

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES



10 Jewel of West Michigan *Shelby Gem Factory*

4 Our Mission
Goes On

5 Power Costs
Increase July 1

8 Top Teens
Recognized

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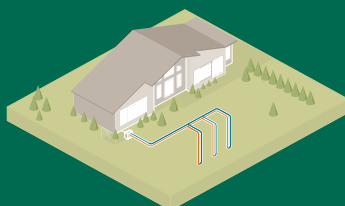
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Editor
Gail Knudtson

Associate Editor
Doug Snitgen

Design Editor
Cindy Zuker

Publisher
Craig Borr

Editor Emeritus
Mike Buda

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Michigan COUNTRY LINES



Photo - Basin Electric

12



Photo - Neil Moran

14



Photo - Greenscapes Landscape Architecture

20

DEPARTMENTS

6 Readers' Pages
Co-op Teen Days, letters, finances, saving energy, prices

18 Home Cooking
Casseroles and pot pies

24 Wolverine Power*
Partners with DNR on wildlife habitat project
Nancy Tanner

26 Marketplace
Classifieds from readers

YOUR CO-OP

Pages specific to your electric cooperative:
1, 4-5, 8, 25, 28-29, 32

*Not in all editions

On the Cover

Larry and Jo Kelley own the Shelby Gem Factory, where they make jewelry and manufacture synthetic gemstones that are physically and chemically identical to real gemstones, right here in Michigan.

Photo - June Kuiper/junekuiiperphotography.com

COLUMNS

9 Policy Perspectives
Regulatory cause-and-effect
Jennifer Taylor

14 Gardening
Hanging baskets
Neil Moran

15 Michigan-Made
Vernors pop
Marjory Priest

16 Family
Strong dads make strong families
Lisa Doublestein

20 House & Home
How to pave a patio
John Bruce & Carol Rich

22 Comfort: Even your room temperatures
James Dulley

30 Ramblings
Lifetime guarantee
Mike Buda

FEATURES

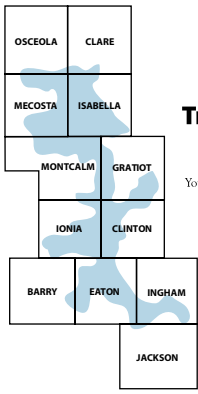
10 Jewel of West Michigan
Shelby Gem Factory
Jan Tableman

12 Our Energy
Managing costs
Magen Howard & Megan McKoy-Noe

13 Battling Copper Crime
Help your co-op catch thieves that cost lives and dollars



Michigan's Electric
Cooperatives
countrylines.com



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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Open 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Portland office:

7973 E. Grand River Avenue
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Electric bill/account questions:

517-647-7556 or 1-800-562-8232

Service questions/outages:

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(24 hours for emergency calls)

Tri-County Propane:

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Rural TV/DIRECTV:

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WildBlue:

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homeworks.org

E-mail: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1 — Philip Conklin

5130 W. Gresham Hwy., Charlotte, MI 48813
517-726-0127
pconklin@homeworks.org

District 2 — Wayne Swiler

Vice-Chairman
11750 Ainsworth Rd., Lake Odessa, MI 48849
616-374-3141
wswiler@homeworks.org

District 3 — Carl Morton

Chairman
11280 Eden Trail, Eagle, MI 48822
517-626-2258
cmorton@homeworks.org

District 4 — Laverne Hansen

Secretary-Treasurer
1190 E. M-46 Hwy., Edmore, MI 48829
989-427-5851
lhansen@homeworks.org

District 5 — Cara Evans

10180 Roosevelt Rd., Bannister, MI 48807
989-862-5590
cevens@homeworks.org

District 6 — Ed Oplinger

10890 W. Weidman Road, Weidman, MI 48893
989-644-3079
eoplinger@homeworks.org

District 7 — Dean Floria

1163 Taft Rd., Remus, MI 49340
989-382-5230
dfloria@homeworks.org

Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

DIRECTV Helped Us Achieve Our Mission For Nearly 20 Years

Our Mission Goes On...

All good things must come to an end—it's an old folk saying that sometimes is true.

In our case, the good thing is our association with DIRECTV®, providing satellite television services to rural mid-Michigan, which will end July 15 as DIRECTV centralizes its sales and service strategy.

It all began back in 1986, when the co-op surveyed members about the idea of bringing TV signals past the city limits where cable companies wouldn't stray.

After a short pilot project, the idea was brought before a special meeting of the co-op's delegates. On April 16, 1988, meeting at Central Montcalm High School in Stanton, 80 delegates heard a presentation by Bob Matheny, then HomeWorks' general manager, about the possibilities of entering a new business.

