

Guest  
COLUMN:  
**Battling  
branches  
and brush**



by Keith "Bud" Sutton  
*Manager of Contract Services*

If you have a home or camp in northern Pennsylvania, chances are you enjoy trees. Not only are they visually appealing, trees provide us with a wealth of benefits — shade, fruit, maple syrup, oxygen, mast to feed nature's creatures.

Unfortunately, trees and electric lines don't mix. Trees that grow too close to power lines can cause power interruptions and may even siphon electricity away from our system, an occurrence referred to as "line loss."

To keep a reliable flow of power to our members, reduce costly line loss and provide safe working conditions for our linemen, your cooperative expends

considerable resources battling brush and branches each year.

At Tri-County, we work on a 10-year right-of-way maintenance cycle. We contract with Asplundh Tree Expert Company and Strauss Tree Service to carry out our tree and brush clearing program. They do a great job for us, and members frequently compliment them on their professionalism.

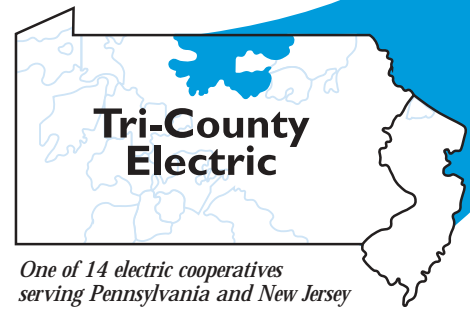
That doesn't mean all members are eager to see tree-cutting crews arrive in their locales. As I said, we Pennsylvanians really like our trees.

But most of us also really like having a steady flow of electricity into our homes, farms and camps. Anyone who has been without power for an extended period understands the integral part electricity plays in our daily lives. Maybe that's why we get such excellent cooperation from members when we let them know that our right-of-way crews will be working nearby.

Following a year like 2003, when we experienced an unusually high number of storm-related outages, it becomes even easier to convince people of the need to keep rights-of-way free from trees and brush to ensure better reliability of service.

Anytime storm-related outages occur, you can just about bet the highest concentration of them will be in those areas of our service territory most in need of tree trimming.

To keep vegetative growth away from utility lines, we employ a three-step process. First, we run a brush hog through the right-of-way to mow down brush and small trees. Then crews move in with bucket trucks, skidders and chainsaws to take down larger trees and side trim limbs and branches that extend into the right-of-way. The third step, which takes place about two years



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

later, involves spray treating rights-of-way to slow the growth of vegetation until cutting crews return in several years.

In addition to clearing predetermined sections of right-of-way, we also remove damage trees — those that have toppled onto our lines during storms as well as those that have a strong potential of coming into contact with our wires.

While most cooperative members understand the importance of maintaining rights-of-way through wooded tracts, the issue becomes a bit more sensitive when yard trees are involved.

I try to look at each situation as if I were the property owner and the tree were in my yard. We are sometimes able to avoid cutting down a yard tree by simply trimming limbs away from electric lines. But we can't do this in every case. If we have liability concerns — for example, if a child could climb the tree and come into contact with one of our lines — we may have no choice but to drop the entire tree.

Ultimately, our goal has to be to provide members with the best level of electric service possible. A proactive approach to right-of-way maintenance is one of the most effective ways for us to achieve that goal. Given the high cost of deferred maintenance, it's also the most economical.

**Tri-County  
Rural Electric Cooperative**

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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*Tommy Rocco poses beside some of the gold and platinum records that adorn the walls of his home in Bradford County. During a songwriting career that spanned from 1972 to 1999, Rocco co-wrote about 50 hits for a variety of country artists.*

into the construction business. Two years later, at age 31, he decided to pursue his dream of a music career.

"I got the bug for Nashville and figured I better try it," he says. "I was a little old to be starting out."

And, as it turns out, he was ill-equipped for a career as country music singer.

"I never cared about playing instruments because I knew how to sing," he says. "And back then, you needed to have a character voice to make it in Nashville. I didn't have that type of voice. I'm just a plain, pretty singer."

