

# Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## Claverack REC

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### Office Hours

Monday through Friday

7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Jeff Fetzer, CCC, Local Pages Editor

## Guest Column



## Look up and live!

By Pete Yastishock, *Director of Safety & Compliance*

OCTOBER is a time when we transition from milder temperatures to colder weather. Many of us are trying to squeeze in one final outdoor project or preparing our homes for the upcoming winter and holiday season. It's a perfect time to remind you to think about what's above when you are doing outdoor activities this fall. Something so simple as looking up can save your life.

Look up:

- ▶ before you lift that ladder to repair or clean your gutter
- ▶ before you drive that new combine across the field
- ▶ before you raise that scaffold to help your brother-in-law put on new siding
- ▶ before you start to prune that fruit tree
- ▶ before you get up on the porch roof to pull off that old aluminum siding
- ▶ before you put up that boom to off-load the roof trusses
- ▶ before you put up those holiday decorations.

Before you start working, always look up to see if there are any electrical hazards above you. If there are power lines overhead, consider them energized. And if you're not sure what type of line is above you, don't gamble; it could be an energized electric line. Be sure to stay a minimum of 10 feet away from any overhead wire.

If you need to get closer than that,

call the co-op at 1-800-326-9799 to see if the line can be temporarily de-energized so you are able to work safely.

It's so simple: Look up and live! Just about any type of item you can think of is capable of conducting electricity. Wooden ladders, lumber, rope, fiberglass painting sticks, pruners, tree limbs, and vinyl siding can and will conduct electricity when contacting or in close proximity to power lines. The human body happens to be a great conductor of electricity, too.

It's also so simple to teach your children and grandchildren to look up and live. Some of the saddest days I've experienced during my career have involved children who contacted electrical wires while climbing trees, holding metal posts or flying kites. Please, teach your kids and grandkids not to play around electrical lines and equipment.

And while it is so simple to look up and live, it's not always as easy as it sounds. While assessing the situation overhead is first nature for our lineworkers, for the rest of us, it takes awareness and effort.

Looking up is not necessarily something we think about when we get ready to do a project, but it needs to be. Hopefully, this can serve as a reminder so that the next time you're doing a task outdoors, you look up before you experience the danger of electricity. ☀

## Claverack member shares his passion for pollinators

By Jeff Fetzer

AFTER 51 years of marriage, Claverack members Jim and Marcia Perkins of Hallstead still have competing ideas about what takes precedence on the proverbial “honey-do” list.

“He has the perfect excuse when I have a honey-do list for him,” Marcia jokes. “He can’t mow the yard because he has to tend to his bees.”

A backyard beekeeper, Jim Perkins’ honey-do list is all about keeping his seven hives of honeybees happy and healthy and teaching others to do the same.

Perkins’ beekeeping hobby began by accident about 25 years ago when he discovered a swarm of honeybees on his Liberty Township property.

“I had a local beekeeper come over, and he put them in a hive and asked if we wanted to keep them,” he recalls.

Perkins agreed to house the hive on his property, mainly because he thought it would improve pollination of the plants growing in his vegetable garden. And for 15 years, that one hive survived with virtually no attention from Perkins.

“That was back before there were all these diseases that affect honeybees,” he says. “I never did anything with the hive. I never went near it, never got honey from it.”

That changed in 2009 after he retired from his 43-year career as a program engineer for Link Aviation in Bingham-



**A SAMPLING:** Some of the honey products Claverack member Jim Perkins has processed from honeybee hives he maintains on his Susquehanna County property include raw and unfiltered honey, comb honey, creamed honey and beeswax candles.

ton, N.Y., and decided to take up beekeeping and honey-making as a hobby.

“I wanted to learn how to raise bees and prevent them from dying off from diseases and parasites that had begun coming in from overseas,” he says.

So he enrolled in a beekeeping class offered through the Montrose Area Adult School and soon immersed himself in beekeeping education by reading books, watching videos, attending beekeeping conferences and joining several area beekeeping clubs.

In recent years, Perkins has been spreading his passion for pollinators by serving as the instructor for the beekeeping course offered through the Montrose Area Adult School.

