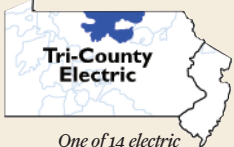


Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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22 North Main Street • P.O. Box 526
Mansfield, PA 16933
Mansfield — 570/662-2175
Coudersport — 814/274-8740
Website:
www.tri-countyrec.com
Email:
trico@tri-countyrec.com
For emergencies call:
1-800-343-2559

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OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

Rounding up help for the heating season



by Craig Eccher

WITH December's arrival, many of us look forward to gathering with family and friends, exchanging gifts and enjoying the holiday season.

But the final month of the year also brings with it the official start of winter and its accompanying higher heating costs.

In these challenging economic times, we know

some of our members will feel the pinch on their household budgets this time of year. We also know we have many generous people in our region willing to help those in need during the holiday season through their churches, service organizations and places of business.

Unfortunately, after the holidays, after the Christmas toy collections, food drives and mitten trees have come to their successful conclusions, some among us will still have a difficult time keeping up with energy costs over the course of a long Northern Tier winter.

To assist your fellow Tri-County Electric members who are having difficulty paying their electric bills, your co-op operates a charitable program called Family-In-Need. The program was created to help cooperative members who have exhausted other forms of aid offered through assistance agencies, social service organizations, churches and government-sponsored programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Members who qualify for the Family-In-Need program receive a credit toward their Tri-County electric bill.

The Family-In-Need program is administered by the Salvation Army and is

funded solely through voluntary member contributions. That's where you can help.

An easy and inexpensive way for you to help your neighbors in need is to simply allow us to round up your electric bill to the next dollar amount each month. The "change" would go directly into the fund, and the most you would ever contribute in a given month would be 99 cents.

So for less than the cost of a cup of coffee, you can help ease the burden of a co-op family experiencing financial hardships. It's a relatively painless way of helping those in need.

It's also a great way for cooperative members to exercise "concern for community," one of the seven guiding philosophies of the cooperative way of doing business.

More detailed information about the Family-In-Need program and how you can sign up appears on page 12d of this month's *Penn Lines*.

The idea behind this initiative, which we began in late 2004, is to assist members who are truly in need, as well as those who have experienced an extraordinary hardship, family catastrophe or serious illness. Since its inception, the program has provided over \$14,000 worth of assistance to 119 members who would have otherwise been unable to pay their electric bills.

Currently, 692 members contribute to the Family-In-Need fund each month. If you are not yet a Family-In-Need program participant, please consider lending your support to this worthy program by allowing Tri-County to round up your electric bill.

Best wishes for a joyous holiday season. 

Tri-County member taps spring to heat home

BY JEFF FETZER

THE SAME spring that has been supplying water to the home of Tri-County members Janine and Bryan Morley for nearly three decades now heats and cools the couple's century-old Potter County farmhouse as well.

When energy costs skyrocketed two years ago, Bryan Morley, like many homeowners, found himself thinking of alternative ways to warm his home. That winter, he says, he spent about \$3,600 on coal and heating oil.

A self-employed welder, Morley initially considered an outdoor heating system to curtail coal or wood dust in the home, something Janine had long objected to.

Bryan's initial plan was to install a self-feeding outdoor wood pellet stove and tie it into the home's existing ductwork through a heat exchanger in the basement.

"I was sold on the idea of a pellet stove at first," he reports. "Then one day I picked up the *Penn Lines* and saw an ad from the geothermal heat pump guys, and I thought, heck, I could do that with my spring."

A geothermal heat pump is an electrically powered device that uses the Earth's constant temperature to heat or cool a home. Heat pumps work in a manner similar to a refrigerator, transferring thermal energy from one place to another. With geothermal heat pumps, heat is extracted from below the Earth's surface through a liquid medium, typically groundwater or an antifreeze solution.

Most homeowners install what is known as a closed-loop geothermal system, which uses a continuous loop of buried plastic pipe as a heat exchanger. The piping, which is typically installed in wells or trenches, is connected to the indoor heat pump to form a sealed, underground or underwater loop through which water and an antifreeze solution is circulated.

