

Currents

Your Link to Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative



High Voltage. . .



Take A Hike!

By Barbara Taylor

One summer activity that most of us can enjoy is a walk in the country. One of my favorite local trails exists thanks to the Rails to Trails movement, where former railroad paths are converted to hiking trails. The Paulinskill Valley Trail is a 27-mile long path that runs through Sussex County starting at Sparta Junction and ending in Knowlton in Warren County.



There is so much to recommend this trail: a smooth crushed cinder path with a moderate grade, shady forest cover, lovely scenic views and more. The trail is maintained as part of the Kittatinny Valley State Park, and the trail description notes that its bridges cross the Paulinskill River 6 times (www.nj.parksandforests.org/parks/kittval.html). There are many parking areas available along the trail; a list of these can be found in the Directions section of the Paulinskill Valley Trail Committee website (www.pvtc-kvsp.org). This interesting website details the history of the trail, includes contact information for many free hiking events that take place on the trail throughout the year, and encourages trail users to *continued on page 2*

Commentary by the President & CEO



Annual Meeting Review

by Jim Siglin
President & CEO

Our 72nd Annual Meeting is now history. With 382 members registering, we had one of the largest crowds in recent years. Total attendance was close to 700. Thank you for taking an active interest in your cooperative.

Reflecting on the meeting, the question and answer session came to mind as providing an excellent opportunity to expand on some of the questions asked. I won't catch all of them but several struck particularly strong chords so I want to address those.

Let me start with the question about tree trimming. Following the ice storms, we received many calls about trimming trees to help prevent or mitigate future problems. We are in the third year of a five-year trimming cycle. This means that we trim our entire 622 miles of line completely over five years. Naturally, trees continue to grow so at the end of the cycle; we have to start over. As I mentioned in my response, we are working to accelerate our trimming cycle to trim our entire system in three years. The biggest barrier is cost. We are working with our contractors to find ways to do more trimming while containing costs.

Reliability naturally follows from any discussion of tree trimming. Vegetation is usually the number one or two cause of interruptions on our system. We are continually investing in additions to our system controls. These devices act like an automatic circuit breaker, similar to what you have at home. These devices sense when there is a fault in the lines. The device opens the circuit for a brief period, a second or two, then recloses the circuit. If the fault is gone, all is well. If it is still there, the cycle repeats. These system protection devices and schemes are designed to prevent long interruptions but do cause minor blinks and blips. In an area blessed

JULY 2009 • Vol. XII, Issue VII

Think Geek for
Gadgets Page 2

Energy Saving and
Web Research
Gadgets Page 3

The Geyser Heat
Pump Water Heater Page 4

with the abundance of trees and wildlife, these are interruptions are inescapable. If you have sensitive or critical equipment, such as a PC for work purposes, investment in an uninterruptible power supply is a good idea. We can help you pick one that is right for you.

Keeping with the tree and reliability theme, the question was asked about putting everything underground to avoid storm, vegetation and animal interruptions. Though this would help in protecting our system in a major storm, underground comes with its own drawbacks. The first is cost - underground construction is easily three times more expensive than overhead. The second is terrain - we are blessed with an abundance of rock, which makes trenching very expensive. The final is ease of maintenance and restoration. With an overhead circuit, we can find a fault with relative ease. When it is buried, we have to use sophisticated sounding equipment to find the fault. Once located, we must dig up the area, repair the fault and restore the surroundings. Restoration of underground circuits takes far longer so outages are longer and repair costs are higher. Where we can, we do go underground and we will continue that practice.

Several questions were raised about renewable energy and were we active or interested in these. The answer is yes and yes. We are active in the sense that we keep informed about what is going on with renewable energy sources and are prepared for any installations that come onto our system. We are interested in these sources as well because they help green our portfolio of power supply even more than the current 70% carbonless mix we have today. If you are interested in a renewable power supply, feel free to call. We'll discuss it with you and get you going in the right direction.