He maintains five production honeybee hives and two starter hives on his 32-acre property and produces 100 to 200 pounds of honey each year. Perkins says he doesn’t sell honey or honey products commercially, noting most of the honey he processes is for personal consumption or is given away to family, friends and fellow beekeepers. He also donates honey for use at various functions at his local church.

An active member of the Susquehanna Beekeepers Association, Perkins

notes the only place he sells his raw and unfiltered honey and comb honey is at the association’s Honey Hut at the Harford Fair in New Milford each August. He explains that 20% of the money raised through the sale of honey during the fair is donated back to the organization and used to fund a local scholarship.

Perkins is also listed on the club’s website, [susquehannabeekeeping.com](http://susquehannabeekeeping.com), as one of the group’s swarm removal contacts. When he receives a call from someone with an unwanted swarm on his or her property, he travels to the site and removes it.

“If a hive gets overcrowded with bees, the bees will raise a new queen, and then the original queen and many of the workers will leave the nest to form a new colony,” says Perkins, who typically gives the swarms he collects to fellow beekeepers.

A hive contains about 40,000 to 50,000 bees. When they swarm, about 75% of the bees leave the hive, according to Perkins. While that’s a positive for the bees because it means they are reproducing, it means a significant drop in honey production for the beekeeper.



**BEEHIVE ACTION:** Honeybees congregate on a frame pulled from the “honey super” of one of Jim Perkins’ beehives.

Perkins notes it takes about a month for the new queen, whose sole function is to lay eggs, to build the population in the hive back to the pre-swarm level.

“We had four or five swarms that left our hives this summer,” he says. “Every time they swarm that’s like watching \$250 worth of bees fly out the window.”

He explains that’s roughly the price a beekeeper would have to pay to purchase a queen bee and packet of 10,000 worker bees to stock a hive. To prevent the loss of their own bees, most beekeepers place several empty “swarm boxes” near their bee yards for the sole purpose of recapturing their bees when they swarm.

Perkins says he devotes so much of his time and attention to honeybees for one reason: he enjoys eating fruit and vegetables.

“If you don’t want to live on a diet of corn and wheat,” he explains, “then you better like bees and pollinators.”

Unlike grains, which are typically pollinated by wind, many fruits, vege-



**FINAL PRODUCT:** Claverack member Jim Perkins of Hallstead displays a container of honey he produced from his apiary. Perkins produces about 100 to 200 pounds of honey annually, mostly for personal consumption and to share with friends and family.

tables and nuts that humans consume require pollination from insects, with honeybees, bumblebees, mason bees and butterflies being the most prolific pollinators.

“Our goal is to keep the bees alive,” says Perkins. “The honey is secondary for us.”

Naturally, he does enjoy eating honey, especially on toast.

To process honey, Perkins removes frames known as “honey supers” from his hives. Each frame houses a honeycomb filled with about three pounds of honey. When it is removed from the hive, a wax capping that covers every hexagonal cell of the honeycomb must be removed. The frame is then placed in a honey extractor, a device in which the frames containing the uncapped honeycomb are spun rapidly, throwing the honey from comb into a collection tank.

Once extraction is complete, the honey is strained through a pair of screens to remove chunks of beeswax and smaller particles before being bottled.

Perkins produces what is known as raw honey, which means that it hasn’t been heated prior to bottling.

While honey keeps indefinitely, raw honey forms sugar crystals over time. Those crystals can be converted back

to liquid form by simply placing the sealed bottle of honey in a bath of hot water.

Perkins advises anyone with an interest in becoming a backyard beekeeper to enroll in a beekeeping course and link up with a group like the Susquehanna Beekeepers Association, which has been serving apiary enthusiasts from Bradford, Wyoming and Susquehanna counties for over 50 years. Perkins serves as program director for the club, which meets at Claverack’s Montrose District office the second Friday of each month at 7 p.m.

The cost to buy a hive, bees and beekeeping equipment to get started in the hobby is about \$500, and Perkins says maintaining hives and attempting to control the various diseases impacting honeybees can require a significant time commitment.

