

Penn *Lines*, PEOPLE AND PLACES

Magazine's Editors Carry on Tradition of Spotighting Rural Life

JILL M. ERCOLINO

GENERATIONS OF RURAL PENNSYLVANIANS HAVE grown up with a copy of *Penn Lines* in their home.

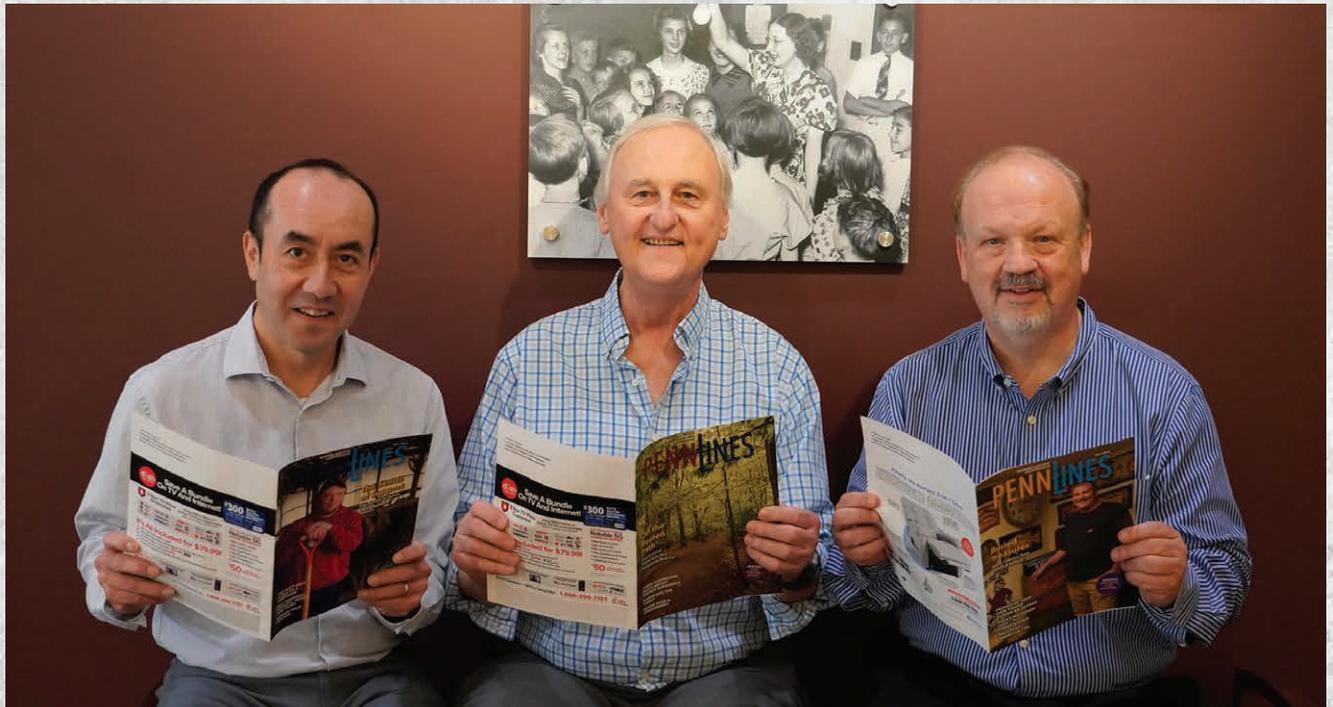
It may be dog-eared and tattered — clipping the monthly recipes is a must-do for lots of home cooks — but most of the time, you know where to find it: on the coffee table or maybe even the kitchen counter.

And while *Penn Lines* may be a magazine, in its nearly

six decades, the publication has evolved into something more meaningful: a trusted source of information that's not only about your local cooperative and the energy industry but also about life in rural Pennsylvania.

