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Rural water safety requires education, individual effort

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Making music

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CONTENTS

- 4 **KEEPING CURRENT**
News from across the Commonwealth
- 6 **ENERGY MATTERS**
Home infrastructure upgrades
- 8 **FEATURE: WELL WISHES**
Rural water safety requires education, individual effort
- 12 **TIME LINES**
Your newsmagazine through the years
- 12A **COOPERATIVE CONNECTION**
Information and advice from your local electric cooperative
- 14 **SMART CIRCUITS**
Three ways to save energy outdoors
- 15 **RURAL VIEWS**
500 cellos, my zarf and family game night
- 16 **FEATURE: MAKING MUSIC**
Local musicians at heart of community gatherings
- 18 **COUNTRY KITCHEN**
Mother's Day reflections
- 19 **TECH TRENDS**
Cutting-edge technologies to save energy at home
- 20 **CLASSIFIEDS**
- 22 **PUNCH LINES**
It's the thought that counts
- 23 **RURAL REFLECTIONS**
May flowers



ON THE COVER

The safety of rural drinking water supplies starts with being aware of what gets into waterways and nearby fields in rural areas.



News from across the Commonwealth

READER RESPONSE

Dear Editor,
I read the recent Penn Lines article about vintage insulators with interest. Just FYI, people who collect beach glass also treasure old insulators that are occasionally washed up on the beach after a storm.

Attached is a picture of some old insulator “beach glass” that I have collected from Lake Erie.

Anita Miller, Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative



Prepare for cicadas to emerge in Pennsylvania for first time in 17 years

One of the six species of periodical cicadas that are found in Pennsylvania — known as Brood X — will surface this spring. This emergence will conclude the lifespan of this set of cicadas that began their lives as nymphs in 2004, hatching from eggs deposited on trees that fell to the ground and were covered for 17 years.

This set of cicadas is expected to emerge by mid-May (depending on temperatures) in southeastern Pennsylvania, as well as a number of other states. Wooded areas typically experience larger numbers of the insects. Cicadas are mostly known for the loud monotone chorus produced by the males, but the insects also may damage trees when they lay their eggs by cut-

ting a small slit in the tips of branches.

The next emergence of periodical cicadas in Pennsylvania is expected to be Brood XIV in 2025.

Invasive zebra mussels found in Raystown Lake

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently notified the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) that suspected zebra mussels, an invasive species, had been observed at Raystown Lake in Huntingdon County. PFBC biologists have confirmed the finding.

It is not known how the zebra mussels were introduced to the lake; however, adult zebra mussels can attach to surfaces and spread easily between waters. In addition, the micro-



scopic larvae of the zebra mussel can be spread through water transported on boats or gear.

Once established in a body of water, they can be extremely difficult to eliminate.

Zebra mussels are small (thumb-nail-sized), striped D-shaped bivalves that are among the worst of the aquatic invasive species found in the United States. They disrupt aquatic food webs, spread on docks and boat hulls, and also can harm infrastructure, such as intake pipes.

Additional information about the zebra mussel can be found online at fishandboat.com.

Volunteers plant trees at Flight 93 National Memorial

In observance of National Park Week in April, volunteers planted approximately 7,000 tree seedlings at



FLIGHT 93 NATIONAL MEMORIAL

the Flight 93 National Memorial near Shanksville, Pa.

Since 2012, volunteers have planted nearly 135,000 native tree seedlings across 167 acres at the memorial. Reforestation is part of the memorial's original design and is meant to reclaim the former surface mine with native trees. The goal of the project, a joint effort of the Friends of Flight 93 National Memorial, the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service, is to plant 150,000 native trees at the site.

Proposed federal change may affect Pennsylvania

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors held an online public hearing April 7 regarding the proposed change in the definition of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). The meeting was chaired by state Sen. Gene Yaw (R-Lycoming).

Based on the MSA definition, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) determines the amount of federal reimbursement and financial incentives available for a number of programs in rural areas, including health care, housing and transportation.

Pennsylvania has about 1.2 million people living in counties that could be reclassified from metro to non-metro under the proposed plan. 🌳



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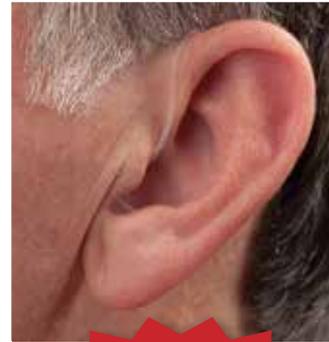
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Home infrastructure upgrades

Environmentally friendly and cost-effective

By Julia Robinson

In response to the combination of pandemic-induced, stay-at-home requirements and expanded remote working options, many people are not only spending more time at home, they're also considering a variety of home upgrades.

Mischa Fisher, chief economist for HomeAdvisor, says the growth in home improvement in 2020 was huge, adding, "We nicknamed it the 'Year of the Home.'" No matter what project is on tap, it's essential to start with basic improvements that ensure energy needs are met safely and efficiently. HomeAdvisor, a digital marketplace that aims to connect clients with pre-screened local service professionals, found home maintenance budgets doubled in 2020 compared to previous years. Simple updates can make every home kinder to the environment and safer, with the added benefit of trimming fat from electric bills.

Energy Star is your friend

Peter Pfeiffer, president of Barley & Pfeiffer Architecture in Austin, Texas, was an early advocate for the Energy Star® program, which encourages energy-efficient appliance purchases.

"We went around to the appliance showrooms and gave a little blue star on the more energy-efficient ones so that the homeowner could see, 'Ah, this is an energy-efficient one,'" Pfeiffer says.

The effort gained national attention as a successful conservation program.

Green building

Simple improvements can go a long way toward improving energy efficiency, Pfeiffer says. He recommends homeowners plan improvements based



SAVING ENERGY: An energy audit will tell you if replacing window screens will help save energy.

on increasing overall energy efficiency, beginning with modest repairs. The next step involves pricier improvements like replacing windows and upgrading appliances. The most advanced improvements center on renewable energy generation and storage.

Energy audit

To find trouble spots, engage a professional for a home energy audit that typically includes a review of electric bills and a thorough examination of the home. Auditors will inspect the quality of insulation, test for electrical hazards, make a thermographic inspection with infrared scanning, and conduct a blower test that measures the quality of air sealing.

Keep outside air outside

Managing the infiltration of outside air can affect homes year-round. Common recommendations are to update the weatherstripping and caulk around doors and windows, clean filters and vents, and seal duct leaks. It's important to make sure to have an airtight heating, ventilating and air conditioning system before upgrading to a new air-handling system.

Prevent radiant heat

Radiant heat is absorbed from sunlight and can be transmitted through roofs and windows. Roof overhangs, awnings, or trees and landscaping planted to shade west-facing windows can help prevent the sun's rays from hitting the windows. Thermal drapes and window coverings can also deflect heat. Radiant barriers in an attic can prevent heat from the roof from transferring to the attic floor.

Add insulation

Adding insulation to a home's attic, basement, walls or crawl spaces will improve energy efficiency. Pfeiffer says optimal roofing materials combined with shade will prevent radiant heat from leaking into the home. Sealing basements and crawl spaces and wrapping hot water heaters in a thermal blanket also improve energy efficiency.

Upgrade lighting

Replace lightbulbs with energy-efficient CFLs or LEDs to decrease energy consumption. An Energy Star-qualified CFL uses about one-fourth the energy and lasts 10 times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs, and Energy Star-qualified LEDs last even longer.

