


**Valley
Rural Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

We read meters, not minds



by **Wayne Miller**
President & CEO

HERE'S one for the "What will they think of next?" category. Scientists reported recently that they have successfully linked the brains of two lab rats in different locations using the internet. That's right: It's Wi-Fi for rats.

Reports stated that, through the creation of a brain-to-brain interface, one rat that had been taught to click a lever for a drink of

water apparently shared its thoughts with a second, untrained rat thousands of miles away, prompting the second rat to get a drink, too. This was hailed as a first step in developing an organic computer that would permit multiple brains (human or rat?) to be linked to solve complex problems.

Like it or not, science fiction seems to be turning into science fact a bit more each day. While some people are excited about the possibilities, others see threats in new technologies.

Electric co-ops such as Valley Rural Electric have been able to use new technologies to improve efficiency and service reliability for members and to cut costs. One of these technologies, the so-called "smart" meter, has improved the way we do business, but has caused concern for folks who have heard these meters can invade their privacy or harm their health. Let's look at what these devices do and don't do.

The new automated meters installed at the farms, homes and businesses of Valley members are part of our advanced metering infrastructure (AMI). Valley REC and other utilities have been using digital meters for many years. The installation of automated metering was made available through the upgrade of our load management/demand response system.

AMI provides two-way communications between your new meter and the computerized billing system in our office. This system has eliminated the need for


members to read their own meters. It has also provided more accurate readings and allows us to take more frequent meter readings. This means we can now quickly provide you with records of your electric use when you have questions about bills or are looking for ways to conserve energy.

An automated meter doesn't tell us what you are doing in your home. It can't report whether you're using a dishwasher or a clothes washer, let alone anything else. It just measures, very accurately, the aggregate amount of electricity that flowed through the meter. Actually, our automated meters really aren't that "smart." They just report their readings to our billing system over the co-op's power lines.

Since the new meters have two-way communication capability, we can send a signal to the meter and see if it responds. That lets us know if electricity is flowing or if there is an outage. This capability enables us to deploy an outage management system that allows us to more easily pinpoint the location and scope of a problem so we can more quickly restore service.

There are also reports claiming radio frequency (RF) exposure from automated meters causes all kinds of ills. We communicate with our automated meters over our electric lines, not via radio frequency. So, there is no RF exposure.

Those of us who work for Valley often use the term "the cooperative advantage" to describe how our co-op serves the best interests of its owner-members and how those owner-members in turn have invested (through payment of their monthly bills) in the system that provides their electricity. Improvement of that system benefits us all.

As much as we like to hear from our members, we don't have the capability (or the inclination) to monitor your home life, much less to set up a brain-to-brain interface with you. We can read your meters, but not your minds. And I think we're both OK with that. 

Small-town America welcomes w

Central Pennsylvania Ragtime Festival to celebrate 5th year at Trolley Museum gala

BY DOUG ROLES
Director of Member Services

THE TWIN boroughs of Orbisonia and Rockhill in southern Huntingdon County take pride in staying connected to the past. Many of the buildings date back to the 19th century or earlier, and local historians frequently tout the role of the early iron and coal industries in the towns' birth.

In the past five years, one local resident has cultivated another connection to Americana by putting together a ragtime festival that attracts some of the genre's top talent.

David Brightbill of Rockhill, who owns the Iron Rail Bed & Breakfast with his wife, Cindy, says the festival began, like so many good things in life, by accident.



SOLO: Ragtime pianist Bryan Wright gives an outdoor performance at the 2011 festival.

"I was looking for a player piano and I got on YouTube and saw videos of other ragtime events," Brightbill explains.

Having been involved in local government and with Rockhill's train and trolley attractions, Brightbill knew the area could draw tourists from far and wide and believed Rockhill could be the place to launch what became the Central Pennsylvania Ragtime Festival.

Ragtime music became popular at the turn of the 20th century and is based on so-called ragged melodies that accent normally unstressed notes. Brightbill studied piano as a teenager at a time when the 1970s movie, "The Sting," (featuring Robert



CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA RAGTIME FESTIVAL

BYGONE ERA: Visitors to the festival can be transported back in time on a trolley ride.

Redford and Paul Newman) again popularized ragtime, giving rebirth to the work of Scott Joplin (1868-1917) by using his melody "The Entertainer" in the film's soundtrack.

Rockhill may be a world away from Hollywood, but the festival in the small town features top-notch names. The performers come to the boroughs from California, Colorado, Washington, D.C., and points in between. Festival-goers arrive from across the U.S. and beyond. Brightbill said a Briton is planning to attend this year's event, while last year's festival drew visitors from France and Canada. Brightbill estimated last year's audience at nearly 90 people.

