

# State Grange Leads Fight Against Rural Phone Rate Increase

(Continued from Page A1)

depressed areas such as Coudersport, Potter County, and Altoona in Butler County, while lowering the rates where economic activity has been increasing — Pittsburgh, Chestnut Hill, Scranton, etc. — and where competition is picking up to undercut Atlantic's rates and services.

In its filing of a rate rebalancing, it gave an example of the effect of its proposal, assuming a typical residential dial tone line with touch tone service and local unlimited calling.

Just as most statewide business or service organizations divide the state into regions, the phone company calls them "cells."

Bell provided a comparison for Cell 1 Pittsburgh city stating that the assumed typical customer there would currently be paying a \$13.58 rate. The proposal would reduce that by \$1.13 to \$12.45.

Meanwhile, in Cell 4 Group B (a further subdivision) Coudersport is currently paying \$9.53. The rate would increase there to \$11.55 for a proposed \$2.02 increase.

The Pennsylvania State Grange was the first advocacy group to take notice of the proposal for redistributing and began took the lead in trying to protect its rural membership of 31,000 in 66 of the state's 67 counties.

In a January news release, the Grange warned of the proposal by Bell Atlantic.

In that news release, Shambaugh stated, "There are many areas in the state where Pennsylvanians believe they are living in an urban area. However, as far as Bell Atlantic is concerned, those areas

could be classified as rural. It appears that the only areas that would receive a rate reduction are Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. If that's true, the impact of the rate increase could affect a large number of Pennsylvanians."

On Thursday, Shambaugh testified before the Senate Committee in front of a crowded hearing room in the state Capitol. The reason for the hearing was to gather testimony on the progress of telecommunications deregulations and to gather a progress report on the implementation of Chapter 30 of the Public Utility Code.

"Specifically, the Grange would like to target the Bell proposal to 'rebalance' their rates," Shambaugh said. "We consider this rebalancing to be in direct violation of the (PUC's) 1994 Bell order under Chapter 30.

"As you know, according to that case, Bell is required to adhere to a rate freeze," Shambaugh said. "In our opinion, a freeze means all rates for all customers.

"Restructuring Bell's local charges means an increase for a segment of their rural clientele whose rates are not frozen," she said.

"It seems to us that a rate rebalance creates two classes of customers, which Chapter 30 was enacted to prevent."

Shambaugh said that the Grange understands the competitive nature of the phone business. That is why the industry was deregulated.

"We understand that (Bell Atlantic) must stay competitive to protect their market. We also understand that they must have a profit if they are to stay in

business.

"Unfortunately, we part company when it comes to who must suffer as a result of this competition. In this case, rural telephone customers do not have the benefit of competition and suffer from the absence of other service carriers," she said.

Shambaugh also noted that Bell Atlantic and Nynex are reportedly to merge with a projected \$3 billion annual profit for the new super company.

"One might wonder why Bell is even requesting a 'rebalancing.' I would certainly not call a \$3 billion annual profit insignificant, or that there is a threat of bankruptcy without the proposed Bell rate restructuring.

"The question then remains, should Bell be allowed to make up every dollar of competitive reductions by increasing rates to consumers who have no alternatives?"

"That is precisely why the PUC has jurisdiction over the rating process, to protect consumers from overpricing," she said.

She also said that some proposals by other telephone companies are pushing for a universal rate of \$25 per month with limited local calling and that a reasonable scenario based on that could be that, in the future, rural Pennsylvanians could be further penalized for living away from the population-dense areas if a precedent such as rebalancing for Bell is allowed now.

"The Grange believes that Bell should not be allowed to finance their competitive ventures on the backs of citizens who have virtual-

ly no choice," she said.

She also said that other public services don't penalize in such a way.

"Bell is obviously trying to increase (its) profit to the detriment of rural consumers," she said, adding that the Grange requests the Senate Committee "... to do everything in its power to stop the Bell proposal ...

"rural consumers need your assistance to ensure that they have access to telephone service, which in today's world is certainly essential, at a reasonable rate."

Shambaugh was one of 11 scheduled speakers, other than Sen. Clarence Bell, chairman of that committee and also chair of the Senate Joint Legislative Budget and Finance Committee and vice

chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, who presided over the hearing.

Though testimony presented by the others was not immediately available, those scheduled to testify included, Irwin Popowski, Esq., with the Consumer Advocate of Pennsylvania; Chip Casteel, with MCI Corp.; William Cologie, president of the Pa. Cable and Telecommunications Association; Will Mitchell, for Bell Atlantic; Vincent Maisano, for the Communication Workers of America; David Rolka, a PUC commissioner; James Ginty, Esq., for AT&T; John Quain, PUC chairman; John Hanger, PUC commissioner; and David Freet, with the Pennsylvania Telephone Association.

## 'A-Day' Family Treat Begins Saturday

DOYLESTOWN (Bucks Co.) — Delaware Valley College will host its 48th annual "A-Day" (Agriculture Day) celebration this Saturday and Sunday, April 27 and 28 (rain or shine), here on campus, on Route 202, just west of the Rt. 611 bypass. The hours on both days are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Started in 1949 by a small group of students to promote agriculture, "A-Day" has become one of the area's largest events, which this weekend will feature farm and orchard tours, agricultural and horticultural exhibitions, equine and livestock demonstrations, science exhibits and educational displays, pony rides, and a petting zoo for children.