Once homeowners have invested some time and a little money into making basic improvements, Pfeiffer advises implementing additional energy-saving measures. Replacing older appliances and windows with Energy Star-rated and e-coated products will save energy over the lifetime of a home. Solar panels can help homeowners create their own power, but unless they address energy demands, the panels won't have as big of an impact. 🌞

Stand Up Straight and Feel Better

Discover the Perfect Walker™, the better way to walk safely and more naturally



It's a cruel fact of life, as we age, gravity takes over. Our muscles droop, our bodies sag and the weight of the world seems to be planted squarely on our shoulders. We dread taking a fall, so we find ourselves walking less and less- and that only makes matters worse.

Well, cheer up! There's finally a product designed to enable us all to walk properly and stay on the go. It's called the Perfect Walker, and it can truly change your life.

Traditional rollators and walkers simply aren't designed well. They require you to hunch over and shuffle your feet when you walk. This puts pressure on your back, neck, wrists and hands. Over time, this makes walking uncomfortable and can result in a variety of health issues. That's all changed with the Perfect Walker. Its upright design and padded elbow rests enable you to



distribute your weight across your arms and shoulders, not your hands and wrists, which helps reduce back, neck and wrist pain and discomfort. Its unique frame gives you plenty of room to step, and the oversized wheels help you glide across the floor. The height can be easily adjusted with the push of a button to fit anyone from 4'9" to over 6'2". Once you've reached your destination you can use the hand brakes to gently slow down, and there's even a handy seat with a storage compartment. Plus the Perfect Walker includes Stand Assist™ handles which make standing from a sitting position simple and easy. Its sleek, lightweight design makes it easy to use indoors and out and it folds up for portability and storage.



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Well wishes

Rural water safety requires education, individual effort

Water is essential for every plant. Every animal. While most plants and animals can get by with less-than-pristine water sources, people require clean, safe water in order to survive and thrive.

The U.S. Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974 to regulate public water systems, which serve approximately 85% of the U.S. population. The other 15% — mostly rural residents spread across the country — get their drinking water from private sources (primarily wells, but also some springs and rainwater cisterns). These private sources are not covered under the 1974 law, leaving the safety of their water supply largely up to the residents themselves, although some mortgage companies do require testing prior to approving a loan on the property.

Neither the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) nor the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulate private wells; however, both have extensive information on their websites regarding safe well construction and water quality testing (epa.gov and dep.pa.gov, respectively).

John Repetz, community relations coordinator and spokesman for the state DEP, notes that while the department doesn't regulate private water sources, state officials recognize the critical importance of safe drinking water.

"Citizens using wells, springs or cisterns as their water supply source should consider having their water tested routinely," Repetz says. "It may be beneficial to space samples such that they are collected during wet and dry periods of the year. Routine water-quality testing by a state-accredited lab will indicate what kind of treatment techniques are needed to maintain good health and safety."

By Kathy Hackleman
Senior Editor/Writer

Drilling down

A significant condition of being able to meet the goal of having safe drinking water, he says, is to make sure water supply wells are drilled and constructed to industry standards by a qualified well driller, taking care to ensure the well includes a grouted well casing.

DEP officials field a number of calls and questions about well-construction standards, well-abandonment proce-



AMY GALFORD, PENN STATE EXTENSION

UNDER DISCUSSION: Bryan Swistock, senior water resources extension associate at Penn State Extension, discusses a water test report with a well owner at a Penn State Extension workshop.

dures and how to obtain a Water Well Completion Report, Repetz says. Those questioners are usually referred to the DEP website, the Pennsylvania Geological Survey website (dcnr.pa.gov) and the Pennsylvania State Extension website (extension.psu.edu/water).

Bryan Swistock, senior water resources extension associate at Penn State

Extension, reports there are roughly 1 million private wells in Pennsylvania, although there's no way to know for sure as they are almost entirely unregulated.

"Pennsylvania is one of only a handful of states that don't regulate private wells at all," Swistock reports. "There are a few counties and a few townships in Pennsylvania that have local ordinances, but the majority of them do not have any regulations."

Swistock says that in his 34 years in extension work, there have been several attempts to pass legislation at the state level to address a variety of issues related to private water supplies, primarily well construction, but none have passed both the state House and state Senate during the same session.

"It's not our role to lobby for legislation," Swistock adds. "Our role is to provide scientific information and let the lawmakers decide what to do about it. We do research and show what effects well construction can have on water quality."

In an effort to spread the word about the importance of safe private water sources, there is a team of 10 extension educators who work directly with residents, including members of the Master Well Owners Network (MWON), volunteers dedicated to educating rural homeowners on the proper management of private water wells.

"Ten of us in extension can't possibly try to work with the large number of people who have private wells, so we used the same concept as the extension Master Gardener program to develop the Master Well Owner Network," Swistock reports.

Army of volunteers

Funded originally through a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant, the idea was to develop an "army" of people out



on the ground who could deliver education to well owners more efficiently. They would do this by talking to friends, families, and coworkers about topics such as the proper location of water wells, water quality testing, and treatment options for water problems. The program is now funded through the DEP with programming offered through Penn State Extension.

“The volunteers do this education one-on-one, just talking to neighbors and friends or doing short presentations at township meetings or at booths set up at county fairs,” Swistock says. “They go through a course where they get some background education, and then they go out and present that information to the public.”

In the 17 years of the MWON program, Penn State Extension has trained more than 900 Master Well Owners across the state. Applications to become involved are available at extension.psu.edu/water/mwon. Since the group’s inception, those volunteers have recorded educational interactions with more than 60,000 well owners.

Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative member Clark Beebe is one of Penn State Extension’s army of volunteers who is focused on educating people about private water sources. Now a resident of Colorado, Beebe still owns a seasonal residence near Towanda, where his property has three wells. One well is abandoned, one older one is used for his seasonal residence and a newer well is used by a tenant who lives in an apartment on the property.

Beebe’s parents purchased the land where his seasonal residence is located in the late 1950s and he moved there with them in the early 1960s, so his introduction to private water sources goes back a long way. He also holds a degree in civil engineering and has had

multiple university courses related to groundwater issues.

“I was intrigued when I first realized that Pennsylvania has zero regulations concerning private water supplies,” Beebe says. “Well caps are not required to be sealed in Pennsylvania, and I know from experience that vermin of all types can get inside and build nests on the underside of the cap. When they die, they fall directly into the water below. Many states require sealed caps — they cost less than \$100 — but they are very rarely installed in Pennsylvania.”

In a perfect world, Beebe would like to see required training and certification (not just licensing) of well drillers, specific regulations on well location and construction, and some required testing of private water sources. (He says numerous agencies have lists of common contaminants in each county, so homeowners can hone in on just those tests.)

“In Pennsylvania, there’s no qualifications to become a well driller,” Beebe points out. “That is surprising. Also, there’s no legal regulations on how to drill a



CHAD VOORHEES, PENN STATE

WELL CAP: This water well in central Pennsylvania is fitted with a sealed, sanitary well cap. Having a cap like this helps keep drinking water from private water wells safe for residents.

well or finish it, or how to seal the casing. All of those things affect the quality of the water you're going to get."

