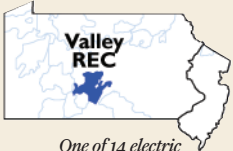


Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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GUEST COLUMN

Our linemen are on call for you



by **Todd Ross**  
Valley REC  
operations manager

**AS MEMBERS** of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative wake each morning and get ready for their day, the co-op's linemen are gearing up for another day of keeping the lights on. They wake before the sun, pour steaming cups of coffee and kiss their families goodbye. After swinging by the office to get the day's orders, our 23 linemen climb into their trucks and head out. Our

lineworkers form a solid team with one job: to deliver safe, reliable electricity. But that job can change in many ways when rough weather steps in and interrupts service.

We often take our electric service for granted. Do we take the men who provide it for granted, too? Let's take a moment and stand in their boots.

Linemen have to work safely and efficiently, at times while 40 feet in the air wearing sturdy, thick rubber gloves. On a typical day, lineworkers maintain electrical distribution lines or build service to new homes and businesses throughout Valley's service territory. They have a lot on their plates. But when our dispatchers call crews with a problem, everything else takes a backseat.

Restoring power takes precedence on a lineworker's to-do list. These brave men are always on call. Our crews are standing by to serve you 24 hours a day, in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning. And they take turns being on call weekends and holidays.


Can you imagine getting a call at 3 a.m.

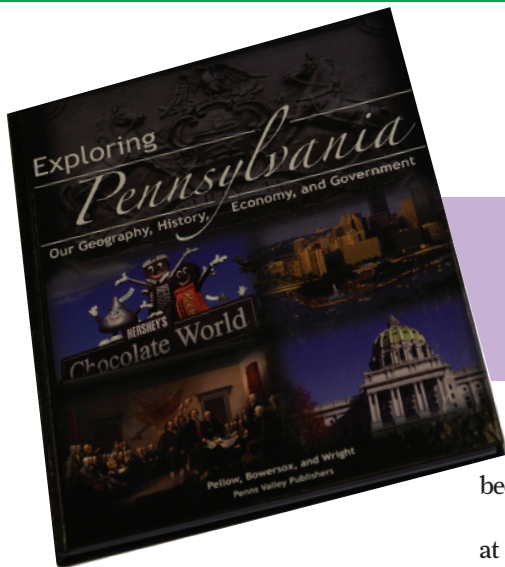
telling you to work outside during bad weather? Not many people are willing to face storms. Our lineworkers face harsh elements daily, all to serve you.

To be ready to respond no matter the situation or weather conditions, linemen are highly trained. At Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, lineworkers go through regular training to ensure they can work safely with various kinds of equipment. The equipment gets tested regularly, too.

"Safety" is the watchword of our linemen. The lives of their co-workers are on the line. Job safety is important to everyone, no matter your occupation. But for lineworkers, there can be no slipups or careless actions. Mistakes can cost a limb or life. That's one of the reasons linemen form a brotherhood. When you put your life in the hands of co-workers every day, they become more than colleagues. They're family.

That sense of family extends to electric co-ops across the nation. One of our principles is cooperation among cooperatives. During recent winter storms, we helped other co-ops in their time of need. And those co-ops extend that service to us, too. It's reassuring to know if a severe storm strikes, a national team of lineworkers stands ready to answer the call from co-ops across the country.

These highly skilled men light our homes and businesses every day. They endure harsh weather and long hours, all to make our lives better. Today (and every day), please take a moment to thank them. Valley REC's lineworkers are the heart of the Co-op Nation, proud and strong. 



BY DOUG ROLES  
Director of Member Services

**IF THERE'S** one person who worries at least as much as parents and teachers that elementary students are learning their Pennsylvania history it's the man who wrote many of the textbooks on the subject. It may be small consolation to the youngster doing homework at the kitchen table, but if the textbook being studied is one authored by Dr. Randall Pellow, he's pulling for the student not just to pass the chapter tests but to develop critical thinking skills and a love of learning.

