

From the
PRESIDENT & CEO:
**An energizing
assembly**



Robert O. Toombs
President & CEO

After attending the 61st annual meeting of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) in Nashville, Tenn., last month, I'm happy to report the cooperative program remains sound and strong.

NRECA is the service organization dedicated to representing the national interests of consumer-owned cooperative electric utilities and those they serve. Accordingly, we addressed many legislative and regulatory issues that have an impact on rural electric cooperatives during the Nashville conference.

The gathering provides all member cooperatives an opportunity to discuss and resolve issues that affect the rural electrification program. This year, we focused heavily on escalating health care costs, as well as corporate accountability.

The annual meeting also demonstrates in a very visible way the vitality and strength of the cooperative program. That's important because there are private electric utilities and some federal legislators who may have a very different agenda than ours, and we believe a strong, united national organization helps keep them in check.

This year's assembly, held March 3-5, drew more than 12,000 cooperative directors, CEOs and staff personnel from 900 electric cooperatives in 47 states. With numbers like that, NRECA definitely gets noticed in Washington.

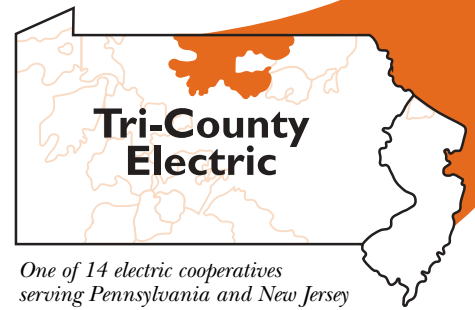
To illustrate that point, one of the highlights of the event was a session in which Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) addressed our group via live videofeed. Sen. Frist, a medical doctor, spoke primarily on health care issues, particularly as they pertain to rural Americans.

The conference also gave us the opportunity to say "aloha" to the newest member to the cooperative family — the Kauia Island Utility Cooperative, which became the first electric cooperative in Hawaii state history last year.

In addition we welcomed a new president, David Cowan of Gettysburg, Pa., to the NRECA Board of Directors. A retired professor, Mr. Cowan serves on the Gettysburg-based Adams Electric Cooperative Board of Directors and has been Pennsylvania's representative on the NRECA board for the past 17 years.

It's great — and a first — to have a friend from Pennsylvania serving as president of our national organization. We're sure our interests will be well represented at the national level during Mr. Cowan's two-year term as president.

We also expect that having a



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Pennsylvania resident in NRECA's top executive post will benefit the Keystone State's rural electric consumers for years to come.


A number of your cooperative's directors were on hand for the Nashville conference. They participated in training programs, attended sessions for election of officers and board members and met with officials from both national and statewide cooperative organizations. They also had the opportunity to share knowledge with cooperative officials from around the country and discuss solutions to common problems.

As is always the case, I came away from the annual meeting energized and enthused about the state of the rural electrification program.

It is reassuring to know that cooperatives have continued to flourish, and they have done so without the scandals and disruptions that have plagued our for-profit counterparts in the energy business during recent years.

I believe this is because as individual cooperatives, we remain small, we operate efficiently, and we have earned the considerable trust of the members we serve. And through our cohesive national organization, we possess the political power necessary to ensure that the best interests of rural electric consumers continue to be served.

**Tri-County
Rural Electric Cooperative**

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Office Hours

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

The hunt of a lifetime

By Jeff Fetzer

Tri-County member Steve Brewster didn't have to go far for his hunt of a lifetime.

In November, Brewster traveled only a couple hours southwest of his Tioga County home to participate in Pennsylvania's second elk hunting season since the early 1930s.

One of just 70 hunters selected to participate in the hunt from a pool of more than 31,000 applicants, Brewster drew a bull elk tag for the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Management Area 2 in the heart of the state's elk range.

Brewster learned in an unusual manner his name had been drawn for the special hunt. A woman called and left a message on his answering machine stating he was among those selected in the random drawing for elk hunting permits.

"I didn't know this woman, so when I first heard the message, I thought it was some kind of cruel practical joke," he remembers.

When he returned the telephone call, however, Brewster learned that the caller,



LUCKY NO. 13. Steve Brewster of Little Marsh, Tioga County, displays his No. 13 Pennsylvania elk hunting permit and the 5-by-6 elk he harvested on the second day of the 2002 elk season. The bull was around 3 years old and had an estimated live weight of 470 pounds. The bull was processed at Leona Meats in Troy, and Brewster is having a shoulder mount of the trophy prepared by Strouse's Taxidermy of Lawrenceville. Both businesses are served by Tri-County Rural Electric.

