

# From the CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER: Building a smarter system



**by Craig Eccher**  
*Executive Vice President  
and Chief Operating Officer*

Your electric cooperative will soon expand upon a project that will add a significant amount of automation to our electric system. By year's end, we will be able to remotely monitor many of our substations from a central location. This will enable employees in our engineering department to keep track of how the system is operating and will ultimately lead to greater levels of reliability for our members.

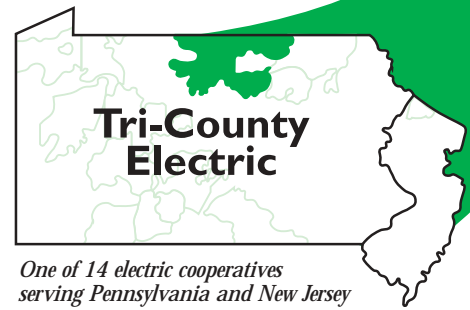
The term for this technology is SCADA, which stands for supervisory control and data acquisition. As part of this project, we will be installing equipment and software in our substations that will send data back to a central computer. That information will enable employees to quickly assess system operations, view possible equipment problems and respond quickly to the needs of the system.

This technology will provide a means for employees to virtually view and control our 22 substations through an office computer. Employees will also be able to open and close tie points between substations from the office.

How does this help you? In the case of a substation failure, it would reduce the amount of time you are without power. Once we equip our substations and tie points with automation equipment and software, we will have the ability to quickly backfeed a portion of a circuit that is without power.

While we have backfeed capabilities today on many of our circuits, we must send crews out to manually open tie points. With SCADA in place, we will be able to perform those same switching activities from the office. This will shorten outage duration considerably as it eliminates driving time for our crews.

Another benefit of this new technology is that it will enable our staff to identify faulty equipment. This, in



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

turn, allows us to provide better information to our linemen during outage restoration.

In addition, the SCADA system will enable us to provide better and more timely maintenance on equipment that may be on its way to failure. So instead of reacting to a piece of equipment when it fails, we may be able to make the required repairs before a breakdown occurs.


We will also be able to utilize the system to help control electrical losses and monitor voltage levels.

Tri-County will increasingly rely on this technology to assist in our day-to-day operations. Our newer substation breakers and voltage regulators have computer-based control systems. These devices collect and contain large amounts of system data. Today we need to physically visit each substation to access this data. Once the SCADA system is fully deployed, a trained employee will be able to retrieve the same information with the stroke of a key.

This system will not only lead us to greater levels of reliability, it will allow us to achieve greater levels of efficiency. This will go a long way in our quest to control operating costs and at the same time increase service levels.

A few years ago, this type of technology wasn't economically feasible for a cooperative the size of Tri-County. Today, it's a must if you wish to run an efficient electric distribution system.

## Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative

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1-800-343-2559

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Annette Fowler <i>Executive Assistant</i>	Bert Cunningham <i>Director, Human Resources</i>
Barbara Johnson <i>Director, Financial 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.)



# A LEATHER-STAMPING



Ernie Brown strikes a mallet onto a stamping tool to create a pattern on a leather belt. The White Pine resident has been stamping leather products for nearly 30 years.

By Jeff Fetzer

Ernie and Eileen Brown's leather-stamping saga started some 30 years ago thanks to a pricey purse.

"My wife wanted this expensive purse," recalls Mr. Brown, a retired school teacher, "and it was more than I could afford."

At that time, 1973, teaching was a low-paying profession, according to Mr. Brown, and Mrs. Brown had been furloughed from her position as an accountant.

As fate would have it, however, Mrs. Brown soon found herself holding the purse strings — literally.

Through a family friend, Eileen learned of a leathercrafting workshop taking place in Williamsport and decided to attend. She purchased a simple kit for \$9.95 that taught her the basics of stamping and carving leather. Then she created her own pocketbook.

"She designed it, learned how to make it, and I saved 60 or 70 bucks," chuckles Mr. Brown.

