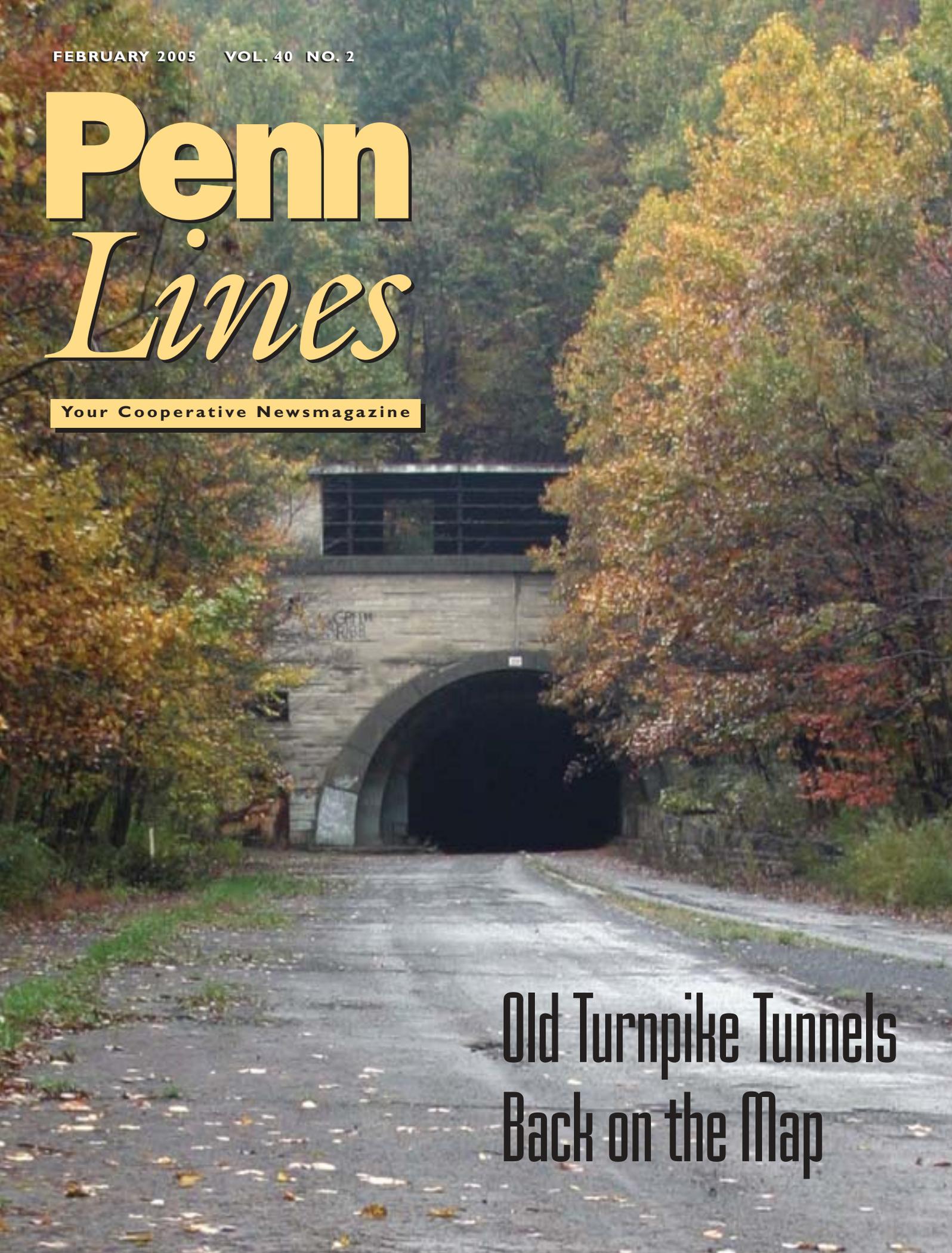


FEBRUARY 2005 VOL. 40 NO. 2

Penn *Lines*

Your Cooperative Newsmagazine



Old Turnpike Tunnels
Back on the Map

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FEBRUARY



Tunnel Vision

Nearly forgotten for a generation, an abandoned stretch of the original Pennsylvania Turnpike — including forgotten two tunnels — may soon reopen to a slower type of traffic



High-Tech Lighting

Once seen as too expensive, bulky, and not “reader friendly,” energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs may soon overtake their mainstream incandescent cousins



DEPARTMENTS

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| 4 | Commentary | 18 | Classifieds |
| 6 | Outdoor Adventures | 22 | New Briefs |
| 14 | Energy Answers | 24 | Humor |
| 14a | News From Your Co-op | 26 | Rural Reflections |
| 16 | Country Kitchen | | |

ABOUT THE COVER: In 2001, the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy purchased 8 miles of an abandoned stretch of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, including the old Sideling Hill and Rays Hill tunnels. The group hopes to turn the road into a biking and hiking path called the Superhighway Trail. Photo by Eric Wise, PREA.



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Regulatory Burden Would Squeeze Electric Cooperatives



by **Frank M. Betley**
President & CEO
 Pennsylvania Rural
 Electric Association
 (PREA) and Conti-
 nental Cooperative
 Services (CCS)

In drafting laws nearly 70 years ago that permitted rural residents to form consumer-owned and controlled, not-for-profit electric cooperatives (laws incidentally, which have been reviewed and re-enacted over the years), state legislators determined electric cooperatives should regulate themselves. By doing so, the Pennsylvania General Assembly joined most other states in recognizing that the establishment of rates and policies by a cooperative's democratically elected board of directors provides the same type of regulatory oversight as Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) review does for stockholder-driven private power companies.

