

Grange Celebrates 125th, Meets Legislators

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.

**Lancaster Farming Staff
HARRISBURG** (Dauphin Co.) — The Pennsylvania State Grange held its annual legislative day and banquet Monday at the Harrisburg Sheraton with hundreds of members attending workshops during the day and meeting and dining with state and federal legislators during the evening.

The Grange is a rural organization devoted to educating, acting as a collective voice, and working to improve living conditions for its members.

While the spring Grange legislative meeting normally coincides with the state legislature's last session before summer break, Grange policy was not decided during these workshop sessions. Policy is decided during the organization's October meeting.

This meeting was also noteworthy because this is the 125th anniversary of the National Grange, of which Pennsylvania is an affiliate. The occasion was marked with the presentation by state Secretary of Agriculture Boyd Wolff of a plaque of appreciation for the efforts of the Grange for agriculture.

Indicative of some of the topics included during the day's afternoon workshops was a prediction by Eric Rabe of Bell of Pennsylvania, that businesses could possibly be attracted to rural areas is a broad-banded, fiber optic telephone network were installed.

According to Rabe, the combination of low real estate prices, lower real estate taxes, and local work ethic in rural areas with dependable communication links to higher-density areas could provide an attractive package for businesses seeking a home.

"This is an issue that we need a lot of public debate on, particularly in terms of who's going to pay the cost and how soon it is done," said Susan Shanaman, a representative of an opposition group to Bell of Pennsylvania's costly proposal for a network of fiber-optic lines.

The two-sides of an issue presentations were indicative of the format for the workshops, designed to provide information and allow members to make their own decisions.

Currently, the majority of phone lines that are in place are voice capacity lines which have limited computer and video signal transmission capabilities.

The proposal by Bell is to install the optic telecommunication network which has the capability of transmitting voice, video and computer signals rapidly.

According to Rabe, the impact would be better service for such things as rural medical services, which could have clear video signals relayed to a specialist in a city for diagnosis.

"If you live in a rural area, you can see what kind of advantage this would be," Rabe said.

Shanaman represented Pennsylvanians for Fair Affordable Competitive Telephone Service (PennFACTS), which is a coalition of organizations which oppose Bell's efforts.

According to Shanaman, if

the okay were given to Bell to go ahead with the project, by the year 2015, 20 percent of Pennsylvania still would not have the service, but would have been paying for it all along.

A chief executive officer at Bell has stated that the cost of putting in the fiber-optic lines would cost between \$15- to \$50 billion, Shanaman said.

PennFACTS is also opposed to legislation which would remove the Pennsylvania Utilities Commission from reviewing telephone industry rate hikes.

"It is wonderful to talk about additional access to health care,

access to education, but a lot of that is happening now, without giving up any kind of PUC review of how rates are set for the telephone industry," she told attending Grange members.

In another workshop, the One Plan concept, which promotes farm resource management as a total integrated strategy for the entire farm, was discussed.

Since each farm is different, no two plans can be exactly alike. A One Plan system would include every resource on the farm, access to other resources, quality and quantity of those resources, ways to improve,

(Turn to Page A21)



Grange Master William Ringler presents a recognition award to Karen Mohn, national 1991 Pamona Lecturer of the Year.