It wasn't long before Eileen was spending hours each day crafting leather belts, wallets, handbags and bracelets on the kitchen table in the couples' secluded

farmhouse near White Pine in northern Lycoming County.

After about three years, Mr. Brown, decided to give the hobby a try.

"I said to her, 'I might as well get involved, too, so I can see you,'" he relates. "I didn't have anything else to do in the evenings. We've never had a television, so I usually just read farm magazines after supper and then went to bed."

To his surprise, Mr. Brown says he found working with leather to be almost addictive. It wasn't long before he converted a wood shed just off the couple's kitchen into a leathercrafting shop and fashioned a desk on which the couple could ply their craft. The Tri-County members also began attending leathercraft workshops and joined the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen chapter in Williamsport so they could socialize and share experiences with other crafters.

In 1976, the year of the U.S. Bicentennial, the Browns entered their first craft show, held at the YWCA in Williamsport, and sold \$78 worth of

merchandise. They enjoyed the two-day event, and decided to hit the local craft fair circuit as a means of supplementing their income. Because they had two young boys, Eric and Evan, the Browns initially restricted their travel to events within a two-hour drive of their home so they could sleep in their own bed at night.

In the mid- to late 1970s, the Browns would make just about any type of leather product customers requested. While belts, wallets and purses have been mainstays, the pair also crafted a number of ornately adorned arrow quivers, pistol holsters, knife sheaths, rifle slings and saddle bags. In the business' formative years, Mr. Brown would create hand-carved scenes and decorations on the leather products they sold.

Today, Brown's Leathercraft, as their business is called, offers soft-leather purses, wallets and backpacks designed and crafted by Eileen, and leather belts hand-stamped and dyed by Ernie. They no longer offer hand-carved leather goods. Carving leather entails tracing a design on a piece of leather and then carving into the leather with a stylus.

"We used to do all hand-carving in the early years," Ernie explains. "But it's too time consuming and people wouldn't pay for it. It might take three hours for a carving, but it



Eileen Brown displays a completed purse.

only takes about 20 minutes to stamp out a belt."

And time became critical for the Browns as they expanded their circuit to include as many as 30 craft shows in some years.

"When we got going, we couldn't make things fast enough," Ernie says. "It was nothing to sell 3,000 belts in a year."

Ernie tells of one show that took place in a state park in Bucks County in the 1980s that made him realize the profit potential of the couple's craft.

"We made more money in that weekend than I made my first year of teaching," he exclaims. "That got me real serious about leather."

Mr. Brown began teaching environmental science at Roosevelt Junior High School in Williamsport in 1962. The following year, the Jersey Shore native and his wife, who hails from Salladasburg, purchased their 75-acre farm in Cogan House Township. Mr. Brown retired from Roosevelt, now a middle school, in 1993.

Since his retirement, Mr. Brown says the couple has slowed down a bit on the show circuit. They participate in 11 craft shows from May 1 to Nov. 1, sticking with those shows they have enjoyed the most over the years. Locally, they continue to have a display on the Green in Wellsboro during the annual Laurel Festival each June.

"The desire to make is still there, but we're getting older and don't like the night driving anymore," Ernie says. "So we've been downsizing and slowing down."

