

From the PRESIDENT & CEO:

Great Expectations



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

I had the privilege of representing your cooperative at the 63rd annual meeting of our nationwide service arm, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), in San Diego recently. The theme of this year's conference was "Great Expectations," and its message was clear: members of electric cooperatives expect more from their local utility than they expect from other types of businesses.

At Tri-County, the goal of your board and management team is to exceed your expectations at all levels — from electric reliability and member service to community involvement and corporate governance.

The importance of the latter, governance, was stressed throughout this year's annual meeting. In his opening address, Glenn English, NRECA chief executive officer, stated scandals involving board members at companies like Enron and WorldCom several years ago have focused

much attention on corporate behavior.

Noting that directors are responsible for the financial soundness of the organizations they serve, English went on to say, "We're finding that this responsibility or expectation or burden is greater than at any time in history."

Fortunately, the nation's electric cooperatives have been able to withstand heightened governance expectations and scrutiny because directors are democratically elected by their fellow members. Co-op directors receive no special rates or free services and hold no more ownership in the cooperative than any other member — one share. It's a system that has worked well for cooperatives for more than 60 years.

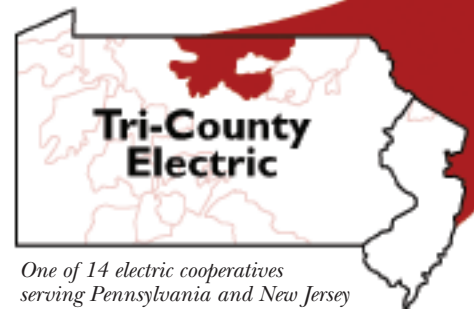
NRECA Board President David Cowan also touched on the corporate oversight issue during his address to the 12,000 cooperative directors and staff on hand for the meeting. A director with Adams Electric Cooperative in Gettysburg, Cowan completed his two-year term as NRECA board president as the meeting closed. We in Pennsylvania are pleased to have had one of our own serving as president of our national organization, ensuring that interests of Pennsylvania's 13 cooperatives were well represented at the national level.

Dubbed NRECA's "education president," Cowan said the increased "scrutiny and responsibilities of diligence that are being placed on directors have raised the bar for all of us." In response, NRECA has been aggressively promoting training and educational programs for directors so they may attain the highest level of board stewardship.

It was obvious to those of us on hand that leaders of the cooperative program have not forgotten the corporate scandals of three years ago and plan to keep governance issues at the forefront.

Growing with our members

Also at the forefront for cooperatives is generational change. This came to light during the annual meeting of the National Cooperative Service Corporation (NCSC) Board of Directors, which was held in conjunction with the NRECA Annual Meeting.



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

I have been honored to have the opportunity to serve on the NCSC's nine-member board for the past eight years and am entering my second and final year as board president. When I first joined the board of directors for NCSC, which provides loans to cooperatives and their affiliated companies, it was a very small, quiet organization. Today, it boasts more than \$850 million in assets and serves more than 350 cooperatives. NCSC's growth was highlighted by our annual meeting theme: "Growing with our members."

With growth come challenges. There is a new generation of cooperative consumers emerging. The new face of electric cooperative members, collectively called "Generation X," comes with a whole different set of expectations and values than first- and second-generation members. As a result, our program must adjust to those expectations while also working to maintain the values and traditions held by our long-time consumer-members.

In coming years, we will see the cooperative program undergo significant transition to reflect the views and attitudes of newer members. While this will certainly entail change, some things will remain the same. There will continue to be a high level of openness, and the need for member participation will remain with the passing of the generational torch.

There is no doubt that the make-up of cooperatives' employees, management, and boards of directors will change significantly in the next decade or so. The strength of the electric cooperative program, though, is that these changes will be incorporated to make our program stronger than ever.

Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative

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22 North Main Street • P.O. Box 526
Mansfield, PA 16933
Mansfield – 570/662-2175
Coudersport – 814/274-8740
Web Site: www.tri-countyrec.com
E-mail: trico@epix.net

For Emergencies call
1-800-343-2559

Robert O. Toombs

President & CEO

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A project for the birds

By Jeff Fetzer

The gym teacher, strolling the sidelines as his students played soccer one spring day about four years ago, was startled to see a large stick come sailing through the air, nearly striking him.

Spinning around to see which student may have been responsible for slinging the stick, he noticed none nearby.

“Did you see that?” William Durst hollered to a fellow gym teacher also on the athletic field.

“Yeah, I think a bird dropped it,” was the response.