Today, electric cooperatives continue to operate in a responsible, self-regulated fashion, basing decisions on economic, operational, and community impact. Our goal remains to provide you with a reliable supply of power at the lowest possible cost.

To keep costs as low as possible, electric cooperatives work hard to maintain our non-jurisdictional — unregulated — status. The financial impact from regulation would simply be staggering.

For example, if regulated by the PUC, electric cooperatives would be

required — collectively — to pay \$4.4 million per year into state-mandated low-income consumer assistance programs. In addition, funding the PUC itself (private power companies are assessed at a maximum of 0.3 percent of gross operating revenues to cover PUC operations — about \$44 million last year) would cost Pennsylvania electric cooperatives as a whole anywhere from \$500,000 to \$750,000 annually. And this assessment does not include any attorney and filing fees arising from PUC cases or factor in assessments to fund the state Office of Consumer Advocate and state Office of Small Business Advocate — expenses that private power companies must also pay.

The Commonwealth's new renewable [energy] portfolio standard (RPS) law requires that private power companies and competitive electric generation suppliers include increasing amounts of "green" energy in their generation mix — up to 18 percent by 2020. Because state legislators realized that imposing RPS on electric cooperatives would go against the historic legislative intent of cooperative self-regulation and unnecessarily harm rural residents, electric cooperatives can meet RPS requirements by offering a "voluntary program of energy efficiency and demand-side management." Pennsylvania electric cooperatives already do this through the Coordinated Load Management System.

Without the load management language, RPS would have burdened electric cooperatives — and you — with at least \$30-\$40 million in additional costs over the next 15 years.

Last July, Commonwealth Court found electric cooperatives generally exempt from making state Public

Utility Realty Tax Act (PURTA) payments — a decision based largely on language in the state's Public Utility Code that excludes electric cooperatives from PUC regulation. If this judgment stands, being freed from PURTA tax obligations will allow Pennsylvania electric cooperatives to once again pay property taxes locally, reinvesting millions of tax dollars within local communities to improve the rural quality of life.

Even *Penn Lines* helps curb any regulatory reach on electric cooperatives. In 1998, the PUC cited the magazine's emphasis on consumer education as a reason why cooperatives did not need to contribute a "fair share" total of \$576,000 to fund state-ordered electricity customer choice awareness advertising, the bulk earmarked for urban markets. 

Betley has served as president & CEO of PREA and CCS since 1997. PREA is the statewide service arm of electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and Penn Lines publisher; CCS is the not-for-profit power supply organization created from the strategic alliance between Allegheny Electric Cooperative, the wholesale generation provider to your local electric distribution cooperative, and Illinois' Soyland Power Cooperative.



Deer Déjà Vu

by Marcus Schneck

Contributing Columnist

Anyone coming of age as a hunter today — an era noted for (supposedly) out-of-control deer herds — might be shocked to find out that at one time very few white-tailed deer existed in the Commonwealth. The situation was so dire that the then-infant Pennsylvania Game Commission was forced to launch a stocking program for the species.

According to “A History of White-Tailed Deer Restocking in the United States: 1878 to 2004,” released late last year by Bogart, Ga.-based Quality Deer Management Association, the state Game Commission stocked and/or relocated at least 4,387 deer within the state between 1906 and 1961. More than 668 were imported from Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Ohio, with the first 50 arriving from Michigan.

Six years ago, Calvin DuBrock, director of the state Game Commission Bureau of Wildlife Management, described the deer situation as it stood a century ago.

“In 1902 commission reports, deer were barely mentioned,” he stated. It is estimated only 200 deer were harvested that year in the Keystone State. In 1906-07, just 10 years into the agency’s history, a deer stocking program was launched accompanied by protection of antlerless deer. However, by the 1920s, with deer populations doubling every two or three years, we began to see mass starvation of deer in many areas of the state.”

In 1927, the state Game Commission declared, “Unless action is taken, nature will bring about a drastic reduction in the number of deer in the entire forest.” A year later, the commission

RARE AS HEN’S TEETH:
A century ago, white-tailed deer — Pennsylvania’s state animal since 1959 — were uncommon residents of Penn’s Woods.

established Pennsylvania’s first statewide antlerless season. Hunters, in turn, harvested more than 25,000 antlerless deer, although many expressed opposition to bucks being protected.

In 1938, the commission moved to a one-week antlerless season and hunters harvested more than 170,000 antlerless deer, a new record.

According to DuBrock, “People viewed it as inconceivable that there could be that many deer harvested in the state. After the 1938 season, many hunters concluded: ‘the deer herd is gone!’”

He continued, “Some sportsmen even had doe mounted to show their grandkids what deer looked like, believing they were never going to be seen again.”

In response, antlerless hunting was allowed in only four counties in 1939 — an overreaction that led to deer starving by the thousands. The next year, Pennsylvania created a two-week season on bucks and doe. The harvest climbed to more than 186,500 deer — again a record, and one established just two years after hunters feared deer had been wiped out.



“After 1940, the antlerless season was severely limited for a decade,” noted DuBrock. “Hunters cried, ‘Enough is enough, save the deer.’ Of course, World War II had a bit to do with this. Deer management was put on hold and deer numbers greatly increased.”

