

# From the CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER: Protecting Our Interests



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

**T**he energy business is changing more rapidly than at any time in its history. Increased regulatory pressures, emerging technologies, more stringent accounting standards, shifting financial markets and environmental concerns have forced those of us in the electric and natural gas industries to re-examine many aspects of the way we conduct business.

The electric sector, in particular, has experienced drastic changes since the creation of independent system operators (ISO) and power exchanges in the

1990s. The emergence of ISOs created an open market for wholesale power transactions and became the launch pad for retail customer choice.

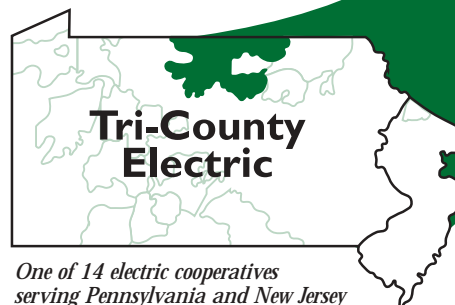
Any time major changes are brewing in the energy industry, it's comforting to know Tri-County and our sister electric cooperatives have a powerful national service organization, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), looking out for our best interests and lobbying Congress on behalf of the nation's 36 million electric cooperative consumers.

Last year, when the national energy bill was first drafted, it contained a provision that would have forced more regulations — and additional expense — on electric co-ops. NRECA lobbied against the provision, which was ultimately removed.

Although Congress failed to approve a national energy bill last year, the issue continues to be debated. A slimmed down Senate version now under consideration may have a chance of being enacted.

Before that takes place, we need to be certain that any energy bill protects the rights of electric cooperative members and doesn't place undo costs upon them. The bill should also encourage renewable forms of energy. A federal tax credit for developing wind generation expired at the end of last year. Since then, many planned wind farms have been put on hold. As I write this, all versions of the energy bill provide tax credits for renewable power projects.

Although the current generation portfolio of Pennsylvania's electric cooperatives does not include wind energy, we are optimistic that some day it will. By offering a tax credit for the development of wind generation, the national energy bill promotes clean



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

energy use and utilization of renewable energy sources available in rural areas.

With the recent escalation of fossil fuels prices, it's more important than ever that our nation begin searching for alternative sources of generation to reduce our dependency on natural gas and coal. So any new energy bill must also ensure an adequate and reliable supply of energy at reasonable prices. To have growth in our rural communities, it is crucial that we have an abundant and affordable flow of electricity.

Your cooperative's board of directors and management staff, along with affiliated associations including NRECA and the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, will be monitoring the provisions of the new energy bill, offering information, input and our position on the many issues it contains.

To ensure that our collective cooperative voice is heard on these issues, nearly 3,000 co-op representatives from around the country will converge on Washington, D.C., this month to lobby Congress on behalf of the cooperative program.

It is hoped that a strong showing in Washington, as well as the input we offer legislators while there, will prompt our elected officials to make decisions on the energy bill and other energy industry matters that are beneficial for rural Pennsylvania and rural America.

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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# And So We Are Getting Electric

*Editor's Note: R. Angus Steadman, chief engineer for Tri-County's electrification efforts from 1936-38, chronicled the struggle to bring power to rural areas of northern Pennsylvania in a nine-page manuscript written circa October 1937, about one month before Tri-County's lines were energized. Mr. Steadman's daughter, Mary Steadman Rothrock of Konosha, Wisconsin, donated a copy of the manuscript to Tri-County during a recent visit to Pennsylvania. We have decided to publish excerpts from Mr. Steadman's writings for several reasons. First, we seek to give members who weren't around "the day the lights came on" a feel for the plight our rural forefathers faced in bringing electricity to their homes and businesses. In addition, this document is one of the few historical manuscripts we have come across that provides details about the birth of Tri-County as an electric cooperative. To read the manuscript in its entirety, visit Tri-County's Web site at [www.tri-countyrec.com](http://www.tri-countyrec.com).*



by R. A. Steadman

From the standpoint of national economics I am still very much at a loss to know the right, or otherwise, of the federal government's program of rural electrification as set up under the Rural Electrification Administration, now so widely known as REA.