They also heard a guest speaker—the general manager of a Georgia electric co-op—that built a successful appliance and satellite TV sales and service subsidiary.

Those 80 delegates took a huge step forward, authorizing an amendment to Tri-County's Articles of Incorporation to "broaden the purpose of the Cooperative to include telecommunication activities, (and) eliminate provisions restricting services to members only..." From there, Rural TV of Michigan took off, growing at one point to serve nearly 2,500 "big dish" subscribers.

In the early 1990s, we had another opportunity, this time to invest in a new satellite service, literally before it got off the ground. Your board of directors considered the facts and the possibilities, looking at financial projections and the need for an affordable source of news, sports and entertainment TV in our rural service area.

Then they took a big step out of their comfort zone and invested \$350,000 in DIRECTV, buying a franchise area within our service territory. After a year or so of waiting and watching, the first satellite launched successfully and in 1993 we were in the "small dish" business.

In some ways, this reminds me of the co-op's earliest days. People living in rural areas saw a need for their families; they were lacking a reliable, affordable service that came easily to people who chose to live in big cities. And some of those people decided to make things happen instead of waiting and hoping for something to happen.

DIRECTV has been a good business for your co-op to be in. After 18 years, we're sad to be leaving it, but DIRECTV bought back its franchises several years ago as a first step in centralizing control of their service, and now our service agreement has come to an end.

We have a lot to look forward to, though. Our propane business continues to grow, and WildBlue™, the satellite internet service, seems to be refreshing itself to be a better choice for people who don't have access to other high-speed sources.

These ventures, like Rural TV, help us achieve our mission, which is to provide our members and customers with energy, comfort and communications solutions that will enhance their quality of life.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative is a better, stronger cooperative for having gone beyond the wires in this way—and our members do enjoy a better quality of life today.



Mark Kappler
General Manager



Join the conversation at
homeworks.org/blog

DIRECTV Affiliation Ends After 18 Years

What Rural TV customers can expect on July 15.

A long and productive relationship between HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative and DIRECTV® will end on July 15, as DIRECTV allows our service agreement to expire (see p. 4). Customers shouldn't notice any interruptions to their programming, but there will be other changes. Here's what Rural TV customers can expect on July 15:

- Your programming will not be affected during the transition, as your services will be switched to DIRECTV automatically.
- After July 15, monthly billing statements will come from DIRECTV and payment should be sent directly to them. Customers who use electronic checks or a debit card will need to provide their bank with the new address.
- Rural TV of Michigan will no longer be able to accept payments.
- Please contact DIRECTV at 800-531-5000 for all of your future programming and service needs.



Tuning In – Missy Robson, now manager of customer service, helped install and service DIRECTV systems in past years. Here she checks out an elliptical dish upgrade that allowed this Rural TV customer to receive local network stations via satellite.

Power Supply Increase Takes Effect July 1

Effective July 1, your electric bill will increase by a small amount to help cover rising power supply costs. A second, smaller increase is planned for Jan. 1, 2012.

The July 1 increase will add \$.00365 per kilowatt-hour to the Power Supply Cost Recovery (PSCR) factor, or \$3.65 a month for a member using 1,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) a month. The PSCR is a pass-through charge that is paid directly to Wolverine Power Cooperative, our power supplier.

Wolverine has recently invested in generation assets that will assure a reliable supply of energy at a cost that is more stable than market rates, as well as in a peaking plant that operates in times of high demand, such as during very hot weather or on summer evenings when people come home from work and switch on various appliances while dialing up the air conditioning.

“Even without these investments on behalf of our members, Wolverine’s rates would have gone up for 2012,” explains HomeWorks general manager, Mark Kappler. “A long-term power contract expires December 31, and the rates we’ve been quoted to replace that contract were higher than we’ve been paying.”

In addition to assuring reliable power supply, Wolverine has invested in upgrading its transmission lines that deliver power to substations, and several substations need to

be expanded or updated to safely handle the increased demand for power in rural areas.

“Wolverine’s team has also been searching out renewable power ventures on our behalf, from the Harvest wind farm in the Thumb to biomass projects, and that has added to

the base cost of power,” Kappler says.

“Wolverine, like HomeWorks Tri-County, is committed to giving our members good value for their energy dollars. That means providing a reliable supply, including green power, at competitive rates.”



HomeWorks’ board of directors toured Wolverine’s Clinton Interconnection, at Clinton Trail (M-50) and Mulliken Highway, soon after its completion in May 2010. The project upgraded transmission service to Eaton and Ionia counties.



Co-op Teens Get a 'Windy' Tour

Thirty-five students made the most of touring the Heritage Wind Farm near Cadillac on a wet, windy day during Michigan Electric Cooperative Teen Days. Steve Thoms of Heritage (above, center front) answered student questions as they all squeezed into a tower base to learn more about wind power and how the turbines operate.

In the co-op careers part of the three-day retreat, lineworkers from Cherryland Electric, Midwest Energy, and HomeWorks Tri-County Electric co-ops talked about their work and training, then helped students gear-up to try climbing a pole and gave bucket truck rides. Twelve chaperones from the co-ops also discussed their differing jobs and education, and a hotline demonstration and electrical safety tips were shared by safety professionals from Great Lakes Energy and HomeWorks Tri-County.

Other activities included watching a live TV 9&10 News newscast and a behind-the-scenes tour of the station, learning about energy efficiency and the co-op business model, and playing games and getting to know other teens from across the state.

Co-op Teen Days is held annually at the Kettunen 4-H Center in Tustin. Sixteen of the teens were chosen to attend the Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., in June. Learn more about these co-op sponsored youth programs at countrylines.com/youth.



Participating co-ops and the teens they sponsored this year were: *Cherryland Electric* – Brandon Acre, Jacob Russell, Lauren Sieloff, Grace Wiesner, Alyssa Zuiderveen; *Cloverland Electric* – Rachel Hoffman, Emily Markstrom, Julie Reed, Dorianne Shaffer, Paul Warner; *Great Lakes Energy* – Justin Dahl, Cade Dailey, Heidi Dill, Jennifer Herrema, Kaylee Kessler, Mackenzie Morison, P.J. Nemish, Matthew Richards, Heath Welch; *HomeWorks Tri-County* – Rebecca Kirby, Tyler Orlando, Alli Rayburn, Blake Warchuck; *Midwest Energy* – Ashley Fogarty, Christine Polmateer, Jessica Waldschmidt, Katelyn Waters; *PIE&G* – Krista Burse, Allan Cramer, Lance Miller, Carlos Portillo, Danielle Rhode, Judy Romel; *Thumb Electric* – Chandler London; and *Wolverine Power Cooperative* – Nathanael Millen.

Refinancing Your Home

If you own your home and are paying on a mortgage, you may be able to save money by refinancing—particularly if you closed on your home many years ago. Only you can decide if refinancing is a smart move, but here are some things to consider:

- **Refinancing *will* cost you money.** You're either going to be charged closing costs to refinance, or you may be offered a "no-closing cost" deal. But don't be fooled. One way or another, you will pay for it, since no-cost transactions usually mean a higher interest rate (than if you paid closing costs out-of-pocket).

- **How long will you expect stay in your current home?** If you're thinking about moving in the next two years or so, the costs may not justify refinancing.

- **Think carefully before "cashing out."** It's popular now to take cash out of a home when refinancing, but your home is not an ATM. That money will have to be repaid sooner or later. And if home prices drop after you refinance, you could find yourself owing more on your mortgage than your house is worth.

- **Check with your current lender before you commit to any refinancing deal.** Chances are, you may be able to save yourself quite a bit of money on closing costs while taking advantage of a lower interest rate. "Calculate" your move carefully!

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to refinancing, but a refinancing calculator, such as one at Bankrate.com, can help you decide whether or not refinancing makes "cents."

Your home is one of your greatest assets—consider any related financing decisions carefully.

– NRECA Insurance & Financial Services Dept.



A New Fridge Can Save Energy

A refrigerator will operate for a very long time without problems, but that doesn't mean it's running at maximum efficiency.

If yours dates from the 1980s, replacing it could cut your electric bill by \$100 (from the 1970s, save \$200 per year), but only if you dispose of the old one. (Recycling allows the metal, plastic and glass to be re-used and keeps toxic chemicals out of landfills.)

Visit energystar.gov to estimate how much energy your current unit uses and how much money a new one may save.

More than a quarter of U.S. households own a second refrigerator, and that increases by 1 percent per year, notes a U.S. Department of Energy report. But these units are often older and less efficient models made before 1993 and use two to three times more energy. A second unit also increases air-conditioning costs since it produces heat. And because refrigerators are designed to operate in conditioned rooms, keeping one in an area exposed to temperature extremes, such as porches, garages and basements, forces it to draw more running power and adds \$420 to \$750 in energy costs over its lifetime.

When looking for a new unit, try a top-mounted freezer (uses 10-25 percent less energy), and buy only the size you really need. Keep it running efficiently by vacuuming the coils once or twice a year, and replace the door seal if it loosens or discolors.

– Brian Sloboda

Potholes, Roads, Gas Tax

[Mike Buda], are you seriously saying we should raise the gas tax (April *Ramblings*, “A Sure Sign of Spring”)? I do work for the power companies and can hardly afford to drive to work as it is. Drive on a dirt road and lower the gas tax!
 –Troy Nelson



I certainly agree with you on potholes and road conditions in Michigan. However, I cannot agree that a higher gas tax is the answer. With the government and politicians now embracing alternative fuels and manufactures of vehicles beginning to produce such cars again, those vehicles are getting a free ride on the highways. Government has to find something else to tax other than gas to fund road repair and construction.

This country constructed economical roads without regard to length of road service. Europe, and possibly Canada, chose to construct more expensive major roads that were designed to last 100 years with minimal repair. We are a throw-away society, so we pay more to re-do roads. We could change, but it would mean less road work per year or more road funding.

–Roland Braasch

Thanks for writing. I'm just saying we get what we pay for, and my feeling is we shouldn't complain about bad roads if we can't agree to pay for good ones. Increasing the gas tax is one option. Letting roads go back to dirt is another. I think most people would rather drive on decent roads. –Mike Buda

U.S. Mail

Having just read your March *Country Lines* article about the mail, I'm offering my appreciation and a suggestion.

I am retired from 35 years with the Postal Service, as a city carrier and in management support. Where I worked, our standard suggestion to customers establishing new delivery during

the winter, or whose curbside box was damaged as was yours, would be to put the vertical post into a 5-gallon bucket filled with sand, then pour water into it. The frozen water adds rigidity as well as added weight. You or your neighbors may find this info helpful down the road, though of course, I hope you won't need it.

Do you realize the Postal Service actually makes an operational profit? (It is not a profit-seeking enterprise, so that word isn't used.) The reason for the huge bookkeeping loss is that federal law now requires the USPS to pre-fund its portion of future retiree health benefits. Other federal agencies do not face that mandate, nor does most of the private sector. (Pension benefits have long been pre-funded. In fact, they're probably over-funded, according to a recent audit, since no one hired in the past 25+ years receives the old Civil Service pension.)

Anyway, I enjoyed your article, and I'll leave you with one additional thought—the possibility of rural mail delivery around the turn of the 20th Century became the impetus for farmers to seek improvements in rural roads, which led to numerous benefits unrelated to the mail, such as improved ability to move crops to market, obtain mechanized equipment, attend fraternal organizations, and so on.

–John Hayes, Grand Rapids

About Nuclear Power

Finally, I say again, someone with a common sense approach to nuclear power (Craig Borr, *Comment*, May). I'm 72 and retired from the engineering department of Guardian Industries of Auburn Hills, MI. I am not an engineer, but I worked as a designer and project coordina-

tor building their many glass manufacturing plants all over this old globe, and I've had many conversations with engineers about nuclear power. Each of the Guardian plants has enough standby power to run the plant in the event of a failure. A 500 ton-per-day plant runs 24/7 for 10-12 years. Guardian's Venezuela plant is full-time stand-alone with a turbine generator because fuel was so cheap there.

I now live in a community outside of Weidman, MI, that has 523 lots and about 250 homes and 175 full-time residents. I see no reason why we could not have our own nuclear power plant. Placed, constructed, secured and operated by trained personnel, of course. It could be sized for a maximum 400 homes and the excess electricity could go to the grid and help for the payments. There are many communities and towns around that could be set up in this manner, do you agree? Are there any surplus nuclear submarine reactors available? Just kidding.

To show you how radical I am, I think we should be driving nuclear-powered autos. If acci-

dents are the argument against that, the 25 gallons of gas in each of our cars is a potential bomb and we seem to have managed that quite well, so far. The main problem I see is our wonderful “MEDIA” and whoever is running it. They sure ran with the opportunity to mold public opinion over the problem in Japan didn't they?

I agree with you that solar and wind are nice ideas, but they will never produce enough reliable power to serve all the demands. Who wants to duck under a windmill blade every time you want to go fishing?