Dr. Pellow is professor emeritus of teacher education at Shippensburg University. He recently authored a new fourth-grade history textbook: "Exploring Pennsylvania: Our Geography, History, Economy and Government." He says his goal is to catch the interest of students long enough for their natural inquisitiveness to take hold.

Randy, as most folks know him, and his wife, Brenda, have been Valley REC members for the past three years. They have a cabin in Calvin, Huntingdon County, and were members of Adams Electric Cooperative for 15 years. Randy connected with Valley REC after seeing a *Penn Lines* article (January 2014) about the commissioning of the USS *Somerset*, a subject he covered in his new book.

Randy brings years of teaching and writing experience to his latest work. He retired from Shippensburg University after 33 years with the teacher education department. He taught courses for both elementary and secondary education majors.

"I've actually taught 33 courses over my career," he recalls.

# Writing history for th

## Textbook author hopes to spark passion for learning by telling Pennsylvania's story to kids

Hailing from the Syracuse, N.Y., area, Randy boasts that he's "actually been through two, 100-inch snowstorms."

He completed his undergraduate work at SUNY-Oswego. He obtained master and doctorate degrees at Penn State.

"That's what brought me here," he says. "In 1971 I finished and was hired at Shippensburg. I've written four different textbooks on Pennsylvania for different grade levels. This is the 21st book I've authored in different capacities."

So, how does the process of getting a quality textbook into the hands of an eager young learner work?

"It's nice to have a publisher that wants you to do one," Randy jokes.

The starting point of writing a textbook is to look at the national and state standards for the subject area, he explains. Textbooks won't sell unless school administrators know the book meets these standards.

After reviewing the standards, the next step is to set up a content outline, draft chapters and then break down those chapters into individual lessons.

Having background information and teaching experience is a big plus in textbook writing, Randy says. Once he has his outline complete, he bounces the content off the publisher.

"You have to write it and keep it interesting for kids. I use a storytelling approach," he says, adding content that can't fit in the book can be included in the teacher's guide.

"There's so much interesting Pennsylvania history and folklore," he says.

Authors and publishers have to weigh how much of the more colorful parts of the keystone state's history to include in elementary textbooks. For example, information about Queen Aliquippa who demanded tobacco and whiskey as the price for letting white

traders and soldiers on her land (Randy calls her "Queen Aliquippa the Extortionist") was not included in the textbook, but was provided to teachers.

"It's a call that has to be made," he says. "The publisher has the final decision."

The new book is filled with attention-getting photos and graphics. He even includes some humor, as in his intro to the state's new energy boom when he tells students, "Marcellus Shale is not a person."

Other works by Pellow include his co-authoring of "The Western Hemisphere" for fifth-grade students and "The Eastern Hemisphere" for sixth-grade students.

Randy says history hasn't changed, but the way it's presented in textbooks has.

"This book is not just on history, but on geography, history and economics," he says. "It's integration of social science aspects that can be totally different. It's cause and effect. You can't study history without geography. Without geography, history has no place to happen."

Tom Cleary, Randy's publisher at Penns Valley, has worked with him for 25 years. He credits Randy with putting in extra effort to provide students and teachers with a quality resource.



# The inquisitive student

“He does all this teacher support material for free and it makes the teacher’s job easier,” Tom says.

“Together we’ve published numerous works, many or most of them for Pennsylvania,” Tom reports. “He is a brilliant guy. He has all these hats that he wears in

**“You can’t study history without geography. Without geography, history has no place to happen,”**

**Dr. Randall Pellow**

geography and history and he’s great at writing textbooks. He is a wonderful person to work with.”

Tom says school districts typically use case-bound (hardback) textbooks for six or seven years. He said Pennsylvania history doesn’t change that much “except for the new part.” It used to be more common for districts to change out textbooks every five years, but budget constraints in many districts have extended this period. Textbook publishers advertise directly to Pennsylvania schools through catalogs and trade shows.

So, does Pellow ever hear from “his” students?

“Sometimes teachers have kids write me and the kids will say, ‘Oh yeah, we used your book in our classroom.’ Of course you always have your critics.”

