

# Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives  
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## Claverack REC

570-265-2167

1-800-326-9799

Email: [mail@claverack.com](mailto:mail@claverack.com)

Website: <http://www.claverack.com>

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Charles R. Bullock, Zone 7**  
**Chairman**

570-280-8470

**Dr. Robert R. Faux, Zone 2**  
**Vice Chairman**

570-574-3531

**Danise C. Fairchild, Zone 1**  
**Secretary/Treasurer**

570-265-3599

**Charles R. McNamara, Zone 8**  
**Vice Secretary/Treasurer**

570-553-4385

**Angela S. Joines, Zone 3**

570-756-4979

**Gary L. Hennip, Zone 4**

570-247-7233

**Robert W. Fearnley, Zone 5**

570-278-2288

**Timothy T. Tewksbury, Zone 6**

570-833-2320

**Anthony J. Ventello, Zone 9**

607-765-2615

**Bobbi Kilmer**

**President & CEO**

### Staff

**Annette Koder, Executive Assistant**

**Steve Allabaugh, Director, Engineering**

**Doug Nichols, Director, Operations**

**Shelley Young, Director, Financial Services**

**Brian Zeidner, Director, Member Services**

### Office Hours

Monday through Friday

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

**Jeff Fetzer, Local Pages Editor**

## From the President & CEO



# My retirement announcement and other annual meeting news

By Bobbi Kilmer

I WAS truly disappointed that circumstances led to the cancellation of our normal annual meeting event this summer.

I was really looking forward to holding the meeting at the Wyoming County Fair for the first time and believe it would have made for a great experience for our members while also benefitting the fair and its vendors.

Regardless of where we've held our annual meeting over the years, I have always enjoyed the opportunity to meet and visit with members on that special day.

Missing this year's gathering was particularly disappointing on a personal level. It would have marked my final appearance before the membership as your president and chief executive officer, as I recently announced plans to retire at the end of this year. I would have preferred to tell you that in person during the meeting.

You'll hear more from me throughout the remainder of the year, and you can rest assured that the board of directors is actively engaged in a search for my replacement.

While we weren't able to meet in person for this year's gathering, your cooperative board did conduct Claverack's 83rd Annual Meeting on Sept. 23. Due to health and safety concerns as well as size restrictions on gatherings, the meeting took place at the cooperative's headquarters, with the board of directors and senior management in attendance.

During the business meeting, the minutes of the 2019 Annual Meeting

were approved. Secretary/Treasurer Danise Fairchild presented the Notice of Meeting and Proof of Mailing as well as the Secretary/Treasurer's report. In her report, she noted that a satisfactory audit of the cooperative's financial records and accounts was completed by Buffamante Whipple and Buttafaro, P.C.

Board Chairman Charles Bullock reported that 2019 was another successful year and that the financial position of the cooperative continues to be strong.

In my CEO report, I reflected on the year's accomplishments such as system improvement projects, safety initiatives and the retirement of \$1.4 million in capital credits. I also shared that despite the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 is shaping up to be a successful year as well. I reported that we are continuing to explore options for the expansion of broadband in our service territory and that we are moving forward with our first phase of the deployment of a new metering system.

Our cooperative attorney, Robert Chappell, announced the results of the election for directors. Directors Danise Fairchild, Dr. Robert Faux, and Angela Joines, representing Zone 1, 2 and 3, respectively, ran unopposed and were re-elected by the membership to serve a three-year term.

I certainly hope that by next year, you'll be able to participate in an in-person event, and Claverack is able to return to its tradition of hosting an informative and entertaining annual meeting. 🌞

## Agritourism business blooms at Wyoming County farm

By Jeff Fetzter

CLAVERACK member Scott Brown would plant several acres of sunflowers on his Wyoming County farm each spring and watch for the people to sprout up.

When the sunflower field blossomed each summer, Scott's Brown Hill Farms would transform into an impromptu tourist attraction as passersby parked along the roads near his Lemon Township farm, piled out of their cars and snapped photos of smiling family members and friends in front of the fields of golden blooms.

Although Brown had been growing black oil sunflowers on the farm since 2007 to supply the popular birdseed to Ross Feeds Inc., his family's mill in Hop Bottom, it was only within the last four or five years that he and his wife, Michele, noticed a surge in visits to their property when the big flowers bloomed.