He adds, "People need to think about where they want to drill a well. You don't want it downhill from a pasture. If you have it downhill from a septic system, that's a problem. If the well isn't very deep and there is no impervious material between the surface and the water source, it is subject to contamination from surface sources. ... One of the important things about water is that there are contaminants you can't see and can't taste. There are other contaminants you can taste, but they aren't harmful. Taste doesn't matter when you are talking about the safety of drinking water."

Individual responsibility

Beebe's friend, John Capwell, grew up east of Towanda along State Route 6 on property that had been in his family since the late 1800s. The property's 20-foot-deep, hand-dug well was still being used by his mother until the 1980s when contamination issues forced its abandonment. That caused him to become even more aware of water quality issues as they relate to private water systems, but his long-held interest in water issues goes upstream from the final water source because, ultimately,

water quality is affected by land use.

"I live in the Buffalo Creek Watershed," Capwell explains. "We live about two miles from the main stem of the creek, but we have one of the feeder areas that starts on our property that ultimately feeds into the creek. We comply with all of the suggestions to keep contaminants out of it. Every three years, we have our septic system pumped. As far as farming practices, our land is used for crops and we have a restriction on how close any of the fertilizers can get to the water area. We have quite a buffer zone around the



JIM CLARK, PENN STATE EXTENSION

TESTING SUGGESTED: Penn State Agricultural Analytical Services Lab water test kits are available for a fee to well and spring owners through any Penn State Extension county office or by calling the lab at 814-863-0841.

water supply, and we have given up tillable land in order to maintain that buffer zone. We also keep the buffer zone planted in native species so that we slow down the movement of water."

Although some would see that buffer as an economic loss, Capwell sees it as an investment in future generations and their opportunity to have a safer water supply. He also sees it as a way to save the soil from erosion and to benefit fish and other wildlife. And it's not even necessary to have an economic loss, he says, as he points out that trees and shrubs planted in buffer zones could be berry bushes and/or nut trees that could financially benefit a landowner.

After working in medical laboratories and starting a business in specialty outdoors (backpacking, canoeing, climbing, etc.), Capwell spent 20-some years testing and doing data analysis for the Colorado School of Mines on fresh water streams out west, including the Green River. Capwell, who has degrees in chemistry and cell molecular biology, taught for another 15 years before retiring, but his interest in water continues.

"Having safe water is critical," he says. "It's easy to think people should test water, but you are asking people to spend their own money. It's not just bacteria you should be testing for, but if you start testing for other things, it begins to get a little more expensive. Really, people should test for bacteria every year and other things every three years. I wish I had a magic answer for how to get more people to test their private water supplies. Everyone should think about the people in their households besides themselves; spend some money to protect the health of your family. I hear constantly, 'Well, it's not hurting me.' My answer is, 'Well, you don't know how it is impacting your health or that of your family.'"

Answers can be found for those seeking to ensure safer private water sources, but in Pennsylvania, it remains the responsibility of the owners of those private water sources to educate themselves and make changes to improve the quality of water they and their family drink. 🌞

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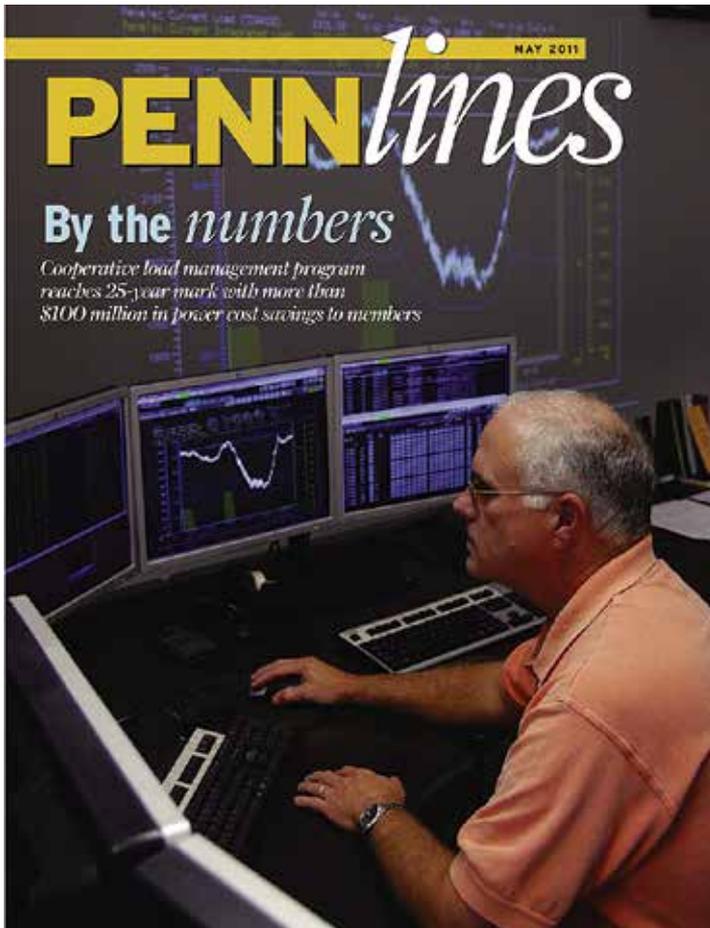
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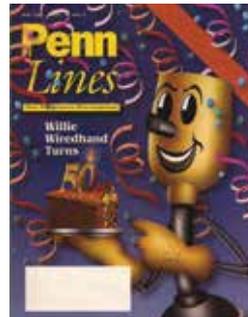
In 2011, Pennsylvania and New Jersey electric cooperatives celebrated 25 years of working with their wholesale power supplier, Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny), to save money through the establishment of the Coordinated Load Management System (CLMS). Ten years ago, the program had saved \$100 million. Today, that number is \$155 million.

As a cost-saving measure, CLMS works by shifting electricity use of residential water heaters and other equipment from times of peak demand — when electricity prices are generally higher — to off-peak hours. The result is that Allegheny’s power costs are lower, which means it is able to reduce power costs to local cooperatives, which in turn reduces the cost to cooperative members, thereby benefitting every member of every electric cooperative in the two states.

Formed by the Pennsylvania and New Jersey electric cooperatives as their generation supplier, Allegheny’s mission is to provide a reliable source of power at an affordable rate. Latching onto the idea that the cheapest kilowatt-hour is the one never generated, Allegheny developed this cost-effective, energy efficiency and conservation initiative long before such concepts became household words.

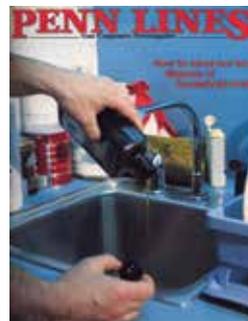
All of the 14 electric cooperatives in the two states participate in the load control program.

2011



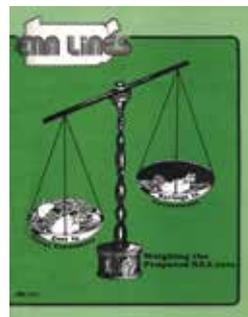
2001

“Willie Wiredhand” celebrates his 50th anniversary this year as the mascot and “spokescharacter” of America’s rural electric cooperatives.



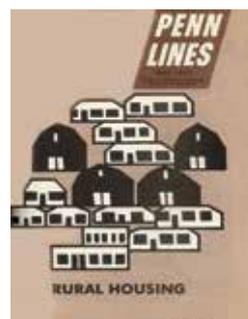
1991

The improper use and disposal of household chemicals may pose a greater threat to our environment than occasional massive toxic spills.