Tri-County member Lynne Nelson of North Fork had attended the Elk Expo in St. Marys, where the elk hunt lottery had taken place earlier in the day. She explained that her husband, George Roth, had been one of the 30 hunters who participated in Pennsylvania's first modern-day elk hunt the previous year.

"She was excited that a nearby resident had been drawn for the hunt and was just calling to congratulate me and brief me about her husband's elk hunting experience," Brewster reports.

Brewster, a member services technical representative for Tri-County, contacted the Game Commission headquarters in Harrisburg to confirm that he had been selected to take part in the elk hunt. Agency officials told him they would not release the information over the telephone.

His first semi-official verification came two days after the phone call from Nelson, when he received a copy of an article that appeared in the Bradford Era newspaper listing his name as among those drawn for the hunt.

"I was as excited as a kid in a candy store when I saw that list," he remarks, "but I still wanted to see something official from the Game Commission."

A week went by with no notification from the agency. Then it came—the envelope from the Game Commission that he was waiting for. Or so he thought.

Upon opening the envelope, he discovered, much to his surprise, a permit to participate in the state's bobcat season. He was one of 545 hunters selected from more than 3,000 applicants to get a bobcat license.

A few days later, he finally received his elk tag — permit No. 13.

The work begins

Enclosed with his letter of confirmation from the Game Commission was a list of registered elk hunting guides who were available to participate in the hunt.

"I must have called at least a dozen of them trying to gather as much information as I could about the terrain, hunting conditions, types of services offered and preparations I would need to make," Brewster reports.

Brewster ultimately opted not to hire an outfitter. Instead, he enlisted the help of friend and fellow Tri-County member,



MAPPING OUT A PLAN. Tioga County residents Steve Brewster and Brian Fuller, both Tri-County members, study a topographic map while hunting in Elk County during the opening day of Pennsylvania's 2002 elk season.

Brian Fuller of Middlebury Center, to join him on the hunt. Fuller had hunted elk out West on a number of occasions and was more than eager to pay the \$10 guiding fee that enabled him to take part in the hunt.

For three consecutive weekends, Brewster made the two-hour drive to Elk County to secure lodging, talk to local residents about the elk herd and scout for the majestic animals.

"You really don't have a lot of time to scout and learn the area," Brewster points out, "because you're notified in October, and the hunt takes place in November."

On his first excursion into elk country, he was joined by Tri-County lineman Randy Smith.

"When we wheeled into town, we saw a number of monster bulls grazing in peoples' yards in downtown Benazette," Brewster recalls. "After that initial trip, I thought it was going to be a simple matter to harvest a very good bull elk."

That notion changed in subsequent weeks, after he and Fuller did some on-foot scouting in the assigned hunting area, which consisted primarily of large tracts of state forest outside the towns of Benazette and Grant.

"We covered a lot of ground on two consecutive weekends but never saw an elk and saw very little sign," Brewster indicates. "I was becoming real skeptical about my chances for success."

The big day arrives

Still, he was very eager for his chance to take part in a hunt that few Pennsylvania hunters will ever experience in their home state.

"I knew I had six days to hunt, and I was going to be there for the duration," Brewster states. "If necessary, I would spend every waking moment hunting for a bull."

Nov. 18, opening day of the 2002 elk season, dawned clear and cold. The evening before, Brewster and Fuller had decided to concentrate their efforts on a parcel of state forest land that adjoins Winslow Hill, a popular elk viewing area that is off limits to hunters.

"We felt like there would be a lot of hunter activity near Winslow Hill," Brewster explains. "Thinking as a white-tail hunter, I tried to coordinate our hunt around the activities of other hunters in the hopes that they would get the elk moving."

Although they came across several hunters during the day, the elk eluded them.

"We must have walked 8 to 10 miles over some very rugged terrain," Brewster reports. "By the end of the day I have to admit that I was a bit discouraged. We hadn't seen a single elk."

The next morning, the pair decided to start the hunt by keeping watch over a field on a piece of private ground that they had previously obtained permission to hunt.

"We watched for about an hour and saw nothing other than whitetails," Brewster recalls. "Then, as we started back toward the truck, we spotted a bull elk in a narrow strip of brushy cover between the road we were parked along and Sinemahoning Creek."

The hunters were uncertain about who owned the property where they had spied the bull. So before pursuing him, they visited the farmer whose field they had been watching and asked him if he also owned the parcel next to the creek. They were in luck — it was his property.

The guide and hunter split up, with Brewster stalking through the brush toward the area where they had last seen the bull.