Durst glanced skyward and spied a massive bird’s nest on top of a utility pole that held stadium lights for the Cowanesque Valley High School football field.

After class, the teacher reported the unauthorized pole-top construction project to principal Michael Schwarz.

Upon viewing the nest and the pair of birds setting up housekeeping atop the light standard, Schwarz knew he had a pair of osprey on the premises.

“The birds weren’t eagles, so they had to be osprey,” Schwarz relates with a chuckle.

An angler, Schwarz confesses that he was familiar with ospreys and would sometimes see the large birds of prey while fishing Tioga County waterways. Given the high amount of human traffic on the football field and track that encircles it, the principal expressed surprise at the birds’ choice of location for their nest. He doesn’t hide his enthusiasm, however, for having a pair of fish hawks, as osprey are known, shacking up on school property.

Other than the occasional falling stick, the birds haven’t caused any problems and have been fun to have around, he said. For each of the past four years, faculty and students have enjoyed watching the graceful raptors flying back to the nest, flailing fish locked in their talons, after a successful dive into the nearby Cowanesque River. They’ve also seen the pair raise two to three chicks each spring.

But when the school’s insurance company notified Schwarz this winter that the old, wooden light poles around the football field were unsafe and would need to be removed, the principal grew concerned over the plight of the pair of osprey upon their return to Tioga County this spring. Not wanting to see the birds lose their happy home, Schwarz decided to see if a nest-relocation project would be possible.

“We wanted the birds to stay here and to enhance their chance of survival,” explains Schwarz. “That’s why it was important to



Tri-County line workers Don Williammee, left, and Rocky Wiedman guide the osprey nest to its new perch on the Cowanesque Valley High School grounds.



The co-op’s Westfield District service crew poses with “The Osprey,” a line truck so-named because of the crew’s frequent interaction with the majestic bird of prey in northern Tioga County. Pictured from left are crew chief George Harer and linemen Don Williammee, Ron Scott, and Rocky Wiedman. The four were on hand to move an osprey nest located at Cowanesque Valley High School athletic fields near Westfield.

move the nest. I also felt it was important educationally for the students to continue to have the opportunity to see these majestic birds of prey up close and to learn about their habits, survival and how they adapt to human environments.”

Schwarz contacted Rich Shire, a wildlife conservation officer with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, to determine how a nest-relocation project might be accomplished. Shire, a Tri-County Rural Electric member, decided to see if the co-op would be interested in lending a hand.

“We were more than happy to help with the project,” said Tri-County Operations Director John Lykens. “It gave us the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to community, which is a cornerstone of the cooperative program.”

So on a blustery day in late February, with temperatures in the low 20s and snow covering the ground, a Tri-County line crew converged upon the Cowanesque Valley High School football field for the nest-relocation project.

Surrounded by a gaggle of heavily bun-

dled students and faculty members, the crew used its digger truck to auger a hole through the frozen turf. Once the digging was done, they fastened a nesting platform to the top of a new utility pole, donated by the co-op for the project, and set the pole about 30 yards away from the original nest. The nesting platform, constructed by volunteers at Hills Creek State Park, had been donated by the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks.

While the Tri-County service crew had considerable experience erecting osprey
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Osprey population taking off in Tioga County

By Jeff Fetzer

Nearly a century after vanishing from the Pennsylvania landscape, the osprey population is beginning to soar in parts of the commonwealth, including Tioga County.

The bird's reemergence in the north-central part of the state over the past two decades can be traced to a successful reintroduction program spearheaded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1989.

Although Tioga County was not part of the osprey's historical nesting grounds, construction of the Tioga-Hammond and Cowanesque dams in the 1970s created ideal habitat for the raptors: large bodies of water teeming with fish.

According to Mark Simonis, park ranger and natural resources specialist with the Corps of Engineers, during the course of drafting a forest, fish, and wildlife plan for the Tioga-Hammond and Cowanesque lakes in the late 1980s, it was learned that osprey were occasionally seen migrating through the area.

At about the same time, Dr. Larry Rymon, a biology professor at East Stroudsburg University, was conducting the nation's first successful osprey reintroduction project in the Poconos. Corps officials began collaborating with Rymon on a similar project in northern Tioga County.

The project involved constructing “hacking towers” along Tioga-Hammond Dam that would serve as artificial nesting sites for osprey chicks removed from nests in the Chesapeake Bay. Volunteers and Corps employees fed and cared for the nestlings until they were old enough to fledge, or fly from the nest.

“The idea is that after a bird fledges, it will fly around the area and make a visual imprint,” says Simonis.

The immature birds migrate, usually to South America, in late August or early September of their first year. They remain there for two to four years before finding a mate and returning north to nest.

“Usually they return to the area where they imprinted,” notes Simonis. “That's the whole theory behind the hacking program.”

It's a theory that met with scepticism in the 1980s but is now regarded as gospel. In Tioga County, 60 osprey were hacked between 1990 and 1994.

The same year the hacking project ended, the Corps recorded its first success story. A pair of ospreys nested atop a stump in the Cowanesque Lake and fledged three young birds. Since then, about 105 osprey young have been fledged from nests along the shores of the Cowanesque and Hammond lakes. Last year was the best on record, with eight pair of nesting ospreys successfully fledging 23 young birds on the Corps-owned properties.

With the success of the reintroduction program in the Poconos, Tioga County, and Moraine State Park in Butler County, the osprey was removed from Pennsylvania's endangered species list in 1998

and officially downgraded to a “threatened” species.

The Corps does not monitor osprey nesting activity off of its property, according to Simonis, so the pair of birds that have been nesting on the Cowanesque Valley High School football field, as well as a pair that has created a huge nest atop a utility pole along state Route 49 near Osceola, are not among those recorded by the Corps.

But their territorial expansion into areas 15 to 20 miles away from the original project site bodes wells for the future of osprey in Pennsylvania, Simonis noted.

“I think they will continue to spread slowly throughout the area,” Simonis says. “Here we are 15 years later, and they've gotten as far as Westfield. Have they gone beyond that? Maybe.”

In Tioga County, habitat limits nesting grounds to those areas near waterways with an adequate supply of fish. The birds typically nest on top of dead trees, often over water or in close proximity to it.

“They like open situations, where they have almost 360-degree visibility,” according to Simonis.

Due to the lack of large dead trees in the area of the lakes, the Corps of Engineers enlisted the help of Tri-County Rural Electric and its private power affiliate, Wellsboro Electric Co., to set a number of nesting platforms atop utility poles along the shores of Hammond and Cowanesque lakes.

“Most of them nest on platforms because there just aren't the appropriate dead snags available,” he said. “And all of these platforms have been put in and installed by our local utilities. It gives you

a really good feeling about your electric company.”

Over the years, the co-op has installed about half a dozen nesting platforms around the Corps' reservoirs, according to George Harer, crew chief for the co-op's Westfield district. The Westfield line crew also must patrol its lines in the area of state Route 49 each spring to look for signs of ospreys attempting to nest on co-op facilities. In those situations, the crew installs a guard to dissuade the birds from the potentially dangerous practice of building on top of utility poles.

Simonis, who oversees the monitoring and reporting of ospreys for the Corps, credits the success of the program to an extensive partnership involving the Corps, local utilities, the state Game Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, universities, and numerous volunteers.

“This has been an absolutely thrilling experience,” said Simonis. “It would not have taken place without a whole team of people who worked cooperatively to reintroduce this amazing bird to north-central Pennsylvania.”



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A project for the birds

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nesting platforms, it was the first time they had ever attempted to physically move a nest. The school came up with an idea of running metal rods underneath the 6-foot by 4-foot nest and then securing the rods in pre-drilled two-by-fours fitted with a rope harness.



Westfield crew chief George Harer repositions an osprey nest before its transfer to a nesting platform on top of a utility pole outside of Cowanesque Valley High School.

Working from buckets 30 feet above the ground, journeymen linemen Rocky Wiedman and Don Williamsee secured the apparatus around the nest and gave Tri-County boom truck operator Ron Scott the OK to hoist the nest from its perch atop the old light pole. Lift-off was successful, with the nest losing only a smattering of sticks on its way to the ground for a closer inspection by those on hand for the project. After attendees and the media had a chance to photograph the snow-filled nest, the boom and bucket trucks were repositioned and workers finished transferring the nest under the direction of Westfield District crew chief George Harer.

The framework that held the nest together for its maiden voyage came out from under the nest without a hitch, and within two hours the project was completed.

"This is magnificent," Schwarz said while looking up at the nest on its new platform. "The level of cooperation has been terrific. It amazed me how everyone did their part and got it done."

Now it's up to the ospreys to accept and adapt to their new vantage point. As of this writing in early March, the birds had not yet returned from their wintering grounds in South America. They usually migrate in late March or early April.

School officials are optimistic the birds, which add to their nest every year, will be back. That means come spring, gym teachers and others who use the track and athletic field may want to watch for falling objects.