

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, Local Pages Editor

Guest Column



Help available during these difficult times

By Lynn Jennings, *Member Service Representative*

LET ME start by circling back 50 years to quote from “Truckin’,” the Grateful Dead’s classic song that contains the famous refrain, “What a long, strange trip it’s been.” Fast forward to 2020, and although Americans don’t seem to agree on much these days, most of us can agree that this year has been a very strange trip indeed.

Let me introduce myself. I’m Lynn Jennings, and I work in Claverack’s member services department as a member service representative. I assist members with billing and payment concerns as well as a wide range of service requests each day.

Due to financial hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have noticed an increase in the number of members falling behind with their electric bill payments. Claverack has responded with a number of measures aimed at helping members get through this difficult time.

Starting in April, the cooperative suspended all late payment penalties as well as disconnections for non-payment. However, with disconnections resuming, it is crucial for members to contact us to try to avoid additional hardships. As a member service representative, I speak for myself and my co-workers in saying that we want to hear from our members so we can help set up payment arrangements, steer them toward our leveled budget billing program, and provide suggestions that might make

a difference for members and their families.

Claverack has added additional funding to our member assistance program, HOPE (Helping Others Pay for Electric). This program is administered by TREHAB, which can be reached at the following numbers: Bradford County, 570-265-2072; Susquehanna County, 570-278-5289; Wyoming County, 570-833-9000.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) opens on Nov. 2, 2020, and provides help with heating bills and heating emergencies. Cooperative members can apply online at compass.state.pa.us or by calling 1-866-857-7095.

Please call the member services department for contact information for additional organizations that may provide help in your coverage area.

Also, don’t forget to check out SmartHub to set up online access to view and pay your bill, monitor your electric use, report outages and more. After signing on to your account, you can pay with just a few clicks, and there are no processing fees for this payment method.

Lastly, if you are struggling to keep up with your electric bill or have had a financial set back, please reach out to the member services department at 1-800-326-9799 to discuss your options. We will work with you to help navigate through this long, strange trip we’ve been on in 2020. 🌟

Co-op begins rolling out advanced metering system

By Jeff Fetzer

IF YOU were receiving electric service from Claverack 15-20 years ago, you probably remember the monthly chore of walking out to your electric meter, jotting down the meter reading on your payment stub and sending it back to the co-op so you could be properly billed for your electric use.

While reading the meter wasn't difficult to do, it could be inconvenient during the winter months, as well as for the elderly, seasonal accounts and members who were away from their homes for extended periods of time. To free members of this monthly task, the co-op began a pilot project in 2002 to replace some of the traditional electro-mechanical meters on the system with digital smart meters that automatically reported a meter reading back to the office via the power lines.

The reporting process with the Hunt Technologies Turtle meters was very slow; it took about 27 hours for a reading to reach the office, and those early meters could only communicate to the office in one direction. But they worked as intended, and within a few years, the co-op initiated a multi-year project to convert its entire system to automatic meters. Along the way, there were advances in metering technology that permitted two-way communications between the meter and the cooperative, as well as slightly faster retrieval of data from the meters.

"Automatic-meter reading technology was transformative for the cooperative," says Claverack's director of engineering, Steve Allabaugh. "It allowed us to move away from a self-read system, which was never especially popular with our membership. But there was a trade-off: When you're dealing with digital technology, whether it's your computer, your cellphone, or your electric meter, new and better technology emerges that makes the old technology obsolete."

Claverack's metering system is reaching that point. Components for the first- and second-generation power-line



GETTING READY: Claverack electronic technician Larry Beebe prepares networking equipment for installation as part of the co-op's advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) project that began in October. The cooperative plans to replace all of the existing meters on its system over the next two years as part of the AMI project. The new wireless metering system will offer real-time meter-reading and outage-reporting capabilities.

carrier meters and related substation equipment are no longer readily available, and the meters Claverack deployed 10 to 20 years ago are no longer being manufactured.

"Knowing that our system was reaching end of life, we began the planning phase for a new AMI (advanced metering infrastructure) system, which we will be deploying over the next two years," says Allabaugh.

The wireless AMI system, manufactured by Eaton, will have vastly superior communications capabilities than the current system, Allabaugh says.