It is said that history repeats itself. That bit of wisdom certainly applies to issues — and perceptions — involving Pennsylvania’s deer herd. 



Marcus Schneck, outdoors editor at The Patriot-News (Harrisburg, Pa.) and editor of Destinations travel-outdoor magazine in Berks County, is the author of more than two dozen out-

doors books and a contributor to many state and national publications. You can reach him at mschneck@comcast.net.



Tunnel Vision

Nearly forgotten for a generation, an abandoned stretch of the original Pennsylvania Turnpike — including forgotten two tunnels — may soon reopen to a slower type of traffic

by **Eric C. Wise**
Assistant Editor

Nestled in the hills in Bedford and Fulton counties lies a stretch of road once traveled by thousands of cars and trucks a day — but not for more than 36 years.

Formerly part of the 64-year-old Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-76), the broad swath of asphalt— cracked in spots and sporting sprigs of stubborn vegetation — lays hidden within the Buchanan State Forest. Most travelers on America’s first superhighway (which cuts through the service territories of five Pennsylvania electric cooperatives) probably do not even realize they have been routed around a 13-mile stretch of the original road, which included two Turnpike tunnels first bored in 1880s for the never-completed South Pennsylvania Railroad.

In 2001, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission sold 8 miles of the abandoned road, along with the two tunnels — Sideling Hill and Rays Hill — to the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy for \$1. Conservancy members hope, through a combination of state and federal grants, to turn the area into a “bike and hike pike” called the Superhighway Trail. As part of the project, the tunnels

would once again open for public use.

“At this time, we don’t restrict access for hiking or biking,” says Ryan Nemanic of the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy. “Use of the old road by cars, motorcycles, and ATVs is prohibited and violators are fined. Hunting is allowed, although hunters must follow state hunting laws and regulations.”

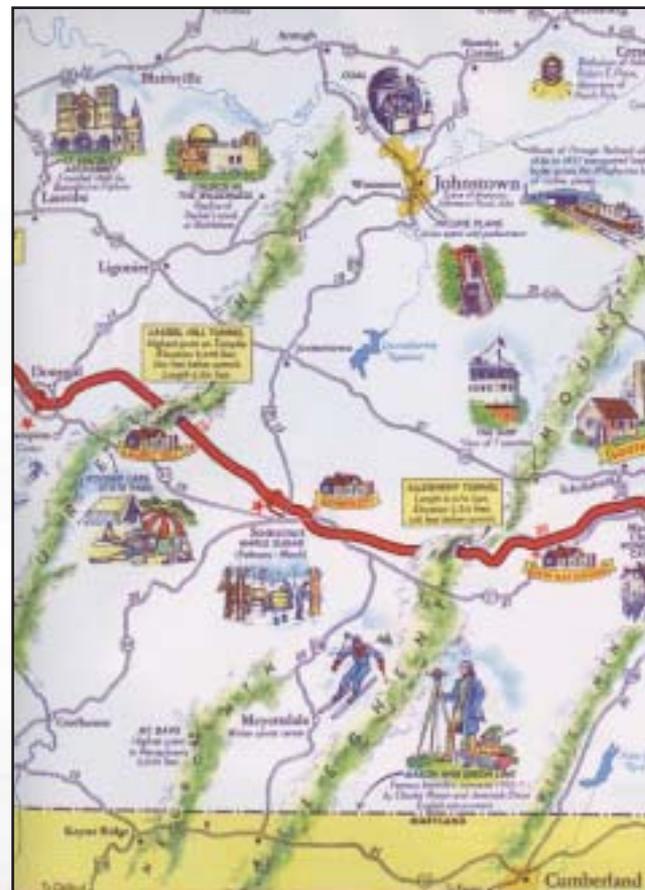
The proposed trail offers more than scenery and history — notably, the intrigue of passing through the two tunnels.

“The structure of the tunnels is very sound,” explains Nemanic. “However, water is seeping into the Sideling Hill Tunnel, which must be addressed before it is officially reopened.”

EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD: This map from 1941 shows the original route of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and prominently features information about the seven tunnels along America’s first “all-weather highway.”

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE COMMISSION

Conservancy leaders have not decided whether to light the tunnels again. “Lighting would improve safety, but



ONE LANE EACH WAY: Until the late 1960s, the Pennsylvania Turnpike narrowed from four lanes to two at tunnel entrances. PHOTO COURTESY PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE COMMISSION

it would also take away some of the tunnels' allure," Nemanic comments.

Near the east end of the planned trail rests the former Cove Valley Service Plaza, which was replaced by the modern Sideling Hill Service Plaza when the bypass opened in 1968. While the graystone Howard Johnson's restaurant and Esso gas pumps previously featured at Cove Valley are long gone, the parking area remains remarkably unscathed.

"The Cove Plaza could be rebuilt as a museum, showing railroad and turnpike history," Nemanic adds. "The access road employees once used will probably be refurbished as the east entrance to the trail, regardless of whether the plaza handles parking only or contains a museum."

The conservancy has entertained ideas of making parts of the tunnels themselves into a museum, even converting their mechanical rooms into a

theater for educational presentations. The future trail may also benefit from local history and natural resources. Nemanic relates that a biologist recently visited the site, suggesting ways the trail could serve as an outdoor biology classroom.