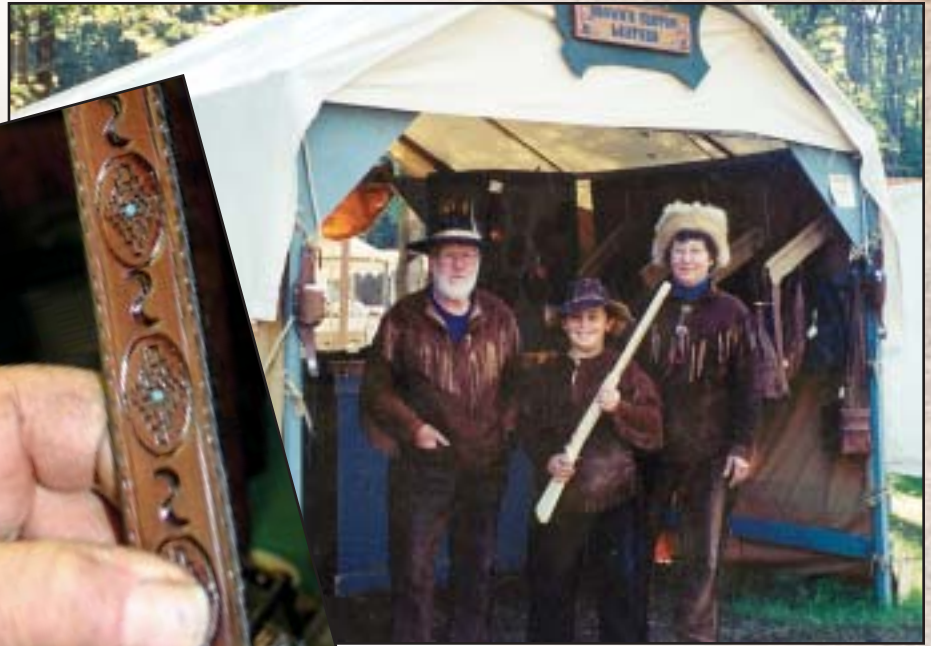
Still, Mrs. Brown puts in eight hours a day crafting the business' soft-leather products, and Mr. Brown spends two to three hours a night banging out tooled belts in his leather shop.

"I'll go out there and put a Johnny Cash tape in and pound on leather for a few hours," he says, adding that in a typical evening he can hand stamp about 10 to 20 belts, which is the Browns' biggest seller.

Ernie notes that creating a belt involves a 13-step process, which begins with cutting a side of leather — purchased from the Westfield Tanning Co. in Tioga County — into belt-width strips. Once cut, the belt is cased, or dampened with water, and Mr. Brown decides on a pattern for the belt, selects the appropriate stamping tools to make the pattern



ABOVE LEFT: A finished hand-tooled belt like this one takes about one hour to complete. The turquoise center of the pattern is hand-painted.



ABOVE: Tri-County members Ernie and Eileen Brown and their grandson, Jacob Brown, stand in front of their vendor's tent at Penn's Colony Craft Show in Saxonburg. The Browns sell their hand-crafted leather goods at about 11 craft shows annually.

and then hammers the stamp into the leather using a mallet. The leather is later dyed, a buckle is attached and buckle holes are made. Some belt designs also incorporate hand-painted designs.

The belts sell for about \$18 to \$23 a piece, and Ernie notes that the designs he uses are always changing to reflect people's changing tastes. Some of the belts have outdoor scenes or animals stamped onto them, others have weaves or Old West-styling and some incorporate patriotic themes.

Handbags are the couple's other top seller, and they are designed and machine-sewn by Mrs. Brown. She says she can make 5 to 10 purses a day, depending on complexity of the design. The purses, which are not stamped, range in price from \$40 for a small, simple handbag to \$100 for a more elaborate purse with numerous pockets.

Scrap leather from the belt-making process, known as off-fallens, is used to create key fobs, bracelets, hair barrettes and other tooled leather items that sell for under \$10.

Despite the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Brown are both state juried craftsmen in leather and members of the Pennsylvania Guild

of Craftsmen, Ernie says neither he nor his wife are artistically inclined, and credits their success at leathercraft to hard work, determination and sound business skills, along with their ability to work together as a team.

"You have to give them a good product and a good price," Eileen says, adding that their leather products are guaranteed.

