

Guest
COLUMN:

At your service



by **Bryan Berguson**
Director of Member Services

In December, I replaced Tri-County's long-time director of member services, Alex Hartley, following his retirement.

As many of you know, Alex did a tremendous job on behalf of the cooperative membership, leaving me with some very big shoes to fill. Fortunately, he has made himself available to help me transition into the position and fulfill the duties he carried out with ease for so many years.

Alex plans to be on hand for the July 8 annual meeting at Williamson High School. The gathering will provide a great opportunity for members to bid farewell to Alex.

One of my priorities for the coming year is to develop a program to promote geothermal heat pump technology to our members. With energy prices continuing to rise, you are hearing more

and more about geothermal, or ground-source, heat pumps.

Geothermal is the most energy-efficient, environmentally clean and cost-effective space-conditioning system available, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These systems generally operate at 350 percent efficiency, and there is no wasted energy going out a chimney or flue.

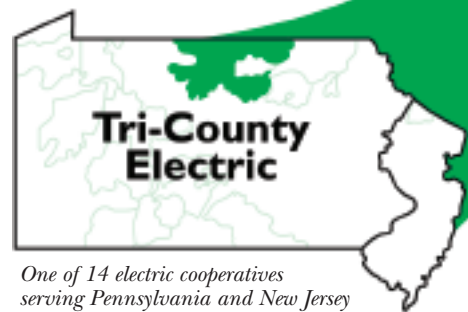
A geothermal heating system is composed of a ground-source heat pump, a heat-delivery system that can be either forced air or radiant, and a series of ground loops. The ground loops can be installed vertically in wells or horizontally in trenches or even ponds.

With this type of system, the ground serves as a heat sink through which heat is collected and transferred into your living space during the cold months. In warmer weather, this process is reversed, allowing you to cool your home by dumping heat from inside your living area into the earth.

Although geothermal technology has been around for more than three decades, there are still some misconceptions about it. One myth I would like to dispel is that it is too cold in our area for geothermal units to work properly. In our region, the ground temperature typically stays about 45 degrees, whether it's 90 degrees in July or below zero in January. The geothermal heat pump is designed to extract heat from that 45-degree ground temperature and does so very efficiently.

Another myth is that you need to hit water when drilling wells for a vertical ground loop system. The water for your geothermal system is completely contained in the piping that makes up the ground loop. In other words, it's a closed system. There is no need for a constant source of fresh water for this type of system.

Because I have been heating and cooling my living space with a geother-



One of 14 electric cooperatives
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

mal system for the past nine years, I can personally attest to the tremendous cost-savings and reliability of ground-source heating. Heating and air conditioning approximately 2,000-square-feet of living space (with 10-foot ceilings) costs me about \$600 per year, based on Tri-County's current electric rates.

If I were to build another home, I wouldn't consider any type of heating system but geothermal. My positive experience with geothermal is one of the reasons I have made it a priority to assist Tri-County members who may be considering installing a ground-source heat pump.

Your co-op recently acquired computer software that allows us to design geoexchange systems for homes or businesses. We are already in the process of helping one cooperative member get up and running with geothermal.

We plan to work closely with one of our fellow Touchstone Energy Cooperatives in Pennsylvania, Somerset REC, in developing our geothermal program. Somerset has a proven track record in this area, assisting hundreds of members with geothermal systems in the southern part of the state over the last 10 years. Their expertise and experience in this area will be a tremendous asset to us as we move forward with a geothermal program of our own.

If you have questions about geothermal, please give our Member Services Department a call at 1-800-343-2559. We look forward to being of service to you.

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Tri-County lends hand to American chestnut restoration project

by Jeff Fetzer

If you happened upon a Tri-County line truck parked in the middle of a back road somewhere with outriggers extended and a lineman working from a bucket elevated into the treetops, you wouldn't be surprised to find a chainsaw buzzing, woodchips flying, and limbs scattered about the ground.

What you might not expect to see, however, is a lineman maneuvering the bucket from branch to branch and collecting nuts in a five-gallon pail.

But that was the situation one fine day last October on Taylor Run Road, a seldom-traveled state forest road northeast of Liberty in Tioga County. There, journeyman lineman Todd Rumsey and Tri-County member Dr. James Montague spent the better part of a morning removing chestnuts from one of the few productive native American chestnut trees remaining in Tioga County.

These chestnuts were not destined to be roasted over an open fire, however. They were gathered as part of The American Chestnut Foundation's long-term project to restore the American chestnut to the forests of the eastern United States.