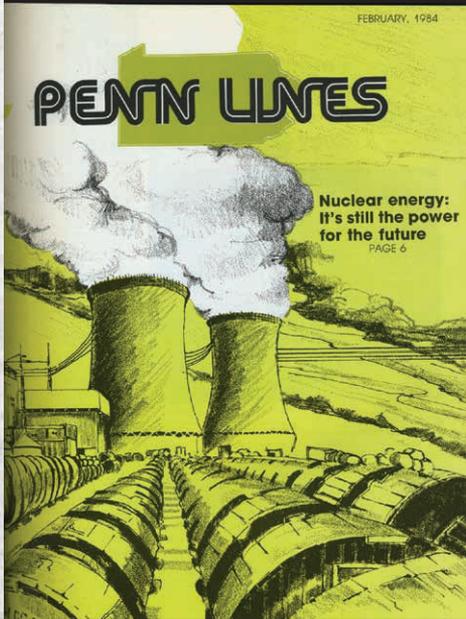
That didn't happen by accident — or overnight.

Behind the scenes and through the years, editors, writers, and cooperative leaders and communicators have

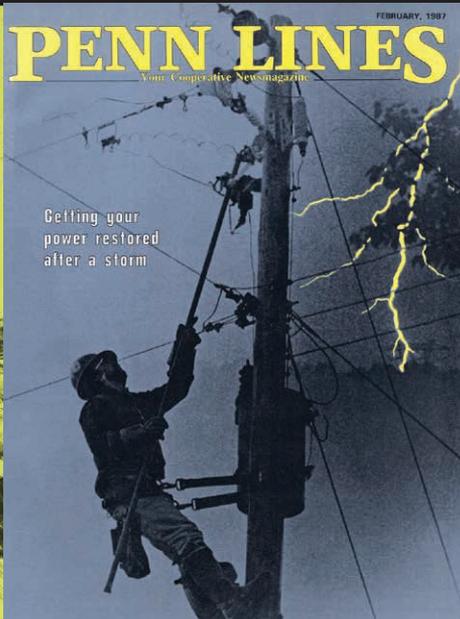


EDITORS, PAST AND PRESENT: *Penn Lines*' editors have spent their careers at the magazine highlighting rural Pennsylvania's people and places. They are, from left: current Editor Pete Fitzgerald; Jim Krut, who oversaw the magazine from 1984 to 1990; and Perry Stambaugh, now a state representative who guided *Penn Lines* from 1990 to 2006.

