

Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

BEDFORD REC

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Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

AI Tools for Electric Cooperatives



**BROOKS
SHOEMAKER**

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IS BECOMING a popular tool for many industries and within our daily lives. It's a hot topic; sometimes exciting, sometimes a little scary — or maybe a lot scary.

AI has the potential to provide many opportunities — as well as a few challenges — to the electric utility sector. But machine learning takes time, and we're still determining how AI can be used.

In addition to AI, many electric cooperatives are exploring other emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Most of AI's current applications are task-specific, like using chatbots to answer common questions from cooperative members or analyzing data to better understand members' needs.

Contrary to what Hollywood might want you to believe, AI can't think for itself. Its abilities depend on how it is programmed, the quality of its training and the data it receives, which is the most concerning aspect of AI. It learns from patterns and makes decisions based on data input — not by having thoughts or opinions of its own.

Because AI interacts with internal systems and external networks, cybersecurity is a priority. When we explore tools powered by AI, we ensure our systems are safe from cyber threats. Strong digital defenses are essential to safely integrating new technology.

As we consider emerging AI tools, our focus will be on solving problems instead of the technology itself. If AI can streamline a process, predict a problem or improve service for members, it's worth considering.

As technology evolves, AI may eventually be built into smart meters to help members track energy use more effectively. It could even help staff better manage the system or predict storm damage to deploy crews more efficiently.

AR and VR are also exciting. AR, for instance, is being tested to provide lineworkers with hands-on experience that prepares them for dangerous situations before facing them in the field. In the future, smart glasses may help crews quickly identify and troubleshoot equipment issues in the field.

Still, as AI brings many opportunities for our industry, it also brings challenges as it grows alongside other energy-hungry technologies, such as generative AI and large-language models.

AI relies heavily on data centers, which consume massive amounts of electricity. As these technologies expand, power consumption is expected to rise significantly, too.

The growing demand strains our nation's electric grid, which can increase the risk of outages, especially in areas already dealing with high energy use or aging infrastructure.

While AI tools offer great potential to improve utility operations, these challenges highlight the growing tension between AI advancement and the long-term capability of the grid. Ultimately, AI, AR, and VR are tools that can help utilities better serve their communities by making energy more reliable, services faster, and operations more efficient.

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Take a Walk on the Wild Side

GARY DIEHL, MEMBER SERVICES MANAGER

IT CERTAINLY WASN'T MY INTENTION to discuss vocabulary in a *Penn Lines* article, but when you learn a new word, it's nice to share it. So here it is: volkssport, which when translated to English means "people's sport."

Penn Lines readers were introduced to the concept nearly a decade ago when Sarah Garcia was featured in the July 2016 issue. According to Garcia, volkssporting describes healthy, organized, non-competitive events suitable for people of all ages and families. Activities include walking, biking, and swimming.



A WEST COAST WALK: Sarah Garcia, left, and her friend, Sue Capp, participate in an American Volkssport Association walk in San Diego, Calif.



Retired from the military, Garcia is a Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative member who lives in Snake Spring Township with her husband and daughter. When she and her husband, Marcelino, were stationed in Germany, they joined a volksmarching club to take part in walking and hiking activities. While Germany is where the sport originated, it has now spread worldwide.

Garcia's involvement and participation have evolved over the years, and she has some great experiences to share. In fact, she's walked nearly 10,000 kilometers (km) thanks to her participation in the volksmarching club.

Because of her military background, Garcia has been to more than a dozen countries and all over the United States. She has since joined the American Volkssport Association (AVA).

Something for everyone

AVA is a non-profit, headquartered in Texas. Known as "America's Walking Club," it has groups in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. AVA's mission is to promote and organize walking and other non-competitive sporting events that encourage fun, fitness, and friendship. Its network of more than 200 clubs organizes more than 2,500 non-competitive events nationwide each year, a majority of which are walks.

AVA hosts a variety of events, including traditional one- or two-day gatherings typically held on weekends. The designated start and finish locations are staffed, and information is available for those who need it. Trail maps and written directions are provided, and the trail is clearly marked. Oftentimes, there are checkpoints and refreshments along the route.

AVA also sponsors year-round events, which are more flexible and feature self-guided courses that have a designated start point. There, participants will find a "start box" containing registration materials, trail maps, directions, and Internationaler Volkssport Verband (IVV) stamps, which help track participation and progress toward achievements. Each stamp represents a completed event, or a certain distance walked, and the stamps are collected in official IVV books.

AVA offers a unique way to record walking adventures through the International Achievement Awards Program. It provides patches, pins and certificates to participants who reach milestones, including the number of events

MUSIC IN THE AIR: The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park, an open-air music venue in San Diego, Calif., is one of many views found on American Volkssport Association walks.

attended and the total distance completed.

Finally, there are seasonal walks, which follow the same format as year-round events, but are only open for part of the year.

Still active

Previously, Garcia organized a local club in Bedford called the Penn Mary Walkers, but the group ultimately disbanded.

"Members were getting older, and interest faded," she says. "There are really no young people interested in it enough to take the reins and continue the local club."

Dissolving the Bedford group hasn't stopped Garcia from staying active. She is a member of the York White Rose Wanderers in York County. Independent from the York group, Garcia has organized a year-round volkssporting event in Bedford. The route travels along the Heritage Trail to the Bedford Springs Omni Resort.

Garcia says volksmarching offers participants the benefits of walking, which include a lower risk of obesity and heart disease. It also lowers blood pressure and cholesterol and helps with depression, memory, and mental health, among other things.

AVA walks are usually 5 or 10 km (3.1 or 6.2 miles); however, most events allow participants to complete shorter distances. Remember: These events are for fun, fitness and friendship, so while the walks may have varying degrees of difficulty, they usually feature easy terrain that is fairly level — not anything like hiking.

AVA has a vision to engage Americans in lifelong walking and other non-competitive physical fitness activities. If you are interested in joining the group or want to learn more, visit ava.org or contact Garcia at sarahgrc@yahoo.com. 📧

SARAH GARCIA



CHASING RAINBOWS: A rainbow stretches over a portion of a "Lighthouse Walk" in New England.



A LONESTAR TROT: Sarah Garcia, center, enjoys an American Volkssport Association walk in San Antonio, Texas, with longtime friends, Sue Capp, left, and Susan Barna.

FUN TIMES IN TEXAS: Sarah Garcia, front, and a group of friends take a break during a sanctioned volksmarch in Texas to clown around for a photo op.



**FROM THE GENERAL
MANAGER & CEO**

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Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Take advantage of “shoulder months,” the transitional periods between peak heating and cooling seasons. During the fall, these milder weeks typically occur between September and November. Shoulder months offer a great opportunity to reduce home energy consumption as the need for extensive heating or cooling is reduced. Look for simple ways to boost indoor comfort without running your heating and cooling system. Use ceiling fans and open windows on breezy days to ventilate your home. On cooler days, add a layer of clothing and avoid running the heat.

Utility Scam Tip of the Month

Delete deceptive emails. If you receive an email that appears to be from the cooperative but you are unsure about it, delete it. Never click on a link, open an attachment or send a reply to an untrusted source. When in doubt, contact the cooperative directly to report suspected email scams. 📧

BROOKS SHOEMAKER
GENERAL MANAGER & CEO

OUTAGE REPORTING

In case of an outage...

- 1** Check your fuses or circuit breakers.
- 2** Check with your neighbors, if convenient, to see if they have been affected by the power failure.
- 3** Call the 24-hour number, 814-623-7568, OR call 814-623-5101 during office hours.

Please have the account holder's name, phone number, physical address or account number available. Any specific information about the outage will also be helpful in pinpointing the problem.

**To report an outage
call: 814-623-7568**

During widespread power outages, many members call to report power failures. You may receive a busy signal, or in certain cases, your call may go unanswered. This occurs in after-hours outages when the office is not fully staffed. Please be patient and try again in a few minutes.



**You can't AVOID
what you CAN'T SEE**

Starting a job — big or small — without first getting utilities marked could result in serious injury, service disruptions for you and your neighbors, and a hefty fine.

Call 8-1-1 before you dig.

Learn more at: **Safe
Electricity.org®**