"It's not solely a local crowd," he says. "These performers have a following. The quality of these performers is as high as you're going to find. These fellows have traveled the world and absolutely love Orbisonia-Rockhill. They like the charm of the community."

Frederick Hodges is one of those entertainers who looks forward to the trip to central Pennsylvania. The virtuoso has appeared nationally on television, but says he feels honored to perform at the Rockhill festival and enjoys the beauty of the area.

"I love spending time in the towns of Rockhill Furnace and Orbisonia and meeting residents," he says. "Playing at the festival is like having a wonderfully relaxing and restorative vacation."

Hodges says there has been a great revival of interest in ragtime throughout the country. He describes ragtime as a "uniquely American" style of music, but not one that is regionally based, like country music.

"Ragtime was the first style of popular music to have universal appeal. It was just as popular in rural Pennsylvania as it was in New York City or St. Louis," he says. "The factors that gave it universal appeal and made it so popular during the ragtime



PHOTO BY LAWRENCE BIE MILLER

JAZZ SINGER: Accompanied by Frederick Hodges, left, Ann Gibson performs at the 2011 Central Pennsylvania Ragtime Festival in Rockhill.

era (late 1890s to early 1920s) still pertain today. This explains why the audiences for ragtime continue to grow among people of all ages."

The festival, which begins at 7 p.m. June 21, includes two ticket-only concerts, an after-hours open house with the performers

World-traveled ragtime performers

and a piano workshop. A gala dinner at the Rockhill Trolley Museum Pavilion will feature a concert and dancing.

This year's festival includes two free performances at the pavilion. Those public events will be held from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Saturday, June 22, and Sunday, June 23.

Budding ragtime pianists will have the opportunity to show off their skills. Walk-up talent will be able to perform during the public events.

Brightbill has both been a piano student and teacher for years. He has served as the organist at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Mount Union for 20 years and is a member of Valley Point Church of the Brethren (served by Valley REC). Brightbill has arranged for the festival to include a Sunday morning performance at St. Luke's.

"Believe it or not, there is gospel ragtime," Brightbill says.

This year's professional performers are: **Adam Swanson** — Adam has been a featured performer and lecturer at ragtime and jazz festivals across the United States. A student at Fort Lewis College, Colo., the 21-year-old is recognized as one of the world's foremost performers and historians of early American popular music.

Bryan Wright — Bryan is the 2013 Scott Joplin International Ragtime Foundation's Artist in Residence. The Lynchburg, Va., native is a classically trained pianist who now specializes in early jazz piano styles.

Frederick Hodges — Frederick has performed with the Royal Society Jazz Orchestra since 1982 and performs solo at various festivals. He has been described as one of the best jazz/ragtime pianists in the world.

Ann Gibson — Ann has performed for over 15 years at West Coast venues, performing renditions of tunes popular in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. She frequently performs with Hodges.

Russell Wilson — Russell, of Clinton, Md., is a member of "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band. He is the 2010 winner of the Carolina Ragtime Competition and placed second in the World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest in Peoria, Ill.

Andrew Greene — Andrew is the founder and director of the Peacherine Ragtime Orchestra. He is curator of the Arthur C. Ziegler, E.J. McBride, Katherine Lingham and Palm Leaf Ragtime Orchestra collections.

Most Valley REC members could be at the festival in less than an hour's drive. Blance Bolton drives from Tennessee.

"The reason I have enjoyed this festival so much is definitely the beauty of the Orbisonia/Rockhill Furnace area," she says. "And getting to know so many wonderful people who live in and around there. It has also been great to get acquainted with so many ragtime fans and the multi-talented musicians who travel far and wide to participate. If you love ragtime music, you will love this festival. The piano players are the best you will find anywhere."

The full schedule of events, ticket pricing and artist bios can be found online at www.rockhillragtime.com.

Festival sponsors include: Community State Bank, Ted Keith Barber Shop, George's Used Cars, Rockhill Trolley Museum, Martin Brown Funeral Home, Orbisonia True Value Hardware, Brown & Walters Insurance, the Iron Rail Bed & Breakfast, Rockhill Church of the Brethren and Orbisonia Presbyterian Church.

The Brightbills will host an after-concert gathering at their bed and breakfast (opened in May 2006) on the first night of the festival. The evening may include some songs around the 88-hole Adam Schaaf player piano that sits near the parlor window. David found

the refurbished piano at a Hollidaysburg shop. He just didn't know when he started looking for it that he'd end up bringing a



PHOTO BY BLANCHE BOLTON

TAKE THE 'A' TRAIN: Festival founder David Brightbill, right, in ticketmaster persona, talks with pianist Adam Swanson during a ragtime music festival in historic Rockhill.

lot more than an old piano to town.