A variety of food will be offered, as well as crafts and games for children of all ages, and live entertainment by local musi-

cians. More than 40,000 people traditionally attend the two-day event, produced by students of Delaware Valley College. The college is celebrating the Centennial of its founding in 1896.

Delaware Valley College is a private, coeducational four-year institution with more than 1,300 men and women enrolled in 35 academic programs, ranging from the agricultural, biological, and physical sciences to business administration and the liberal arts.

Admission to "A-Day" is free. If you park your car on-campus, there is a \$5 parking fee, which also includes a souvenir "A-Day" program book. The public is invited.

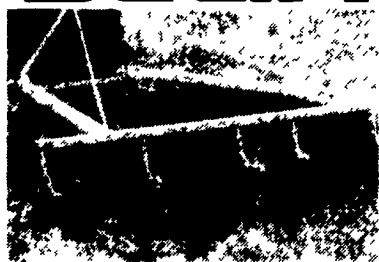
For more information about Delaware Valley College's "A-Day," call Erma Martin at (215) 489-2230.

For literature and the name of your local dealer, contact

### J.S. WOODHOUSE CO., INC.

572 Industrial Dr., Lewisberry, PA 17339 (717)938-5100

## DELTA CHAIN HARROWS



▲ Pasture Renovation & Maintenance spreads and incorporates manure thatches dead growth, aerates soil, increases moisture penetration, renovates pasture by preparing soil for seeding while stimulating existing growth. Spreads and incorporates lime or fertilizer, covers broadcast seed for better germination.

- ▲ Offset tynes eliminate ridges.
- ▲ Drawbars available for 4' to 24' widths
- ▲ Carrier carts available for 16' to 42' widths
- ▲ 3-point carrier available (as shown in photo)

## 500 Pull-Type Sprayer

- 500 Gal. Pull-Type Sprayer
- 45 Ft. Fully Hydraulic or 47 Ft. Manual Suspension Box Available
- Single or Tandem Axle
- Strong Durable Channel Frame Construction
- Other Options Available



Flash - Purchase by 5/31. Receive FREE 5 gal. stainless steel foam marker \$990 retail value



Made in USA

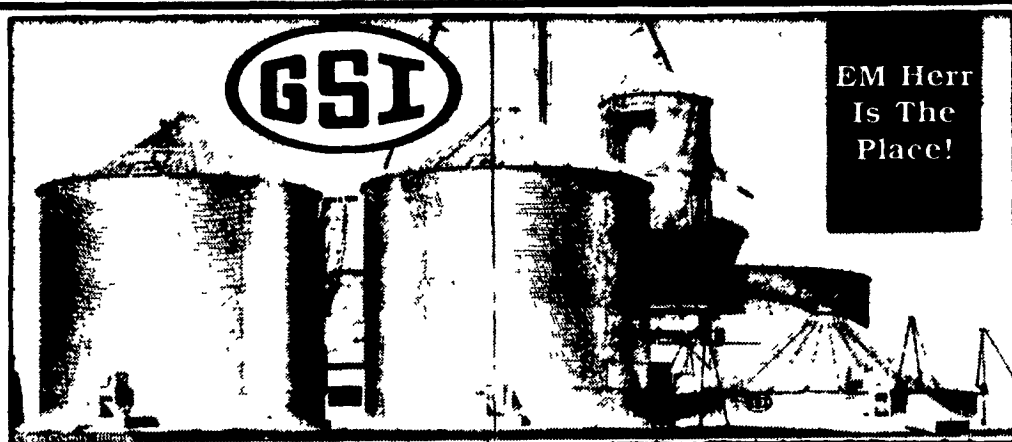
**ag·chem**  
EQUIPMENT CO. INC.

1168 Enterprise Rd.  
East Petersburg, PA 17520  
Call For More Information and FREE Catalog  
1-800-326-3009

## EMHERR

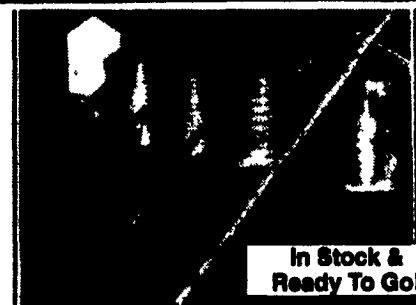
# BIG SAVINGS! ON GRAIN BINS AND DRYERS

Plan Now For This Year's Crop! Call The Experts!



EM Herr  
Is The  
Place!

- Weight-Tronix Feed Mill
- Transport Augers
- Feed Bins
- Wet Tanks
- Grain Bins
- Bucket Elevators
- Stirring Systems
- Utility Augers
- Air Drying Systems
- Grain Dryers
- Parts & Motors



In Stock &  
Ready To Go!

**WESTFIELD GRAIN AUGERS**  
Quality Product At An Affordable Price!

Early Order Discounts Now In Effect

**EMHERR**  
EQUIPMENT, INC.

Serving The Industry For Over 35 Years

★ Full Line Parts Dept. ★ Sell, Service & Install  
Rt. 272 South - 14. Herrville Rd.  
Willow Street, PA 17584  
Ph: 717-464-3321 or  
Toll Free 800-732-0053  
Store Hours: Mon.-Sat. 7:30 AM to 8:00 PM