Nearby Wooden Bridge Creek promises to draw trout fishermen, while winter splendor could attract cross-country skiers. In addition, remnants of the never-finished South Pennsylvania Railroad, including a stone-arch culvert constructed for trains to pass over a stream, can be easily reached along a marked path just east of the Sideling Hill Tunnel's west portal.

Nemanic emphasizes that since the Pennsylvania Turnpike was designed with gentle inclines, a wide range of people can enjoy the trail as envisioned, even those unable to hike hilly, demanding courses. (The seven tunnels along the Turnpike's original 160-mile stretch between Carlisle and Irwin — six of which had been cut by the South Pennsylvania Railroad — greatly reduced the need for steep grades.)

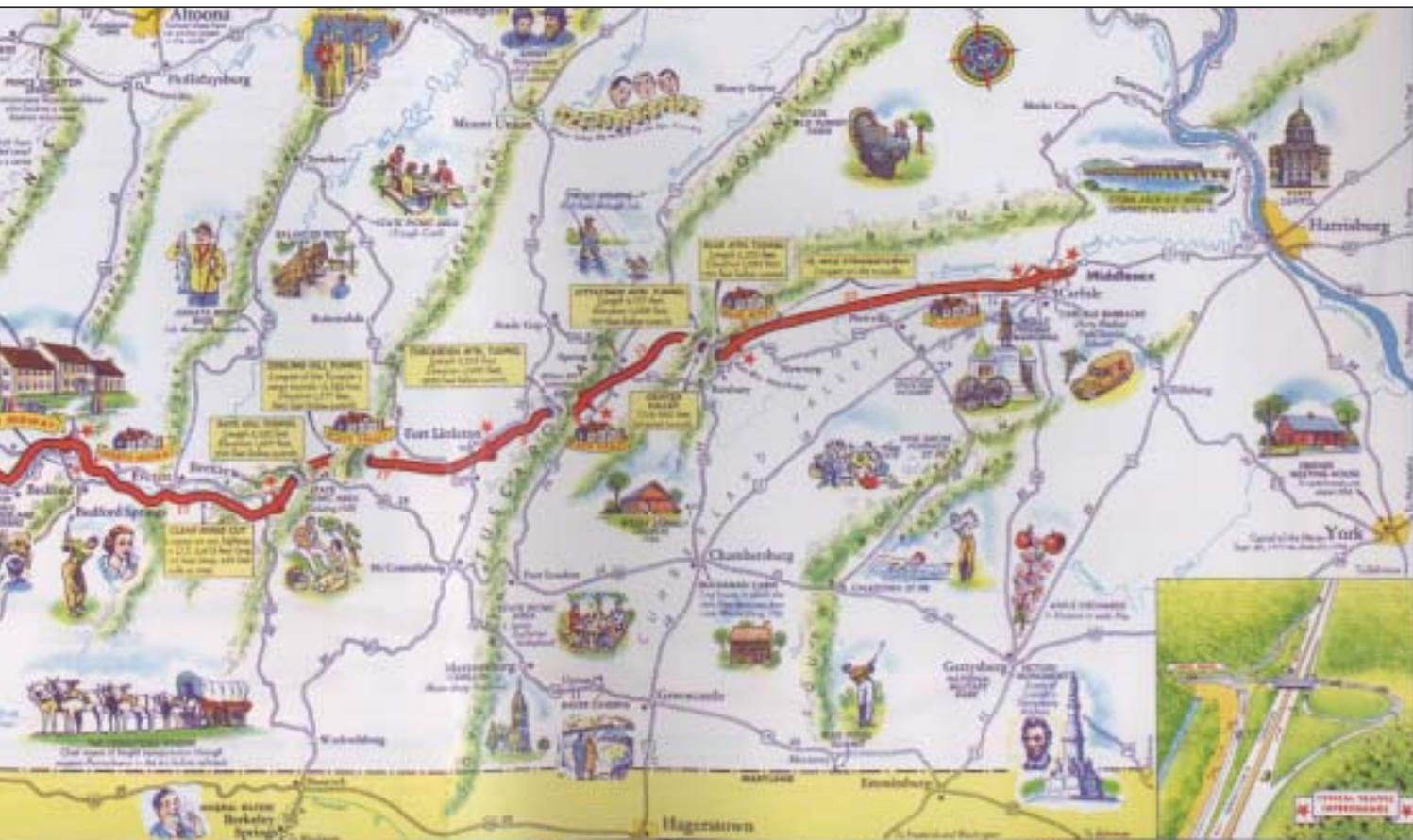
"Our primary goal is a recreational trail that will bring economic development to the area," Nemanic stresses. "The unique feature of the site is the diversity of opportunities that exist. But depending on the direction the project takes, it may cost millions."

Disappearing Act

A trip across the Pennsylvania Turnpike today means driving through four tunnels, three fewer than when the highway opened October 1, 1940. For most of the first three decades of its operation, the turnpike's four lanes merged into two at tunnel entrances.

As more drivers used the limited access highway, huge bottlenecks began to develop at tunnel mouths. Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission officials addressed the problem by excavating parallel tunnels in four locations (Blue Mountain, Kittatinny Mountain, Tuscarora Mountain, and Allegheny) and routing traffic around the other three — Sideling Hill (the longest of the seven in length, at 6,782 feet, or 1.28

(continues on page 11)



(continued from page 9)

miles), Rays Hill (the shortest in length, at 3,532 feet, two-thirds of a mile), and the three-quarters-of-a-mile-long Laurel Hill Tunnel, located near Donegal in Westmoreland County, once the highest point on the Turnpike at 2,456 feet.