1981

The Rural Electrification Administration is in a fight for its life with Washington, D.C., as many federal programs are on the chopping block.



1971

People planning to relocate to a rural area should consider size of lot, topography, soil conditions, sewage disposal options and water sources.

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Tri-County REC

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Mansfield, PA 16933

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For emergencies call:

1-800-343-2559

Secure Pay by phone:

1-888-678-2013

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From the President & CEO



Maintaining a culture of safety

By Kevin Brownlee

“SAFETY” is a universal word that is mentioned often and used loosely. Companies large and small, across all industries, express their commitment to safety.

As someone new to the Tri-County organization, it didn't take long for me to realize that your electric cooperative doesn't just talk about its commitment to safety; it operates in a culture of safety by making the safety of its employees and the community its top priority.

At its essence, Tri-County's mission is to provide safe, affordable and reliable electricity to its members. At the end of the day, we strive to deliver a steady flow of power to our members, but equally important, we want to return our workers home safely to their loved ones. To do this requires ongoing focus, dedication and vigilance.

Tri-County has a safety team that focuses on keeping employees and the community safe around electricity. We also have the benefit of a full-time safety professional who guides us in establishing and following protocols based on leading national safety practices for the utility industry.

Our safety team has regular meetings in which they discuss upcoming projects from a safety perspective. They monitor and track near-misses of accidents in order to understand them, share “lessons learned,” and improve in the future.

We require our lineworkers to wear specialized equipment when working next to or with power lines and to take

part in regular safety training. Our line crews conduct safety tailboards before beginning each job to review work procedures, personal protective equipment requirements, and specific precautions associated with the project at hand.

As importantly, we encourage all of our crews to speak up and hold each other accountable for safety. We also hold our entire organization accountable by voluntarily participating in the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program, a comprehensive national program that utilizes an inspection/certification process with a goal of improving safety performance and culture.

Tri-County's safety efforts extend beyond our employees. We strive to keep our members and our communities safe. That's why the cooperative has a long history of providing safety talks and electrical safety demonstrations free of charge at community events and to schools, youth groups, first responders and other organizations. And that's why we're using this space in *Penn Lines* to focus on electrical safety in May, National Electrical Safety Month.

There is much you can do to keep yourself and your community safe around electricity. Report downed power lines. Teach your children about the dangers of electricity. Don't attempt electrical DIY projects or overload your outlets. Contact Tri-County or visit our website, tri-countyrec.com, for additional electrical safety tips.

Be mindful when it comes to electrical safety. Pause and take the extra time to plug into safety. 

Co-op to purchase Penelec's Waverly assets

Tri-County plans expansion into New York state

By Jeff Fetzer

TRI-COUNTY Rural Electric Cooperative plans to expand its service territory into New York state as a result of an asset purchase agreement the cooperative reached with First Energy/Penelec in February.

Under terms of the agreement, Tri-County will purchase the electric distribution assets of Penelec's Waverly, N.Y., service territory, which serves nearly 4,000 customers in the Village of Waverly and Town of Barton in the Southern Tier of New York.

"We believe this addition will be a great fit for our cooperative and its members, while also providing Penelec customers in the Waverly area with a local presence and Tri-County's exceptional service," said Tri-County President & CEO Kevin Brownlee. "From the co-op's perspective, the acquisition will allow us to expand our footprint in New York state. Doing so will create economies of scale for the cooperative and will allow us to spread costs across a larger membership."

Under terms of the purchase agreement, Tri-County proposes to acquire all of the New York-located distribution assets of Penelec. These assets comprise 179 miles of electric line and two substations that provide electric service to about 3,800 customers in Tioga County, New York.

The purchase is contingent upon authorization from the New York State Public Service Commission. Penelec and Tri-County submitted the required regulatory filings in April, and the regulatory review process is anticipated to take at least 12 to 18 months to complete.

Tri-County's existing service area is adjacent to the southern portion of Penelec's Waverly territory, and the cooperative has been providing power to about 60 consumer-members in New York's Allegany, Steuben and Chemung counties since the 1940s.

Tri-County intends to add Penelec's Waverly customers to its cooperative



membership upon completion of the acquisition, according to Brownlee.

He said the cooperative also anticipates creating a manned operations district in the Sayre, Pa., area to support maintenance and service restoration for the northeastern portion of Tri-County's Pennsylvania and New York territory.

"This purchase will allow Tri-County to enhance reliability and improve response time for our existing co-op

members in the northeastern corner of our service region in Bradford County through the creation of a new operations district in the Sayre area," Brownlee said. "Having a line crew stationed locally would provide those same benefits to consumers just across the Pennsylvania-New York border in the Waverly and Barton areas."

The proposed purchase involves distribution assets only, and no Penelec employees will be transferred. ☀

Tri-Co broadband enables seasonal members to go remote, stay connected

By Jeff Fetzer

GO REMOTE. STAY CONNECTED.

Those two concepts, which have historically been at odds for owners of seasonal cabins and second homes in rural North-central Pennsylvania, are being bridged thanks to Tri-County's efforts to bring high-speed internet service to the region through the co-op's broadband subsidiary, Tri-Co Connections.

For many of the cooperative's seasonal members, summer stays and weekend retreats in the PA Wilds and Endless Mountains region have long meant foregoing the ability to connect to the internet from their homes away from home.

That is beginning to change with the buildout of Tri-Co Connections' fiber broadband network in Potter County in full swing.

"The main thing we are trying to promote is when you go remote, you can stay connected," says Bill Gerski, senior vice president of business development for Tri-Co Connections. "So if you have a second home or a cabin and are visiting our beautiful area, you can stay connected during your visit."

Gerski says access to Tri-Co's fiber-optic network brings a bevy of benefits to seasonal members, including: online shopping; the ability to search the internet for local businesses and operating hours, entertainment options, hiking trails, and nearby events; online learning; telemedicine; business accessibility; smart home and security capabilities that allow visitors to monitor their seasonal camps and homes — and even their trail cameras — remotely; entertainment options, including live-streaming television programming and movies, and online gaming; and enhanced phone service options.

"With broadband access readily available, people with second homes and camps will stay longer and visit more often," Gerski predicts. "That



means they will be shopping at our local hardware stores and retail shops, eating in our local restaurants and putting money into the community. Because of broadband, people are going remote and staying connected, and it's going to help with the economic culture of the entire area."

Tri-County seasonal member Brad Smith of Brogue, Pa., says the availability of high-speed internet service from Tri-Co Connections was one of the factors that prompted him to purchase a log home on an 85-acre property in the Coudersport area in September 2020.

Smith, who has been visiting properties he has owned in Potter County for more than 40 years, confirms that he and his wife are spending more time in God's Country since hooking up to Tri-Co Connections broadband service in January.

"We're self-employed, so every free minute we get, we go to the mountains," he says. "Without high-speed internet, we wouldn't be coming up as much. That's a fact. It provides us with a service that we need."

Smith owns a real estate business in York County, so staying connected provides the ability to receive and respond to email and work while away from home.

"We live in a rural area of York County, and we cannot get the high-speed internet service at home that we have up there," Smith says. "We were tickled to death when we found out Tri-County would provide that to us up in Coudersport."

Smith says he and his wife visit their Potter County property home at least monthly, and his two daughters and one grandson are also making more frequent visits to family's second home largely because of the availability of internet service.

"We are absolutely satisfied 100% with the Tri-Co internet service," he says. "It just gives you a real nice feeling to be able to go there and know you can watch Netflix or get on your iPad. The internet brings home along."

