

# From the PRESIDENT & CEO: Lessons from the storm



**Robert O. Toombs**  
*President & CEO*

**M**other Nature put your cooperative to the test in the beginning days of the new year.

Judging from the high marks members have given us, I believe we passed that test.

We've received scores of notes and cards, e-mails and telephone calls from members thanking the co-op and its dedicated employees for getting the power back on following the devastating ice and snow storms that hit the area the first week of January. I truly appreciate your kind words and the confidence you place in us.

Prior to the New Year's storm, the co-op had gone many years without any major weather-related outages. Our veteran lineworkers have told me this was the worst storm they had ever faced, in terms of scope and duration of outages,

difficulties and hazards encountered while restoring service.

Our hats go off to co-op line crews and the more than 50 linemen and right-of-way workers from outside companies and utilities who helped us restore power from Jan. 1 through Jan. 10.

For over a week, these crews worked extremely long hours under the most adverse conditions. Ice up to an inch thick coated utility poles, wires and related equipment, making service restoration an arduous task. As they chipped away at the problem, crews were reminded of danger each time a nearby tree or limb, strained by an accumulation of ice and snow, came crashing down. And come down they did — hundreds of them.

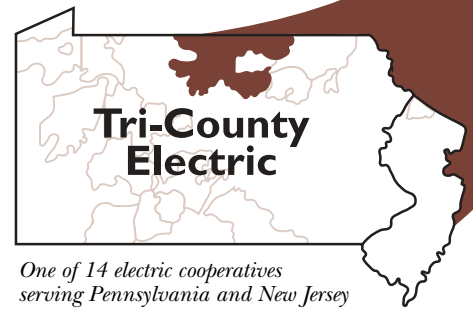
Fortunately, we navigated the storm without any serious injuries, thanks to a little luck and a lot of preparation. One thing that we've learned from this ordeal is the continuous safety training that we provide to our employees pays big dividends.

We've also learned that we need to be as aggressive with our right-of-way maintenance program as we are with our safety education efforts.

To that end, Tri-County's board of directors has opted to increase the budget for right-of-way clearing and maintenance this year by 50 percent. This not only lowers the odds of having a tree or limb come down on one of our workers, but also will go a long way toward reducing the size and duration of future outages.

The goal of vegetation management work is to prevent trees growing within co-op rights-of-way from coming into contact with electric lines. This is achieved in two primary ways: manually — by cutting or mowing — and chemically, which involves spraying brush and saplings.

Right-of-way maintenance is much



*One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey*

more expensive and difficult to achieve today than it once was, primarily due to environmental safeguards and landowner reluctance to clear brush and trees. From the co-op's perspective, it's a tedious process in which we make very few allies, but it's one of those necessary evils.

Tri-County maintains over 3,000 miles of electric lines. Those lines are primarily located along back roads, across state forest and in some of the most remote locations in Pennsylvania. Remember, we don't serve the towns and populated areas of the counties in which we operate.

Because of the nature of our service territory — mountainous, remote and heavily forested — right-of-way maintenance is absolutely critical if we are to improve our service reliability. Keep in mind that the vast majority of New Year's outages that lasted longer than 24 hours were caused by trees and limbs that splintered and fell onto electric lines.

Had we been more vigorous with our right-of-way efforts in the past, we would have had fewer members lose electricity in this storm, and it would have taken less time to restore power.

Please remember that the next time the co-op seeks your cooperation with its vegetation management program. We ask those members who have been reluctant to allow the co-op to clear trees and brush along rights-of-way in the past to please reconsider. Your neighbors down the line and our employees will truly appreciate your consideration.

## Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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**For Emergencies call**  
1-800-343-2559

## Robert O. Toombs *President & CEO*

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Bobbi Jo Kilmer <i>Executive Assistant</i>	Michael W. VanBergen <i>Sr. Director, Electric Operations</i>
Barbara Johnson <i>Director, Financial Services</i>	Bert Cunningham <i>Director, Human Resources</i>
Ralph Park <i>Sr. Director, Engineering Services</i>	Alex F. Hartley <i>Director, Member Services</i>

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## Office Hours

7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Mon.-Fri.)

MARCH 2003 12a



# Tri-County tackles worst storm in nearly 40 years

by Jeff Fetzer

**A** New Year's Day ice storm and a nor'easter two days later teamed up to create the most extensive and persistent outages and the most treacherous working conditions experienced in Tri-County's service territory in recent memory.

Problems began during the early afternoon of New Year's Day, when rain turned to freezing rain, causing ice to accumulate on trees and electric lines all across the Northern Tier.

At about 2 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 1, the co-op's call center in Wellsboro began receiving the first reports of outages from Tri-County members in western Potter County.

By nightfall, outage reports were streaming into the call center from throughout the co-op's service territory, and line workers were called away from holiday gatherings to battle the elements in what would turn into a marathon power restoration effort.