Although abandoned, the four-mile stretch of highway between the Sideling Hill and Rays Hill tunnels has been occasionally used for roadway safety projects over the years, including one involving cuts to warn drivers when tires drift off the road. Today, these shoulder rumble strips are standard on most interstates and U.S. highways.

The Federal Highway Administration has also used the roadway for trials of new road signs, test crashes with large trucks, and guide rail experiments. Reflectivity of road signs was tested inside the Sideling Hill Tunnel.

The area also hosted tactical and firearms training for Troop T of the Pennsylvania State Police as well as military units prior to deployment in Iraq. The Sideling Hill Tunnel has even been considered by film companies as a movie location and as a currency storage depot — another Fort Knox — by the U.S. Mint.

Unlike the Sideling Hill and Rays Hill tunnels, Laurel Hill (officially retired in 1964) is visible from the eastbound lanes of the current highway, near mile marker 99.2. The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission sometimes stores concrete barriers on the old road leading up the tunnel, and the tunnel's entrance once housed salt, anti-skid, and other maintenance materials.

Carl DeFebo, public information manager for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, warns that visitors are prohibited at Laurel Hill, as the tunnel is leased to a private company.

In the late 1930s, engineers considered two additional South Pennsylvania Railroad tunnels when plotting the course of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, but bypassed them instead. Both are on private property and not considered safe.

The eastern end of Quemahoning Tunnel, which was used by a different railroad in the early 1900s, is located

at mile marker 106.3 off the westbound lanes. The second “near miss” tunnel, Negro Mountain, rests about 400 feet from the westbound shoulder of the Turnpike near mile marker 116.

Another Tunnel Bites the Dust?

Costs of upkeep have left the future of the Allegheny Tunnel in Somerset County in question. At just more than

one mile in length, Allegheny is the longest Turnpike tunnel in use and the only one not begun as a railroad tunnel. Years of wear and maintenance needs have state Turnpike Commission officials considering whether to bypass the location, upgrade the existing tunnels, or even add a third tunnel. However, no final decision has been reached. 



(Compact) Fluorescent Fancy

Once seen as too expensive, bulky, and not “reader friendly,” energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs may soon overtake their mainstream incandescent cousins

by Sharon O'Malley
Contributing Writer

When it was time for Kerry Campbell to change a light bulb in an 18-foot-high ceiling fixture above the landing of her Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) office, she chose a bulb that will last for the better part of a decade.

“I don’t want to be up there changing that bulb any more than I have to,” she remarks.

A few years ago, she might not have chosen such a long-lasting bulb—a compact fluorescent—because it did not emit the right color and carried a sky-high price tag.

Indeed, says Campbell, who works in the state Office of Energy and Technology Development, consumers have shied away from this most energy efficient of all residential lighting because the bulbs were seen as too expensive, bulky, and gave off “funky” hues that did not match traditional incandescent light.

Over the past two years, however, those concerns have all but vanished. Not only are more manufacturers designing stylish covers for the twisted tubes that pack up to 10,000 hours of light and only need changing every five to seven years, but they have made the bulbs smaller and closer in color to familiar—yet electricity-hogging—incandescent lights. Best of all, today’s compact fluorescent bulbs come without the pesky flickering that characterized prior generations of fluorescent lighting.

The price of screw-in spiral fluorescent bulbs has dropped by about two-thirds over the last few years.

“Now you don’t have to compromise energy savings for design or looks,” says Campbell, who notes that improvements in compact fluorescent light bulbs are a relief for energy-conscious consumers.



SUPER EFFICIENT: Compact fluorescent light bulbs, such as these from Sylvania, can replace just about any standard incandescent bulb. The bulbs come in three-way twisted, flame-shaped, and frosted models, and even include one that will not attract insects.

to a 75-watt incandescent; a three-way 12-, 18- and 29-watt bulb outperforms a 30-, 70- and 100-watt incandescent variety.

Still, Pennsylvanians love the soft yellow glow (and low-

Consumer Resistance Remains

Compact fluorescents, which consume about 75 percent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs, can save a homeowner up to \$2,000 in utility bills over their long life if used throughout a home.

But the price of a store-bought compact fluorescent bulb still packs some sticker shock. The bare-bones compact fluorescent equivalent of America’s household staple—the 60-watt, soft white incandescent bulb, which generally lasts for 750 to 1,000 hours—costs around \$6.

Even at that price, notes Campbell, compact fluorescent bulbs “have made great strides.”

Fluorescent lighting boasts greater energy efficiency, in part, because the bulbs give off far more light—lumens—than heat energy (watts). Since fluorescent bulbs create a negligible amount of heat as they burn, they can produce between 50 and 100 lumens per watt.

Incandescent lights, on the other hand, emit only about 15 lumens per watt. And since they waste most of their energy producing heat, incandescent bulbs tend to burn out more quickly.

The end result—a 15-watt compact fluorescent bulb generates the same amount of light as a 60-watt incandescent bulb; a 20-watt bulb becomes equivalent

er cost) of familiar incandescent lighting and have resisted more expensive fluorescent replacements since they first hit the market in 1939. Early versions, installed mainly in office buildings and notorious for hesitating and blinking before offering a steady stream of overhead light, once came only in long, thin tubes that cast a harsh, bluish glare instead of warm candle-like radiance.