Michele, who owned and operated a bridal shop in Tunkhannock at the time, had been exploring options for several years that would allow her to return to the farm full time. With the growing local awareness of the Browns' sunflower fields, coupled with the exploding popularity of sunflower field farm tours nationally, Scott and Michele warmed to the idea of agritourism.

Agritourism focuses on activities that bring visitors to a working farm to enjoy the rural setting, learn about farm operations or be involved in a special activity. Scott and Michele, who both possess an entrepreneurial bent, thought their spacious, bucolic 270-



**THREE GENERATIONS:** The Brown family, from left, Jacob, Janet, Philip, Scott and Michele, have opened their historic Brown Hill Farms to seasonal public tours of their tulip, sunflower and pumpkin fields. The 270-acre Wyoming County farm, served by Claverack, began as a dairy farm in 1868. The operation converted to crop farming in 2002 and entered the agritourism business in 2017.

acre crop farm outside of Tunkhannock would be an ideal fit.

So in the fall of 2017, they decided to give agritourism a go by opening Brown Hill Farms' pumpkin patch to public picking.

"We've grown pumpkins for 20 years and sold them at roadside stands and out of the yard," Michele says. "We always had people ask if they could pick pumpkins out of the field. So we tried it, just to see if people were open to coming here, and it went very well."

In addition to opening the farm to pumpkin picking, the Browns created a corn maze, provided hay rides, set up potato slingshots, and built a hay bale tower, complete with slides, for kids and families to enjoy.

Encouraged by the initial success,

Michele decided to sell the bridal shop she had operated for 20 years and return full time to the farm to grow the agritourism business. And that meant incorporating sunflowers into the mix.

"We always thought sunflowers were beautiful, but we had no idea how nuts people were for them," Michele says. "We used to plant along the road, and people would be pulling over and getting out of their cars, crawling through the fields, cutting flowers down and helping themselves. We decided to move them away from the road so we could control the environment a little bit more."

For the second year of the farm tour operation, Scott planted a 14-acre sunflower patch on the interior of the property he and Michele own, along with Scott's parents, Philip and Janet Brown, and readied the grounds for visitors.

"I was scared to death when we opened the sunflower field," Michele acknowledges. "I didn't know if it was going to be worth it. And then people

**SUNNY DAYS:** About 14 acres of brilliant sunflower fields draw as many as 1,000 visitors a day to Brown Hill Farms, 405 E. Avery Station Road, Tunkhannock, during the two weeks in August the flowers are in bloom.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KELSEY G. PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO BY JEFF FETZTER



**FLOWER POWER:** A youngster takes in the vivid colors of the tulip fields at Brown Hill Farms near Tunkhannock in early May.

just kept coming and coming.”

Fueled by photo sharing on Facebook, thousands of visitors flocked to the farm during the two weeks the fields blossomed that year. For the price of admission to the grounds, guests could take photos next to the brilliant sunflower field and were also permitted to cut several flowers to take home with them.

To enhance the experience for visitors, the following year the Browns set up several photo props — an old tractor, a blue velvet couch, a kissing booth, a barrel horse, a wooden swing — around the perimeter of the sunflower patch. They also incorporated a number of walking trails within the



PHOTO COURTESY OF KELSEY G. PHOTOGRAPHY

**PUMPKIN PICKERS:** A brother and sister search for the perfect pumpkin during last year's fall tours at Brown Hill Farms. The fall tours will take place at the Lemon Township farm through the end of October. Visitors can pick their own pumpkins, sling potatoes, navigate a corn maze and glide down slides at the hay bale tower.

planted areas and watched their fledgling agritourism business flourish.

Seeking to balance out the growing season and add to the farm's cash flow in the spring, the Browns planted 370,000 tulip bulbs on four acres of the farm last fall. The plan was to open the farm to tourism for the two to three weeks the tulips would be bloom in late April or early May.

In addition to taking photos with colorful tulip backdrops, the Browns envisioned allowing visitors to pick their own flowers from the field, as well as purchase tulip bulbs for planting. That was the plan, anyhow.