However, after a year and a half of battle in helping to organize and carry through to completion a 400-mile project in the hills of northern Pennsylvania, I feel that I have learned so much in an entirely new field of rural activity that a brief recital may prove of interest to the million others, like myself, who are now demanding a necessity that they should have had years ago.

It is a notable fact that this country, gloriously ahead in so many other fields of social betterment, has lagged sadly in giving our 30 million rural population the benefit of electricity. In fact, up to the present time, the number of our farmers in a position to receive central station service has been so small that the percent is almost negligible. Within the past two years, the activity of the Rural Electrification Administration has so brought this situation to the foreground that it has now become an

economic problem of major importance. The passive attitude of the past is over. Farmers everywhere, from Maine to California are clamoring for service with a cry that will not be denied.

Being a graduate of an agricultural college with a major in rural engineering, I had always sworn that I would never take my family to live on a farm that did not have all of the so-called modern conveniences. Yet ten years ago we bought a farm which lacked the one thing which would make it modern. We did everything but get down on our knees begging the power company to give us service. Now, however, all is changed. We're going to have electricity. The poles are set, the wire is strung, the transformer hung and the service drop connected. We're going to have lights in 30 days, and this time we know it's true.

The pains, trials and tribulations, which we underwent to attain this service, may or may not prove a criterion in guiding the destinies of future cooperative rural electric projects. Still, I do know that it is a fair-size sample of the difficulties besetting nearly every project of its kind since REA's inception.

Others there are, who darkly hint that REA has ulterior and far-reaching designs that, if not checked, will place cooperative electricity in this country on the same basis that it is in Sweden. They fear that when everything is ready, a few swift movers will place Washington in all the "king rows," and private business will be a thing of the past.

Perhaps these experts and shouters are correct, but to those of us who have been fighting to get a commodity that is as necessary to present day existence as the automobile, it smells like something the cat dragged in. In the first place, the utilities have been doing pretty well all these years without the rural business. Secondly, by far the big majority of these projects are buying their current from local power companies, and in a good many instances this current represents energy that would otherwise be wasted. In fact, it is not the policy of REA to build generating plants at all if the local utility is inclined to play ball with a decent rate. Third, if the 14 hours a day the farmer has to work, many by the foggy light of a kerosene lantern — if those 14 daily hours can be brightened and shortened by a little subsidy, God knows it will

be in as good a cause as shipping and a lot of other things. To me it is one of the most commendable things the federal government has ever done.

It was around (1936) some of us woke up to the fact that there was a part of the government "alphabet" designed to meet our problem. A few leading spirits got together and in a short time there was a small unadvertised meeting in the west end of (Tioga) county. Soon there was another, attended this time by over 100, all wanting electricity in the next 30 days.

At first we were handicapped by being slow in getting organized, but by October (1936) we were under way as the Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative Association....It is a large name, (being the secretary, I should know) but Washington insisted on the words "rural electric cooperative," so, seeing that we were borrowing \$455,000 with nothing for assets but hope in the future, well — it's still a large name.

If anyone has the idea that getting a thousand or more farmers with strong Republican tendencies, 100 hundred percent behind a cooperative movement sponsored by a Democratic administration was a simple matter, just think again. In the first place, by no possible stretch of imagination can an Eastern dairy farmer be classified as a group-conscious individual. He is, by very nature, an independent soul. Furthermore, he has had many sad experiences with group movements.

All of us wanted electricity at a price we could afford. Seventy-five percent of us wanted it through REA because we knew that if it had not been for REA it would have been a long, long time in coming — if ever. But the grief that the other 25 percent caused was simply appalling. The staking crew and right-of-way man would go merrily on for several miles, then suddenly would appear one of those independent individuals giving orders to keep off. Some simply stated that REA could set poles on their land when REA owned it. Others, more broad minded, gave permission to go anywhere as long as we stayed in the fence rows — that is, if we were careful which fence rows we used. Still others wanted from \$5 to \$40 for each pole set on their premises, and we were without a dollar to our name. However, we have now completed over 350 miles of line, and I am happy to state that so far, we have not had to pay for a single easement.

It has been a year of hard work and worry with plenty of "bitter" along with the "sweet." Yet now we are told that we are



still far from the home stretch, and that with the turning on of current, a whole new field of grief will open up.