Carol Hoke, immediate past president of the Northcentral Penn Real Estate Board, says for many out-of-area residents looking to buy a home or property in Potter and Tioga counties, lack of high-speed internet can be a deal breaker.

Hoke says since the COVID-19 pandemic began, properties in Northern Tier have selling at record pace as people look to escape urban areas to live, work and recreate in more rural settings.

(continues on page 12d)

Tri-Co broadband

(continued from page 12c)

“People want to get out of the city, and if high-speed internet is available, they can work from home,” she says. “Some people won’t come without broadband.”

For some seasonal co-op members, internet access can be a mixed blessing.

Jim Kent, who lives near Buffalo, N.Y., and owns a seasonal property in the Shinglehouse area, says, half-joking, that not all of his family members were thrilled that he had signed up for Tri-Co Connections service at his property, which was originally purchased by his grandfather in 1919 as a farm.

“Some of them wanted to preserve the remoteness,” he says, “and some of them don’t want work to be able to get in touch with them when they are at the farm.”

For Kent, a retired computer programmer, the decision to subscribe to the internet service was born out of practicality. He explains he is paying about the same amount for his internet service that he had been paying for a seldom-used landline telephone.

“Now I have phone service through magicJack (an internet-based phone service),” he says, “and I can get just about every Buffalo television channel

while I am there through the Spectrum app, so I can watch the local news.”

Although the farm is used primarily as a hunting destination, Kent says he visits the property several times a month, year-round, and is especially looking forward to having internet access during the winter months.

“When I think I will be using it most is when the days are short and it’s too cold to work outside,” he says. “That’s when the internet will really come in handy. I can read my emails, look at Facebook and Craigslist and watch how-to videos on YouTube.”

Kent says his wife has been especially happy to have internet service at the property.

“She actually took a picture of me at the farm and sent it to my kids — advertising to the kids that we have internet there now,” he says. “We just got hooked up two weeks ago. The installers were great. The customer service side was great. We’re really happy with the service.”

Members interested in registering for internet service or seeking more information about seasonal plans and pricing can call 1-833-822-2010 or visit the Tri-Co Connections website at tricoconnections.com.

The broadband company has connected more than 800 co-op members

in Potter County to its fiber-optic internet service since its first customer came online last April. High-speed broadband service is currently available to Tri-County members in the Coudersport, Oswayo, Shinglehouse, Austin and Costello areas and will be available in the Ulysses, Harrison Valley and Gold areas in the next six to eight months.

Tri-Co Connections expects to make broadband service available to all Tri-County members across the co-op’s 5,000-square-mile service territory by 2025. 📶

Co-op offers scholarship to MU students

Applications are being accepted for a \$1,000 scholarship that is available for the 2021-22 academic year to a Mansfield University student who is a Tri-County member or dependent.

To be eligible for consideration, students must:

- ▶ be enrolled full time at Mansfield University
- ▶ demonstrate financial need
- ▶ be a member or dependent of a member of Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative
- ▶ demonstrate the highest traits of leadership, citizenship and character.

Applications may be obtained by contacting Bryan Berguson, Tri-County director of member services, at 1-800-343-2559. Students can also apply online by visiting our homepage, tri-countyrec.com, and clicking on Mansfield University Scholarship under the “Member Services” drop-down menu at the top of the screen.

Tri-County endowed the scholarship fund at Mansfield University in 2000, with a goal of providing financial assistance to any member or dependent of a member pursuing a degree at the university.

A member of the State System of Higher Education, Mansfield University attracts many students from throughout the cooperative’s service territory.

SmartHub: Manage your account from anywhere

SmartHub, Tri-County’s online bill payment and account management program, lets you manage all aspects of your account online or with your mobile device.

WITH SMARTHUB, YOU CAN:

- ▶ View bills online
- ▶ View billing history
- ▶ Change account information
- ▶ Receive billing notifications
- ▶ Pay your bill online using your checking account, credit or debit card
- ▶ Receive a paperless bill
- ▶ Access your account info on your smartphone or tablet
- ▶ Report power outages
- ▶ Monitor your electric use with average daily consumption graphs

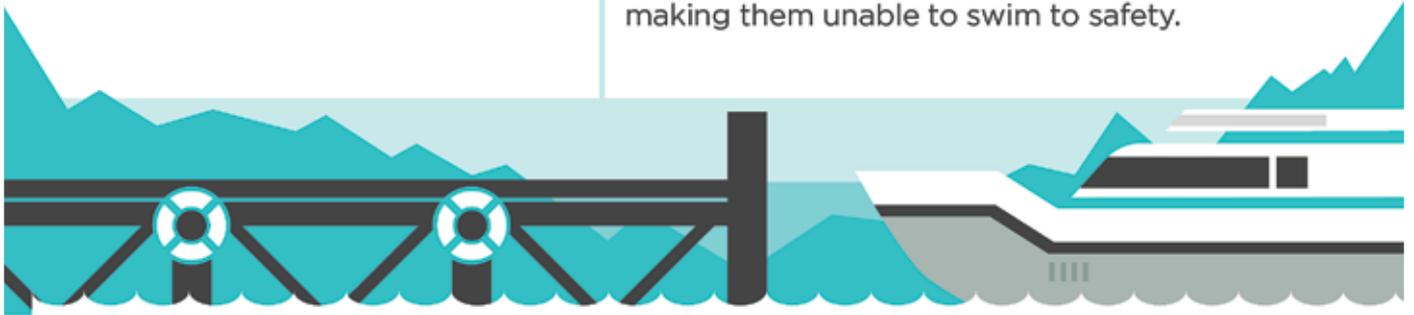


Signing up for SmartHub is easy. Visit our website, tri-countyrec.com, click on the SmartHub icon and follow the registration instructions. The SmartHub mobile app is available for download through your app store.

All Tri-County offices will be closed on Monday, May 31, in observance of Memorial Day.

HOW TO PREVENT ELECTRIC SHOCK DROWNING

Each year, 3,800 people die from drowning. Electric shock drowning occurs when an electric current escapes boats, docks and lights near marinas, shocking nearby swimmers. There are no visible signs of current seeping into water, which makes this a hidden danger. The electric shock paralyzes swimmers, making them unable to swim to safety.



ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR:

Swimmers

- **Never swim near a boat or launching ramp.** Residual current could flow into the water from the boat or the marina's wiring, potentially putting anyone in the water at risk of electric shock.
- If you feel any tingling sensations while in the water, **tell someone and swim back** in the direction from which you came. Immediately report it to the dock or marina owner.

Boat Owners

- **Ensure your boat is properly maintained and consider having it inspected annually.** GFCIs and ELCIs should be tested monthly. Conduct leakage testing to determine if electrical current is escaping the vessel.
- **Use portable GFCIs or shore power cords** (including "Y" adapters) that are "UL- Marine Listed" when using electricity near water.
- Regularly have your boat's electrical system inspected by a certified marine electrician. **Ensure it meets your local and state NEC, NFPA and ABYC safety codes.**

IF YOU SEE ELECTRIC SHOCK DROWNING TAKING PLACE:



TURN POWER OFF



THROW A LIFE RING



CALL 911

DO NOT enter the water. You could become a victim, too.