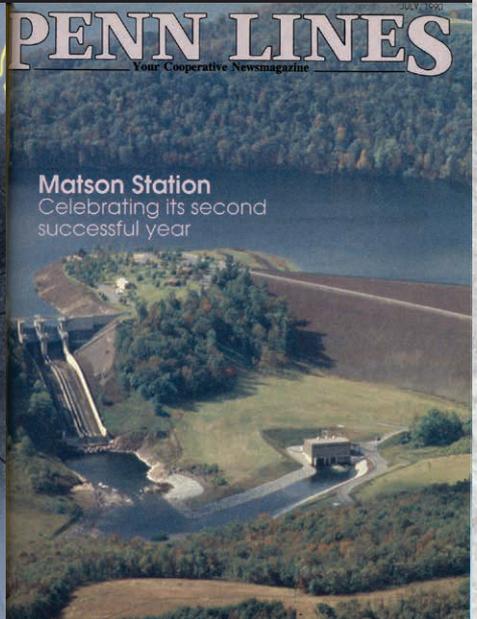
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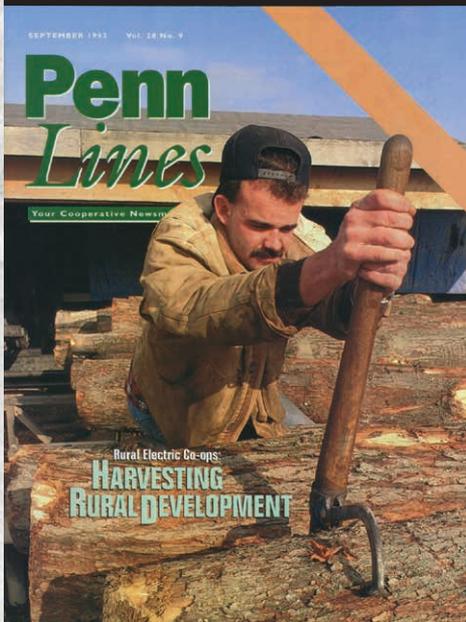
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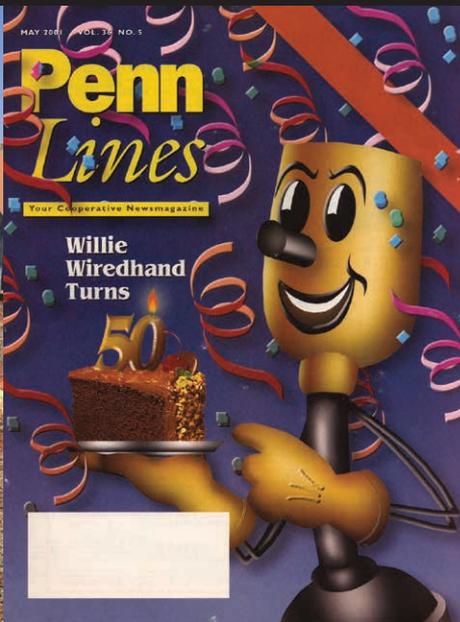
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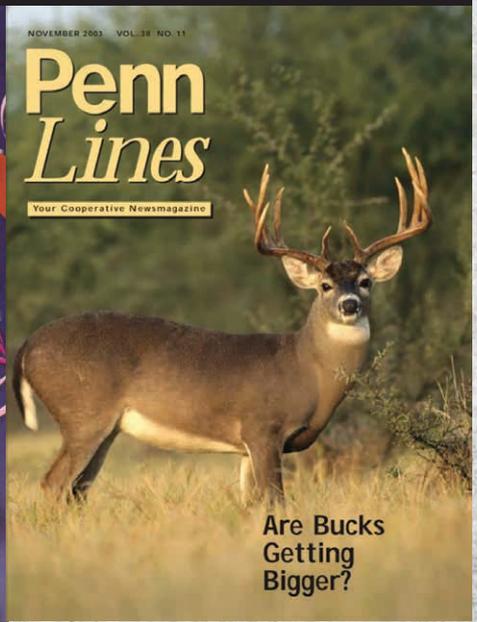
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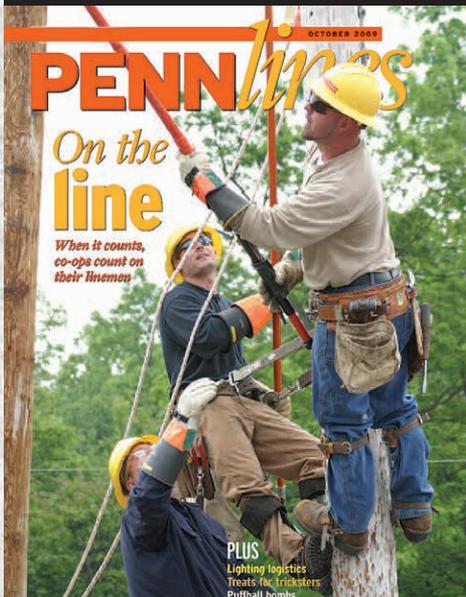
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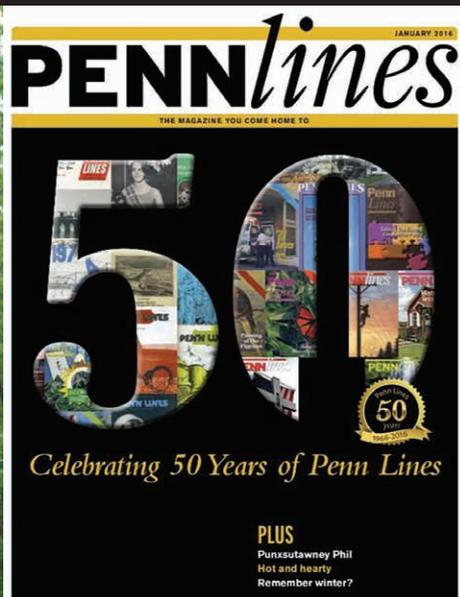
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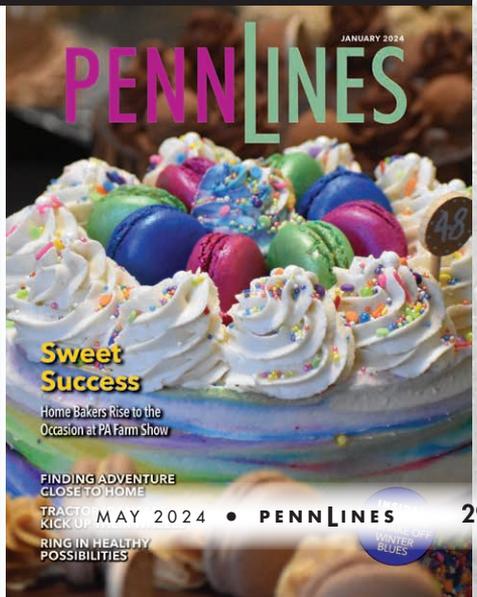
2009



