

CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL'S

Business Guide to **SHOPPING ELECTRICITY**



Rate caps coming off

How can your company
save money buying energy?

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE
CENTRAL PENN
BUSINESS JOURNAL
FALL 2009

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DON'T BE LEFT IN THE DARK when PPL rate caps are lifted January 2010. **More than 17 chambers of commerce** in PPL territory have joined together to offer an electricity solution for all size businesses through the Chamber*Choice* Energy Program. The Chamber*Choice* Energy program, managed by OnDemand Energy Solutions, together with Richards Energy represents the largest buying group in PPL. **More than 1.5 Billion kilowatt hours** annually are currently being "shopped" for huge savings effective January 1, 2010. It is not too late to join the group!

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CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL'S Business Guide to SHOPPING ELECTRICITY

The worst thing to do is to do nothing

By now, we all know the electricity rate caps we've enjoyed since the late 1990s will begin expiring at the year's end. We also get that we're going to pay more for electricity when that happens.



What we may not realize is that there are ways to dull the sting of those higher prices. The Central Penn Business Journal is here to show you how.

Rate caps were established to protect customers who continued to buy their electricity from utilities rather than from competitive suppliers. The thought was that deregulation would lower the market value of the utilities' power plants below what the utilities spent to build them. The deal was that ratepayers would reimburse the difference, and utilities would agree to the cap until the reimbursement had been paid off. As it turned out, however, the value of the power plants actually increased.

So we're reluctantly waving goodbye to rate caps and saying hello to higher prices. But businesses aren't altogether helpless.

The worst thing we can do is to do nothing and let the utility shop the price for us. Wouldn't we rather be in control of that decision?

Shopping electricity rates isn't all that complicated, but it will take a little work. In this guide, we show you who to call, what to ask and what you should expect. There is a directory of 46 energy suppliers and their contact information.

Ideas such as pooling electricity also are great, and this guide can help make those connections.

In this ever-changing energy climate, it's important to have all the facts to make the right decision. Consider this your guide.

CHRISTOPHER K. PASSANTE,
EDITOR, CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL

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How to shop



BY DAVID DAGAN

Having options is not easy. When the rate caps that held down Central Pennsylvania's electricity prices in recent years come off starting in January, business owners will have a lot of options to think about.

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One option is to do nothing. If that happens, you will keep getting power at whatever price your utility can buy it for you. The utilities are using hedging strategies to buy power for smaller customers to minimize the risk of high prices. Large power users such as factories do not get the same system of hedges when the utility buys electricity for them.

If you decide to shop for savings, you're likely to find them, but it will take some legwork.

For one thing, it can be hard to figure out who to speak with.

"If no one reaches out to you, it can be a little daunting," said Matt Sommer, manager of natural gas and electricity for York-based Shipley Energy. The company acts as a broker that connects businesses with electricity suppliers.

An up-to-date list of suppliers licensed to do business in Pennsylvania is included in these pages. The state Public Utility Commission (PUC) keeps an online list of suppliers broken down by utility. The PUC does not promise the list will be up to date, but it can be a place to look.

The local utilities are PPL Electric Utilities Corp. and Metropolitan Edison Co. PPL's rate caps will come off at the start of 2010; Met Ed will follow a year later.

Once you have made contact, consider the following tips for negotiating with a supplier:

► **Get a feel for the company to make sure they have staying power and will provide good service.**

"Anytime these markets open up, you see a bunch of people rush in and almost invariably ... quite a few of those who rush in end up rushing as abruptly out within a year or two," Sommer said.

Especially if you commit to a term over one year, you also want to make sure the company will answer your questions throughout the relationship, he said.