Beginning Arbor Day, April 28, and extending through May, chestnuts, including those collected with the assistance of Tri-County last fall, will be planted in orchards throughout Pennsylvania in the hopes that a blight-resistant American chestnut can be achieved.

Montague, one of about 40 members of the Pennsylvania chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation, maintains an experimental chestnut orchard on his property in Liberty Township. He began the orchard in 2001 after learning about the foundation's restoration program.

A retired physician, Montague says his interest in returning "the tree that built America" to its former glory came from childhood recollections of his father's stories about the importance of chestnut trees.



THE TREE THAT BUILT AMERICA: This is the trunk of one of the American chestnut trees growing along Taylor Run Road in the Tioga State Forest. Straight-grained, lightweight, and rot resistant, chestnut was the wood of choice for barn and home construction and ideal for making everything from fence posts to furniture.

"My father lived out in the country, and collecting chestnuts was one of his noon activities," he relates. "The chestnut was very instrumental in getting our area settled. It provided food for man and beast. And the lumber was exceptional — straight grained, lightweight and rot resistant."

Montague, who hails from eastern Lycoming County, remembers timber crews hauling chestnut logs out of the



FRUITS OF THEIR LABORS. Tri-County Lineman Todd Rumsey and cooperative member Dr. James Montague of Liberty display their haul after a morning of chestnut collecting along Taylor Run Road in Liberty Township, Tioga County. Before most of the nation's chestnut trees succumbed to blight, nuts from the trees provided an abundant annual food source for wildlife, farm animals, and man.

woods and sawing them for lumber after he moved to Blossburg in Tioga County in the early 1960s. By that time, the American chestnut had been virtually wiped out by a quick-spreading blight first discovered in New York City in 1904.

In less than 50 years, the American chestnut went from one the most important and dominant hardwood tree species in the eastern part of the country to a memory.

Fortunately, groups like The American Chestnut Foundation and volunteers like Dr. Montague have kept that memory alive and are working to give future generations their own recollections of the American chestnut tree.

The foundation, founded in 1983, has spearheaded efforts to back-cross American chestnut trees with disease-resistant Chinese chestnut trees. The goal is to create a hybrid tree that com-





OUT ON A LIMB. Todd Rumsey, a journeyman lineman with the cooperative's Liberty District, collects chestnuts from one of the few remaining native American chestnut trees in the Northern Tier. The nuts were hand-pollinated with pollen from Chinese chestnut trees by cooperative member Dr. James Montague with assistance from Tri-County last June. The protective bags prevent self-pollination.

binest all of the mast-producing characteristics and timber qualities of the American chestnut with the blight-fighting ability of the Oriental trees.

Ultimately, the foundation hopes to restore the American chestnut to the woodlands of its native range. This spring, a blight-resistant American chestnut tree is expected to be ready for a test planting, according to information provided by the foundation. If the backcrossing program continues to progress as planned, blight-resistant American chestnuts will be ready for wider distribution over the next 10 years.

Getting to that point has been an ambitious undertaking involving hun-

dreds of volunteers and thousands of man-hours.

The first step involves locating American chestnuts that have managed to survive the blight. Such trees are uncommon, and they too, are likely to eventually fall to blight. Sometimes, as is the case of the pair of American chestnuts growing along Taylor Run Road, the trees are able to reach maturity and produce nuts before being stricken with blight.

Montague and a friend located the pair of native chestnuts while cruising state forest roads several years ago. Montague, a member of the cooperative's Member Advisory Committee, contacted Tri-County to see if the cooperative would lend a bucket truck and operator to pollinate the trees and harvest chestnuts.

"We were more than happy to help with efforts to bring back the American chestnut tree," states John Lykens, Tri-County's director of engineering and operations. "These types of projects provide another opportunity for us to demonstrate our commitment to community, one of the guiding principals of the electric cooperative program."

Last June, the cooperative assisted Montague in placing plastic bags over the female flowers, or burrs, on each of the trees growing along Taylor Run Road to prevent self-pollination from occurring. They returned a few weeks later to remove the bags, pollinate the burrs with pollen from Chinese chestnut trees and re-cover the burrs with the protective bags.

In October, Montague and Rumsey returned to pluck the now hybridized nuts from the trees. From there the chestnuts were shipped to the foundation and placed in cold storage to awaiting planting this spring. This was the second year of Tri-County's involvement in the project.