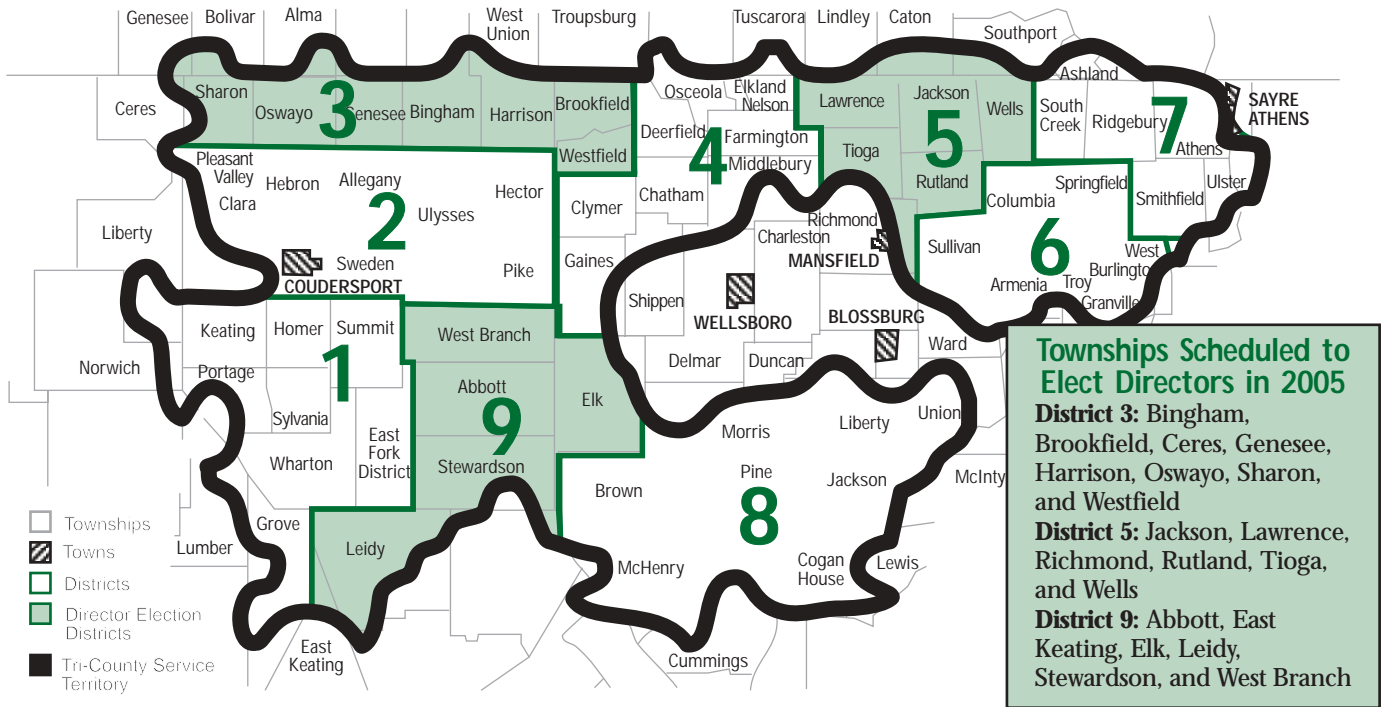
She proudly notes that Johnny Cash's sister, Joanne Cash Yates, is one of her repeat handbag customers.

"We've met some of the nicest people in the world through crafting," says Ernie. "It makes you realize what a great country this is and that there is all kind of opportunity out there."

Mr. and Mrs. Brown both say they have no intention of giving up their craft anytime soon.

"We will be doing this until we can't physically do it any more," Ernie states with a smile. "It's been very good to us; we still enjoy it. What else would we do?"

*For more information about Brown's Leathercraft, 88 Cowhide Lane, Trout Run, Pa., call 570/634-2038 or send an e-mail to: [ewbrown@cub.kcnet.org](mailto:ewbrown@cub.kcnet.org).*



# Official Notice of Director Elections

## Candidates Sought For Districts 3, 5, and 9

**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 rights by simply voting in your district's election.

During the co-op's annual meeting each year, 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 3, 5, and 9, currently served by directors Ralph E. Snyder, Barbara J. Seeley, and Jay E. Haldeman, 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 15, 2005.

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 direct them to Alex Hartley, Tri-County's director of member services. You can contact him at 570/662-2175 or 1-800-343-2559.

*Remember: Director candidate petitions are due by April 15.*