



United Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

United Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Post Office Box 688

DuBois, PA 15801-0688

Customer Service: 888-581-8969

www.unitedpa.com

Outage: 800-262-8959

Office Hours: M - F 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

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From the President & CEO



Do the ‘Electric Shift’ to save

By Brenda Swartzlander

JUST LIKE the rest of you, I am so glad to see summer return to our part of the country, and along with it some semblance of “normal” returning to our lives.

At United Electric, summer means our construction season is in full swing. The summer heat also brings along with it higher demand for electricity as air conditioning loads set the highest generation demands of the year. United’s wholesale power bill — and ultimately, your electric bill — is determined for the year based on the five highest-use periods throughout the summer. The amount of electricity being used by our members during these five peak periods will set the generation capacity we are required to purchase throughout the next year. Simply put, we have to buy the generation capacity needed during these peak periods for the next year, even though it is only needed during several unusually hot days in the summer. That is why we are again asking that you do the “Electric Shift” to help us hold down the cost of electricity.

Peaks on the power grid occur on weekdays between the hours of noon and 7 p.m., and they will occur on the hottest days of summer between June and September. It is crucial for United Electric and our members that we lower demand levels during the five peak periods. Since it is impossible to predict exactly when these peaks will occur, we may need to ask you to reduce or shift

electric consumption several days each month, quite possibly several days in a row when we get a hot period.

There is not an energy shortage. Our request is specifically to reduce demand cost, which would otherwise result in higher electric bills to you. By reducing consumption during peak periods from noon until 7 p.m., United Electric hopes to maintain stable electric rates both now and into the future. This can only be accomplished with the voluntary help from you, our members. You can help control our power costs by shifting your use of nonessential appliances to the morning or after 7 p.m. on the days when you hear an Electric Shift announcement on local radio stations. We are asking you to shift the use of items such as stoves/ovens, pool pumps, dehumidifiers, extra lighting, clothes dryers, air conditioners and any other non-essential appliances on these hot summer days.

We urge you to please help in any way you can. Feel free to call the United Electric office at 1-888-581-8969 for answers to any questions you may have, and thank you in advance for doing the Electric Shift to help us curb your electric costs. Have a fun and safe summer.

Until next month,

Brenda

United Electric’s office will be closed Friday, July 3, in observation of Independence Day.

Pennsylvania Wilds has a lot to offer

By Kristy Smith

ESPECIALLY this year, everyone probably has cabin fever. If you're ready to be out and about, maybe even with a mask, consider the local flair of the Pennsylvania Wilds. State parks, national forestland and locally made commodities all happen to be available within United Electric's service territory. Wineries and distilleries are also interspersed throughout the Pennsylvania Wilds. Laurel Mountain Winery, Wapiti Ridge Winery and Chicken Hill Distillery-Cook Forest Outlet are not only in the Pennsylvania Wilds in United Electric's territory, they are also United Electric members.

Wine and scenery

Nestled in picturesque country scenery, Laurel Mountain Winery sits just off U.S. Route 219 in Falls Creek. The winery opened to the public in 1995 in a renovated barn that was built sometime around 1900.

"When my father, Lt. Col. John Nordberg, retired from the army, he wanted to be near the family farm in Driftwood, Pa.," Vicki Tretick says. "He wanted to start a winery that was close to the farm, but also very close to Interstate 80."

Vicki's mother, Barbara, owns Laurel Mountain Winery now, while Vicki is the owner-in-training along with her husband, Certified Wine Maker Mike Tretick.

Vicki says, "Mike received his certification from the Pennsylvania State University program, which was a combination of online and in-person classes."

According to Vicki, the most popular wines at the winery are Laurel Blush and Rattlesnake Red.

"We try to create new items every one to two years and we usually produce two bottlings per week, which is a lot when you have 30 different varieties," she says. "We also have the gift shop where we sell an assortment of wine-related items, as well as items from local farms, such as Calhoun



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LAUREL MOUNTAIN WINERY

NICE PLACE TO VISIT: Visit Laurel Mountain Winery in Falls Creek, Pa.

Farm's soaps and lotions made from goat's milk."

Not only can you depend on Laurel Mountain Winery for your wine fix, you can also depend on it for your entertainment fix. Laurel Mountain Winery has a pavilion that can be rented for any type of event or occasion, including weddings. At the pavilion on select Saturdays in the summer, Laurel Mountain Winery hosts "Sunset at the Winery," where local bands start playing at 7 p.m. The cost is \$5 per person plus the cost of food. Cider pressing is held annually in October and Paint and Sip classes are also offered. Not into wine? Check out the on-site antique tool museum with tools and other items from the family farm.

During the closure of non-essential business locations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Laurel Mountain Winery relied on their loyal customers to keep them going.

"We offered curbside pickup and continued our shipping program," Vicki reports. "We even offered delivery within a 10-mile radius of the winery. We really missed the face-to-face interaction though, especially at our special events and tastings that had to be canceled. We really have to say 'Thank you' to our loyal customers. We couldn't have done it without you."

