

FROM THE MANAGER/CEO

Prepare for the storm in advance

New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

EMERGENCY OUTAGE NUMBER

814/766-3221
1-800-270-3177



Rick L. Eichelberger
General Manager & CEO

A BIG STORY throughout 2011 in Pennsylvania was weather events. Weather can be an electric utility's worst enemy as it can lead to extended power outages. The good news is the worst storms in Pennsylvania did not affect New Enterprise Rural Electric. Weather events — tornadoes, high wind gusts, flooding, ice or snow storms, and lightning

— are all events that keep our employees on high alert.

Since we had several heavy, wet snow storms in the 1990s, we have undertaken a huge effort to upgrade our poles and wires. That is why you may see our line crews working on an old power line that has been there for years. During the last 15 years, 150 miles of old line has been replaced. An electric distribution system can never be totally storm-proofed, but a lot can be done to minimize damage. We estimate that less than 10 miles remain of the oldest line to replace.

Our line crews are prepared to roll the trucks when a weather event strikes. Prior to a severe weather event striking Pennsylvania, the 14 electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey stay in constant contact and are prepared to assist each other in a moment's notice. When a system-wide weather event strikes, there is always going to be that last power line put back in service, and someone will be the last one to have power restored.

Our cooperative has had an excellent

outage record since the 1990s partly due to our preventative maintenance work and partly because of favorable weather conditions. Winter is always a good time to be reminded that weather events can come along without much notice. The possibility of a several-day power outage will always be real.

One of the most difficult things for a cooperative member to understand and for the cooperative to have an answer for is: How long will it be until power is restored to me? Each of us must always have a plan of action when we are caught without electricity for days. Most of us can handle the inconvenience of a day without power. Several days or a week without electricity leads to other concerns like needing an alternative heat source, frozen water lines, food thawing out in a freezer or maybe even an alternative location to stay.

Did we learn from the 1990s? You bet we did. Are we better prepared for our turn when it comes the next time? You bet we are. Will we find out more things to do in the future to be even better prepared? You bet we will.

Severe weather will hit our system at some point and we all need to be as prepared as possible. Just as the cooperative has been doing things every year to lessen the impact of weather-related events on the power lines, each of us should give some thought to how we would handle a power outage that lasts for several days.

For tips on what to do when your power goes out, see page 14d. 

Man's best friend helps children with autism

BY BRAUNA L. SELL

FOR YEARS, seeing-eye dogs have helped the visually impaired to gain their independence. Now, service dogs are being trained to help children who have been diagnosed with autism. These special dogs are trained to help guide children through everyday social challenges and lower overall stress levels.



Researchers have measured children's levels of cortisol (a stress hormone) before, during and after they began using a service dog. When a dog is by the side of a child with autism, the child's cortisol levels decrease significantly. Not only is the child's stress level decreased, the stress levels of the child's parents or caretakers are also down.

New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative consumer-members Richard and Bernadette Ochoa have two grandsons diagnosed with autism — Joseph (Joe) and Reuben. Joe and Reuben are two of the most adorable little boys you've ever seen, but hidden behind their sweet faces is a world that can be filled with unpredictability and pain.

Both boys were happy, seemingly normal, babies. When the boys were between 12 and 18 months old, their parents, Neil and Mindy Ochoa, started to see considerable deviations from typical behavior and development. The boys didn't respond to their names, focused intently on twirling socks, and exhibited other obsessive behavior. Next came the

tantrums and severe self-injurious behavior. Just keeping the boys out of danger day after day had turned into a demanding job for the Ochoas.

As boys often do, Joe and Reuben find new ways to get into trouble. Joe has run away from home several times. One time, he ran two miles in 20 minutes wearing only his underwear, even though three adults were present when he left the house. The family then had new locks installed, but Neil and Mindy worry he might use a window for his escape next time.

"Where's Reuben?" is the most popular question in the Ochoa family, as often he's in sight one second and gone the next. Reuben has no fear of heights or water, and has even climbed 15 feet up a tree and jumped. The family always makes sure to have a hand on him when they are out anywhere as he bolts as soon as he has the opportunity. Reuben finds this most amusing.