Although it is expected that the entire breeding project will take 30 to 50 years, within five years the foundation expects to realize the first line of highly blight resistant trees. Those trees will be 15/16th American chestnut and one-sixteenth Chinese

chestnut and are expected to be virtually identical in appearance and characteristics of the chestnut trees that dominated the hardwood forests of Eastern United States so many years ago.

"Out of 20,000 cross-bred trees, they expect to find 80 that are resistant to the disease," says Montague.

It's a slow process, but one that volunteers like Montague feel will be worth the wait for future generations.

A wealth of information about The American Chestnut Foundation's restoration efforts can be found on the foundation's Web site at www.acf.org. For membership information, call the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation at 814/863-7192 or visit the state chapter on the Internet at www.patacf.org.



SEEDS OF HOPE: The chestnuts contained inside these burrs, collected last fall in Tioga County, will be planted in coming weeks at experimental orchards operated by volunteers throughout the state. Through an extensive back-breeding program, The American Chestnut Foundation has been working since 1983 to develop a blight-resistant American chestnut tree and restore the species to its native range in the eastern United States.



Tri-County chairman elected to national board

Dr. James R. Davis, board chairman at Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, has been elected to serve on a national cooperative banking board. Davis won election to a three-year term on the National Cooperative Services Corporation



Dr. James R. Davis

(NCSC) board of directors during its annual organizational meeting Feb. 20 in Orlando, Fla.

"I am honored to represent Tri-County and the Northeast on the NCSC board,"

Davis said. "NCSC provides invaluable services to its member cooperatives, and I am looking forward to my involvement with the organization."

NCSC is a member-owned cooperative association that provides electric cooperatives and their affiliates with specialized financing and related services. The banking cooperative is governed by an 11-member board of directors chosen from five geographically defined districts in the country.

As Davis joined the board representing NCSC District 1, Tri-County Rural Electric President and CEO Robert O. Toombs rotated off of the NCSC board after concluding his third and final three-year term. NCSC Directors may serve no more than three terms.

A self-employed educational consultant and advising faculty member of NOVA Southeastern University, Davis is retired from the Northern Tioga School District, where his most recent post was assistant superintendent.

Davis and business partner Daniel Perma co-authored a textbook, "Align-

ing Standards and Curriculum for Classroom Success," that is used in workshops they conduct, as well as curriculum classes taught at the college level. Originally printed in 2000, a second edition of the textbook is expected to be published this summer.

Davis holds a doctorate degree in educational administration from New Mexico State University, a master's degree in guidance and counseling from Alfred University, and a bachelor's degree in mathematics education from Mansfield University.

He and his wife, Elaine, reside in Elkland. They have three grown sons, Tom, Matt, and Jared.

Davis was appointed to the Tri-County board of directors in April 2001, won election to a full three-year term on the board in October 2003, and became board chairman in July 2005.

Davis' term on the NCSC board is contingent upon his continued service as a Tri-County director. Only active electric cooperative directors and chief executive officers are permitted to serve on the NCSC board.

Davis also serves as director on the boards of Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Tri-County's wholesale power supplier; Susquehanna Energy Plus, Mansfield; and the River Valley Country Club, Westfield.

NCSC, based in Herndon, Va., oversees over \$850 million in assets and operates through a management agreement with the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corp. (CFC). CFC, formed in 1969, is a member-owned financial institution that provides state-of-the-art financial products to approximately 1,050 electric cooperative members in 49 states, District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories. CFC has total loans and guarantees outstanding that exceed \$20 billion.

Watch out for utility imposters

Last month, a pair of burglars gained entrance to an elderly couple's home in Susquehanna County by posing as utility employees and made off with several hundred dollars in cash. Tri-County advises residents to be suspicious of individuals who attempt to get inside your home by stating they work for the cooperative.

Normally, the only Tri-County employees with routine business in your neighborhood are the cooperative's meter readers and servicemen.

"Tri-County workers do not perform repairs on household wiring systems," says Bryan Berguson, director of member services. "In fact, our employees have instructions not to enter customers' homes unless it is an emergency or for pre-arranged visits for services such as conducting energy audits."

Each Tri-County employee carries a laminated plastic identification card showing his or her photograph, signature, and employee identification number. Employees drive vehicles that are clearly marked with Tri-County emblems on the doors.

If someone you do not recognize comes to your door and states he or she is a Tri-County employee, protect yourself by:

- Asking to see identification.
- Calling Tri-County at 1-800-343-2559 to verify work and employee identities if there is any doubt.
- Looking for clearly marked service vehicles.
- Reporting any suspicious activity to the police.