### A new direction

Rocco says it didn't take him long to realize that if he hoped to earn a living in the music business, he'd need another plan.

"If I wanted to be in music, I had to be a writer," he says.

Although he had never aspired to become a songwriter, Rocco says he had a natural understanding of how to compose songs. Writing lyrics, however, proved to be challenging initially.

"Anybody who plays music can write music," he says. "But you have to know what to write about and how to write about it in a way others can relate to it."

At first, Rocco was writing on his own, while taking on small construction projects to earn a living. In short order he landed a job writing songs for a music publishing company with a stable of four other writers.

# Music Career Takes Songwriter from Country Road to Streets of Gold

by Jeff Fetzer

Just over 20 years ago, Tommy Rocco co-wrote "A Little Good News," a song nominated for a Grammy and the winner of the Country Music Association's (CMA) Single of the Year award.

These days, the Tri-County member finds even greater rewards sharing the "Good News" at area churches and senior centers.

"I touch people in a different way than I ever did before," says Rocco, who co-authored six Number One hits during a Nashville songwriting career that spanned nearly three decades.

Since retiring from the country music industry in 1999 and taking up year-round residence in Bradford County, Rocco has been performing his original gospel compositions and old-time country songs for local audiences.

"I'm getting a lot of fulfillment out of this," he says. "I don't get paid any place I go. I'm just enjoying what I do."

He tells of a girl who approached him with tears in her eyes following one of his recent performances.

She thanked Rocco and said she had been angry with God for nearly two years following the death of her father. His songs of redemption, she told Rocco, helped her accept her father's passing and put it into perspective.

"When you experience something like

that," Rocco relates, "all those Number One songs melt right away.

"I had a great career in Nashville," he continues. "I met some great people, great talents and rubbed elbows with some major players in the business, but this is more rewarding. It's what I feel I've been led to do."

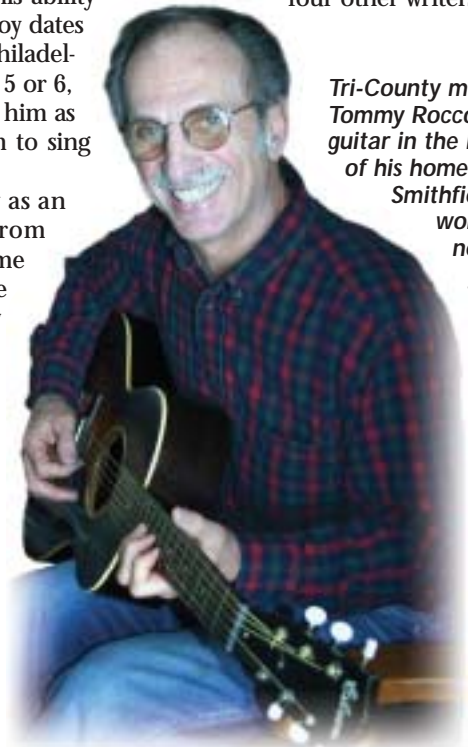
### Born to perform

While Rocco's calling to craft songs of salvation is a recent discovery, his ability to make music for others to enjoy dates back to his childhood days in Philadelphia. When he was a boy of just 5 or 6, he remembers people stopping him as he walked to school to ask him to sing tunes for them.

After moving to New Jersey as an adolescent and graduating from Freehold High School — the same high school rock legend Bruce Springsteen would attend a few years later — Rocco enlisted in the Air Force. After his military stint ended, he returned to New Jersey and began performing country and early rock and roll songs in the Freehold area.

"I was just doing it for fun," he says. "But in the back of your mind, you're thinking you're going to make it some day."

In 1970, Rocco put his performing days on hold and moved to East Smithfield, where he and a friend went



*Tri-County member Tommy Rocco strums a guitar in the living room of his home in East Smithfield. After working for nearly 30 years as a country music songwriter in Nashville, Rocco today devotes his time to writing and performing Gospel music at area churches and senior centers.*

Through pluck, raw talent and the ability to heed the advice of his peers at the publishing company, Rocco's songwriting talents blossomed. Within a year of his arrival in Nashville, Rocco scored his first hit song, "I'll Never Break These Chains," a song performed by Tommy Overstreet that Rocco co-wrote with his mentor, Charlie Black.