To see store hours or a list of events, check out Laurel Mountain Winery's website at laurelwines.com, give them

a call at 814-371-7022, or hit up their Facebook or Instagram pages. You can also find their wines sold at Benezette Wines in Benezette, Castle Wines in Pittsburgh and Cook Forest Wines (inside the MacBeth's Cabins store) in Cooksburg. You can also support them by checking with our local restaurants next time you dine out.

A taste of Elk Country

What's in a name? David and Michelle Albert of Penfield knew that you could pack a lot of meaning in a name so they carefully chose their winery's name: Wapiti (wah-pee-tee) Ridge Wine Cellars. Wapiti refers to the Native American word for elk, and what better place to stop on your way to Pennsylvania's Elk Country. In 2011, the Alberts, who are also United Electric members, thought that right off Route 255 between DuBois and Penfield would be a



PHOTO BY KRISTY SMITH

WELCOME: Wapiti Ridge Wine Cellars has a unique sign along Route 255 in Penfield, Pa.

great location for a winery.

“Not only was it close to home, but the building was already there and it’s right on the way to a lot of tourist destinations,” Michelle explains. “Most of our grapes come from North East, Pa., which is in Erie County.”

According to Michelle, their most popular wines are Bennett’s Valley Red and White. They also create a seasonal wine every year, the most popular of which is my favorite, Spook Hollow.

Wapiti Ridge Wine Cellars also relied on pickup orders during the closure of non-essential businesses.

“We seemed to be doing alright with the pickup orders, so we didn’t need to do shipping,” Michelle says. “It’s great that people support us so well.”

Small businesses were hit especially hard during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with immense support from the public, many small businesses remained profitable. Michelle extends a most sincere “Thank you” to all of the winery’s loyal customers.

Check out Wapiti Ridge Wine Cellars’ store hours at wapitiwines.com or give them a call at 814-371-5700. Don’t forget to check out their Facebook or Twitter pages to see which festival they will be attending. You never know what business you might run into on your Pennsylvania Wilds tour.

Legal spirits

What do chickens have to do with alcohol? Nothing jumps out at you until you ask Sharon Stenta, store manager of Chicken Hill Distillery.

“There are three owners of Chicken Hill Distillery: Dan Meyer, Chris Kline and Kevin Wolfel,” she says. “All three of them lived on Chicken Hill Road in Kersey, Pa., at different times in their lives.”

Thus, in 2018, the aptly named Chicken Hill Distillery opened. When Act 36 was implemented in 2017, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (PLCB) began allowing licensed distilleries to sell liquor on premises that were made on the premises.

Sharon explains, “When the laws changed, the owners originally had a

restaurant at our Kersey location that they converted to the distillery. In 2019, a building near Cook Forest came up for sale and the owners thought it would be a great location for a distillery outlet store. The store was opened in May 2019 in Clarington, right next to the Double Diamond Deer Ranch.”

To review, moonshine is a slang term that refers to any high-proof spirit that is illegally distilled. You’ll usually find it in a jar without a label that came from your “grandfather’s friend of a friend.” Distilleries are licensed, legal producers of “moonshine” product, which means that they can legally produce a quality, high-proof spirit for your enjoyment, as long as you’re at least 21 years of age.

“Our No. 1, year-round best seller at both locations is our Apple Pie Corn



WIDE VARIETY: Chicken Hill Distillery offers many flavors and varieties at both the Kersey, Pa., store and the Clarington, Pa., store.

Shine,” Sharon states. “Besides corn shine, we also sell corn whiskey, brandy, rum and bourbon. We are usually doing three new flavors per year, and we soon plan to do a limited time flavor monthly.”

Need somewhere to host that bridal shower? Chicken Hill Distillery can reserve a space for you. They also host Paint and Sip events and select music nights throughout the year.

“We want to show our customers that we are more than just spirits by not having a ‘bar-type’ atmosphere,” Sharon explains. “Both of our locations are places where anyone could feel comfortable finding the right spirit for them.”

As for recent events, Sharon explains,



BRANCHING OUT: During the recent coronavirus pandemic, Chicken Hill Distillery branched out to offer a new sanitizing product line.

“When the COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States, our stores weren’t allowed to remain open. We had to close down our Cook Forest outlet and only have the Kersey location open for pickups.”

Due to different states’ various laws, along with different carriers’ policies concerning alcohol, Chicken Hill Distillery cannot ship orders.

“Even though we wouldn’t be open, we still wanted to create product,” she says. “We decided to fill a void by making hand sanitizer.”

To be effective, hand sanitizer must be made with at least 60% alcohol.

“We donated our first run of hand sanitizer to area first responders and we started selling it in our Kersey location,” Sharon says. “We have people who order one bottle, and we have customers that are ordering 500 bottles. We plan to continue our hand-sanitizer production, no matter what happens with the global pandemic.”

