiency, increase energy use and contribute to unnecessary wear and tear on equipment. Inspect your filter monthly during periods of heavy air conditioner use and replace it if it appears dirty. A clean filter supports efficient operation and can even enhance indoor air quality — helping you stay cool and comfortable during the hottest days of summer.



Democracy in Action: Recapping Somerset REC's 87th Annual Meeting

EMILY BAER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES

THE 87TH SOMERSET RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC) Annual Meeting was held June 11 in the Somerset Area High School auditorium. The co-op had a slightly smaller-than-anticipated turnout, with 374 attendees that included 285 registered members.

Upon arrival, members were greeted by cooperative employees. After registration, members proceeded to the cafeteria for refreshments and entered for a chance to win one of the grand prizes. As a thank you for attending, members received a patriotic-themed gift: a red or blue bucket with a Somerset REC logo that was packed with a reusable picnic tablecloth, grilling spatula, and barbecue mitt.

As they entered the auditorium, members received an annual report, which included information about the 2026 director nominees, the 2025 financial report, scholarship recipients, the load management program and the SmartHub app, which is a convenient way for consumers to manage their Somerset REC accounts. Copies of the annual report are also available at the main office.

During the meeting, Somerset REC General Manager Rus Ogburn presented \$1,000 scholarships to 13 recipients. He also highlighted the impact that artificial intelligence is having on the electric grid.

"When you can build load twice as fast as you can build generation, it does not take long for the mismatch to accumulate," he said.

Ogburn also discussed the practical importance of managing demand and reducing peak use by reinforcing the benefit of member participation in load-management programs.

Retired District 3 Director Lowell Friedline was also

recognized on stage after 51 years of service to the co-op and more than three decades of service to Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny), the co-op's wholesale energy provider.

"He's a very level-headed, thoughtful, wise gentleman," Ogburn said. "In the boardroom, he always spoke softly and wisely."

The guest speaker for the evening was Steve Brame, president & CEO of Allegheny and its sister organization, the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association. He emphasized the resilience of electric cooperatives and the long-term value of the cooperative business model. Members also asked Brame questions about the electric industry.

In contested board elections, Douglas Black was named the new District 3 director; and incumbents Russ Hillegas, representing District 2, and Jason Huston, representing District 7, were re-elected. During the board's reorganization meeting, the following officers were elected: president, Jerry Engle; vice president, Floyd Lehman; and secretary/treasurer, Hillegas. 🗳️



DIRECTOR ELECTIONS: Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative General Manager Rus Ogburn, second from left, congratulates the three directors elected and re-elected at the co-op's 87th annual meeting. Shown, from left, are Russ Hillegas, Ogburn, Jason Huston and Douglas Black, who replaces retiring Director Lowell Friedline.

SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED



STANDOUT STUDENTS: Somerset REC recently presented \$1,000 scholarships to 13 local high school students. They are, from left, Arabella Renna, Gabe Barlow, Jessica Pepe, Rianna Culp, Kaydence Smith, Madolyn Kimmel, Josiah Smith, Lindsey Shaffer, Gianna Rosman, Taylor Demchak and Addison Barto. Not shown are Seth Kimmel and Addison Younkin.