The boys join forces as a demolition crew, shredding wallpaper and ceiling tiles to make confetti all over their bedroom floor. Joe sometimes puts his head through the walls and doors during temper rages.



GETTING READY: Reuben Ochoa prepares to ride at the Bedford County Therapeutic Riding Program.

Concerned about the future, the Ochoa family contacted "4 Paws for Ability," a non-profit agency founded by Karen Shirk in 1998.

Karen was inspired by her service dog, Ben, to help other people. Karen considers Ben to be her

co-founder in training autism service dogs. 4 Paws for Ability has a unique approach to placement. She partners with her clients and by doing so is able to place dogs without a long waiting list.

4 Paws for Ability's mission is:

- ▶ To enrich lives of people with disabilities by training and placing service dogs to provide individuals with companionship and promote independent living;
- ▶ To educate the public to accept the use of service dogs in public places; and
- ▶ To assist with animal rescue whenever possible by obtaining animals from shelters and rescue groups.

Autism service dogs are specifically trained for the individual and their family. The dog for Joe and Reuben will be trained to help stop repetitive behavior, calm destructive and aggressive behavior, and help keep tabs on runaways. The boys can be harnessed to the dog in stores and other crowded places. The dog can track them if they get lost, even in a nearby cornfield, which has happened.

The cost to place a dog with Joe and Reuben is \$22,000. The Ochoas are committed to raise \$13,000 in support of the 4 Paws for Ability mission. Fundraisers have started to raise the money for the service dog.

A mother whose son has already has a service dog says:

"I am so amazed with Grover. I cannot believe what a help he is. I had never heard of a service dog being used this way, but what a job he does. When



TAKING A LOOK: Joe Ochoa stares down Lou, the pony.

The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his dog.

— George G. Vest

Jason is outside, Grover prevents him from going toward the street. In the library, Jason is happy just to be with Grover. Jason seems much calmer and secure with Grover around. I know that

Grover was placed in the home for Jason, but he has brought such peace and happiness to the whole family. Thank you for this wonderful service you provide.”

What is autism?

Autism is defined by the Autism Society of America as a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities.

Most signs or characteristics of autism are evident in the areas of speech or communication (verbal and non-verbal). Many of the signs or symptoms of autism begin presenting themselves between 2 and 6 years of age.

Research indicates the following symptoms are the most commonly found characteristics of autism:

- ▶ The child is unable to coo by 12 months.
- ▶ The child does not point or gesture by 12 months.
- ▶ The child does not say single words by 16 months.
- ▶ The child does not say two or more words by 24 months.
- ▶ The child has lost some social skills or language abilities.

Other characteristics include:

- ▶ No fear of danger.
- ▶ Over- or under-sensitivity to pain.
- ▶ May avoid eye contact.
- ▶ May prefer to be by himself/herself.
- ▶ Has difficulty expressing what they want or need – may then try to use gestures.
- ▶ May echo words or phrases.
- ▶ May have inappropriate attachments to objects.
- ▶ May spin himself/herself or objects.
- ▶ Prolonged repetitive play.
- ▶ May insist on things/routines always being the same.
- ▶ May exhibit inappropriate laughing (laughing when not appropriate to the situation).
- ▶ May display tantrums for no apparent reason.
- ▶ May avoid cuddling.
- ▶ May exhibit self-injurious behavior when upset – i.e., biting self or head banging.
- ▶ An overall difficulty interacting with others.

If you see the above symptoms, you should consult with your doctor and a psychologist before drawing your own conclusions. It is also important to see a psychologist or a speech therapist, and not just take the word of your doctor or primary care physician. Although medical doctors are very well trained, psychologists and speech pathologists have specific training in autism and other developmental disorders and may have a better understanding of autism and how to treat it. However, it's best to START by seeing your doctor to rule out any other medical conditions and to get his or her clinical opinion initially.

For many treatment programs, it is a collective effort of many different professional disciplines – medical doctor, psychologist, occupational therapist and counselor (all should have specific training dealing with autism). Again – check with your doctor about all options if you think your child might have autism.