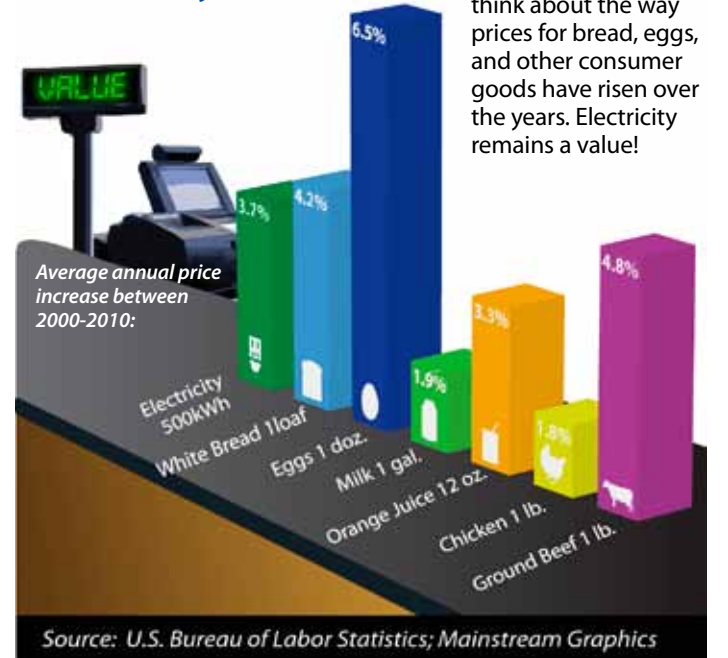
–Frederick Hartway, Weidman

More On Carrom Games

Enjoyed the “Game On” article in March about Carrom boards. One of the many games on the board involved shooting the wooden carroms into an inner ring area with a central hole. If my recall is correct, the inner ring was worth 15 points. Having learned to count by 15's as a child now comes in handy as an adult in figuring out how much a standard 15 percent tip would be.

–Cal Frappier, Cross Village

“Check out” the value of electricity!



Next time you're at the grocery store, think about the way prices for bread, eggs, and other consumer goods have risen over the years. Electricity remains a value!

Teens Learn About Electricity, Safety and Leadership

From left, Alli Rayburn of Lyons, Blake Warchuck of Six Lakes, Becca Kirby of Edmore, and Tyler Orlando of Six Lakes represented HomeWorks Tri-County Electric at the annual Michigan Electric Cooperative Teen Days, held April 27-29 at the Kettunen Center near Cadillac.

Their activities included a tour of the 9&10 News studios (including a live broadcast of the evening news); trying on lineworker gear and attempting to climb a utility pole; a ride in a utility truck bucket; a tour of the Stoney Corners Wind Farm; and a mock co-op board meeting.

Blake and Alli each earned a \$50 savings bond for their winning essays. Alli and Tyler were selected for the National Rural Electric Youth Tour, June 11-16, in Washington, D.C.



Photo - Cindy Zuker

Four Scholarships Awarded to Area Students

Four area students earned \$2,500 in Touchstone Energy® scholarships, made available by HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative.

Winning a \$1,000 scholarship each were Rachel Dyer of Grand Ledge and Jacob Hutson of Blanchard.

Dyer, the daughter of John and Noreen Dyer of Grand Ledge, plans to study engineering at Michigan or Michigan State.

Hutson, the son of Rod and Mary Hutson

of Blanchard, will study electrical or mechanical engineering at Valparaiso.

A \$250 scholarship each was awarded to Karol Chubb of Blanchard and Krista Fedewa of Westphalia.

Chubb, the daughter of David and Shirley Chubb of Blanchard, will study exercise and health science at Alma College.

Fedewa has returned to college part-time to further her education. She is studying business management and computer infor-

mation systems at Lansing Community College, transferring to Northwood for her bachelor's degree.

The Touchstone Energy scholarship program will begin accepting applications for the 2012-13 school year in January. High school seniors are eligible for one-time scholarships of up to \$1,000. Adults returning to school can receive a \$250 grant. For more information, watch homeworks.org.



Jacob Hutson



Rachel Dyer



Karol Chubb



Krista Fedewa

Regulatory Cause-and-Effect

Stringent EPA regulations could cost consumers tens of billions of dollars.

For every cause, there is an effect. The wind blows; a limb falls.

Cause-and-effect relationships exist in the energy industry, as well. For example, electric bills will climb if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moves forward with imposing a series of potentially crippling regulations on power plants. Some of these new rules directly result from court orders.

According to a report from the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, which oversees the nation's bulk power grid, EPA mandates affecting cooling water intake structures, coal ash disposal, interstate transport of air pollutants, and hazardous air pollutants, including mercury, could force electric utilities to retire or retrofit between 33,000 megawatts (MW) to 70,000 MW of generating capacity by 2015—power that will need to be replaced in some way, and during a period of rising construction costs. Another hurdle, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, from power plants presents an even greater challenge.

Stringent regulations in each of these targeted areas could potentially impose tens of billions of dollars of extra compliance costs onto the backs of utilities—and



Photo - ©iStockphoto.com/Jeremy Mayes

therefore their members' electric bills. For example, in June 2010, the EPA proposed two possible approaches for managing coal ash and other coal combustion byproducts and residues produced when coal is burned to make electricity. One, nonhazardous regulation of CCBs, will ensure that coal ash is handled safely and protect not just the environment, but also jobs and consumers.