Over the years, Rocco typically shared songwriting credits with one or two other writers, and usually one of those writers was Black. Co-writers typically bounce ideas for song composition and lyrics off one another, sometimes scrutinizing lines for hours before either accepting or abandoning them.

"Writing songs is nothing like people think it is — where the song just falls from heaven," he maintains. "For most of us, we're not that gifted. Once in a while a song falls into place in 20 minutes, but for us that was a rarity because we were so picky with what we wanted to say."

Rocco's success right out of the shoot left him hungry for more.

"I had a couple of top ten records the first year," he says. "That's what draws you and hooks you and keeps you there."

### Strait to the top

By the 1980s, the songwriter's career had ignited. He co-wrote a string of hits for artists including George Strait, Anne Murray, Lee Greenwood, T.G. Sheppard, Kenny Rogers, Don Williams and Tammy Wynette. In one year, there were 17 songs on the Top 100 country charts that Rocco had a hand in crafting.

His biggest hits include the aforementioned "A Little Good News." Recorded by Anne Murray, the song was nominated for the CMA's Song of the Year Award in 1984. Murray claimed the CMA's Single of the Year award with the song, which Rocco co-wrote with Charlie Black and Rory Bourke.

He also co-wrote a number-one hit for George Strait the same year titled "Let's Fall To Pieces Together." That song won the Music City Award's Song of the Year award in 1984. It was no coincidence the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) named Rocco as its Songwriter of the Year for 1984.

Despite his success, the songwriter is reluctant to dwell on his achievements.

"I'm proud of what I've done, but I'm nothing special," he says. "It was a gift from God. On top of that I worked around a lot of great people."

By the 1990s, the complexion of

country music and Nashville was changing, and Rocco began contemplating retirement. While country artists of yesteryear welcomed songs from a wide variety of writers, country stars of the 1990s were more likely to work exclusively with their own small group of writers.

Songwriters also had much more access to big-name country musicians years ago. Rocco recalls that Conway Twitty would always greet him by reaching into his shirt pocket in search of a cassette tape.

"Writers did all kind of things to get their songs recorded," he says. "I always kept a tape with me that contained what I thought was my best song for the artist I expected to see. The country music community was a small, close-knit thing back then. It's such a closed organization today."

For writers like Rocco, it became increasingly difficult to get songs recorded as major artists became more inaccessible.

### A change of scenery

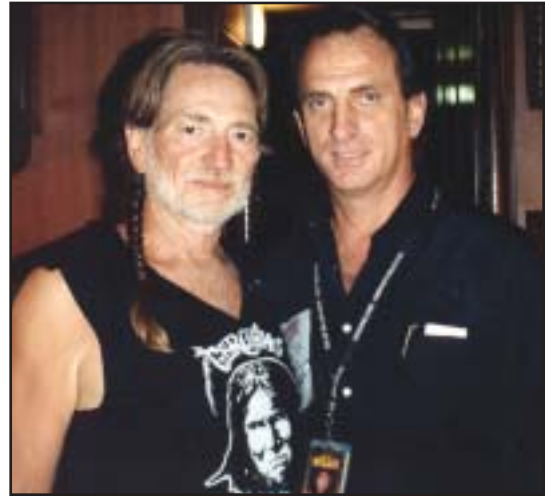
Tiring of the Nashville scene, in 1994 Rocco and his wife, Beverly, purchased a home in East Smithfield, and Tommy began splitting time between Nashville and the Northern Tier. By 1999, he decided it was time to leave country music for good.

"I left because I was done," he says. "I had written about everything I wanted to write about, it was getting repetitious and the business was moving past me."

He estimates over the span of nearly 30 years he co-wrote over 1,000 country songs. His final hit record was a song he co-wrote with Charlie Black and country artist Phil Vassar in 1999 titled "Six-Pack Summer." The song became a top 10 hit for Vassar in 2000.