A drawback of closed-loop systems is that drilling wells or digging trenches adds considerable expense to the heating project. What Morley envisioned for his system involved utilizing groundwater from his existing spring, running the spring water through a heat pump in his basement and then discharging it directly into a small stream adjacent to his house. This is referred

to as an open-loop system, and since the piping was already in place from the spring to Morley's home some 1,300 feet away, no drilling or digging would be required.

Although his plans for an open-loop system were met with some initial skepticism or uncertainty from representatives of one heat pump manufacturer and several state agencies, eventually Morley received a letter from the state Department of Environmental Protection granting him approval to discharge water from the heating system into the stream.

"We aren't changing the water by going through the heat pump," he says. "We are only changing the temperature of the water."

With assistance from Tri-County member services representative Mike Filer, a certified geothermal installer, Morley planned out and installed his system last fall.

"This project was totally outside the box," Filer notes. "An open-loop system is not common in our area. But if you've got a dependable spring with enough volume, this is definitely the way to go."

Filer says in order for an open-loop system to operate off of a spring, the flow needs to be at least 10 gallons a minute. The Morleys' spring has a flow of about 50 gallons per minute.

The Morleys' new heating and cooling system was put into service a year ago this month, and the results, Bryan says, have exceeded his most optimistic expectations.

"It looks like we will be spending less than \$1,200 a year for heating and cooling, versus the \$3,600 we were spending on heating alone two years ago," says Morley. "I know oil prices have come down since then, but even at today's prices, I think it's safe to say the new heating system will pay for itself in three years."

Since there was no underground piping to install and he was able to use his home's existing ductwork, Morley's main expense was for the 6-ton Climate Master heat pump unit, which he installed himself. The total cost of the heating system was \$7,500. However, a \$2,000 federal



Tri-County member Bryan Morley stands in front of his century-old farmhouse along Route 449 near Gold. After years of burning wood, coal and oil, Bryan installed a geothermal heating system last fall that has lowered his energy costs significantly while providing a clean and steady source of heat and air-conditioning. Morley's system utilizes groundwater from a gravity-fed spring some 1,300 feet from his home as a thermal energy source.

energy tax credit and a \$500 credit from Tri-County for going with geothermal heating pared his final cost to \$5,000.

The heating system has its own meter, so Morley can monitor exactly how much energy it uses. Over its first 10 months of operation, including an abnormally cold heating season, his electric use had increased an average of 682 kilowatt-hours per month, which equates to about \$70 extra per month in electric costs at Tri-County's current rate.

But it's been more than just saving energy dollars that the Morleys are enjoying with their new system, which heats and cools about 3,000 square feet, including the basement.

"We love it," he says. "It's clean, gives you a steady heat, and I don't have to feed the thing. And we didn't have any problems with dry skin last winter, which had always been an issue before."

"When it's cold outside and I come in the cellar and it's warm, it always give me a thrill to think we are heating our house with water," adds Morley. "The most discouraging thing is that I hadn't done this sooner." ☀️

ENERGY*matters*

Get the LED out

Give yourself and the planet a gift this holiday season by decorating your Christmas tree with energy-efficient LED lighting.

LED lights last up to 10 times longer than traditional incandescent strands, are cool to the touch, reducing the risk of fire, and are available in a variety of colors and shapes.

But their energy-saving ability is even more impressive. An Energy Star-qualified decorated light string consumes

about 75 percent less energy than conventional incandescent light strands. Based on savings estimates from testing done by Pacific Gas and Electric, a traditional



mini-incandescent light string with 300 lights consumes about \$4.50 worth of electricity over the course of the holiday season. The LED equivalent costs less than \$0.45 cents, saving over \$4 per each 300-light string.

And according to information on the Energy Star website, if all light strings sold in America this year were Energy Star-qualified, we would save over 2 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity per year, reducing greenhouse gas emissions the equivalent of nearly 300,000 cars.

Holiday Closings

Tri-County's offices will be closed on the following days during the holidays:

- December 24-25 – Christmas
- January 1 – New Year's Day

Energy assistance program offers help with heating bills

If you need help paying your heating bills, you may be able to receive assistance through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the program provides energy-assistance grants to help low-income households pay their heating bills through the winter.

LIHEAP offers both cash grants and crisis grants. If you are eligible for a cash grant, the grant will be sent directly to your utility or fuel dealer, and the payment will be credited on your bill. You will receive written notice telling you if you are eligible for assistance and the amount you will receive.

Crisis grants are available to help those who have emergency situations in which they are in danger of being without heat.

Those situations include: having broken heating equipment or leaking fuel lines; being without fuel; having utility service terminated; or in danger of being without fuel or of having utility service terminated.

If you have a heating emergency, or for more information about LIHEAP, call your county assistance office or the toll-free LIHEAP hotline at 1-866-857-7095.

Below are the income guidelines for acceptance into the program:

Household Size	Maximum Income (before taxes)
1	\$16,245
2	\$21,855
3	\$27,465
4	\$33,075
5	\$38,685
6	\$44,295
Add \$5,610 for each additional member of the household	

Season's Greetings from all of us at Tri-County Rural Electric

President and CEO: Craig Eccher

Board of Directors: Donald Blackwell, Alfred Calkins, James Davis, Lowell Geiser, Ferd Irish, Gerald Kite, Nick Reitter, Barbara Seeley, Alston Teeter

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Tri-County goes a-Twitter

Tri-County took the plunge into social networking when it opened a Twitter account on the internet this month.

Twitter enables users to send and receive messages known as "tweets."



Tweets are one- or two-sentence posts displayed on the author's profile pages and delivered to the author's subscribers, who are known as followers.

The co-op's initial tweets will be used to provide co-op members and other followers with updates about Tri-County's Co-op Connections card program offerings as well as other co-op-related news briefs.

To become a Tri-County follower, visit www.twitter.com/TricoConnection.

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, eliminating seasonal spikes in your electric bill, as well as billing fluctuations caused by estimated meter readings or changes in your electric use.

Participants in Budget Billing pay the same amount each month for 11 months. The budget amount is based on the average of your electric bills for the previous year. In the 12th month of your Budget Billing cycle, we perform a "true-up," comparing your budgeted amount with your actual cost for the year. Your bill total in the settlement month will reflect the difference between the actual and budgeted amounts.

After the true-up, Tri-County reviews and adjusts your budgeted amount for the next year based on your electric use from the previous 12 months, taking into account any rate adjustments that may have been implemented.

If you are interested in setting up a Budget Billing plan for your account, please call the financial services department at 1-800-343-2559.

We will calculate your monthly payment amount and mail it to you, along with a sign-up form and further budget information.



Family-In-Need Fund It's common cents

With today's higher energy costs, more and more cooperative families struggle to keep up with their energy bills.

You can help some of your neighbors in need by participating in Tri-County's Family-In-Need Fund.

This voluntary program allows you to assist members of the cooperative who have difficulties paying their electric bills. Participating in the program is inexpensive – less than \$1 a month – and helps unite the entire co-op as members help each other through difficult financial times.

CONTRIBUTING IS EASY

The concept behind the Family-In-Need Fund is simple. You allow Tri-County to "round up" your monthly electric bill to the next dollar amount. The difference between the round-up amount and your actual bill amount – which can be no higher than 99 cents in one month – goes into this new fund.

A FEW CENTS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Your donation of less than a dollar a month doesn't amount to a large sum of money, typically about \$6 per year. But

your pocket change, when pooled with contributions from all of the other participating members of the co-op, can truly make a difference for a family that has fallen behind on its electric bill.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you would like to help your co-op neighbors, the Family-In-Need Fund is an easy way to do just that. Just fill out the form below and enclose it with your next electric bill. If you decide you no longer want to participate in the program, just call the office and ask to stop.

The success of this program depends on the generosity of members. Neighbors helping neighbors – it's the cooperative way. Please send in your form today.

Yes! I want to become a volunteer for the Family-In-Need Fund!

I understand that my bill will be rounded up to the next dollar amount. My total bill will include my monthly contribution to the program, and I am responsible for paying that amount. I also understand that to stop donating to the fund, all I need to do is call the office and ask to stop.

Name: _____ Account No.: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Thank you for helping.