Another parent's comments:

“While Scooby may love cats more than the cats would prefer, autism assistance dog Scooby is the friend Tyler has waited so long to find. Scooby knows nothing of the word ‘different.’ In Scooby's eyes, Tyler is the perfect friend just the way he is.”

If you would like to help Joe and Reuben receive a service dog with a tax-deductible donation, please visit the 4 Paws for Ability donation page at <http://www.4PawsForAbility.org/donation.html>. If you would prefer to send a check, mail your check to 4 Paws for Ability, In Honor of Ochoa, 253 Dayton Avenue, Xenia, OH 45385. Be sure to write “Ochoa” in the memo line of your check.

There are two autism support groups in this area. They are:

Bedford County Autism Support Group

Contact name: Debbie Ott
814/766-2478

Contact email: bcasg1@embarqmail.com

Check it out on Facebook at Bedford County Autism Support Group.

The meetings are held at Colonial Hills Baptist Church, Route 30, Bedford. The group meets the second Thursday of each month. Childcare is provided.

Blair County Support Group

708 North Second Street
Altoona, PA 16001
814/943 9002

Contact name: Terri Rossman

Contact email: BTNSCR@aol.com

The group meets the first Wednesday of every month from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the YWCA, Union Avenue, Altoona.

Websites:

Abroad.web.officelive.com/default.aspx — Advisory Board on Autism and Related Disabilities (ABOARD). The phone number is 800/827-9385.

Autismlink.com —

The phone number is 412/364-1886 or email: info@autismlink.com. 

New savings with the Co-op Connections card

The Co-op Connections program is now announcing the Healthy Savings Program with your Co-op Connections card.



Besides saving on prescriptions and discounts from local businesses, you can now save on dental, vision,

hearing, lab and imaging services, and chiropractic work.

You can save:

- ▶ 10 to 60 percent discounts on eyeglasses, contact lenses, eye exams and LASIK.
- ▶ 20 to 40 percent discounts on dental care such as cleanings, X-ray, root canals, crowns and orthodontics.
- ▶ Additional savings on chiropractic visits, lab tests, imaging scans and hearing aids.

Make sure you show the participating provider your Co-op Connections card to receive your discount on their services. You may call 800/800-7616 to locate a participating provider in the Healthy Savings Program or online at www.healthsavings.coop. You will need to have your Co-op Connections card. You can print a temporary card from the website or call the office and we will print one for you. Please remember this is not insurance and a check will not be sent for payment. These are discounts offered directly from the participating providers.

For 2011, cooperative members of New Enterprise REC had a total savings on prescriptions of 34.7 percent. If you need a Co-op Connections card, please call Wendy at extension 230. ☀

February co-op calendar

Feb. 13 – Board meeting

Feb. 23 – Install service load limiters on accounts with past dues balances. The last day to make a payment arrangement to avoid installation of the limiter is Feb. 21. Please call Brawna at extension 224 to set up the arrangement.

Feb. 28 – Regular payments due

Power out?

If your power just went out, there are a few things you can do before calling the office:



- ▶ Check your fuses or breakers in your panel box.
- ▶ If you live in a doublewide or mobile home, check the main breaker in your disconnect box.
- ▶ Check your neighbors to see if they have power.
- ▶ Check outside for the potential problem such as a broken pole, limbs or trees on the line, or a dead animal at the transformer.
- ▶ Call New Enterprise REC at 814/766-3221 or 800/270-3177 and press 3 to report the outage. If the outage occurs after business hours, listen to the message to obtain the person's on-call phone number or pager number.
- ▶ Have the following information ready: account name, service location (address), phone number and what time the power went out.

Please be patient until a crew and equipment can get ready and be dispatched to your area. In widespread outages, we will get to your area as quickly as possible. Have emergency supplies on hand for longer outages including bottled water, prepackaged food, blankets, flashlight and batteries.



Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

Switch to energy-saving halogen incandescent lightbulbs to cut lighting energy use by 25 percent. These bulbs last three times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs and can easily be dimmed. Want to save more? Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) and light-emitting diodes (LEDs) cut lighting energy use by at least 75 percent. Learn more at energysavers.gov.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy