

Do you think you'll be hungry  
around 1:00 on the third  
Monday of the Month?  
No worries!  
Lunch now being served at  
MERA General Meetings.  
Upcoming:  
October 20 and November 17



# MERA HOMETOWN NEWS

AND CALENDAR OF EVENTS  
Items of interest to MERA Members  
October 2025

Want to know more?  
Check us out at  
[merasite.org](http://merasite.org)

## A Note from MERA's President

HELLO Fall! Meetings will now be held at the Rec Center on River Road. The program for October will be quite interesting. It will be on the background of the founder of our company  
A real rags to riches story. Come and enjoy this plus a light lunch!  
Jim

## MERA Calendar of Events

*You won't want to miss any of these great MERA events!*

*Special Note & Good News: Beginning immediately, lunch will be provided at MERA general meetings! A BIG THANK YOU to the refreshment committee, Joyce & Jim Zeiber, for the extra time and effort invested each month.*

- **MERA General Meeting October 20, 2025, 1:00 at Muhlenberg Rec Center**  
Our speaker will be historian Paul Druzba. Join us to learn about John Rigg who went "From Farmer to Trolley Tycoon." This program tells the story of a poor boy who was born in Berks County, grew up in Lancaster County and left the farm as a teenager. He told a friend he was going to Reading to become a millionaire, and that is exactly what he did. Rigg got a job on one of those newfangled horsecars, shortly thereafter becoming a superintendent. He set out to absorb all competing companies and overseeing their conversion to electric power and the cars became trolleys. Eventually, by about 1902, he controlled 62 corporations and along the way founded Metropolitan Edison Company, which became Met-Ed.
- **Happy Hour Wednesday October 29, 4pm** at Klinger's at the Airport, 2385 Bernville Rd, Reading.
- **MERA General Membership Meeting November 17, 2025, 1:00 at the Muhlenberg Rec Center**  
Cookie Baking Contest. Bring in your best and favorite cookies for the group to judge...we know it's a burden to have to taste Christmas cookies but we're sure you'll handle it! Prizes for winners!
- **Happy Hour Wednesday November 19, 4pm** (NOTE DATE CHANGE DUE TO Thanksgiving holiday) Coastal Grill, 2713 Meridian Blvd., Wyomissing.
- **Bethlehem Christmas Trip, December 4.** We begin our day with free time to explore Main Street, Bethlehem, where sparkling white lights adorn trees in the Historic Moravian District to get you into the Christmas Spirit! Lunch will be on your own, while enjoying the town. Next, we

make our way to Christkindlmarkt, a one-of-a-kind family event that celebrates the spirit of the season in Bethlehem. This heart-warming holiday event features handmade works by some of the nation's finest artisans, the ring-ting-tingling sounds of live Christmas music and jolly, old St. Nick's hearty laughter. You can shop for handmade ornaments, nutcrackers, collectibles from Germany, and much more. Then we board our coach and take a one-hour guided tour of the area with decorated trees, holiday lights, and the Star of Bethlehem. Cost of Trip \$94.

[Deadline for reservation and payment is October 20.](#) For questions contact: **Barb Seidel** at 484-794-0857 or [bseidel3523@comcast.net](mailto:bseidel3523@comcast.net)

- **NERA Annual Christmas Luncheon – a member favorite** - is scheduled for Thursday, December 11, 11:00 – 2:00pm. The event returns to The Warehouse, 215 Pine Street, Hamburg, PA, where we've had good food and a good deal! This year they promise an extra special dessert! The price remains just \$25 per person. Because of FirstEnergy's generous matching grant, NERA can provide this lovely holiday lunch for *much less* than the actual cost. For more details see the flyer enclosed in this mailing. Deadline to register is November 26. Contact **Gary Pleiss** at (610) 927-7590.
- **Happy Hour Wednesday December 17, 4pm** (NOTE DATE CHANGE DUE TO Christmas holiday) Ozgood's, 319 E. Penn Ave, Robesonia.

## Want More Fun in Your Life? Become a NERA Board Member!

Join a great team and be part of planning NERA activities! We invite you to join the NERA board – for an initial term of one year with the possible extension for another three years. You'll coordinate the details for two of NERA's favorite annual events: the June picnic and the September Chicken Bake. Please call Cindy Thomas at [xthomas999@comcast.net](mailto:xthomas999@comcast.net) for more details. Be part of making it happen!

## NERA Membership Renewal

New! NERA Renewal Notices are now **pumpkin-spiced**! Well, okay, not really. But it is that time of year. The 2026 renewal form is enclosed in this month's NERA mailing.

- Our annual dues remain at *just* \$5 – a good deal by any calculation!
- DID YOU KNOW? FirstEnergy matches each \$5 dues payment with \$10 which subsidizes our costs.
- NEW this year! If you hate writing a check for just \$5 each year *and* paying the postage, there's a new option. You can renew your membership for *three years*. Write one check for \$15 and your NERA membership is good through 2028. Please note, these payments are NOT REFUNDABLE...and by that we mean: *not refundable*. Doesn't matter if they discover radioactive deposits under the Pagoda or the entire NERA Board moves to The Maldives, you aren't getting your \$15 back. On the other hand, you'll have three whole years where you can ignore our pleas to write a check and renew your membership.