Pellow says the biggest frustration is if a grammatical error is discovered during the proofreading process, but something happens and the correction is not made prior to publishing.

“It’s an interesting process and a complicated process and

a long process,” he says.

Randy coined the acronym “SWIRL” for the activities in the book.

“It deals with Pennsylvania core standards of speaking, writing, informational reading, and the ‘L’s’ of literature and listening and another ‘L,’ language. I call it vocabulary development,” he says.

“Integrating these functions into the textbook, I think, certainly contributes to comprehension,” Randy says.

The student activity book is oriented to the textbook’s SWIRL activities and focuses on informational reading and follow-up questions.

Asked what he most wants young learners to take away from his textbook, Randy says he wants to build their curiosity about their world.

“I’m kind of a mass collector person,” he says. “I want them to keep an inquisitiveness about not only history but geography and government. And these are basic things I want them to learn, as well as to acquire a thirst for knowledge. I want them to appreciate the complexity of our history.”

Recent Pennsylvania history covered in the textbook includes the crash of Flight 93 in Somerset County on Sept. 11, 2001, the 2008 recession and the Marcellus Shale boom.

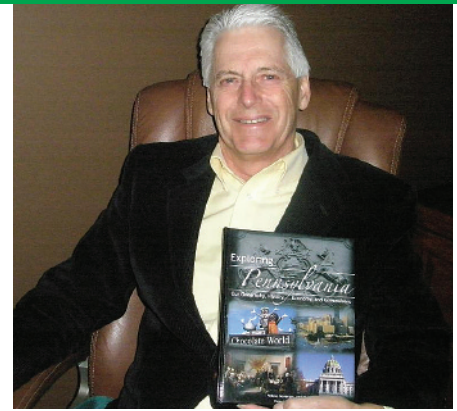
When it comes to doing research on more recent history, Randy says, “Thank goodness for the internet.”

He cautions that web gathering includes authenticating the information. And if sources provide conflicting information, he will note this in the teacher’s guide so teachers can present the information to students.

“Another crucial facet by which I acquire knowledge (besides reading historical accounts) is that I travel to a variety of specific locations throughout our state,” he says. “I can write about places much more vividly and knowledgeably if I have been there. I have been to most places written about in the text, but not all.”

Sites he has visited include: Drake’s Oil Well Museum, Presque Isle and the vineyards of the Erie Plain, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Pine Creek Gorge (Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania), Johnstown Incline Plane, and Bushkill Falls.

Randy says he actually spent a whole



**Dr. Randall Pellow**

year with the project, writing the textbook, the student activities, the teacher’s guide and lesson plans, and the chapter tests. He also places additional information, such as a supplement on Daniel Boone, on the Penns Valley website.

On this project, Randy, the senior author, worked with co-authors Laurie Bowersox and Nicholas Wright. Laurie is principal for grades 3, 4 and 5 at Eastern Lebanon County School District and Nicholas works in the same building as a social studies coordinator.

“We also have a very creative graphic artist at Penns Valley Publishing,” Randy says.

He also credits his in-house proofreader, his wife Brenda, who reads all the writing and does every activity in the Student Activity Book (SAB).

“She is extremely helpful in this process,” he says.

Also helpful in composing the SAB are their grandchildren.

“One in particular, Samia, was a fourth grader when I wrote the activities,” he says. “I had her actually do some of the activities; she was very helpful to tune in my thinking to a fourth grader’s thought processes.”

Through their connection with *Penn Lines*, Randy, Brenda and Tom were able to attend the commissioning ceremony of the USS *Somerset* in early March.

“It was a highly reverent program with many tributes to the heroic actions of those 40 people on Flight 93,” he reports. “It was a very worthwhile program and day spent honoring the men and women of Flight 93 and our country’s military.”

The event gave Randy an opportunity to experience another page of Pennsylvania history, something he encourages for all his students. 🌟





# A measure of the past



## Stringbox was the high-speed 'range finder' of days gone by

BY DOUG ROLES  
Director of Member Services

Anyone who has ever cleaned out an attic or basement knows that coming across a long-forgotten item can bring back a lot of memories. Rick Poleck, Valley REC's Shade Gap district manager, had this happen recently while cleaning out one of the co-op's pickup trucks that was being retired.