2016



2024



embraced a shared vision, one that’s made *Penn Lines* a fixture in cooperative communities, where it’s told your stories and shared your values.

“Going to the mailbox every day is still a ritual for most people in rural Pennsylvania,” former editor Perry Stambaugh says, “and having *Penn Lines* in there once a month is part of home.”

Cooperatives, their people and places

Today, Stambaugh is a state representative for Perry and Juniata counties. He’s also a farmer. In 1990, however, he was a writer starting what would become a 16-year stint as *Penn Lines* editor.

Others who have held the position include Jim Krut, his predecessor who went on to establish and lead the communications department at Adams Electric Cooperative for two decades (a U.S. Army veteran, he also gained fame as the “Helicopter Zombie” in 1978’s “Dawn of the Dead”), and Stambaugh’s successor, Pete Fitzgerald, a fellow U.S.

Army veteran who leads the magazine today.

The trio’s service has spanned four decades — or the majority of *Penn Lines*’ lifetime.

“By the time I became editor,” Fitzgerald says, “I had inherited what was a very strong tradition — an institution — in rural Pennsylvania in terms of what *Penn Lines* was to its readers. My mission was not to mess that up.”

While these editors have guided the magazine through several redesigns — the most recent in 2022 — *Penn Lines* hasn’t strayed from its rural roots, despite the cosmetic changes.

Articles highlighting cooperatives, their people and places, mixed with common-sense information about energy and statewide issues, continue to be the magazine’s backbone.

And as local newspapers fade away, especially in rural areas, *Penn Lines* has remained — a constant in the lives of 600,000 readers — to plug that information void. In each issue, the center section — “the magazine’s heart,” as Fitzgerald calls it — is dedicated to local cooperative content.



STORIES THAT MATTER: Current *Penn Lines* Editor Pete Fitzgerald, left, credits Jim Krut, one of his predecessors, with sharing impactful stories with readers. During his time, Krut explored radon poisoning and Lyme disease. Later in his career, Krut worked for Adams Electric Cooperative in Gettysburg, where after retiring he helped to write a book about its 75-year history.

“The cooperative focus has always been on the member, and that’s where *Penn Lines* continues to reach people,” he says. “We’re telling a local story about members and their communities. With the increasing disappearance of print, there’s a thirst for local content out there, and *Penn Lines* is helping to fill that gap.”

“One of the secrets [of local newspapers] has always been to put a lot of local names and faces in the paper,” Krut adds, “and the same is true with *Penn Lines*, but with one difference: *Penn Lines* illustrates electrical safety, electrical efficiency and rural problems that no one else may be addressing.”

Over the years, *Penn Lines* readers have been alerted to important topics, too, such as radon poisoning, Lyme disease, the state’s opioid epidemic and the loss of rural hospitals. The magazine has also reported on legislation impacting the cooperative way of life, both positively and negatively.

“For the main editorial feature,” Stambaugh says, “we tried to find the statewide issues everyone was talking about, whether it was economic development ... emergency services — just anything that would apply to readers whether they lived in Erie County or down in Adams or York counties. I think we succeeded at that.”

“During my tenure, Lyme disease was just being discovered,” Krut recalls, “so we did articles on that. We also covered radon. People had no idea what radon was or where they could get a radon detector, but by the time we were done, some co-ops were selling radon detection kits.

“So, as co-ops and as part of the co-op family, we worked to solve rural problems, and we did much of that through *Penn Lines*.”