► **Compare prices.**

The benchmark you should compare any quotes with is what the utility will

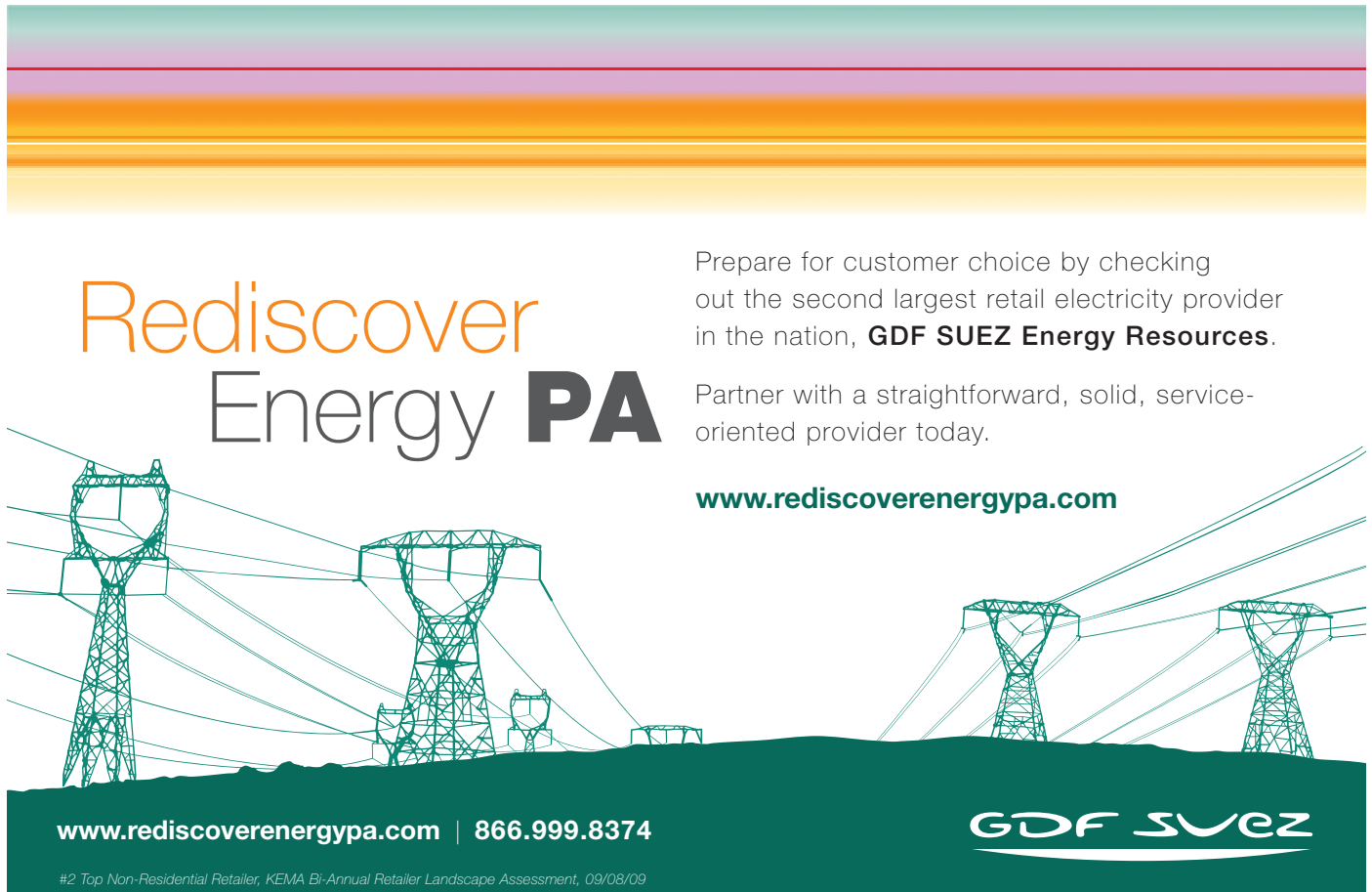
charge. After all, if you can get a better deal by doing nothing, there's no reason to make a switch. PPL has not yet completed its power purchases for 2010, but it offers estimates of what the price to compare will be on its Electric Choice Web site.

To find that site, go to www.pplelectric.com. Click on "Residential Customers," then "Learning Center" and then "Electric Choice." To find the price list, click on the yellow tab that says "Price to Compare."

The price varies depending on what customer class you are in. To find out your customer class, look at the "Rate Schedule" classification on your PPL bill. You can expect to find a price in the neighborhood of 10.5 cents per kilowatt-hour, the standard unit of measurement.

Most suppliers will be able to beat that price, Sommer said. But he warned customers to be clear about whether quotes include all taxes and transmission charges, which cover the cost of moving the power from plants to your area.

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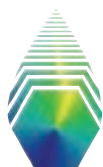
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GARY SCICCHITANO,
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► **Be ready to give up some information.**

Before giving you a quote, a supplier will want to analyze your energy usage. You can give PPL blanket permission to share data with all your suppliers using an online form, or authorize the sharing case by case. The online form is hard to find, so we've created a shortcut: <http://tinyurl.com/ppl-form>.

► **Consider joining a pool.**

Some midstate chambers of commerce have teamed up with suppliers who are bundling the power needs of many users and buying in bulk on the theory that the resulting price will be cheaper. Other chambers are endorsing suppliers or offering discounts, but without the pooling. Another advantage of signing on with a chamber is that it could save you time.

► **Finally, you may have to think about how long to commit yourself to a particular contract.**

Shipley is recommending one-year terms because the market is so new, Sommer said. On the other hand, he said, if you believe the economy will gain strength by next year, you can expect energy prices to rise, too. In that case, you might want to consider locking up your price for a longer term.



Sommer

Gary Scicchitano recently signed up his nonprofit, the home health care provider Visiting Nurse Association of Central Pennsylvania, for a pool. It was painless and worth his time, Scicchitano said.

"Every dollar counts," he said. 💡

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RESEARCHED BY ALAINE KEISLING

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