"The communication to and from the meter will be much faster," he says, noting the system communicates through a "mesh network" that integrates all of the meters on the system via radio communications, cellular, DSL and, potentially, fiber optic internet. "We will be able to get information from the meter in a matter of minutes.

It will also provide real-time outage information that we'll be able to integrate directly into our outage management system. This will be particularly helpful during storms, since we will be able to quickly identify areas where outages are occurring."

With the new meter system in place, members who utilize the Smart Hub application will be able to view their meter readings on an hourly basis. This will help members get a better understanding of and better manage their electric use. Having access to hourly readings is especially helpful when diagnosing causes of an unexpected spike in energy consumption.

Another benefit of the new metering system, Allabaugh says, is that it gives the cooperative the ability to de-energize power to any meter remotely.

"So if a landlord is renting a home to someone who is moving out, we can shut the meter off from the office and then turn it back on for a new tenant without ever rolling a truck and two-man crew out to the property," Allabaugh explains. "It's safer, less expensive and can be handled in real time."

The cooperative began the first phase of its AMI rollout in October, when co-op crews started installing communications equipment known as "gateways" in southeastern Bradford County.

After the communications equipment has been installed, Claverack will begin deploying some 1,500 of the new smart meters to homes and businesses served by the Monroeton, Leroy and Plank Road substations. The initial meter deployment is expected to take place beginning in January or February of 2021.

"Once we gain experience with the mesh and get the new system integrated with our billing system, we will begin mass deployment of the AMI communications equipment and meters across our entire service area," Allabaugh says.

He says the co-op plans to have its entire 19,000-meter system converted to the new Eaton AMI infrastructure by the end of 2022. 🌞

Claverack adds Tesla to fleet to explore EV experience

By Jeff Fetzer

CLAVERRACK joined the growing ranks of electric vehicle owners when it added a 2020 Tesla Model 3 to its company fleet in August.

“With growing interest in electric vehicles (EVs), we decided to purchase one so we could give our members an experience-based evaluation of operating an EV in our area,” says Claverack’s director of member services, Brian Zeidner. “We felt this would be a great tool to engage members, with respect to their questions, wants and needs regarding electric vehicle ownership.”

While electric vehicles make up a tiny segment of U.S. auto market — about 2% in 2019 — battery-powered and plug-in hybrid electric cars have generated significant buzz among consumers and the media in the last couple of years. A number of factors are revving up interest in EVs:

- ▶ The introduction of the Tesla Model 3 compact sedan in 2018, which has quickly become the best-selling EV in the United States due to its mid-range pricing, driving fun factor and high customer satisfaction rate.
- ▶ All the major car manufacturers have begun producing electric vehicles, with more EV models being rolled out each year. Ford, the world’s first company to mass produce gas-powered vehicles, is set to begin selling its all-electric Mustang Mach-EV this year and plans to offer an all-electric F-150 pickup in 2021.
- ▶ The pricing gap between electric vehicles and gas-powered vehicles has continued to close.
- ▶ Battery range for EVs has continued to improve, with eight models by various manufacturers exceeding 225 miles per charge, while battery-charging stations have become more commonplace, especially in urban areas and along main transportation routes.

As an electric provider that will be impacted as more people plug into the grid to charge their battery-powered buggies, Claverack has more than a



TEST DRIVE: Claverack Member Service Representative Lynn Jennings and Director of Member Services Brian Zeidner show off the Tesla Model 3 electric vehicle the cooperative acquired in August. The all-wheel drive sedan was purchased in order to familiarize employees with the operations of an electric vehicle so that they can talk knowledgeably with members who are considering purchasing them. Zeidner reports that employees who have taken the car for a spin have been highly enthusiastic about the car’s performance and comfort. The car has a battery range of about 300 miles.

passing interest in monitoring EV market trends. As a cooperative that cites “education, training and information” among its guiding principles, Claverack also seeks to pass information along to its members who may be interested in owning an electric vehicle in the future.

That led the cooperative down the road of EV ownership. Zeidner and Claverack member service representative Lynn Jennings began exploring EV options last year, and, after researching and test-driving battery-powered cars made by several manufacturers, settled on the co-op’s white Tesla Model 3.

“Based on the driving experience, battery range, and the availability of an all-wheel drive option, Tesla seemed to be the best choice,” Zeidner says.