## Attention Members with Comcast Web Addresses

Comcast is moving user data – emails, folders and contacts – to the Yahoo Mail platform. The migration will take place over the upcoming months. The process began in June so some subscribers have already been notified of the change. When you receive notification from Comcast, please take the recommended action so your online communications – including those from NERA - will not be interrupted! As we understand it, your email address won't change but you must accept Yahoo's terms and conditions. If you have any questions, we recommend you contact Comcast.

## MEIRA Member Profile

### Fran Merkel

Fran Merkel is working towards her third retirement. As soon as she can find someone to replace her. But, we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Fran started at GPU in 1971 and retired in 1997. Fran started as a clerk in purchasing then transitioned to Human Resources and eventually became payroll supervisor. She then moved on to a similar position at UGI ultimately retiring from there as well. Her favorite part of the work at GPU was working in HR and payroll. "I enjoyed interacting with all the people."

Fran grew up in Leesport and attended Schuylkill Valley High School, Penn State Berks, Alvernia and Albright studying human resources management and business. She has three kids and six grandchildren - all living locally to her delight.

After leaving the utility world, Fran reinvented herself. She attended Lancaster Theological Seminary, graduating in 2005 with a Master of Divinity degree. She has been working as a pastor ever since.

She started at Christ Church in Bath but moved home in 2013 to Leesport to take care of her mother, who recently passed at the age of 101. Fran is currently the pastor at St John Gernant's Church in Leesport. "Because there are so few young people entering the field, there's a real shortage of pastors. I'm filling in and supporting the congregation at the Lutheran Church of The Holy Trinity in Leesport as well as tending to my own church as there just isn't anyone else available." Fran would like to retire for a third time, "but there aren't many replacement pastors out there!"

You would think there would be little crossover between utility work and the ministry but Fran's experience in payroll has been useful. "I had one church where the previous treasurer had not filed or paid payroll taxes for four years. I knew just what to do and who to call to help resolve the issue!"

Although she is no fan of flying, she did spend a month in India as part of her seminary training. During her eye-opening visit she spent time touring orphanages and slum living communities witnessing great poverty.

In what little spare time she has, Fran likes spending it with her grandchildren, assisting the Schuylkill Valley Food Pantry and completing jigsaw puzzles.

Fran says, "if you need a good book to read, try the Bible!" She also advises fellow MEIRA members to keep active. Keep your mind sharp by trying new things." And, if you know a good minister looking to move to Leesport, let her know!

## MEIRA Members Giving Back!

Hometown News would like to hear more about YOUR volunteer activities! Reach out to Karen Baxter, [kbaxter@ptd.net](mailto:kbaxter@ptd.net), with information about the organization where you give your time.

## Bits & Pieces

*One thing we know, MEIRA members are busy people. This column is all about keeping us connected by reporting quick snapshots of MEIRA member activities. We'd love to hear from you. Submit your items by emailing [meraberks@gmail.com](mailto:meraberks@gmail.com).*

**Jeff Antolic** reports he is still working on his golf game. It helps that he is working at the Reading Country Club. His daughter Brooke is pursuing her nurse practitioner degree. **Mary Beth and Mark**

**Mancias'** son just got married. Mary Beth volunteers as the Religious Education teacher for 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade students at Sacred Heart School. This summer **Maxi Shirey's** family staged an elegant 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party for her and her twin sister, Janey. **Jim & Joyce Zeiber** toured northern Europe including Estonia, Denmark and Norway. Their favorite stop was Berlin. **Don & Pat McKinney** welcomed their 4<sup>th</sup> great grandchild with a visit to South Carolina. **Cindy and Jeff Thomas** also visited Germany with a stop at Reutlinger, Reading's sister city. Sadly, they have no pagoda there. **Georgine & Joe McCool** soaked up the desert beauty that is Sedona, Arizona. Although they were surprised to learn that the area gets monsoons. They also visited the Grand Canyon while the fire was burning. They report the air quality was affected but they were still able to enjoy the site. **Bonnie Paparella**, our intrepid hike leader, has been enjoying some quality time with her recliner following knee replacement surgery. **Denis and Kathy Dorward** took the family to the Virgin Islands including a 2-day sailboat charter that gave them the opportunity to swim with turtles!

## **MERA Welcomes New Members**

Be sure to offer a warm welcome to MERA's newest member recently retired **Andy Zulkosky**. We are thrilled you've joined us and look forward to seeing you at an upcoming MERA event!

## **MERA Member Milestones**

### **Happy October Anniversary!**

Bruce & Maria Balthaser  
Robert & Charlene Benner  
John & Karen Bigelow  
Richard & Sarah Johnson  
Leonard & Willene Koenig  
Roger & Karen Levesque  
Lori Lobb & Sue Perez

Brian & Sandy Lowe  
Marie & Jeffrey Nye  
Rich & Cynthia Piergrossi  
Steve & Linda Rathman  
Henry & Philomena Robidoux  
Jon & Kelly Storch  
Richard & Suzanne Zitrick

## **Happy October Milestone\* Birthday!**

**\*A milestone birthday is one that ends in "0" or "5."**

Larry Biehl  
Shirley Biehl  
Pankaj Doshi  
Yvonne Espig  
Kris Gillotti  
Dave Hollenbach  
Robert McLean

Tim Nuhfer  
Morena O'Brien  
Del Somerville  
Deb Ulrich  
George Weida  
Kevin Wickman

*There was a king once  
who was 12 inches tall.  
Terrible king, great  
ruler.*