Three ways to save energy outdoors

By Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen

Dear Pat and Brad: During summertime, the deck becomes our kitchen, and my wife and I spend most of our free time in the backyard. We've invested a lot of time and effort making the interior of our home more energy efficient, but we're wondering if there are ways we can save energy outdoors as well. — *Josh*

Dear Josh: The most common way to save energy during summer months is lowering your cooling costs indoors. Since you and your wife are spending a lot of time outdoors, you can certainly save energy and money by reducing your air conditioning use inside. Setting the thermostat just a few degrees higher can make quite a difference. But to answer your main question, yes — there are ways to save energy outdoors. Here are three:

1. Pumps and maintenance

Many of us have one or more pumps that service our yard or reside on our property. Pumps can supply water for a swimming pool, your lawn and garden, or your septic system or well. It's easy to let maintenance slip, which cuts the pump's efficiency and shortens its life.

Maintaining pumps involves cleaning the filters or checking oil and belts. If you have multiple pumps and need to hire a professional for assistance, try to do all the maintenance at once to reduce the overall cost. You may also want to consider replacing older pumps with energy-efficient Energy Star®-rated ones before they break down. While you're at it, check for leaks in the water lines, which make your pumps work harder and longer.

2. Outdoor lighting

If you have security lighting, there's a good chance you can save a little



energy. Some security lights can be 500 to 1000 watts. That's the equivalent of 40 to 80 indoor LED bulbs — quite a lot of energy! Adding timers, motion sensors and light sensors can reduce your bulb energy use.

Switching to LEDs is another great strategy. Solar lights are also a good way to light walkways, a water feature or your deck — without having to buy any electricity at all.

3. Grilling

Using your oven can raise your kitchen's temperature up to 10 degrees, increasing the need for running your air conditioner, so grilling outdoors is a great way to save energy. If you like to barbecue or grill most of your meals, you may want to consider the fuel you use. If natural gas is available, it's usually much less expensive than propane. Natural gas is also convenient because you don't have to refill any tanks like you would with propane. On the downside, if you don't already have gas lines running to your

patio or deck, the cost of installing them can be prohibitive.

Other fuel types like charcoal briquettes or wood take more preparation and can be fussy to work with, and charcoal grills emit three times as much carbon as gas grills.

Whichever fuel type you choose for your grill, you can save energy by barbecuing (keeping the lid closed during cooking) rather than grilling (cooking with the lid off at higher heat).

Hopefully these ideas will help you enjoy your outdoor living space this summer — and help you save energy! ☀️

Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency write on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.

500 cellos, my zarf and family game night

By Mitchell Kyd

“News from the Path Valley Hotel”

If you can resist doomscrolling and get beyond the usual headlines of this past, crazy year, you’ll be amazed at what you see. The things that have forced us apart have been bringing us together in grand and unexpected ways.

For example, my friend Jane plays and teaches cello. She transitioned to Zoom for lessons, but when live concerts evaporated, so did her joy of being part of something bigger.

Enter Texas cellist and teacher Tony Rogers. Thanks to his talent, Jane has performed in multiple, worldwide performances during lockdown, all without leaving her rural Pennsylvania home. As many as 533 cello players from 40 countries have been submitting videos of their assigned parts to Rogers who artfully syncs and melds all into virtual, global masterworks — 13 productions to date.

Meanwhile, the rest of us can relax in the best seats in the house without changing our jammies and enjoy these concerts without charge. Search YouTube for “Covid Cello Project” to hear and see my current favorite, Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah.”

I’m inclined to think the fresh connections we’re making globally aren’t nearly as meaningful as the ones we’re refreshing across the kitchen table. With a break from commuting, no sports practices or competitions, no social events or volunteer commitments, families have had time to sit down together for a meal again or maybe a family game night.

It’s been a time for rediscovering the little things we love about the people we call family. Like the adorable way



they brush their hair back as a tell when they’re bluffing a good hand in poker. Or the way their lips tremble as they struggle to suppress a smirk before playing their last tile in Scrabble.

It’s an odd thing for a writer and reader to confess she’s never played that word game, but that is my shame. With zero experience, I’ve always been free to envision myself as a Scrabbler extraordinaire queuing up 10-dollar words like *quintessential* or *obsequious*. That dream was flattened a few weeks ago in my first attempt as I watched the board fill up during Sunday game night.

What a fiendish creation! I was outwitted from the start by the real Scrabble masters and their massive vocabularies of minuscule words. Did you know *zax*, *zex*, *zin*, *zuz*, *pyx* and *arf* are all valid words in the official Scrabble dictionary? Yeah. Me, neither.

Xystus is valid, too, as in a covered area where athletes trained in ancient Greece; award 16 points. Now there’s a word to work into casual conversation. *Yep, the game got rained out so the kids are all having ice cream down by the xystus.*

When was the last time you used the word *xylyl* in a sentence? Possibly chemistry class. It’s a noun for *univalent radical*, a term I didn’t understand until after I decoded it thrice. (Oooh! There’s 11 points!) If you ever see that word again, it will probably be on the Scrabble board earning 19 points.

What’s worse than being undone by three-letter words beginning with “z” is that there’s math involved in Scrabble. You must add up all those tiles on the fly and then apply point multipliers and bonus points, presumably in your head as you play. Tracking letters *and* numbers? That’s not math; that’s algebra. That’s the stuff of my ninth-grade nightmares, so thank you, no. I am, however, great at prodding, heckling and laughing with everyone else until the tears run, so I always win at Scrabble now, even if I’m only watching.

Time spent together for Sunday dinner and game night may be only one thing that’s knitting our family together, but it’s creating shared memories and tightening our connections when so much else is unravelling. Family game night has also taught me this: I can play my lonely “z” next to *arf* and hoist my ornamental, metal, cup-shaped holder for hot coffee into the air in triumph, aka my 16-point *zarf*. ☀



YVONNE BUTTS-MITCHELL writes and blogs (deadmousediaries.com) under the pen name Mitchell Kyd. The “News from the Path Valley Hotel” series was inspired by her encounters with contractors, critters and assorted creepy crawlies while rehabbing her family cabin after its 17-year stint as a giant closet.



DYNAMIC DUET: Country musicians John Topper Jr., member of Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative, and Connie Claycomb (stage name, Connie Rose) perform at the Crossroads Bible Church in Bedford during the cooperative's 2016 annual meeting.

Making music

Local musicians at heart of community gatherings

Music: it's one of the universal cultural traits of all human societies, a deeply personal and deeply communal experience, somehow often occurring simultaneously. And while not every local musician will one day hear their voice on the radio, they continue to be a staple in community gatherings, evoking positive emotions in their audiences.

John Topper Jr., a Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) member who refers to himself as a Christian songwriter with a cowboy kick, has been trying to make people smile most of his life. It's how he figured out how he had a knack for music.

"I always liked to entertain people," says Topper, a native of Hyndman. "Not a class clown, but I liked to imitate people. Didn't take me long to realize I could sing. Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis — I could imitate those guys and people enjoyed it. I could entertain a crowd."

Topper — who points to influences like Alan Jackson, George Strait,

By Michael T. Crawford
Associate Editor

Johnny Cash, Brad Paisley and Marty Stewart, to name a few — started out playing drums in various rock 'n' roll bands before gravitating more toward country bands. He only picked up the guitar after he found himself trying to sing and drum at the same time.

"One night the lead singer of this band I was playing with got sick, and he swung around a boom mic and I was singing from the drums," he recalls. "I felt like it was hard to drum and sing at the same time, so I learned to play enough guitar to sing and get by."