The EPA's other option—to regulate coal ash as hazardous, a determination the agency has rejected before (the last time in 2000)—would hit coal-fired power plant operators with staggering costs, send electric bills up, and eliminate

beneficial coal ash recycling (about one-third of the fly ash created in the U.S. is used as a Portland cement replacement). The Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), a nonprofit utility research group that includes electric co-ops as members, pegs the potential price tag from a hazardous CCB designation at between \$54.6 billion and \$76.8 billion over a 20-year period.

Electric co-ops have been actively urging the EPA through comments, testimony and litigation to consider the negative consequences of higher electric bills in promulgating new rules. In fact, over 10,500 comments from co-ops and their consumer-members were filed with the agency opposing regulating CCBs as hazardous.

Until the EPA's various power plant rules are finalized, the bottom line remains unknown—cause-and-effect uncertain. But no matter what comes down the pike, electric co-ops are committed to working hard to provide you with safe, reliable electric power at an affordable price.

Jewel of West Michigan

The Shelby Gem Factory produces beautiful, affordable gemstones and jewelry.



Larry Kelley demonstrates a ring vise—one of the major tools used at the Shelby Gem Factory to make jewelry. Larry and his wife Jo are members of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative.

cooking temperature,” Larry says. “It is rare to find a flawless natural ruby or sapphire.”

Factory employees “grow” the crystals in eight high-temperature furnaces. Electric coils surround an iridium cup that can withstand temperatures of 3,500 to 5,000 degrees. Ingredients are combined in the cup and melted. A rotating rod, called a “seed,” is inserted in the center of the cup to circulate the liquid and prevent hot spots. Then, the seed is raised at a painstakingly slow pace, cooling the liquid and forming a large crystal.

“It takes about three weeks to grow a diamond crystal, about a month to grow a ruby or emerald,” Larry explains.

Using a diamond saw, the factory’s highly skilled craftsmen can cut hundreds of rough gems from a single crystal. Each gem is then placed on the faceting machine where 57 facets, or sides, are cut and polished.

“When you facet a diamond, it has to be precise or it just doesn’t sparkle the way it should,” Larry says.

The jewelry makers mount the gems in 14 karat yellow or white gold settings. Larry purchases the rough gold castings from a company in Louisiana, and then does the final polishing of the pieces on-site.

Founded in 1970, the Shelby Gem Factory is truly a family affair. Larry’s wife Jo has been a full partner in the venture since 1979. Their son, John, has also grown up helping his dad make exquisite jewelry, and now works full-time for the company.

“My son has an even better eye than I do for seeing the potential in a particular crystal,” Larry notes.

Located about 15 minutes inland from Silver Lake Sand Dunes and Pentwater, the factory/showroom does most of its business during the summer months. The showroom is an interesting mix of glass cases displaying the jewelry and science exhibits that detail how the gems are made.

“On a rainy day, we will be overrun,” Jo says, “and some people come not knowing

A self-taught gemologist, Larry Kelley has spent over 40 years refining his “secret family recipes” to produce dazzling diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires that look like natural gemstones. As a result, visitors to his Shelby Gem Factory can purchase stunning jewelry at a fraction of the cost.

“People often think that imitation stones are not as good as the real thing,” Larry says, “but in many respects, ours are better. Shelby emeralds are about 1.4 times harder than natural emeralds, so they will last longer.”

Imitation stones are chemically different than their natural counterparts. A natural diamond is made completely of carbon. The

composition of a Shelby diamond is one of many closely guarded family recipes, but because it does not contain carbon, it will not burn like a genuine diamond.

“All our white diamonds are flawless and D color like the most expensive genuine diamonds,” Larry reports. “No one will know the difference. In fact, many jewelers cannot tell.” The “D color” rating is the highest any diamond can receive on the color scale created by the Gemological Institute of America.

The factory also produces man-made rubies and sapphires which are chemically and physically identical to stones dug from the ground.

“Most of the gems we make are nearly flawless, because we control the ingredients and

Photos: June Kuiper/JuneKuiperphotography.com

Photo: Shelby Gem Factory



The Shelby Gem Factory makes a replica of Princess Diana's engagement ring recently worn by Princess Catherine. The original 18-carat sapphire ring cost \$65,000 in 1981.

what they will find. But, they keep coming back because we make beautiful jewelry that looks like the real thing for a fraction of the cost."

Jo attributes the factory's recent increase in sales to the faltering economy. A husband who might have spent \$3,000 on an anniversary gift a few years ago will come into the showroom and select a comparable piece of jewelry for \$300. Another Great Lakes Energy member, Linda Kotzian of Shelby, can testify.

"The first ring my husband bought me as a gift shortly after we were married came from Shelby Gem, since he couldn't afford a 'real' diamond back then," Linda recalls. "The setting was beautiful and it's still my favorite ring, although I did replace the synthetic diamond with a real one a few years ago." They also sell 'real' diamonds, she says, "but the synthetic stone was as beautiful as any diamond, and the ring brought me a lot of admiring comments over the years."