Initial reports from the field were not encouraging. Trees and limbs coated with up to an inch of ice were splintering and crashing onto electric lines throughout the higher elevations.

When daylight broke on Jan. 2, the co-op knew it was in for a pitched battle with Mother Nature. Five of the

*Roger Rishel, a lineman for Citizens' Electric Co. of Lewisburg, works to restore service to a home on Armenia Mountain. He was one of more than 50 outside workers called in to assist Tri-County with power restoration efforts after the New Year's storm.*

co-op's 22 substations had been knocked out of service. In all, about 7,700 members — nearly half the consumers served by the co-op — were without electricity. And weather forecasters were calling for a major snowstorm the following day.

Tri-County, assisted by the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, quickly enlisted an army of contract construction and right-of-way crews and line workers from other Pennsylvania electric utilities to bolster the co-op's restoration efforts.

At daybreak Friday, Jan. 3, the co-op had made considerable progress, reducing outage numbers by about half of what had been



reported at the height of the storm. The gains were short-lived though, as the nor'easter arrived on schedule, dumping more than a foot of snow on trees and electric lines still encrusted in an armor of ice.

## Around-the-clock effort

Crews, working 16-hour shifts in subfreezing temperatures, continued their round-the-clock restoration efforts through the weekend. By nightfall on Sunday, the co-op had pared its outage numbers down to 1,500. But with trees continuing to fall, often onto lines that had been previously repaired, it would take until Friday, Jan. 10, to finally conquer the devastation leveled by the New Year's storms.

"This was without a doubt the most frustrating outage we've had to handle since I've been with the co-op," noted Mike VanBergen, Tri-County's senior director of operations and a co-op

*We would like to thank everyone who worked so hard and long under such ugly conditions to get the power back. We're aware that many worked long hours in extreme cold on our behalf. We also appreciate the courteous manner all of our questions were answered both in the office and over the phone.*

Sincerely,  
Marilyn and Vernon Lapps  
Millerton, Pa.

**Right-of-way maintenance is sometimes impaired by landowners' desires to spare their trees. Unfortunately, power lines and trees make poor companions when heavy ice and snow come into play.**



**Under these fallen red pines lies an electric line. Dozens of pines on this Armenia Mountain property fell across the co-op's right-of-way, taking down lines and making repair work a tedious process.**



employee since 1974. "Every time we'd get a circuit back in service, more trees would come down and we'd end up with another section of line on the ground. We were losing lines to falling trees as fast as we could put them back up."

Trees could be seen and heard crashing to the ground at regular intervals throughout the higher elevations, posing serious safety concerns for workers. In fact, one crew working at night on Armenia Mountain was ordered to vacate a section of line because trees were toppling at an alarming rate.

Despite icy poles, frigid conditions and trees crashing around them, no serious injuries were reported by any of the nearly 90 workers the co-op had in the field repairing lines and clearing rights-of-way.

While outages were widespread throughout Potter, Tioga, western Bradford and northern Lycoming counties, the higher elevations were hardest hit. The most persistent problems occurred in the areas of Bentley Creek, Ayers Corners, Milan, Columbia Crossroads and Armenia Mountain in Bradford County; Jackson Center, Sullivan Township and Morris in Tioga County; Cherry Springs, Germania, Austin and Coneville in Potter County; and Black Forest and Cammal in Lycoming County.

**Worst storm in nearly 40 years**

"This was the worst storm I've worked here at Tri-County," commented lineman Randy Smith, a 14-year veteran with the co-op. "Some of our retired

linemen say it was the worst they've seen since the ice storm of 1964."

Smith reported line workers were hampered in their restoration efforts by not only the heavy buildup of ice and snow on poles, lines and equipment, but also remote roads and rights-of-way that remained impassible for days.

The journeyman lineman, who works out of the co-op's Mainesburg district, reported that many co-op members went out of their way to assist the crews. He noted that one member volunteered the use of his snowmobile so workers could locate damaged sections of line in an area otherwise accessible only by foot.

"The members were just terrific," Smith praised. "They offered us food, use of their equipment and were very understanding of the situation we were facing. In the 10 days we were working *(continues on page 12d)*



**The co-op lost more than two dozen poles, including this one in the Black Forest area of Lycoming County, during the New Year's storm.**

# New Year's Storm Summary

- ❄️ Rain turns to freezing rain on New Year's Day, glazing power lines, trees and roadways with a coating of ice up to an inch thick.
- ❄️ Nor'easter on Friday, Jan. 3, dumps a foot to 18 inches of snow on higher elevations.
- ❄️ More than 7,700 members without power at height of outage.
- ❄️ Over 50 outside line construction and right-of-way crews assist in power restoration effort.
- ❄️ Storm costs expected to exceed \$1 million.
- ❄️ Reserve account being established to minimize economic impact of major outages in the future.
- ❄️ An additional \$250,000 added to co-op's right-of-way budget for 2003.
- ❄️ Basic charge for seasonal members to increase by \$2.25.
- ❄️ Distribution charge for residential, commercial and industrial members to increase by approximately 5.5 percent (one-half cent per kilowatt-hour).
- ❄️ C&T Call Center handles over 13,000 calls Jan. 1-8. On peak day, Jan. 4, call center operators answer 3,290 calls.
- ❄️ Some members without power for a week.
- ❄️ No injuries reported among repair crews.