Eventually, some homeowners welcomed fluorescent tubes into their basements, laundry rooms, and kitchens, but not into the main living areas of the home.

Year by year, lighting manufacturers have responded by shrinking and twisting those fluorescent tubes into the A-like shape of a typical incandescent bulb and threading their bases so they can screw into table lamps and overhead sockets. In addition, they have manipulated the color of fluorescent bulbs so they mimic popular incandescents.

“In the past I would say, ‘Don’t change the bulb in your favorite reading lamp for a compact fluorescent,’” comments Campbell. “But today, you may want to try it.”

She concludes, “If you replace one bulb, you’re probably not going to notice any savings on your electric bill. But if you replace a whole lot of them over time, you will see the results.”





Get Smart

by James Dulley

Contributing Columnist

If you hate waking up to a cold bedroom after you turned the heat down for the night, you might want to consider installing a “smart” thermostat. With these devices, you can go to bed and wake up to a comfortable house—and realize lower utility bills in the process.

Setting your thermostat lower at night during winter (and higher during summer) produces tremendous savings. The reason—less heat is gained or lost when indoor temperatures move closer to outdoor temperatures, meaning your furnace or air conditioner does not have to run as often.

Most new smart thermostats allow you to set different temperatures during four periods each day—perfect for fitting into your lifestyle. A typical week-day winter schedule for a family might result in the thermostat being set at 70 degrees from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., then lowered to 58 degrees when everyone leaves for school or work. By the time kids arrive home around 3 p.m., the thermostat will have the house back up to a toasty 68 degrees. At 11 p.m., when everyone goes to bed, temperatures kick back 60 degrees.

Big Brains

Some smart thermostats sense both indoor and outdoor temperatures and humidity levels. This data, along with memory of how long it takes to warm up your house, lets the thermostat determine the precise time to start your furnace to meet the programmed schedule. As a result, your bedroom should be warm when your alarm goes off in the morning no matter how cold it is outside.



Smart thermostats come with several simple programming methods that even the most digitally challenged person can handle, including a generic preprogrammed time/temperature schedule. This way, you can use the unit immediately and figure out how to program your personal schedule at a later time.

For additional convenience, some models boast internal power storage so you can snap them off the wall base and program settings from your easy chair. A few smart thermostat designs even resemble a tiny touch screen computer display—the entire programming process, menu-driven by touching the screen, eliminates the need for a complicated owner’s manual.

When shopping for a smart thermostat, you will see a designation of 7, 5+2, or 5+1+1 on the packaging. These numbers refer to programming flexibility. With a 7-day thermostat, you can program a different temperature schedule for every day of the week. These are ideal if your at-home schedule varies.

A 5+2-day thermostat allows you to program one schedule for every week-day and another schedule for the weekend. A 5+1+1-day model permits you to create different Saturday and Sunday schedules.

You can find smart thermostats at most home center and hardware stores. With safe low-voltage and color-coded wiring, they are ideal for do-it-yourselfers. 

James Dulley is a nationally syndicated energy management expert. For more information on this subject, request Dulley’s “Utility Bills Update No. 425,” which includes a buyer’s guide on 11 smart thermostat manufacturers (25 models), listing temperature/time schedules, programming options, comfort/convenience features, and a savings chart. Send your request to: James Dulley, c/o Penn Lines magazine, 6906 Royalgreen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45244. Please include \$3 and a business-size self-addressed stamped envelope. Or for quicker turnaround, check out www.dulley.com via the World Wide Web.





Ah, Sweet Valentine

by Kitty Halke

Contributing Columnist

Nothing says “Happy Valentine’s Day” like homemade sweets. They are perfect for your sweetie, or as a gift for the neighbors, the letter carrier, or anyone who deserves a special little “thank you.” (For an added touch, present your plate of kitchen creations covered in pink- or lavender-tinted plastic wrap tied up with a bright red ribbon.)

Made with ingredients commonly found in your pantry, refrigerator, or freezer (even those left over from holiday baking), these three recipes are easy to make but look elegant. Sweet eating!

Kitty Halke is a cooking professional and freelance writer from rural Pennsylvania. Send recipes and comments to her in care of: Penn Lines, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266.

CHOCOLATE ORANGE BITES

- 2/3 cup butter
- 8-oz. package semi-sweet chocolate morsels
- 4 egg yolks
- 4 tablespoons sugar

- 1-1/2 tablespoons grated orange rind
- 2 tablespoons ground pecans
- additional ground pecans or sprinkles for garnish

Melt butter in a heavy saucepan; add chocolate morsels and melt over low heat, stirring until all of the chocolate chips are melted and mixture is smooth. Cool slightly. In a separate bowl, beat egg yolks until light-colored. Add sugar and continue beating until creamy. Add the chocolate mixture to the eggs and sugar; stir in orange rind and ground pecans. Put the complete mixture in the refrigerator and chill several hours until set or overnight. Place sprinkles or crushed pecans on plate that has been lined with wax paper. Roll refrigerated chocolate-orange mixture into small balls and then roll the balls in crushed pecans or sprinkles until covered. Place in refrigerator until firm (and continue to store in refrigerator.)



ALMOND CRACKED CANDY

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 cup sliced almonds | 1-1/2 cups granulated sugar |
| 3/4 cup shredded sweetened coconut | 3 tablespoons water |
| 1/2 cup butter | 1 tablespoon corn syrup |
| | 1/2 teaspoon salt |

Combine almonds and coconut and spread evenly on the bottom of a slightly greased 9" x 13" pan. In a saucepan, melt butter and then add sugar, water, corn syrup, and salt and cook until a candy thermometer show mixture has reached 290 degrees. Remove mixture from heat and pour over almond and coconut mixture. Cool. Break into small pieces.