A standard of excellence

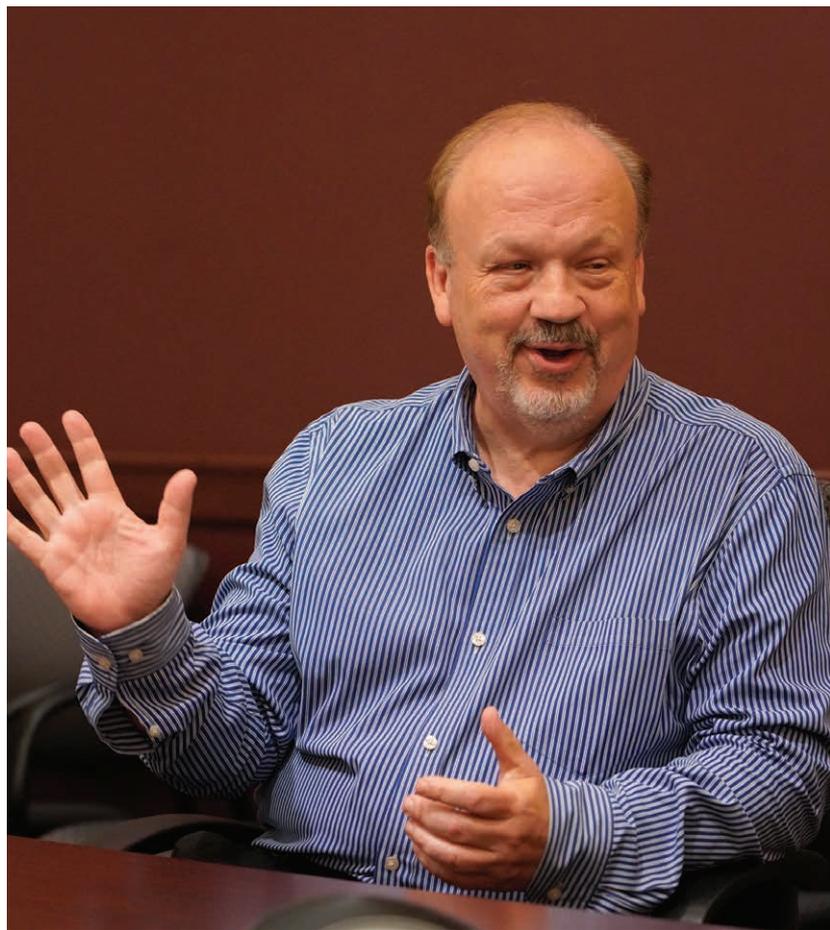
Along the way, *Penn Lines* has won a number of awards. The magazine also continues to maintain high interest among readers, with nearly 90% reading it on a regular basis.

The editors say that’s because they’ve worked closely with the state’s rural electric cooperatives and their communicators to maintain a standard of excellence in the magazine.

“Everyone sort of fed off of each other and continually improved and made the final product better and better and better as time has gone on,” says Stambaugh, who also oversaw national publications, including *RE Magazine* for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Then, as now, the goal is to make every issue of *Penn Lines* interesting and informative, which can be challenging when the main topic, energy, is complex.

“We have this mission of education — that’s one of our



BETTER AND BETTER: Perry Stambaugh discusses the standard of excellence that’s defined *Penn Lines* throughout its history. Since leaving the magazine, he’s worked at national publications and now serves as a state representative for Perry and Juniata counties.

cooperative principles,” Fitzgerald says, “and we take it very seriously. The key is providing an entertaining and enjoyable platform to understand these important issues.

“It comes down to the compelling writing and the human-interest feature stories that *Penn Lines* is known for,” he adds. “There is a tremendous tradition here of just solid writing and reporting.”

While at the helm, Krut says he was a student of magazines and what made them successful. He wanted *Penn Lines* — a benefit of cooperative membership that’s mailed monthly — to be the type of magazine readers would be compelled to buy if they saw it on a newsstand.

“If you can’t keep up with what the best publications are doing, you’re going to lose the attention of your audience,” he says. “There has to be something in it for them, and it has to be about them.”

To be a success, publications also require buy-in, particularly from the people behind the scenes. *Penn Lines* has had that in its favor, too.

“You don’t stay with an organization as long as Jim and I and Pete have been with the electric co-op program if you don’t believe in its mission or you don’t feel connected to its mission,” Stambaugh says. “Here, you just feel like you’re having a positive impact on a lot of people.”