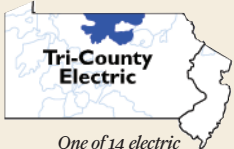


Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Tri-County REC
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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- Annette Bender**, *Executive Assistant*
- John Lykens**, *Director, Engineering & Operations*
- Barbara Johnson**, *Director, Financial Services*
- Bryan Berguson**, *Director, Member Services*

OFFICE HOURS

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

Metering our move to automation



by Craig Eccher

BY THE year's end, Tri-County will have completed its goal to convert all of our analog electric meters to digital technology. We began this process over seven years ago and can now begin taking advantage of all the benefits of our automated metering infrastructure, or AMI.

AMI benefits your electric co-op and you, as a cooperative member, in a variety of ways. With AMI, meter readings are transmitted directly to the office on a daily basis. This helps us reduce costs associated with manually reading members' electric meters. Our employees no longer have to travel hundreds of miles each month to read the 18,000-plus meters on our system. This lowers our labor and transportation expenses, helping us to provide rate stability to our members.

With full deployment of automated meters, we have finally been able to eliminate the need for estimated meter readings. Historically, we read your electric meter every other month and relied on estimated readings in those months when an employee did not physically visit your home. The estimated readings sometimes caused excessive swings in members' electric bills, depending on weather, time of year and number of days in a particular billing cycle. We are pleased to finally be able to provide members with accurate meter readings each and every month.

The new digital meters also provide us with a tool to assist members who have questions about their electric consumption. Because the new meters transmit readings to the office daily, we can help you to identify possible reasons


behind a sudden increase — or decrease — in your electric use. In the future, the AMI system will tie in with our electronic billing program, giving E-Bill participants the ability to view their daily readings in report form and helping them to make informed energy efficiency and conservation decisions.

AMI also aids our engineering department in a number of ways. It has the ability to detect outages on our system — though members are reminded that they still need to call the office any time they lose electric service.

From a reliability standpoint, the new AMI system will also provide the engineering department with valuable system information such as voltage levels. We will be able to determine when a circuit is becoming overloaded, which helps us to plan for future circuit replacement.

The data collected from digital meters helps us to better serve our members by improving efficiency, reliability and quality of service, and providing useful information to you and our engineering group.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention various claims floating around the internet that so-called "smart meters" have the potential to intrude upon electric users' privacy. I can assure you, our meter technology does not go beyond the meter to monitor specific devices and appliances within your home. And the information we collect from your meter is not shared with any third parties, unless we are requested to do so by the member.

As your electric cooperative, Tri-County remains committed to protecting your privacy and the security of your electric consumption data. Should you have additional questions, please feel free to contact the office. Best wishes to all of you for a joyous holiday season. 

Blacksmith forges ahead by looking to the past

BY JEFF FETZER

AFTER LEAVING the bright lights and bustle of Pennsylvania's capital city for the dark skies and serenity of God's Country in 2003, Tri-County member Doug Firestone decided it was time to forge ahead with his dream of hammering out a living as a blacksmith.

The aptly named Firestone, owner of Firestone Forge in Germania, says he didn't originally set out to earn a living by plying a dying trade.

Like many of his Baby Boomer generation cohorts, Firestone, 50, says he focused on climbing the corporate ladder and fattening his bank account during the first two decades of his working career.

"For the longest time, my priority was my career," says Firestone, who worked for an engineering firm in Harrisburg before moving to Potter County eight years ago. "That focus on career and making money eventually became detrimental to me and those around me."

Then came his wake-up call: the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"Nine-eleven pushed me over the edge," he says. "I decided that it would be better to live a much simpler life, closer to the earth, and just leave the rat race behind."

So Doug and his wife, Chris, hatched a plan to relocate to a small, rural community with plenty of outdoor opportunities

where they could raise their young son.

Chris, an employee with the state Bureau of Forestry, secured a transfer to the Tioga State Forest district office in Wellsboro, and the family purchased a home in the village of Germania.

"We were looking at towns near areas with the most green on the map," Firestone explains. "I like to go into the forest. Hunting isn't a hobby to me, it's who I am, and it's also part of my whole philosophy."

It's a philosophy that harkens back to another era, one that places a high value on sense of community, self-reliance and responsibility to family and that eschews the excess consumerism that Firestone sees as a growing problem within the country today.

"I came here with the intent of being a stay-at-home father," he says. "I wanted to spend time with my son. I figure the way we can fix this country is to start at my own house."

Firestone, who took an interest in blacksmithing while attending college, figured opening a blacksmith shop would enable him to stay at home with his son, now age 12, and also provide some extra income for the family. For most of his early working career, Firestone had enjoyed blacksmithing as a hobby and part-time business, producing and selling hand-forged items such as eating utensils, lantern hooks, tools and tent stakes at

weekend living history events known as rendezvous, where buckskin-clad re-enactors celebrate the lifestyle of early 19th-century American trappers and furtraders.

Attending the gatherings of modern-day mountain men further stoked Firestone's fascination with early American living, and he began expanding his blacksmithing



ALL FIRED UP: Tri-County member Doug Firestone of Germania works the crank on his forge to bring the oven temperature up to an orange-hot 1,800 degrees, the point at which steel can be shaped by striking it with a hammer.



PRIDE AND JOY: Potter County craftsman Doug Firestone shows off his favorite hunting rifle, a .60 flintlock muzzleloader that he and custom gun maker Mike Brooks built. Before becoming a blacksmith, Firestone had apprenticed as a gunsmith with his uncle in the Lebanon County area.

skills by crafting 18th-century items such as door hinges and latches, fireplace tools, music stands, wash stands, and lighting fixtures.

Passionate about preserving his time-honored craft for future generations, he began offering blacksmithing demonstrations at summer history camps in the Philadelphia area. He continues that tradition today, providing blacksmithing demonstrations at the Woodsmen's Festival at Cherry Springs State Park each August, as well as demonstrations and blacksmithing lessons as at his shop, by appointment.

Firestone Forge houses a retail store, where customers can purchase Firestone's hand-crafted items, from wall hooks, utensils and historical hardware to bone-handled knives, axes, garden tools and a variety of decorative pieces. The store also carries a limited supply of hunting, fishing and trapping goods, antiques and, as a



HAMMER TIME: Blacksmith Doug Firestone works with hammer and anvil to fashion a piece of steel into a lid lifter for a Dutch oven. A traditional blacksmith, Firestone employs 18th-century techniques to hand-craft hardware, housewares and tools at his shop, Firestone Forge, in Germania. The forge specializes in custom and reproduction work.

designated stop on the Route 6 Artisan Trail, houses artwork by regional artists during the tourism season.

Like the traditional blacksmith of yesteryear, Firestone specializes in custom blacksmithing and gunsmithing services at his shop.

"I can do any type of blacksmithing, from replicating and restoring historical household items to creating modern, contemporary pieces of art," he says. "I can take my blacksmithing skills and use them along with my gunsmithing work to not only create 18th-century firearms from scratch, but also to repair historic firearms all the way up to modern guns."

Firestone, who apprenticed as a gunsmith at his uncle's shop while growing up in Lebanon County, says building and restoring firearms is the work he finds most rewarding. He typically crafts about five guns a year, from flintlock fowlers used in the Colonial era to modern bolt-action rifles.

He says the blacksmithing business has exceeded his expectations, crediting his associations with the Route 6 Artisans Trail, the Pennsylvania Wilds Artisan Trail, the Potter County Visitors Bureau and the Northern Tier Cultural Alliance with bringing customers to his door.

"I'm fixing, building, repairing something every day," he says. "I'm constantly busy filling orders. Right now I am three or four months behind in my work."

The craftsman says while he's not getting rich from his new enterprise, he's finally found his dream job, forging usable and decorative objects with hot steel, hammer and anvil, and the sweat of his brow.

"It's smoky; it's hot; it's dirty; it's hard work," he says, "but it's the most rewarding thing I've ever done. It's like I'm on vacation every day. Once I decided that money was not going to be my guiding light, as long as I can eat and have a dry place to sleep, I don't think I need much more."

His at-home occupation — his shop is located in the former Deiter's Country Store adjacent to his house along Route 144 — also gives him the ability to provide food for his family throughout the year.

"I'm happy working in my garden, hunting and fishing with my son and eating what we harvest," he says. "There's something special about sitting down to a meal knowing where everything came from."

Calling himself as a "localvore," a term used to describe someone dedicated to eating food grown and purchased locally, Firestone says that he buys as much as possible from local stores and farmers markets.

"If we want our food to be good and healthy, we should be buying it from the man we see at the barber shop or at church on Sunday," he says. "Instead, we're going to Wal-Mart and buying peanuts from China and apples grown in New Zealand — and all to save a few dollars so we can buy more stuff. This consumerism is what drives everything, and it's even how we judge the health of our economy, but we are losing our culture because of it."

Firestone tries to do his part to help change that not only through his own purchasing activities, but through his service as a board member of the Northern Tier Cultural

Alliance. The alliance works to foster awareness and appreciation of the region's cultural traditions and heritage through various education programs and community involvement and also coordinates the Northern Tier Buy Fresh, Buy Local program, designed to promote local food growers in Wyoming, Susquehanna, Bradford, Sullivan, Tioga and Potter counties.

"In the early 1900s, almost 90 percent of people were working for themselves," he says. "They were farmers, milk men, businessmen working for themselves, and all working for the community. You knew who raised the beef you were eating or the fruit you bought. You knew who was poor in the community and you helped them. Now we are so disconnected, we just say, 'Let's let the federal government take care of it.' That drifting away from community is a horrible thing in our culture, and now I try to help keep this sense of community going."

For more information or to schedule a visit to Firestone Forge, call 814/435-8277 or visit online at www.firestoneforge.com. 🌟



HOOKS AND ADDERS: The retail shop at Firestone Forge in Germania is stocked with a variety of Doug Firestone's handcrafted items, from decorative snake paperweights and wall hooks to custom cutlery and utensils. Shop hours vary by the season, so it's best to call ahead. A Co-op Connections discount program participant, the number for Firestone Forge is 814/435-8277.

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

PRESIDENT AND CEO:
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Greg Inman, Barbara Johnson,
Linda Kaminski, Betty Leet, Mike Lewis,
John Lykens, Brenda Main, Bob Mathers,
Joe Mickey, Tim McCurdy,
Eric McRoberts, Chris Payne,
Jason Perkins, Phil Plumley,
Anthony Rachiele, Ben Ransom,
Forrest Rathbun, Penny Root,
John Rotello, Heidi Roupp, Todd Rumsey,
Steve Salada, Ron Sawyer, Ron Scott,
Randy Sickler, Shawn Simonds,
Randy Smith, Wade Snyder,
Gerry Songster, James Succowich,
Rick Tavares, Lorraine Thompson,
Brian White, Rocky Wiedman,
Mark Whitney, Donald Williammee,
Lori Wojnarek

Let's keep in touch

If you've eliminated your landline telephone phone in favor of a cell phone, please be sure to notify Tri-County of the change.

Tri-County uses your telephone number when dispatching outages and to notify members about planned outages, so it is very important that we have your correct number on file.

Please be sure to review your next Tri-County bill statement and verify that the telephone number and your address are accurate.

If either is incorrect, please write the correct number or address on your payment stub and return with payment or call the office at 1-800-343-2559.

The cooperative also has begun compiling member email addresses and cell numbers in an effort to enhance our future communications efforts with members. At some point, we would like to be able to email or send text messages to members for things like Beat the Peak alerts and other announcements. If you would like to share your email address or cell phone number with us, please send to billing@tri-countyrec.com or contact the Mansfield office.

Co-op gift certificates make great stocking stuffers

Still looking for holiday gift ideas? Gift certificates from your electric co-op make an ideal holiday stocking stuffer.

Give the gift of electricity to that hard-to-buy-for relative or to the family down the road struggling to make ends meet. A Tri-County gift certificate could brighten the holidays for someone in your life.

Simply fill out this form and return it to Tri-County with your check for the amount of the gift.

Recipient's Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Tri-County Account Number: _____

Amount of Gift: _____

From: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Mail the certificate to: _____

Holiday Closings

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

Friday, Dec. 23, and
Monday, Dec. 26 –

Christmas

Monday, Jan. 2 –
New Year's