Topper went on to front a band with a friend, referring to themselves as "John Topper and the New Edition (JTNE)" — a nod to "Kenny Rogers and the First Edition." Outside of JTNE performances, Topper has written and performed country songs for the past 20 years, guided by singer and songwriter Harlan Howard's description of country music as "three chords and the truth."

Friendly crowd

But often when people see him on stage, he says, he's not John Topper, country singer — he's Mr. Topper or Coach Topper. Having spent all but one year of his nearly-five-decades teaching career within Bedford County, Topper's audiences have rarely been strangers to him.

"It's good — it's been fun and a blessing," says Topper, who coached football and wrestling at Bedford Senior High School for 20 years. "Folks knew me from different venues — as a teacher and a coach."

Nowadays, Topper performs mostly in churches or retirement villages, but he will still put on performances for special occasions — like the Bedford REC Annual Meeting. Topper has performed at the cooperative's annual meeting twice — by himself in 2019, and also alongside fellow country singer Connie Claycomb — perhaps better known by her stage name, Connie Rose.

Cooperative annual meetings are more than just business reports and

casting ballots. They're community events — special occasions for cooperative members to engage not just with their cooperative but with each other. At Huntingdon-based Valley REC, providing musical entertainment at these gatherings dates back to some of the cooperative's earliest member events, according to Doug Roles, Valley REC's vice president of member services.

"The entertainment was a centerpiece of the event, in addition to the reports by board officers and demonstrations of new electrical appliances," Roles says. "Especially popular through the years were gospel quartets or cowboy and western groups. A quick search of Valley's newsletter archive turns up names like The Sunshine Boys or Doc Williams and his Border Riders."

In 2018, bluegrass musicians of the Werner Family Band took the stage at the cooperative's annual meeting after a chance encounter performing at a family reunion in Belleville.

"My cousin, Carol, is married to Jim Stauffer (Valley REC board chairman)," explains Henry Werner, the band's manager and sound operator. "They heard us play at a family reunion, and Jim said, 'Hey, would you guys consider coming up and playing for the members meeting?'"



BLUEGRASS ENTERTAINMENT: The Werner Family Band performs at the Huntingdon Area High School during the Valley Rural Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting in 2018. Pictured are, from left: Silas Werner, Gideon Werner, Henry Werner, Stephen Werner and Mark Werner.

PHOTO BY RUTH TOPPER



COUNTRY COLLABORATION: Country musicians John Topper Jr., member of Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative, and Connie Claycomb (stage name, Connie Rose) perform at the Old Timers Celebration held at Wills Mountain Grove.

Bluegrass, developed during the 1940s in the Appalachian region — which includes 52 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties — draws from Irish, Scottish and English musical styles, according to the Bluegrass Heritage Foundation. The genre's name stems from the popular late-1930s' group, "Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys," a reference to Monroe's native state

of Kentucky — the Bluegrass State.

"Bluegrass is one of those genres that's very accessible," Werner says. "You see events where people just get together in the parking lot and just play the music together in small groups. ... There's different instruments, so each child can master their own instruments and have their own style but blend together well."

Word of mouth

Taking up the bass to play alongside his

boys — Mark, Gideon, Stephen and Silas — the Werner Family Band began performing at local festivals — such as the Remington Ride Bluegrass Festival — in 2015.

"There were several people there from our area of Lancaster County that heard us and said, 'Hey, we're doing a fundraiser' or 'We have a church, will you come and play?'" Werner recalls. "And that's how things got started and took off — word of mouth and people seeing us play and inviting us to come and play for their events."

The Werner Family Band has slowly transitioned to a "friends and family" band and grown to six members: Gideon Werner on vocals and banjo; Silas Werner on the mandolin; Brett Beiler on vocals and guitar; Brenton Wenger on guitar and banjo; Brandon Fox on bass; and Stephen Werner on vocals and fiddle. Beiler, a friend of the Werner boys, replaced Mark Werner in 2017 after Mark lost interest in performing.

"My boys call it Werner Half & Half," jokes Werner, who stepped aside as bassist after needing rotator cuff surgery. "We've been talking about the next step to becoming less of a family band and moving into their own group. We're still the Werner Family Band this year, but — maybe in 2022 — they're thinking of performing and recording as Ironwood Drive."

It's something Werner always suspected would happen, he says.

"Once the kids get older and get into other things, it becomes more difficult to get everybody together as a family group," Werner says. "I think we always knew there was going to be a window of opportunity to play as a family group. I'm pleased that the boys want to continue with friends. All of them enjoy bluegrass music, so I think it makes sense for them to go on their own."

He adds, "It's something that allowed us to enjoy ourselves but also give out joy to others that hear the music. For me, and I believe for the boys too, this has been a very rewarding part of playing." 🌞

Mother's Day reflections

By Anne M. Kirchner

The most rewarding job I have ever held is the one titled “Mother,” aka Mommy, Mama or Mom. My own mother laid a foundation by teaching me the importance of responsibility, integrity and determination. I also learned the importance of quality conversation. Sharing my thoughts and feelings about all matters with my children resulted in a lifelong trust. My children learned what was important to me and why. In turn, they chose to do the same with me.

Those candid moments often occurred in the kitchen. Now young adults, my children return home and continue to share openly about their goals, beliefs, and failures. There’s no better feeling than prepping a meal while my child sits at the kitchen counter sharing details about his or her life. The moment is elevated when my child joins in the food preparation. Standing side by side, we share ingredients that bring nourishment to our bodies and to our souls.

May you reflect peacefully upon your mother or mother-like figure while enjoying some of my favorite Mother’s Day recipes. Each year, my family celebrates by making my favorite foods — shrimp scampi, grilled asparagus and rhubarb pudding. Shrimp scampi is a classic Italian dish, perfect for a spring brunch. We harvest the asparagus and rhubarb from our garden, launching a new season for food and conversation. And did I mention the rhubarb pudding was created by my own mother when I was a small child? Enjoy!



Trained in public relations, **Anne M. Kirchner** focuses her writing on human connections, travel and culinary arts. She enjoys researching food origins, exploring cooking techniques and creating new recipes.



Shrimp Scampi

- 1 pound linguini pasta
- 5 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound raw shrimp, peeled and deveined
- Kosher salt
- Ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 cup white wine vinegar or white balsamic vinegar
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1/4 cup parsley, chopped

Bring a large pot of water to boil. Add the linguini and cook according to package directions. Drain the pasta and drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Set aside. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté shallots and garlic until the shallots are translucent, about 3 to 4 minutes. Season the shrimp with kosher salt, ground black pepper and Italian seasoning. Add shrimp to the pan and cook until the shrimp turns pink, about 2 to 3 minutes. Add the white wine vinegar and lemon juice. Bring to a simmer. Add the cooked pasta to the skillet and stir until warm. Add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil and chopped parsley. Serve immediately. Makes 4 to 6 servings.



Grilled Asparagus

- 1 pound asparagus
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Preheat grill. Prepare the asparagus by breaking or cutting off any tough bottom ends. Place the asparagus spears in a pan and add the olive oil, lemon juice, honey, garlic and kosher salt. Toss to coat the asparagus well. Place the asparagus spears on the grill so the thickest ends are aimed toward the hottest part of the grill. Grill the asparagus spears for 2 to 4 minutes until lightly charred and fork tender, turning them often so the spears brown evenly. Remove from the grill and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.