Before bringing this article to a close, I wish to give a little friendly advice to the million others who will soon be having their own problems in rural electrification: The word “cooperative” appears in the name of all of these projects. That word signifies the one thing, without which, every project for rural electrification will shortly pass out of existence. Unified cooperation is necessary all the way down the line.

Cooperation is the keynote to the success of any project and all of my advice can be summed up in that one word.

A short time ago, as the haze of Indian Summer merged with evening’s dusk, we finished our day’s work at a little farm that nestled against the peace of wooded hills. A woman was here gathering chips for the supper fire. Seeing us, she paused. Tired eyes brightened. “Is it really and truly coming way back here?” she asked.

As I answered in the affirmative, I thought of the new electric range in our store room, lights at the touch of a finger, of washers, irons and other things. And so thinking, I drove back to my own home with its hot stove and dingy lamps, but a song is in my heart because I know that the wonder day will soon arrive when current will be turned on in a thousand more rural homes, and tired-eyed men and women will give thanks for drudging hours saved. I am glad that I have had a small part in making it all come true.

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*R. Angus Steadman was born in Velisca, Iowa, on November 9, 1894. His mother, Grace Crocker Steadman, served for a number of years as head of the music department at Mansfield Normal School (now Mansfield University). When Angus, along with his wife, Margaret, moved to Pennsylvania to be near his folks, they bought a farm, known as the Sanitarium Farm, 10 miles outside Mansfield.*

*While living at the farm, Angus earned an associate degree in civil engineering from Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. In 1936, he was hired to design and build the electric system for Tri-County.*

*In 1939, when Tri-County’s rural electrification project was completed, Steadman transferred to North Carolina to install REA lines there. Just before he was to leave for North Carolina, he had a major heart attack, but insisted on going anyway. He was there for six months and was able to finish the project. Ailing, he returned to Mansfield, where he remained bedridden until his death in 1941.*

## Digging up memories of the co-op’s early days

by Jeff Fetzer

Earl Heyler glances up and down the aging utility pole, its splintery surface pockmarked from years of climbing.

“I think that’s the one,” he says, pointing to a pole along Old Route 15 near Sebring, Tioga County. “Every once in a while, you come on to one that you remember.”

What the 86-year-old recalls about this particular pole was manually digging the seven-foot-deep hole in which it was placed more than 65 years ago.

The hole, he says, was two feet deeper than normal because the pole was extra long — about 45 feet compared to the 35-foot pole typically used at the time. And the digging was unusually easy because the pole site was adjacent to the main road, which had been previously excavated and backfilled with rock-free material.

Heyler was among the scores of laborers hired by Tri-County on a temporary basis in the late 1930s as the co-op embarked upon electrification efforts in the rural areas of north-central Pennsylvania.

“It was my first job, and the only job I’ve ever had off the farm,” says Heyler, a Tri-County member who still helps out on the Nauvoo dairy operation he passed down to his sons, Ken and John.

When Earl Heyler went to work for the cooperative in the fall of 1938, the fledgling utility already had power flowing in the northern part of its service territory. Nineteen years old at the time, Heyler says he wanted to not only play a part in bringing electricity to the Liberty area, but also to earn a few dollars during a time of year that was traditionally slow on the farm.

“Money was pretty scarce back then,” he says, pointing out the nation was still in the grips of the Great Depression.

For their efforts, the workers earned 40 cents an hour, a pretty good wage at the time, according to Heyler.

“And if you didn’t work, there was always somebody to replace you,” he notes.

Initially, Heyler worked on a small



*Earl Heyler of Nauvoo, Tioga County, displays a long-handled spoon similar to one he used while working as a digger for Tri-County in 1938.*

crew that delivered poles to the various job sites. However, he was soon transferred to the digging crew.

He estimates the co-op employed about 15 to 20 diggers in the Liberty area that fall. Each morning, they would load into the back of a pick-up truck. One by one, they would be dropped off at a pole site marked by a stake. Using metal digging bars and long-handled spoons, the workers would dig holes about five feet deep for the standard 35-foot poles.

“As you’d get done digging one hole, the driver would pick you up and take you to another hole,” Heyler says, noting that workers could dig four to five holes in the course of a 10-hour day “if the digging was halfway decent.”