"There was a time I could play quite a bit from memory," Brightbill says. "Now, at the festival, I just stay in the back and take it all in." 🌟

You can help cool future power costs

Our **future electric rates** are partially **based on how much power you use** on hot, humid weekdays **between 1 and 6 p.m.** this summer. When you hear an announcement from your local electric cooperative about doing the "Electric Shift," try these simple steps:

- ▶ Set air conditioners at 78 degrees or use fans instead.
- ▶ Close curtains and blinds to keep things cooler.
- ▶ Operate washers, dryers, dishwashers, stoves and other major appliances in early morning or evening.
- ▶ Minimize the number of times you open your refrigerator and freezer.
- ▶ Cook with an outdoor grill or a microwave oven.
- ▶ Turn off any non-essential lights.
- ▶ Run pool pumps at night.

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PEOPLE YOU CAN COUNT ON.™



Copper theft a nuisance at best, deadly at worst

BY DOUG ROLES

Director of Member Services

REPORTS OF copper theft continue to make the news locally and around the country, including one case in late April in which it appears a would-be criminal was electrocuted at a South Carolina electric cooperative substation. Removing copper (or any metal) from an electric utility is not only criminal, but poses a danger to those attempting the theft and those who work around the equipment.

The crime can also lead to outages and can result in thousands of dollars in damages — ultimately paid for by consumers. Copper wire is appealing to thieves who look to sell it for scrap. Burglars often climb power poles, scale fences and break into buildings to steal the precious metal, almost always endangering themselves and others in the process. Between 2001 and 2008, the price of copper skyrocketed 500 percent. After a brief decline in 2009, it has hovered at a strong \$3.40 per pound for the past several years.

“To a would-be thief, stealing copper may seem like a quick way to make a buck,” says Luanne Eckenrode, Valley REC vice president of consumer services and public relations. “But

it’s illegal, it’s costly, and it’s not worth losing a life. Working with metal and electricity is a dangerous combination, even for trained employees using proper equipment.”

Fortunately, Valley REC has not experienced metal theft in recent months. Martinsburg District Manager Mike Shawley recalls that from 2008 to 2010, there was a rash of copper thefts in the area. Increased security, he says, has diminished incidents of theft. He encouraged residents who see suspicious activity around utility equipment to call the police.

“We have a good working relationship with local law enforcement,” Shawley says. “In their regular patrols, they check our substations.”

Since stolen wire is commonly taken to recycling centers and traded for cash, many electric cooperatives stamp copper and aluminum wire with an ID number as a deterrent. Although many state laws require recycling centers to keep records of transactions, enforcement can be difficult. Without identifying marks, stolen wire is hard to track and rarely recovered. Legislation introduced on the federal level aims to improve tracking and impose stiffer penalties; most states have also toughened metal theft laws over the past few years.

Tougher laws and more awareness of electrical hazards could further reduce crimes. Thieves may not understand they are risking their lives by taking copper from utility poles or substations, where high transmission voltage is stepped down to a lower level for distribution lines.

“Electricity can’t be seen, but surely can be felt, but then it’s usually too late,” says Shade Gap District Manager Rick Poleck.

“The big danger is electrocution. That’s the ultimate danger,” Shawley says.

Valley REC urges members to follow these guidelines to guard against electrical dangers and prevent copper theft:

- ▶ Never enter or touch equipment inside a substation; stay away from power lines and anything touching a power line.
- ▶ If you notice anything unusual with electric facilities, such as an open substation gate, open equipment or a hanging wire, contact your Valley REC office immediately.
- ▶ If you see anyone around electric substations or electric facilities other than co-op personnel or contractors, call the police.
- ▶ To deter thieves around the home, install motion-sensor lights outside residences, garages and outbuildings.
- ▶ Store tools and wire cutters in a secure location and never leave them out while you are away.
- ▶ If you work in construction, do not leave any wires or plumbing unattended. Don’t leave loose wire at the job site, especially overnight.
- ▶ Help spread the word about the deadly consequences that can result from trying to steal copper or aluminum wire.

Anyone witnessing suspicious activity, such as after-hours entry into a substation or unmarked vehicles parked near a utility pole or driving on a right-of-way, should not attempt to intervene, but should contact authorities. Valley REC personnel can be reached at 800-432-0680. ☀

Source: Cooperative Research Network

Annual aerial line inspection slated for June/July



Valley Rural Electric Cooperative is using a contracted helicopter and pilot to conduct aerial pole inspections again this summer. Getting a bird’s eye view of lines and equipment allows Valley REC staff to better plan improvement projects and right-of-way maintenance.

“If you see a helicopter flying low, it’s probably us doing line inspection,” said Todd Ross, Valley REC operations manager. “We’re set up to be done in June, but depending on weather, the work could go into July. We’re going to be in almost every township in our service territory at some point.”

Valley REC is again using Pine Bottom Aviation Services, LLC of Martinsburg. Members should not be impacted by the inspection work.