Although he has had several offers from his former publishing company to resume his songwriting career in Nashville, Rocco says he has no plans of leaving his rural home for a return to the bright lights and big city.

"It can be a very rewarding business if you succeed, but it's very tough to succeed — whether as a musician, a writer or a singer," Rocco says. "Right now, I'm just having fun writing and performing Christian music."



Although he never wrote a song for country music legend Willie Nelson, Tommy Rocco made quite an impression on his wife, Beverly, when he took her to meet Nelson on the couple's first date back in November 1991. The photograph was taken on Nelson's tour bus in Daytona, Fla. Tommy and Beverly married the following year.

## Tommy Rocco's Number One Hits

**"A Little Good News"**

**Co-writers: Rory Bourke, Charlie Black**

**Artist: Anne Murray (1983)**

**"Sounds like Love"**

**Co-writer: Charlie Black**

**Artist: Johnny Lee (1983)**

**"Let's Fall to Pieces Together"**

**Co-writers: Dickey Lee, Johnny Russell**

**Artist: George Strait (1984)**

**"Slow Burn"**

**Co-writer: Charlie Black**

**Artist: T.G. Sheppard (1984)**

**"Strong Heart"**

**Co-writer: Charlie Black, Austin Roberts**

**Artist: T.G. Sheppard (1985)**

**"Honor Bound"**

**Co-writers: Charlie Black, Austin Roberts**

**Artist: Earl Thomas Conley (1986)**



## TRI-COUNTY HELPING STUDENTS "GET CHARGED!" ABOUT ELECTRICITY

Tri-County has distributed electricity curriculum kits to area middle and junior high schools to help students gain a better understanding of electricity.

Through the Get Charged! Electricity and You program developed by Discovery Channel School in partnership with Touchstone Energy Cooperatives, Tri-County distributed the educational kits free of charge to 15 schools within its service territory.

Each kit, designed to augment a school's existing science curriculum, contains a variety of educational tools, including videos, CD-ROMs, a teachers resource guide and student activity books. The kit provides educators with entertaining lesson plans designed to teach students in grades five through nine basic information about electricity — how it works and how to use it.

In support of its ongoing commitment to community service, Tri-County decided to launch the Get Charged! program locally to give students a real-world understanding of power, the purpose of electricity and the role electric cooperatives play in delivering power.

"We are very happy to be able to provide these materials to our local schools," said Craig Eccher, Tri-County's chief operating officer. "By sponsoring the Get Charged! program, we hope to ensure that students receive a quality

education on electricity and its importance in today's world."

The following middle and junior high schools received Get Charged! kits: Athens, Austin, Coudersport, Cowanesque Valley, Elkland, Galeton, Liberty, Mansfield, New Covenant Academy, Northern Potter, Oswayo Valley, Troy, Canton, Wellsboro and Williamson. In addition, Tri-County donated the instructional materials to community libraries in Coudersport and Mansfield for use by home-schoolers.

Drawing on Discovery Channel's award-winning programming for much of its content, the curriculum and materials used in the Get Charged! program were developed by Discovery Channel School for classroom use and comply with National Science Education Standards.

The Get Charged! program marks the first time Discovery has teamed up with a non-educational entity to provide content directly to schools.

"Lots of kids are still in the dark about electricity," said Paul Thomas, vice president, Discovery Education. "We're delighted to partner with the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives to help get kids energized about power."

Touchstone Energy is a national alliance of local, consumer-owned electric cooperatives providing high standards of service to customers large and small. Over 600 Touchstone Energy Cooperatives, including Tri-County, deliver energy and energy solutions to more than 16 million customers in 44 states each day.

*Tri-County Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Craig Eccher, right, presents a Get Charged! electricity curriculum kit to Mrs. Kristine Worthington for use in her science classes at Mansfield Junior High School. Looking on is Get Charged! project coordinator Alex Hartley, director of member services for Tri-County.*



### Let Budget Billing even out your monthly payments

You can avoid monthly fluctuations in your electric bill 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 12. Call the Mansfield office at 1-800-343-2559 if you have questions about Budget Billing.