"I tiptoed up through that strip of cover, glassing every bit of brush in front of me, when suddenly I saw a set of antlers sticking up over the grass," Brewster recounts. "At that point, I needed to make a decision: Should I harvest it or should I take my chances and hope to see a bigger bull,

knowing that they were not plentiful in my assigned hunting area?"

After several minutes the bull, which had been bedded down, winded him and stood.

"I came to appreciate his size and realized that the rack was attractive," he relates. "As I tried to decide whether I should shoot or not, a light came on in my head. I had never been a trophy hunter before, why should I start now?"

Two shots from his .270 Winchester downed the elk, a 470-pound, 5-by-6 bull.

Brewster says he thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the state's second modern-day elk hunt and adds that it was more challenging than he had anticipated.

"When you drive into town and see all these elk roaming in people's yards, you get the impression that harvesting one would be fairly easy," he remarks. "But we quickly learned that the farther you go from these areas where elk hunting is restricted, the more skittish they become. You're not going to just walk up on them like you do in downtown Benezette."

The 31-year-old states he definitely plans to apply for an elk hunting permit when he becomes eligible again in five years.

"It was the opportunity of a lifetime to participate in this hunt," he summarizes. "I would recommend it to anyone."



WHAT ARE THE ODDS? *It's a pretty good bet that Steve Brewster is the only living hunter to have legally harvested an elk and a bobcat in Pennsylvania in the same hunting season. To harvest either game animal requires applying for a permit, which is issued via a lottery drawing. Not only did he beat long odds to get drawn for both permits, he also successfully filled both tags. Here, he shows the 17-pound male bobcat he bagged while hunting near his home on Dec. 17.*



Elk Facts

Pennsylvania held its first elk season in over 70 years in 2001.

Seventy hunters out of nearly 31,500 applicants were selected to participate in the 2002 hunt.

Pennsylvania's original elk herd was extirpated by the late 1800s. Today's elk are descendants of animals that the Game Commission imported from the Rocky Mountain region between 1913 and 1926.

Prior to the fall 2002 hunt, the Game Commission reported there were 133 adult bull elk, 70 spike bulls, 390 cows and 169 calves roaming the state's elk range.

Elk can be found in Elk, Cameron, Clearfield, Clinton and Potter counties.

Mainly grazers, elk prefer habitat such as forest clearcuts, revegetated strip mines, grassy meadows and open stream bottoms.

A mature bull elk weighs 600 to 1000 pounds. Mature cows weigh 400 to 600 pounds.

In 2002, elk hunters took 32 bull elk and 29 antlerless elk. The heaviest elk harvested was a 9-by-7 bull with an estimated live weight of 878 pounds.



PAiD program saves time, stamps and late-fee worries

If you are looking for ways to simplify your life, Tri-County's Payment Automatically Drafted (PAiD) program is for you.

PAiD is Tri-County's automated bill-payment program. By participating, you can avoid the hassle of searching for stamps, licking envelopes and worrying about whether your payment arrives on time.

When you participate in the PAiD program, the payment for your electric bill is automatically drafted from your checking or savings account each month. Even if you are out of town, your bill will be paid on time. You'll never have to worry about a late fee again.

Signing up is easy. Simply complete the form that appears below and return it to Tri-County. Make sure to check with your bank for its federal reserve routing number.

Here's what happens after you sign up:

- The first automated payment will be made the second billing period after we receive your completed form. The first month will be a trial run to verify account numbers. No money will be moved.
- You will continue to receive a monthly bill statement.
- Your bill statement will alert you to the date that your payment will be automatically withdrawn.

With Tri-County's PAiD program, paying your electric bill is simple. There are no sign-up charges or transaction fees. And you can cancel PAiD at any time by notifying us in writing.

To become a PAiD participant, just complete and return the form below, and we'll do the rest. For additional information about PAiD, call us at 800/343-2559.



I authorize Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative to instruct my financial institution to make electric payments from the account listed below. I will notify Tri-County if I decide to discontinue this payment service or change banks or account numbers.

Customer Name (as it appears on your bill)

Address

City State Zip Code

Tri-County Account Number

Name of Financial Institution

Address of Financial Institution

Bank Account Number:

Checking or Savings

Bank's Federal Reserve Routing Number

Account Holder Signature Date

Even out your payments with Budget Billing

You can avoid fluctuations in your electric bill from month to month by participating in Tri-County's Budget Billing Plan. The program allows you to level out your monthly payments throughout the year. If you are interested in a budget billing plan for your account, now is the time to contact our office. We will calculate your monthly payment amount and mail it to you, along with a sign-up form and further budget information. Since the first budget payment is due in our office June 10, we must have your signed contract in our Mansfield office by May 10. Call the Mansfield office at 800/343-2559 if you have questions about our budget billing program.