Many times, however, it wasn’t. There was gravel, water, hard pan and solid rock to contend with. When a digger’s progress was halted by rock, a blasting crew would be called upon to loosen things up with a charge of dynamite.

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After each hole was completed, another group of workers known as "pikers" would be called upon to set the pole. After a series of poles were in place, a team of horses would transport a spool of wire along the right-of-way, and another crew would string the line from span to span.

In just three or four months, the areas of Cogan House, Brookside, Blackwell, English Center and Liberty were wired and ready for current.

"It was quite an accomplishment," Heyler says. "Somebody had laid things out pretty well for us to get done as quickly as we did. Those lines went up in a hurry."

Once work was completed near his home turf, Heyler was enlisted to help co-op crews working near Milan in Bradford County for the remainder of the winter. By spring, Heyler was back to full-time dairy farming — only now he would have bright new electric lights greeting him in the barn each morning instead of the dull flicker of kerosene lamps.

Although his co-op career was short-lived, the efforts of Heyler and many others like him who labored to bring electricity to the region nearly seven decades ago have stood the test of time — much like that old, weathered pole along the highway near Sebring.

## Mark your Calendars!

### Annual Meeting set for July 10

Tri-County Rural Electric invites members to join us at the Williamson High School on Saturday, July 10, for our 2004 annual meeting. We will provide a catered lunch, door prizes and a variety of displays. There's fun and games in store for the kids, too.

Don't miss out on this great opportunity to meet your Tri-County representatives, vote for directors and enjoy the fellowship of your co-op neighbors.

# Electrical Safety: Does Your Home Pass the Test?

**F**aulty home electrical wiring causes 40,000 fires, claims 350 lives and causes thousands of injuries and more than \$2 billion in personal property damage in the United States each year, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

During May — National Electrical Safety Month — the Leviton Institute advises homeowners conduct the following 10-step electrical safety inspection to help prevent a tragedy from taking place in your home:

- 1. Electrical Outlets:** Check for loose-fitting plugs that may create a shock or fire hazard. Replace missing or broken wall plates so wiring and components are not exposed.
- 2. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs):** Make sure GFCIs are installed in your kitchen, bathrooms, workshop, basement, garage and outdoor areas where water and electricity are likely to come in contact. Test them monthly to ensure they work properly.
- 3. Plugs:** Never force them into outlets. Don't remove the ground pin (third prong) to make a three-prong plug fit a two-conductor outlet. Avoid overloading outlets with adapters and too many appliance plugs.
- 4. Cords:** Make sure they are not frayed or cracked, placed under carpets or rugs, resting on furniture or located in high-traffic areas. Do not nail or staple them to walls, floors or other objects.
- 5. Extension Cords:** Use on a temporary basis only. They are not intended as permanent household wiring. Make sure they have safety closures to protect young children from shock hazards and mouth burn injuries.
- 6. Light Bulbs:** Check the wattage to make sure light bulbs match the fixture requirements. Replace bulbs that have higher wattage ratings than recommended. Make sure they are screwed in securely so they don't overheat.
- 7. Circuit Breakers/Fuses:** Fuses should be properly rated for the circuit they are protecting. If you don't know the correct rating, have an electrician identify and label the correct size to be used.



Always replace a fuse with the same size you are removing. Check that circuit breakers are working properly.

- 8. Appliances/Electronics:** If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker or has given you an electrical shock, immediately unplug it and have it repaired or replaced. Look for cracks or damage in wiring, plugs and connectors. Use surge protectors to protect expensive electronics.
- 9. Outdoor Connections:** Electric-powered lawn equipment and power tools should not be used in the rain, on wet grass or in wet conditions. Inspect for frayed cords, broken plugs and cracked or broken housings. Always use an extension cord rated for outdoor use.
- 10. Service Capacity:** Electrical systems can become overloaded. As you continue to upgrade your home with more lighting, appliances and electronics, your home's electrical service capacity may become overburdened. If fuses blow or circuit breakers trip frequently, you may need to increase your home's electrical service and add new branch circuits. A qualified, licensed electrician can determine the appropriate service requirements for your home and provide you with an estimate of the cost to upgrade.

## Notice...

All Tri-County offices will be closed Monday, May 31, 2004, in observance of Memorial Day.