Then came the pandemic. When the tulips burst into blossom this spring, Wyoming County remained under the red phase of the state's coronavirus shutdown, which altered the couple's original plans for tulip picking.

While spring visitors were allowed onto the property, they weren't permitted to get out of their cars. So the Browns rented rubber mats and placed them through the tulip plantings so people could drive through the colorful field of flowers and take photos without leaving their vehicles. They also offered drive-thru sales of cut flowers, along with refreshments.

“We did sell a lot of cut flowers from the field and were very pleased with the turnout,” Michele says.

While COVID-19 restrictions had eased by the time the sunflowers bloomed in August, the farm was restricted to hosting a maximum of 250 people at any given time on the



PHOTO BY JEFF FEITZER

**PICTURE PERFECT:** Against a backdrop of sunflowers and the rolling hills of the Endless Mountains, the Hindman girls, Ava, 8, and Aubrie, 4, and their cousin, Haleigh DeSantis, 18 months, pose for a photo during an August visit to Brown Hill Farms. They were accompanied by Ava and Aubrie's mother, Claverack member Sheena Hindman of Wyalusing, who was visiting the farm for the first time. “It's just beautiful,” she said.

property. To comply, Brown Hill Farms required visitors to purchase tickets in advance for sunflower tours, which were scheduled daily in two-hour blocks.

Despite the restrictions, Scott and Michele say they were pleased with attendance during the tulip and sunflower seasons. Their pumpkin patch and fall attractions opened for the season on Sept. 26 and will remain operational through October.

The couple say they continue to tweak their tour offerings each year. They have added tram tours of the farm, and operate a concession that features hamburgers, made from beef produced on the farm, specialty French fries, pulled pork and beverages. This year, they also added a large parking area and constructed an on-site store for visitor check-in and to sell tulip bulbs, produce, jams and jellies, T-shirts and vases.

The farm, which has been in the Brown family since the mid-1800s, was a dairy farm until 2002, when the family converted to production of crops and hay. In addition to growing field corn and soybeans, the Browns also grow produce, including sweet corn, potatoes, string beans and pumpkins, which are sold at three self-serve stands in the Tunkhannock area.

Scott, the fifth generation Brown to work the farm, says he's been pleased with his wife's decision to share their historic farm with the public. He says he particularly enjoys talking about the  
*(continues on page 14d)*

**Agritourism business**

*(continued from page 14c)*

farm operation with visitors.

“People leave here happy,” he says. “When I am driving the tram around the field you rarely see someone not smiling.”

He says he doesn’t anticipate any major additions to the existing lineup of farm tours and is satisfied with the present mix of agritourism and normal farm operations.

“We don’t want to grow huge,” he says. “I don’t want to see this get out of hand so it’s not enjoyable for us or our visitors.”

Michele, raised on a dairy farm in Meshoppen, says she’s thankful for the opportunity to spend time on the farm with her husband and their 22-year-old son, Jacob.

“I really wanted to come back to the farm,” Michele says. “Agritourism has given me an avenue to do that.”

For information about Brown Hill Farms and hours of operation for fall farm tours, visit [brownhillfarms.com](http://brownhillfarms.com) or check out the farm’s Facebook page. 🌞

**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 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. 🌞

**Even out your payments with Levelized Billing**

You can avoid large fluctuations in your electric bill from month to month by participating in Claverack’s Levelized Billing plan.

The program allows you to level out your monthly payments throughout the year.

Levelized Billing is available to members with at least one year of electric use, provided they have fewer than two late payments in the prior 12 months.

This plan is particularly helpful to members with electric heating or central air conditioning systems, since their electric bills tend to increase significantly during the heating and cooling seasons. It’s also convenient for those on fixed incomes.

If you are interested in a Levelized Billing plan, please call the member services department at 1-800-326-9799.

**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 homepage.

**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.



**ELECTION RESULTS:** Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative President & CEO Bobbi Kilmer congratulates members elected to the board of directors following the co-op’s 83rd annual meeting held in the Claverack board room on Sept. 23. Pictured are, from left, Kilmer and directors Angela S. Joines of Jackson, Danise C. Fairchild of Wyalusing and Dr. Robert R. Faux of Tunkhannock, representing Zones 3, 1 and 2, respectively.