Rhubarb Pudding

- 3 cups rhubarb, diced
- 3 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups sugar, divided
- 1 cup flour, divided
- 2 tablespoons butter

Place rhubarb in an 8x8-inch baking dish. In a small bowl, beat eggs, 1 cup sugar and 1/2 cup flour until creamy. Pour mixture over rhubarb. In another bowl, make crumb topping by combining 1/2 cup flour, 1/2 cup sugar and butter. Using pastry blender or two knives, cut butter into dry ingredients. Spread crumb topping over the rhubarb and creamy mixture. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream. Makes 6 servings.

Cutting-edge technologies to save energy at home

By Maria Kanevsky

What's the next best thing to help reduce your energy needs? Many energy-efficient technologies for the home are constantly changing. As homeowners are looking for new ways to save energy, there are many cutting-edge technologies being developed.

Refrigerators are essential for any modern home, and they typically use a good deal of energy to properly cool your food. Reducing the amount of energy your refrigerator uses can help lower your home energy consumption. One emerging technology that can save energy is the magnetic refrigerator.

Most refrigerators use a traditional compressor to cool perishables, but magnetic refrigerators use a magnetic field as an innovative way to cool food. This is possible through a phenomenon called the "magnetocaloric effect," which causes certain materials to cool down when a magnetic field is removed. This creates a more energy-efficient refrigerator, using approximately 30% less energy than traditional refrigerators. Magnetic refrigerators also remove the need for harmful chemicals used in traditional refrigerants.

There are a few magnetic refrigerators that are already commercially available; however, the market is still extremely limited.

Air conditioners use a lot of energy to keep your home cool, particularly during summer months. Choosing the right roofing material can make a huge impact on how much heat your home absorbs. Certain types of roofing can reflect more sunlight, which can help to keep your home cooler, reducing your need for air conditioning.

These "cool roofs" are specifically



MCELROY METAL

COOL METAL ROOF: Cool roofs are lighter in color and can use reflective paint, highly reflective tiles or a reflective sheet covering, like this metal roof.

designed to absorb less heat and reflect more of the sun's rays. Cool roofs are lighter in color and can use reflective paint, highly reflective tiles, or a reflective sheet covering. There are several types of cool roofs commercially available, and choosing the right type is important. Low-sloped roofs are better suited for reflective sheet membranes, while high-sloped roofs work better with reflective shingles and tiles. The overall heat savings you can achieve from roofing depends on home insulation, climate and a few additional factors. If you're considering a new roof for your home, a cool roof may be a great option to reduce energy use.

If you're looking to save energy in the laundry room, a heat pump clothes dryer can help reduce energy use by at least 28% compared to standard dryers. Instead of releasing warm and humid air through a vent outside the home, heat pump clothes dryers work by sending humid air through an evaporator that removes moisture without losing too much heat. Heat pump dryers do not require outside ventilation like

standard dryers, which is a major efficiency benefit. Additionally, since these dryers use lower temperatures, they are gentler on clothes. Several commercial brands sell Energy Star®-certified heat pump dryers, and the cost typically ranges from \$900 to \$1,500.

These emerging technologies are among the newest available to reduce your energy use at home, but because they are new, they will come with higher sticker prices than their conventional counterparts. As with any new technology, prices will become more affordable as these efficiency options become more mainstream.

When considering new technologies, make sure you fully understand the costs and benefits over time to get the best value. ☀️

Maria Kanevsky writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. Electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.

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July 2021	May 17
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Classified Advertisements

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Source: American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency

It's the thought that counts

By John Kasun

Many men are excellent cooks, but for complete disclosure I must say no one ever used my name and the words “good cook” in the same sentence. I am pretty much limited to making grilled cheese sandwiches, heating up a can of baked beans and pouring milk over breakfast cereal.

However, the other morning I awoke early and found myself “cooking” inspired. My wife, Sandy, was motionless under the covers and her dog, Abbey, was curled up in her bed on the floor, snoring. Quietly making my way to the kitchen, I decided to whip up sausage and pancakes as a breakfast surprise. Having seen my wife do it many times, it seemed simple enough.

I put some sausage and a little water in a covered skillet and turned the stove on low. Next came pancake mix, milk, eggs and a medium-sized bowl. Measuring out the pancake mix, adding milk and eggs according to the directions on the box seemed easy enough although my aim was a little off and for some reason I had more ingredients on the counter than in the bowl. I didn't have time to worry about a little mess as I was being creative and looking forward to a delicious breakfast.

The mixture seemed a little thin, so I added some extra pancake mix. I see cooks on TV add extra stuff all the time. However, when I tried to stir everything together, I wound up with a huge ball of dough-looking material with the handle of a spoon sticking out of the middle. It looked like a cross between a cement lollypop and dough-ball normally used for carp bait. I guessed that adding too much extra pancake mix was not such a good idea.



It seemed as if the best thing to do was start over. Setting the bowl and mixture aside, I got a larger clean bowl down from the shelf and followed the directions more carefully the second time.

We had recently remodeled our kitchen and I was starting to understand why my wife had insisted on a large counter working area. I was quickly running out of work space with all the bowls, boxes of mix, egg cartons and milk bottles spread around; things were definitely getting messy. Checking the sausage, I found it barely warm so I turned the heat up to medium-high.

Finally, I was ready to go, and I reached for my wife's power mixer to make the job quicker and easier. My latest pancake mixture seemed to be working well as my bowl was soon filled with a smooth, rich-looking blend, and visions of delicious pancakes floated in my mind's eye. My concentration was suddenly broken by a snap, crackle, pop sound and a burning smell. I turned to find the sausage smoking and hot grease exploding from the skillet in all directions like pork

fireworks. I had forgotten to replace the cover on the skillet.

Suddenly, I heard a gasp and turned to see my wife and Abbey standing in the kitchen doorway.

“Good heavens, what are you doing?” Sandy asked.

I assumed she was simply overcome with joy at my thoughtfulness. In the next second

I learned a valuable cooking lesson: always turn off the mixer before lifting it from the bowl. It looked like Rambo attacked the kitchen with a machine gun firing pancake bullets in all directions. In the time it took me to release the mixer switch, the wall and refrigerator were covered with pancake batter. Aside from the sizzling and now-burnt sausage sputtering hot grease everywhere, all was quiet for about 10 seconds as my wife, with eyes wide open, said, “I am going back to bed. Let me know if you ever get your mess cleaned up.”

Abbey looked up at me, shook her head slowly side to side, turned and followed her “mom” down the hallway. I must admit that things didn't go quite as I planned; however, I am sure my wife was touched by my efforts. I swear I saw tears in her eyes. ☀



A writer with more than 30 years of experience, **John Kasun**, a lifelong Pennsylvanian, looks for the humor in everyday life and then tells a story from that perspective. He is a member of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.

May flowers

It's a beautiful time of year in Pennsylvania, so please share your photos of everything that is happening in your life with the Rural Reflections readers.

Amateur photographers are encouraged to send photos to Penn Lines Photos, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266. Include your name, address, phone number and the name of your electric cooperative. 2021 winners in each of five categories — artistic, landscape, human, animal, and editor's choice — will receive \$75 and runners-up will receive \$25. (Please note — the color on photos printed at home often rubs off before it arrives in our office, so beautiful photos are unusable — professionally printed photos typically arrive in good shape.)

We work ahead, so please send summer photos by mid-May; fall photos by July and winter photos by September (hint: save your spring photos to submit next year). 2021 photos will be returned in early 2022 if you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. 📧



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