“This used to be easy,” Perkins says. “The first hive I had for 15 years and



**SAFETY SUIT:** Jim Perkins displays a honey-filled comb removed from one of the five honeybee hives he maintains in his bee yard in Liberty Township, Susquehanna County.

never went near it. Now all these diseases have been imported that you have to watch out for.”

He says Colony Collapse Disorder, a phenomenon that occurs when the majority of worker bees in a colony disappear and leave behind a queen, plenty of food and a few nurse bees

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**HONEY:** Claverack member Jim Perkins removes the beeswax capping that covers each of the cells in a honey comb. Once the capping is removed, the frame housing the honeycomb is rapidly spun in an extractor, a mechanical device, to separate the liquid honey from the comb.

**Passion for pollinators**

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to care for the remaining immature bees and the queen, began causing an alarming drop in honeybee numbers in the early 2000s. It continues to be an ongoing issue, while its causes remain up for debate.

“Half of the people think it was pesticides that killed the bees and half think it was something else,” he says.

Recent studies are blaming some of the honeybee declines on the varroa destructor, a parasitic mite that sucks the fat bodies from honeybees, leaving them very susceptible to disease, and is considered to be one of multiple stress factors contributing to global bee population declines.

Despite its challenges, or maybe because of them, Perkins says he enjoys all aspects of beekeeping.

“It gets me out of the house,” he says. “It can be extremely time consuming if you have more than one or two hives. And if you’re like me, you tend to overdo it. Why? Because I’m an engineer.”

“Because he doesn’t want to mow the yard,” interjects Marcia Perkins with a laugh.

While she isn’t directly involved in her husband’s hobby, Marcia says she is very supportive of it.

“If you don’t have a hobby when you retire, you sit in a chair and you die,” she says. “He keeps bees. I quilt and sew — and clean up after him!” 🐝

**Going away for the winter?**

Claverack offers members who will be away from home for an extended period – including “snowbirds” who migrate to warmer climates for the winter – two convenient and timely ways to receive their electric bills while they are gone.

**ONLINE BILLING**

Claverack’s SmartHub program gives members the ability to receive and pay electric bills electronically, either online or through the SmartHub mobile app available for smartphones and tablets.

With SmartHub, members receive an email notification when a new bill is generated. They can then pay their bill electronically using a checking account, MasterCard, Visa or debit card.

SmartHub participants also have access to their account information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To explore the features of SmartHub, visit the Claverack website, [claverack.com](http://claverack.com), and click on the SmartHub option on our home page.

**SEASONAL ADDRESS PROGRAM**

The co-op also offers a Seasonal Address Program that allows members to receive their electric bills at an alternate mailing address.

It’s easy to sign up for the program: just call our billing department and provide your alternate address, along with the dates you expect to be away. During this period, your correspondence from Claverack will be mailed directly to the seasonal address, eliminating the need for the postal service to forward it to you.

For more information on the Seasonal Address Program or SmartHub, contact the Claverack office at 1-800-326-9799.

**Claverack to conduct member survey in November**

Claverack will be conducting a member satisfaction survey by phone and email with the help of TSE Services during the month of November.

The telephone survey will take approximately 5 to 7 minutes. Most phone calls will be made Monday through Friday from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m., but some may be made on weekdays or Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., if necessary.

Calls will be made from a call center based in Allentown, Pa., and the caller ID will show a 919 area code.

The email will include a link to the survey embedded in the email invitation. Claverack’s logo will appear in the email.

If you are one of the members to receive a call or email, please participate so we can find out how we are doing and how we can better serve you.



**CO-OP SUPPORT:** Claverack Board Chairman Charles Bullock presents a check for \$1,000 to Erica Rogler, executive director of the Wyoming County Cultural Center at the Dietrich Theater, as part of the co-op’s commitment to the communities it serves. The donation, funded through Claverack’s unclaimed property fund, will be used to support children’s programs held at the Tunkhannock cultural center. On hand for the check presentation are, from left, Dietrich Assistant Cultural Director Mary Turner, Rogler, Bullock, Claverack President & CEO Bobbi Kilmer, and Claverack Director Dr. Robert Faux.