Since taking delivery of the car in late summer, Claverack employees have been test-driving the all-wheel drive Tesla, a four-door sedan with a battery range of about 300 miles.

“We are educating our employees

about the car,” Zeidner says, “so they, in turn, can be employee ambassadors about electric vehicles and provide members with experienced-based answers to question they may have or concerns they may have about EVs.”

He said employees have been using the car for official co-op business to gain more insight and experience with operating an EV.

“The experience we’ve had with the vehicle from the public and the employees so far has been overwhelmingly positive,” he says. “It seems to generate a lot of excitement and questions in regard to energy efficiency and electric vehicles.”

Based on Claverack’s electric rates, Zeidner estimates the cost to charge the car’s battery is about one-third to one-half of the price of fueling a similar-sized gas-powered vehicle.

Members interested in purchasing an electric vehicle or learning more about them can contact the member services department at 1-800-326-9799. 🌱

Rebates available for Energy Star appliances

TO ENCOURAGE members to practice energy conservation and responsible energy use, Claverack offers rebates of up to \$100 to consumer-members who purchase qualifying Energy Star® appliances.

With Claverack's Energy Star rebate program, members not only benefit from the energy savings achieved from the product itself, they receive a direct rebate from the co-op for their purchase. For Energy Star-rated refrigerators, the rebate amount is \$100; for washers or dryers, members will receive a \$50 rebate.

To apply for the rebate through the Claverack Energy Star Rebate Program, members must:

- ▶ Purchase an Energy Star-rated refrigerator, washer or dryer in the current calendar year.
- ▶ Complete a rebate form, which can be found on the Claverack homepage, claverack.com, or by calling the office at 1-800-326-9799.
- ▶ Include a receipt or invoice showing the date and purchase price of the Energy Star items.
- ▶ Include a copy of the Energy Star



label from the appliance.

- ▶ Mail all documentation to: Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, Attn: Appliance Rebate Program, 32750 Route 6, Wysox, PA 18854.

Once all documentation is received, a bill credit will be applied to your account. Rebates are available on a first-come, first-served basis. There is a limit of one rebate per appliance type per member account, and appliances must be installed within Claverack's service territory.

Funding for rebates is limited, and the rebate program is subject to change or be canceled without notice.

For more information, contact the Claverack member services department at 1-800-326-9799. ☀

Operation Round-Up

MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS

Financial hardships created by the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many cooperative families to struggle to keep up with their energy bills.



You can help some of your neighbors in need by participating in Claverack's Operation Round-Up program.

This voluntary program allows you to assist members of the cooperative experiencing difficulties paying their electric bills. Participating in the program is inexpensive – less than \$1 a month – and allows you to help make a difference in a neighbor's life.

CONTRIBUTING IS EASY

The concept is simple. Claverack rounds up your monthly electric bill to the next dollar amount. The difference between the round-up amount and your actual bill amount goes into our member assistance fund.

For example, if your electric bill is \$100.32, then you would pay \$101. The extra 68 cents goes into our member assistance fund for needy families of the cooperative. The average yearly donation is \$6.

In addition to being a great way to help neighbors in need, participating in the program can also make balancing your checkbook easier.

WISH TO DONATE MORE?

If you'd like to help your fellow members even more during this unprecedented time of financial uncertainty, we have created additional options for you to contribute more than the traditional round-up amount.

Members can add an extra dollar amount to their monthly donation. Simply enter the even dollar amount that you would like to add to the Round-Up form that can be found on our website, claverack.com, or call our office and ask your member service representative to make the change for you. Your bill will reflect the total amount donated each month.

If you would prefer to make a one-time donation to Operation Round-Up, that option is also available. Enter the one-time amount in the associated field on our online Round-Up form, and we will add that to your account. With the next bill you receive, the amount of your donation will be added to the total amount due, and you will see it listed as "Roundup Amt."

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

If you would like to help others, Operation Round-Up is an easy way to do so. Sign up today to start helping others by calling us at 1-800-326-9799, or sign up through the Claverack website by clicking on Operation Round-Up under the "Your Bill" drop-down menu at the top of the screen.

Member survey begins this month

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

The telephone survey will take 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 250 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.

**Claverack's offices
will be closed in
observance of
Thanksgiving Day,
Thursday, Nov. 26.**