Their showroom has been a tourist draw in Shelby for years, Linda adds, since it highlights the unique process they use to produce the synthetic gems, and "I didn't realize until I glanced at their website that they make 'more varieties of synthetic and imitation gems than anyone else in the world.' And all in little ol' Shelby, MI!"

The crystal below, made by Larry Kelley, is a piece of the "Shelby Simulated Diamond" made at the Shelby Gem Factory. The crystals "grown" at the Factory come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Craftsmen cut the crystals into much smaller pieces to create individual gemstones. Visit shelbygemfactory.com or call 231-861-2165 for information.



A map in the showroom filled with colorful tacks represents the factory's worldwide clientele. The Kelleys' devotion to service has created a loyal customer base that includes three generations of some families.

"I have had many young couples come in and tell me that one of their grandfathers gave their grandmother a ring from here, their own parents got their wedding rings from here, and now they want a Shelby diamond, too," Jo notes.

Shelby Gem Factory builds many custom pieces for their clients, too. The high cost of insuring genuine gemstones has caused many jewelry owners to have inexpensive replicas made so the originals can remain in the family safe.

"On the other hand, I had a lady come in with only one earring and asked if we could make her another one. I told her, sure, we could match the earring perfectly, and asked her what happened to the other one," Jo laughs. "Turns out her parrot pulled it out of her ear and ate it."

The Kelleys love their work because jewelry purchases are generally made to celebrate special occasions, so most of their customers are very happy people. Of course, the final price tag may have something to do with those smiles, too.

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Common Ground Alliance

Managing Costs

Issues largely outside the direct control of your local co-op will impact electric bills in coming years.

After two years of declines, the price tag for building power plants and buying utility equipment is climbing once again. An improving world economy and hikes in costs for skilled labor, fuel and raw materials are driving expenses up. These higher prices likely will affect electric bills over the long-term.

“Electric co-ops have an obligation to keep the lights on and electric bills affordable at a time when costs for components needed to construct generation, upgrade existing power plants, expand transmission facilities, and modernize distribution systems are steadily rising,” acknowledges Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). “Combined with the costs of complying with new regulations, these are pressures that will affect electric bills in years to come—all of which are largely beyond the control of local co-ops.”

Keeping the Lights On

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation, the nation’s bulk power grid watchdog, estimates the U.S. will need to build 135,000 megawatts (MW) of new generation by 2017 to meet demand. Facilities already on the drawing board, though, will only deliver 77,000 MW. Electric co-ops—experiencing average annual load growth well above the levels of other electric utilities—estimate they will need to bring about 12,000 MW of new generation on-line over the next decade.

“However, this generation will be the most expensive in history, coming at a time when construction materials like steel, copper and concrete are shooting upward,” English remarks.

The past 20 years have witnessed nations in Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East transform themselves from backwater provinces into economic “tigers,” particularly in the areas of manufacturing, tourism, information technology and financial services. Flush with cash, these countries have embarked on unprecedented construction binges, erecting thousands of power plants, factories, residential high-rises and office towers.

Projects of this scope commandeer vast

amounts of basic resources—along with engineering and skilled labor expertise—and push up prices for items like oil, timber, steel, nickel and concrete.

After a brief downturn due to the global recession, worldwide commodity prices have rebounded—steel soared 42 percent between 2009 and 2010, while copper, used for wire and to ground electrical equipment, topped record highs of \$4.50 per pound earlier this year.

For new coal-fired and nuclear power plants, overall costs jumped 25 percent and 37 percent, respectively, compared to the year before, reports the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Capital costs for a pulverized coal plant now average over \$2,800 per kilowatt (kW), while a nuclear plant runs about \$5,300 per kW.

Wind generation capital costs increased, as well—about 21 percent, to \$2,400 per kW for land-based wind farms, and 50 percent, to \$5,975 per kW, for turbines placed offshore. Geothermal power plants also leaped 50 percent, to \$4,140 per kW.

On the other hand, costs for solar power dropped. The cost to build photovoltaic arrays, which convert sunlight directly to electricity, decreased 25 percent, to roughly \$4,755 per kW. But for both wind and solar, backup power from coal or natural gas must be built to be available when the wind isn’t blowing and the sun isn’t shining.

Natural gas-fired power plants, both peaking units (operate only when electric consumption crests) and baseload (full-time) facilities, currently boast the most stable costs. Total costs are generally much lower for combustion turbines and other natural gas generation equipment. This is true because they are manufactured in a factory and assembled on-site. Coal and nuclear plants, however, are built from the ground up—a more costly and time-intensive process.