Amidst the normal "clutter" in an electric utility truck, Rick found a stringbox. Odds are that unless you worked in surveying 30 years ago, you've never heard of this tool. To someone like Rick, the little plastic box, now an artifact, once was a piece of high-tech equipment.

"This was the hottest thing when it came out in the 1980s," Rick recalls.

The stringbox resembles the old plastic bait boxes anglers used to wear on their hips. Instead of carrying red worms or grubs, it contains a spool of thread, a wheel and an odometer-like counter. The model Rick found in the truck is the Chainman II.

He used the device, or one like it, when he worked as a staking engineer for the co-op. He says the name "Chainman" is derived from one of the workers on a typical three-man surveying crew. Frequently, crews were comprised of a supervisor, a transit operator and a chainman – the person who would pull a chain or tape between points during a line survey.

The stringbox enabled a lone surveyor, such as a Valley REC staking engineer, to accurately measure distances without

lugging heavy equipment or covering the same ground twice.

"I always thought it was ingenious, how this was designed," Rick points out. "This was one of the biggest improvements for the guy in the field."

To measure a distance, the surveyor or staking engineer ties the thread to a limb or stake and then walks to the next point. As he or she walks, thread is pulled from the spool and around the wheel that turns the counter. The counter resembles the analog odometer of a car or truck, down to the reset or "trip" button, and measures to the nearest foot.

"You just tie this off and start traipsing down through the woods," Rick says. "The string is biodegradable so when you reach 'Point B' you can just break it off and leave it."

The box has a button for securing the string and keeping the spool from unraveling while not in use. Each spool holds 10,000 feet of line.

The stringbox had its weak points: Rotted or frayed string could break or stretch while being pulled from the box. The user also had to move around obstacles in a way that wouldn't hang up the string and inflate the reading on the counter.

"You still had to crawl through the brush and rough terrain to get the measurement," Rick remembers. "But it didn't take two guys to get your distance."

He says the stringbox is similar to a measuring wheel, but the stringbox is more useful on uneven terrain where a wheel would not be practical. Rick, who

worked for seven years in surveying before coming to work for Valley in 1981, says locating in the field has changed over the years.

When he started working in surveying, it was common to use 300-foot chain tapes. He remembers them as being "murder to use," requiring a plumb bob to improve accuracy. To add to the enjoyment, at that time all the math (trigonometry) was done manually.

Later crews began using an electronic distance measuring device (EDM) that utilized a reflecting prism. The battery-powered device was mounted on a tripod. Scientific calculators also came to prominence, taking a lot of the pencil and eraser work out of the figuring.

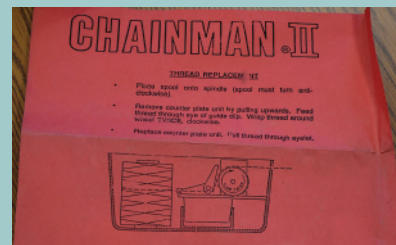
When Rick started with Valley REC, he used a cloth tape. They were lighter to handle but could stretch. He recalls the progression of measuring instruments at the co-op was tape, to chain, to stringbox to electronic range finders and ultimately today's global positioning system (GPS) technology.

When using the chain tape by himself, he learned to push a small piece of stick into the ground tightly enough that the tape could be affixed to it, but loosely enough that the tape could be pulled free for rewinding, saving him from walking the ground twice.

The stringbox did away with that worry. And, for a device with no "on" button, no laser technology and no computer link-up, it had a good run before being relegated to the bottom of the toolbox. 🌞



LEFT: As thread is pulled from the spool inside the stringbox, a wheel turns a counter to measure distance. The piece in the center, holding the wheel in place, is a simple drywall anchor. BELOW: The Chainman II stringbox kit includes directions and an extra spool of thread. The directions explain the reloading procedure.



PHOTOS BY DOUG ROLES