The last question I will address came as the last question of the evening. The question was (paraphrased), "What is Sussex Rural and our counterparts across the US doing to influence the cap and trade legislation being proposed. This legislation is simply a tax on carbon and will drive our bills through the roof." I am pleased to say we are doing a lot. Since the middle of last year, cooperatives all across the country have been communicating with their elected officials to raise their concern over affordability. We have written often

continued on page 4

Think Geek for Gadgets

by Tom (Sigmund Freud) Tate

In the mail yesterday came a glorious little catalog that prompted this gadget review. The catalog is from a Virginia company, Think Geek. It struck me, as I flipped through the pages, that with all the depressing news flooding the media these days, we all could use a pick-me-up. Buying a new gadget always does that for me. The downside is if it is an expensive item, buyer's remorse can creep in and that wouldn't serve anyone well right now. Therefore, I offer Think Geek as an alterna-



tive. See, Currents offers help for troubles that assail us (hence the Freud reference). No appointments or medical charges necessary.

This catalog is chock full of inexpensive, frivolous but undeniably cool/fun gadgets. For under \$20 (or even under \$10), you can get something that serves no other purpose than to lift your spirits. Let's review a few of these.

Mini UFO This radio controlled flyer is slightly larger than a silver dollar and hovers and moves at your bidding. A flashing blue LED at the top makes for eerie nighttime flights. Think of the fun buzzing office mates or hapless pets:>) Now reduced to \$19.99!



Sonic Screwdriver These fellows and gals are cut from the same bolt of cloth as I am offering a wide range of Dr. Who gizmos. "Dr. Who?" you ask. Only the longest running sci-fi program in the history of television. Aside from a short hiatus in the 1990s, this program has aired on BBC since the 1960s. This is a replica of the Doctor's tool of choice for escaping from various traps and quandaries. It offers the appropriate sounds plus has UV ink and a UV light for writing secret messages (not part of the REAL sonic screwdriver in the series but cool nonetheless). \$17.99.

Tribbles Okay, Trekkies, this is from the classic episode, "The Trouble with Tribbles". While these Tribbles won't cause mayhem in your starship, er, office, they are adorable.

They shake, wail and purr and should have the same calming effect as their prolific forebears from the final frontier. Boldly go where no one in your neighborhood has gone and buy one today. \$14.99 - 19.99.

Electronic Box Opener Are you like me and really enjoy getting a package? Especially one with the tear-off strip? Well, if your mailbox has been especially barren of late, here is relief - a gizmo that makes the sound of that paper strip being ripped off, when you want it. Be advised that the write up states the device makes other random noises that could be offensive to some of a more genteel persuasion. Caveat emptor. \$9.99.

I could ramble on but why not check all the geeky goodness for yourself at www.thinkgeek.com.

You'll be glad you did!!



Take A Hike

continued from page 1

become members. A membership perk is a shopper's discount at Ramsey Outdoor, a favorite of hikers, campers and Boy Scouts.

My own preferred stretch of the trail is between Old Swartswood Road in Hampton and Stillwater Road in Stillwater. There are some great limestone rock formations, and the Paulinskil River gently runs alongside much of the path.

This trail is never crowded, but it is used for many purposes. Along with many birds, squirrels, deer and even possibly a bear, you may also encounter hikers, bikers, dog walkers and horseback riders. I have learned that trail etiquette requires that hikers yield to oncoming bicycles, and everyone yields to horses.

I plan to extend my ramblings this summer. Hope to see you on the trail!

Make the wise choice

When it's time to buy a new water heater, there are a number of choices you can make. You can purchase a heater warranted for six or eight years, one that will be cheap to buy, but expensive to operate. Or you can invest in a Marathon and save money in operating costs...for a lifetime. Marathon - super efficient and warranted not to leak for as long as you own your home.



- **Seamless Polybutylene Tank** will never rust, corrode or leak.
- **Environfoam® Insulation** completely surrounds the tank. Superior efficiency with no Ozone-depleting chemicals.
- **Heating Elements** designed to maintain water temperatures and perform in the harshest water environments (just like ours here in NJ).
- **Bowl-Shaped Tank Bottom** developed to allow more complete tank draining.

Contact us today for model availability, pricing and complete information. 973.875.5101 x117 or go to our website: <http://www.sussexrec.com/brochures/Marathon.html>

Marathon® Simply the wisest choice
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ENERGY SAVING AND WEB RESEARCH GADGETS

by Tom Tate

I stand accused of having too many e-mail addresses. Does anyone think that six is too many? That is actually a reduction although I think I have a couple more at Yahoo and other sites. At any rate, if not for all the e-mail addresses I would miss an awful lot of really cool announcements and fail you in the gadget review department. So, I will gladly continue to bear the burden of 100 - 200 e-mails a day to bring you the latest in gadgetry. Chest thumping mode off.

The hardware gadgets that cropped up in my in-box are from Black and Decker. The e-mail hawked their energy saver series of products (www.energysaverseries.com). Intrigued, I took a cruise to the site. They have three offerings and I took a close look at two since the Power Monitor does not work with our automated metering system at this time. The first is a thermal leak detector, useful for finding hot spots around the home. For instance, you can identify where you have faulty weatherstripping around the front door and repair or replace it. I purchased one for field trials right here in Sussex County so I can give you a first hand report later.



I was fortunate enough to acquire a pre-production sample of the Lights Out motion activated light control. This device simply mounts over an existing light switch and uses a motion sensor to turn lights on and off. This is one neat piece of hardware. The instructions are clear, concise and easy to follow. After reading through them (yes, I read the directions - do not revoke my DIY card), I preset the options (duration before lights are turned off, amount of natural light that will override the sensor) and the actual installation took two minutes, max. Everything, and I mean everything, you need to successfully mount the device is included. This is, hands down, the best thought out offering I have seen in many moons.

The advantage of Lights Out versus a sensor that replaces the wall switch? Ease of installation, without a doubt. And, probably cost (in-wall devices start at \$30.00). I say probably because prices are not posted yet. The device is in my

office and has been working flawlessly except my coworkers now think I am gone since it shuts off the lights if I sit at my PC and work. *Hummm*- I might be onto something here. Be advised, the device only works with single location switches. If you have lights controlled by two different switches, this product will not work.

These days, anything you do to save energy is a worthy investment. The Lights Out device has the greatest potential for savings but the thermal leak detector is a terrific high tech addition to any toolbox.

The other gadget is a web-based tool Wolfram Alpha (<http://www43.wolframalpha.com/>). If you find it of interest, you can join the ranks of the early adopters and wow your friends and families with your amazing grasp of arcane facts. Just what does this new gadget do for you? Typical search engines scour the web and categorize web pages based on a variety of statistics such as key words (words featured prominently in the site). When you search for something, say a recipe for building a dugout canoe with a spork, you get results that simply list web pages containing these terms. If a site



has paid for the privilege, it will be at or near the top of the results. Now you must wade through the returns to find what you want.

When Ask Jeeves first burst upon the scene a few years ago, I immediately liked the method of writing a question and having results presented based on that query. Turns out it was mostly window dressing but it felt comfortable and natural. Wolfram Alpha adopts a far different approach. They claim to be an answer calculation engine. You can enter a formula, a town name, or other formats and the results are displayed in a concise, downloadable format. You don't get a bunch of web pages, you get an answer. At the bottom, they provide access to the source(s) of the answer. At this writing, I am still getting used to how it works but it seems promising. Any student will be drawn to this - kind of the CliffsNotes of the web.

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WolframAlpha computational knowledge engine

canoe

Assuming "canoe" is a word | Use as a language instead

Definitions:

Noun:

canoe	small and light boat; pointed at both ends; propelled with a paddle
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Verb:

canoe	travel by canoe
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(2 meanings)

Pronunciation:

kən'u (kuhn'oo)

Narrower terms: Show categories

birch bark | birchbark | birchbark canoe | dugout | dugout canoe | kayak | outrigger canoe | pirogue

Broader terms: Show categories

boat | small boat

Hyphenation:

ca - noe

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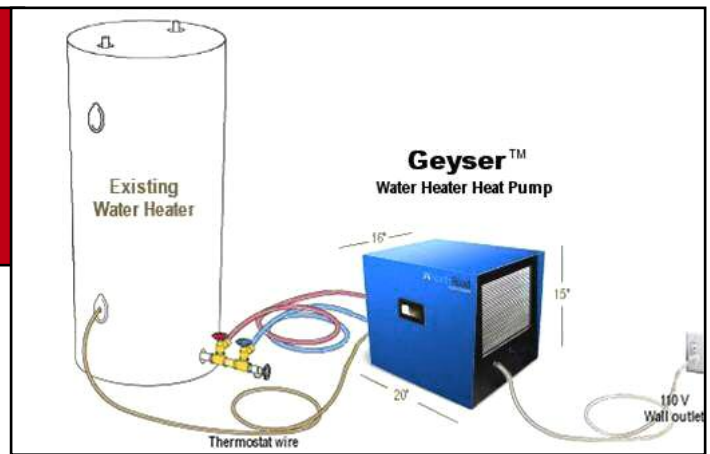
[Infrastructure for this computation provided by Wolfram|Alpha launch partner Dell, Inc.]

The Geyser Heat Pump Water Heater

by Tom Tate

There is a new category of products that is making a splash of late, heat pump water heaters. This article showcases one that seems like a natural for our members, the Geyser from North Road Technologies. For the past two years, we have offered arguably the best electric water heater on the market, the Marathon. When you pair the super efficient Marathon with a heat pump water heater, you come about as close to free domestic hot water as you can get. Not only is the output free, but it slices, dices, purees and walks the dog when you are away! Now how much are you willing to pay? But wait, before you answer... Okay, okay, just a touch of Billy Mays hyperbole with those "free" and "slicing/dicing, etc." statements.

The fundamental question is, why add this device if I already have an excellent domestic water heating source? Depending upon how you heat your water, you can use the heat pump technology to dramatically increase efficiency (it is rated at 370%) and save up to 70% of your costs. To me, that is reason enough. But, let me add a couple of additional factors. The heat pump is very green in that it uses the latent heat in the air surrounding it to heat water for domestic purposes. In the process, it can dehumidify an area in the summer and heat that area in the winter. Renewable, addi-



tional space conditioning as a by product and eligibility for Federal tax credits (30% of installed cost), 5-year limited warranty, works with any heating source; electric or fossil. A compelling package, indeed.

Let me offer my home as an example. My Marathon is in our basement. Nice and cool, my basement does require dehumidification in the summer (I run a dehumidifier). In the winter, if I want to work in the shop, I must either use a space heater or bundle up. This product could eliminate the dehumidifier and provide some welcome warmth in cold weather. It is definitely in my budget plans for the near future.

Installation is easy and all components required come with the unit. It runs on 120 volts so no special wiring is required, just plug it in! Not being all that handy with plumbing, I will still invest in professional assistance for that side.

We will be looking closer at this product in the near future. If you have an immediate interest, let me know or check out their website for more details: www.northrdt.com.

Meeting Review...

continued from page 1

in Currents about this effort; Our Energy, Our Future. The questioner was exactly right, cap and trade, designed to limit manmade carbon with the intent of modifying climate change, is a tax and a big one. At its extreme, it would cost taxpayers \$6 trillion dollars. Given the state of the economy and the amount of debt already incurred in the last 8 months, this would be a crippling blow. All of us, cooperative members and not, must let Washington

know that we cannot sacrifice our way of life because electric rates exceed any reasonable ability to pay. Your call to action is clear - go to www.ourenergy.coop today and send an email expressing your position. It is simple and takes a couple of minutes. If you prefer, stop by and give us permission to send the email for you. Encourage everyone you know to do the same. Together, cooperatives have always been able to make a difference and we can do it again.

JULY 2009

Currents

Vol. XII, Issue VII

Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

"I read about eight newspapers in a day. When I'm in a town with only one newspaper, I read it eight times." —Will Rogers
(source: www.BrainyQuote.com)

With a fascinating feature available on the Newseum website, you will never have a shortage of reading material. (Warning: Visiting this website may cause you to lose track of time and neglect important responsibilities. It is advised that you set aside a significant block of time before following this link.)

Just navigate to <http://www.newseum.org/>

todaysfrontpages/flash/ to find today's front pages of newspapers from across the country and around the world. Each day, the front pages of more than 700 newspapers are available for your perusal. Move your mouse to a city anywhere in the world and the local newspaper pops up. You can compare coverage of a current topic, find unique regional news, or keep in touch with a personal favorite newspaper. If you just want a quick news fix, each day a different editor selects his or her Top 10 Front Pages.

There is an archive of front pages of historical significance. But other than that, previous dates are not available so make sure you read it while it's hot off the presses.

Currents

is published monthly by



Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative

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