NUT CHEWS

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 16-oz. package semisweet chocolate chips | 2 tablespoons melted butter |
| 2 tablespoons butter | 1-1/2 cups chopped salted peanuts |
| 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter | 8-oz. package caramels |
| 1/2 cup, plus 2 tablespoons confectioner's sugar | 1 tablespoon whipping cream |

Melt chocolate chips and 2 tablespoons butter over low heat, stirring constantly. Pour mixture into a non-stick 8" x 8" baking pan. Mix peanut butter; all of the confectioner's sugar and 2 tablespoons of melted butter until well blended. Drop mixture over melted chocolate in the baking pan. Top with 1 cup of the chopped, salted peanuts, pressing lightly into the peanut butter-chocolate layers. Melt caramels with whipping cream in a saucepan and spread over the peanut butter-chocolate-peanut mixture. Sprinkle remaining 1/2 cup of chopped peanuts on top and press lightly. When cooled, cut into 1-inch squares and store in refrigerator.



compiled by Perry Stambaugh

Editor

Electric Cooperatives Give Rural Economic Development A Boost

High-level negotiations described as “frank, technical, and sometimes tense” between the nation’s electric cooperatives and the Bush Administration resulted in a “remarkable breakthrough” late last year. That is when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — finally — issued new regulations enabling the creation of a beefed up Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDL&G) Program.

REDL&G — using electric cooperatives as intermediaries — provides zero-interest loans and grants that help rural areas create jobs and boost businesses. The program has a record of leveraging private sector investment at a rate of 5-to-1.

“The release of the REDL&G rules ends two years of foot-dragging by USDA, the White House Office of Management and Budget [OMB] and U.S. Treasury Department on the issue,” explains Russ Biggica, director of government & regulatory affairs for the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association — the statewide service arm of your local electric cooperative. “The hold-up was unfortunate because zero-interest loans and grants help entire rural communities, not just areas or facilities served by electric cooperatives. Millions of dollars worth of electric cooperative-supported economic development projects across the U.S. were left hanging in limbo.”

The bureaucratic wrangling stemmed from the 2002 Farm Bill, which authorized “REDL&G enhancements.” The law permitted private lenders — envisioned as Herndon, Va.-based National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation — to issue government-backed bonds which, in turn, would form the basis for making additional REDL&G loans through eligible electric distribution and telephone cooperatives. Because the lender must pay an annual fee of 30 basis points (three-tenths of

1 percent) into the REDL&G fund for the 20-year life of the bond, total funding available for the program could effectively top \$300 million at no cost to the federal government.

“In essence, the lender program was to become like Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac — sort of a quasi-private operation, pumping millions into the rural economy,” Biggica comments. “But fierce opposition by anti-cooperative forces with close ties to the Administration — such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce — led to proposed rules that would have killed the concept. The National Propane Gas Association even bragged that this ‘REC bailout,’ as they called it, was going to be thwarted through the regulatory process.”

While the Farm Bill required that REDL&G enhancement regulations be issued within 180 days, USDA took two years to do so. The rules then underwent review by OMB, which should have taken about 90 days. However, as of last July, they had not even been officially logged in.

“Treasury also had to sign off on the regulations,” Biggica adds. “But that department stonewalled as well. Reportedly, officials there were not too keen about approving another government loan guarantee and mistrusted the whole idea. The big stumbling block was that Treasury had virtually no model at the federal level to compare it to.”

Throughout the process, PREA worked closely with strong electric cooperative supporters — U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), a member of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, and U.S. Rep. Tim Holden (D-17th), a member of the House Agriculture Committee — to put pressure on Treasury and OMB. Specter even sent a letter to President Bush demanding action.

Meanwhile, Congress authorized \$1 billion in guarantee underwriting for the REDL&G Program in the 2003, 2004, and 2005 federal budgets.



Zero-interest loans assist electric cooperative economic development efforts aimed at providing employment opportunities for skilled workers, like this mechanic refurbishing an emergency vehicle at the New Lexington Fire Equipment Company in Somerset County.

“Electric cooperatives across the country contacted their state congressional delegations, who made it clear to the Administration that they wanted this no-risk, bipartisan, rural economic development tool implemented,” Biggica stresses. “These efforts really helped hasten a resolution and let electric cooperatives develop a new level of understanding and trust with the Bush Administration.”

Since 1991, 25 Pennsylvania projects have now received financing from REDL&G zero-interest loans, totaling \$7.6 million. The projects funded have created or retained more than 1,400 permanent, well-paying jobs and leveraged more than \$26.7 million in additional outside capital. Nationwide, REDL&G loans and grants have supported nearly 1,000 projects that have created or retained more than 29,000 jobs and pumped \$1.5 billion into the rural economy.

“REDL&G is simply an extension of the original rural electrification mission — to ensure a quality of life for all citizens, no matter where they may live,” Biggica concludes.



Thoughts from Earl Pitts, Uhmerikun!

Money to most of us means one thing — a paycheck. An' economical activity? Well, that means stretchin' that paycheck to your next paycheck. Most of us will agree that is a lot harder than it sounds.

But I'm here to tell you that money is a lot more'n just your paycheck. I found that out by watchin' CNBC. I know what you're thinkin' — me watchin' CNBC is like a hamburger without French — 'er, freedom — fries. That's why I say I'm watchin' it — not understandin' it.

You get these four-eyed economy geeks together an' they're not even speakin' English. Oh, I understand most 'em words — I just can't figger out what the heck they're sayin'.

We got a Consumer Price Index, your long-term interest rates, your orders for durable goods. You got a plungin' dollar, inflation, gubbermint spending, unemployment, the price a' oil, an' consumer confidence.

I watch this channel for 15 minutes an' my brain starts thompin' on account I'm crammin' too much stuff up there. I didn't know money was that complicated.

Wake up, America! Sorry CNBC, but this experiment is over. I'm goin' back to basic economical indicators — a checkbook, a wallet, an' a jar a' pennies.



By now, you know 'bout me an' doctors. Yeah, I'd rather dance the hula barefoot on broken glass than step foot inside a doctor's office. That's why I thank the Almighty every day that I am as healthy as I have been, for as long as I have been. I know plenty of people who take a fistful of pills three or four times a day.

I mean, I seen this soap commercial that 'splained we had 2,000 body parts.

I probably know'd somebody who had an operation on every one of 'em.

An' this is weird. I was tellin' you I was healthy. Me an' Pearl figgered it out. I ain't had the flu, I ain't had a cold, an' I ain't even had a snuffle in maybe seven or eight years. Pearl says it's cause I got so much hatred bottled up inside a' me, it probably kills any virus that tries to get in there. I go, "Well, I guess there's a health benefit to bein' ornery, ain't there."

I got buddies fightin' cancer, arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, you name it. But not me. Earl Pitts has turned out to be bulletproof.

That was, until 2 a.m. the other mornin'. I woke up in a flop-sweat. My belly was cramped up somethin' fierce, my head was poundin', and I could hardly sit up. I was delirious — I was hallucinatin'. I may have seen a bright light.

Wake up, America! Turns out I shouldn't have eaten those pickled eggs and pizza right before bedtime. But they looked so temptin' in the fridge! Any rate, a walk through the house, a glass a' water, an' I was fine. Pearl wasn't too happy, though — woke her up outta a real sound sleep. Like I said, I may be bulletproof, but now I better appreciate what sick people is goin' through.



I'm comin' to you this month with the greatest piece of advice I could ever give. Do not — I repeat, do not — pick a fight with your garbage men. That right there is a war you don't want and can't possibly win.

See the thing was, I wanted to throw away an ol' garbage can. I mean, we had this ol' can, one a' 'em metal ones. Rusted through on one side, beat to death every time my wife Pearl pulled outta the

driveway. So I put it out by the street with the garbage, an' put a sign on it that read "take this." I get up the next mornin' an' the trash is gone. But the garbage can is still there.

Pearl says to me, "Earl, maybe that sign blowed off overnight an' they didn't see it." I says, "That's probably what happened, no problem." Next week, same sign. Next morning, ' same garbage can.

Well, this goes on for about four weeks. Finally, I crushed that can into a twisted heap of metal. Next morning, ' it was a twisted heap of metal left in my driveway. I'm thinkin' — now, these boys is messin' with me.

I go, "that's it, I'm callin' the trash company." I called 'em people up an' I called 'em people out. I called 'em by every name in the book. I says, "Your garbage guys better straighten up an' fly right. I'm watchin' you an' I'll report you to all my listeners and readers."

An' guess what. I got up this mornin' an' that ol' twisted, rusted garbage can was gone! But the garbage men did leave two ripped open Hefty bags with trash blowin' around in its place. Apparently, they think that makes us even.

Wake up, America! We'll see about that next week, when I believe I'll be throwin' away 10 Hefty bags full a' cinder blocks. Bring it on, trash boys! 

I'm Earl Pitts, American.



Daily social commentary from Earl Pitts — a.k.a. Gary Burbank, a nationally syndicated radio personality — can be heard on the following radio stations that cover

electric cooperative service territories in Pennsylvania: WARM-AM 590 Wilkes-Barre/Scranton; WIOO-AM 1000 Carlisle; WMTZ-FM 96.5 Johnstown; WQBR-FM 99.9/92.7 McElhattan; and WVNW-FM 96.7 Burnham-Lewistown.





More 2004 Favorites

Last month, we published winners of our 2004 "Rural Reflections" contest. With thousands of photos sent in, we could easily fill several issues with the excellent shots of families, friends, landscapes, and pets that crossed our desks.

This issue, we highlight additional favorites from the past year. Beginning in March, we will begin publishing 2005 contest submissions. So unwrap the camera, digital or otherwise, you got for the holidays, put in some film (or memory card) and start snapping away. By sharing your photos with other *Penn Lines* readers, you may find yourself a winner of one of our five, \$75 year-end prizes.

To be eligible for this year's "Rural Reflections" contest, send your snapshots (no digital scans, please) to: *Penn Lines* Photos, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266. On the back of each photo, please include your name, address, phone number, and the name of the electric cooperative that serves your home, business, or seasonal residence.

Becky Cooke
Gettysburg, Pa.
Adams Electric



Sharon Champaign
Bentley Creek, Pa.
Tri-County Rural Electric

Denise Garraffa
Strasburg, Pa.
Valley REC

Sharon Stockholm
Montrose, Pa.
Claverack REC