To find out Chicken Hill Distillery’s store hours for both Kersey and Cooksburg, call 814-885-6818 or 814-752-2002. You can also log on to chickenhillshine.com, or find both locations with separate pages on Facebook. Don’t forget about the tasting room on your next outing to Cook Forest.

I hope that all of our United Electric members have come through the COVID-19 pandemic healthy, and I look forward to seeing our members frequenting our area businesses again. Maybe I’ll see you on a trail in Parker Dam or at a wine-tasting event, but I might have to wave to you from 6 feet away. 🍷

Rustic Views

Nature is nature – neither cruel nor kind

By Glenn Schuckers

SOME SAY nature can be cruel, that it plays cruel tricks on us, but I think I disagree. Nature is nature; it is neither cruel nor kind. When I think back to how nature treats us, I am reminded of what Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote about nature back in the 19th century: “Nature does not cocker us: we are children, not pets: she is not fond: everything is dealt to us without fear or favor, after severe universal laws.” He used that word “cocker” as it was often used back then to mean pamper or indulge. What he meant, I think, was that nature does not treat us as we would treat a pet.

Nowhere was that more apparent than a couple of months ago. We had a normal spring after a very mild winter. Some people thought Punxsutawney Phil was going to be right — that we were going to have an early spring.

Warmer-than-usual weather in March continued into April, and when I looked at the buds beginning to swell on our fruit trees and lilac bushes, I thought they were right. We almost always have apple trees in blossom on Mother’s Day. Last year was an exception when the trees did not get to full bloom until almost the end of May. So, around the beginning of May, I thought things would get back to their usual schedule.

I could not have been more wrong.

After that warm spell, we had a week of weather that was not just cool, it was cold. The middle of May felt more like March. Daytime temperatures struggled to get out of the 30s and at night here, they went down into the 20s. A few nights out where I live were in the lower 20s, and for almost a whole week, there was frost on the grass every morning.

I can recall one such season in the late 1970s when our entire apple crop was lost due to freezing temperatures when the trees were in full bloom. The only “blessing” was that the crop was destroyed so early that we were able to cut way back on the fertilizer and spray ma-



PHOTO BY GLENN SCHUCKERS

ROUGH SPRING: The branches on our bald cypress should be covered with green needles now, but a freeze in May destroyed them. Whether they will come back or not is still an open question.

terials, as well as on the mowing in the orchards, so we did not have to spend as much as we would have had the crop been destroyed in July or August.

Farmers know that when some kinds of natural events happen, there is nothing they can do about it. At one time, we gathered old tires and piled them in the valley and burned them on a frosty night.

When I asked the expert from Penn State about this, he just shook his head and said, “You can burn tires all night, but most of the time, all you’ll do is scorch one side of a tree while the other side gets frosted. You’d be better off to go to bed and get a good night’s sleep.”

He explained that in terrain like ours, the heat from a fire just goes straight up and unless there is a very low cloud ceiling, burning tires (which is now against the law) or anything else is mostly futile.

When the weather turned cold this year, I did cover an almond bush out back. It is one I transplanted from our old house after our home was destroyed by fire. We tried to bring what shrubs and bushes we could to remind us of “home.” Ann brought out an old flannel sheet that was big enough to cover the bush, so for six nights, I covered the bush at sunset and uncovered it the next morning. Luckily, it worked and when things turned warm, we had nice pink flowers on the bush.

So we were not being punished by nature. This part of Pennsylvania had not been singled out in some grand

scheme to have bushes and flowers and fruit destroyed by frost. Call it part of the natural cycle, or what we should expect when we live in Zone 4. It is why there are not any peach, apricot, or pecan groves nearby, and why anyone who has a lemon tree needs to have it in a pot to bring in for the winter. Nature has rules and all we can do is obey them.

Three years ago, I took a chance and planted two peach trees in a little dwarf orchard by the new house. I knew I was taking a chance, but the trees were “advertised” as being hardy. One has survived, although this past May might have been its last. The leaves were out and some of them have dropped, although I am still holding out hope that it will survive. The other has been replaced twice. Hope springs eternal.

One tree that most likely will not survive is a bald cypress (no jokes about the author, please) that is almost eight years old. It’s sort of a unique tree that has needles just like an evergreen, but every fall, the needles drop as the leaves on an oak tree do, and then grow back in the spring. Those needles were about a quarter inch long when the cold weather hit and, as a photo with this column shows, they are gone. Whether they will recover is still an open question.

So much as I would like to say that nature played a cruel trick on us this year, it is not so. Nature was just being nature, and the rest of the summer may be “normal.” We may get our usual 40 inches of precipitation, or this month may be the beginning of a long drought. I don’t look at squirrel nests in the trees or the color of caterpillars. Whatever happens, we have not been singled out for either a reward or a punishment. Nature is just nature. ☀



Glenn Schuckers, a longtime member of United Electric, operated Schuckers’ Orchard in Luthersburg until the mid-1990s. He is a retired high school teacher and a contributing writer for *The Courier Express*.

We are pleased to have Glenn provide our *Penn Lines* readers with his take on rural life.