# Co-op seeks director candidates

Hartley, Tri-County's director of member services at 570/662-2175 or 800/343-2559.

**E**lection by majority — it's what makes America a democratic nation. It's also one of the hallmarks of membership in a rural electric cooperative.

As a member, you may take an active role in democracy at Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative by running for a seat on the co-op's board of directors. Or you can exercise your democratic right by simply voting in your district's election.

During the co-op's annual meeting each July, a portion of the membership has the opportunity to vote for directors to represent the district in which they reside.

This year, Tri-County will hold director elections for Districts 1, 4 and 7, currently served by directors Gerald Kite, Dr. James Davis and Alston Teeter, respectively.

If you reside in one of these districts and wish to run for a seat on the board, contact the cooperative's Mansfield office. We will send you a director candidate information packet. It contains the forms and instructions necessary for filing your candidacy.

## Director Duties

Directors are responsible for developing co-op policies and long-range plans. They voice members' concerns and make recommendations to Tri-County's management staff.

Nine directors comprise Tri-County's board. Each board member represents a specific area within the utility's service territory, as the map above illustrates.

Directors serve three-year terms. Elections take place on a rotating basis, with three of the co-op's nine districts voting each year. Board members meet regularly at Tri-County's headquarters in Mansfield on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

To be eligible for director candidacy, you must meet the following criteria and all other guidelines listed in the cooperative's bylaws:

- Receive electrical service from the cooperative at your principal residence.
- Be a member and a bona-fide resident of the district you seek to represent.
- Not be in any way employed by, or financially interested in, a competing enterprise or business selling electrical appliances, fixtures or supplies to the members of the cooperative.

## Election Procedures

To register as a candidate, you are required to file an official petition and personal statement of qualification for director. Both documents must be submitted to Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 526, 22 N. Main St., Mansfield, PA 16933. The filing deadline is 4 p.m., Friday, April 11, 2003.

For your name to appear on the official ballot, you must secure at least 15 signatures from members residing in your district.

Remember, joint memberships have only one vote, so husband and wife signatures count as a single signature.

If you have any questions regarding director elections, please contact Alex

## Townships Scheduled to Elect Directors in 2003

**District 1:** East Fork District, Homer, Keating, Liberty, Norwich, Portage, Summit, Sylvania and Wharton in Potter County; Grove and Lumber in Cameron County.

**District 4:** Chatham, Clymer, Deerfield, Elkland, Farmington, Gaines, Middlebury, Nelson, Osceola and Shippen in Tioga County.

**District 7:** Athens, Ridgebury, Smithfield, South Creek and Ulster in Bradford County.

*(continued from page 12c)*

to restore power, I dealt with just one irate member."

The Tri-County office in Mansfield received dozens of letters, cards, phone calls and e-mail messages, thanking the co-op for its efforts to restore power under very hazardous conditions and praising the outside personnel for their professionalism and commitment to getting the job done.

"I want to thank all of the members for their support, patience and positive comments during the storm," stated Bob Toombs, Tri-County's president & CEO. "I'd also like to express my appreciation to all those members, businesses and organizations who donated time and equipment to help us get the power back on."

Toombs noted that the C&T Call Center proved to be a tremendous asset throughout the outage. Many callers expressed appreciation at being able to talk to live operators when they phoned in, and the system was capable of handling the hundreds of calls that were coming in daily.

The call center — jointly owned by Tri-County and its sister cooperative, Claverack REC headquartered in Wysox, Pa. — registered more than 7,000 calls for Tri-County during the course of the outage.



**A heavy coating of ice on poles and electric equipment made repair work a treacherous and time-consuming affair.**

## Assessing the damages

While all the bills are not yet in, co-op officials expect the storm will ring up more than \$1 million in expenses.

As a result, the co-op board of directors in January approved the establishment of a storm reserve fund and voted to allocate an additional \$250,000 for right-of-way management.

"This storm pointed out the need for the co-op to be more aggressive with its vegetation management program," Toombs remarked. "By increasing our right-of-way budget by 50 percent, we expect to be able to reduce the number and duration of outages our members experience the next time a major storm hits us."

To fund the additional right-of-way expense and storm reserve fund, the co-op has increased the cost-of-service charge for seasonal members by \$2.25 and upped the distribution charge for residential, commercial and industrial accounts by about 5.5 percent — an increase of approximately one-half cent per kilowatt-hour.

The co-op's last increase took place in 1992, when rates for the average consumer went up by 3.4 percent. However, the co-op reduced its distribution charges by 6 percent in 1997.