Photo: Basin Electric

A project engineer and manager inspect the gate valve during air blows at a substation that is under construction. The air blows process removes debris from the new power plant’s piping before startup. The 385-net megawatt coal-based power plant will be complete this summer.

The bottom line? A portfolio of power plants that cost \$100 billion to erect in 2000 would cost about \$215 billion today.

Hometown Effects

For most local electric co-ops, the biggest expense involves buying power. Wholesale power purchases can account for as much as 75 percent of your co-op’s budget, which also impacts your electric rates.

Then there’s basic operations—everything from replacing poles and wire to maintaining rights-of-way and fueling line trucks. Costs for these activities continue to escalate. Between 1990 and 2010 in the north-central part of the nation, for example, prices for utility poles, towers and fixtures skyrocketed 98 percent while transformers spiked 154 percent.

Regulations on a Roll

Looming government regulations also pose a threat. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is considering four major rules that could become game-changers for electric utilities: cooling water intake, coal ash disposal, interstate transport of air pollutants, and using the best available technology to curb power plant emissions. In addition, the

LIVE WIRE: Help Electric Co-ops Battle Copper Crime

agency has begun regulating greenhouse gases from new and modified large stationary sources, including coal and natural gas power plants, under the federal Clean Air Act. The bulk of these EPA regulations are due to court-imposed decisions and deadlines.

“It’s entirely possible tighter emissions standards and other rules will have a multi-billion dollar impact on the cost of doing business for electric co-ops,” says Kirk Johnson, NRECA senior vice president of government relations.

Combating Rising Costs

In May, thousands of co-op leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., to call for more certainty on how electricity generation will be regulated.

“Co-ops need Congress’ help to break out of the planning gridlock and set the rules for power generation today and in decades to come,” stresses English. “Not knowing the rules is costing us valuable time and delaying critical decisions. Until the government provides more certainty, electric co-ops, along with the rest of the utility industry, are hamstrung in making informed decisions to provide generation and reliable power for our future.”

Following orders and deadlines set by court orders, the EPA in recent years has begun issuing regulatory proposals that will affect power plants, however, what the final regulations will look like remains unclear.

“Rest assured, local electric co-ops are working together to keep your electric bills affordable,” relates Craig Borr, CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. “We’re controlling costs through innovation. No matter what government mandates come our way, we’ll continue to put you, our members, first.”

Michigan electric co-ops are “Looking Out for You.”

Sources: *Cooperative Research Network, NRECA Strategic Analysis, U.S. Energy Information Administration, Handy-Whitman Index of Public Construction Costs*

Would you risk being hit by lightning for \$100? Seems a bit ludicrous, but desperate times cause folks to do foolish things.

Thefts of copper, bronze and aluminum to sell for scrap metal are on the rise at abandoned commercial buildings, empty homes, and—most dangerously—at power substations near neighborhoods. This theft from co-ops and other electric utilities causes power outages, additional maintenance and expenses, diminished service reliability, and in some cases, serious injury or death (to lineworkers, as well as the thieves).

In Michigan, a man was recently fined \$5,179 and faces a prison sentence of two to 15 years for copper theft from a Wolverine Power Cooperative substation. In Oklahoma, electric co-op members are facing a \$1 million repair bill because thieves wrecked a substation for just \$100 worth of copper. In New Mexico, a man was found dead beneath a power pole, electrocuted while trying to cut copper wiring from a live transformer. A Texas man died when he cut into a live power line while trying to steal copper. Similar accidents have been reported across the country.

“To a would-be thief, stealing copper may seem like a quick way to make a buck,” says Joe McElroy, loss control specialist and safety consultant for the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. “But it’s illegal, costly, and it’s not worth a life. Working with any metal and electricity is a dangerous combination, even for trained employees using proper equipment.”

It’s hard to understand why folks would put their life on the line for a few dollars, but many law enforcement officials believe that methamphetamine users are responsible for much of the problem.

The price of scrap copper fluctuates, but has increased 542 percent since 2001. Your electric co-op uses copper to ground equipment, protecting it from power surges and lightning by giving electricity a safe path to the ground. A lot of copper wire is also used in substations, where high-voltage electricity arriving from distant power plants is stepped-down before it travels to your neighborhood. Then, another transformer near your home—either mounted on a utility pole or in a (usually green) box on the ground—lowers the voltage again so you can use the power at home. Copper is an essential component every step of the way.

Lineworkers are highly trained professionals who understand the dangers of working with electricity and take proper safety precautions. To protect the public, utilities surround their substations with secure fencing and warning signs, but some thieves will not be deterred.

Please help your electric co-op keep equipment safe, prevent outages, and save lives by helping to prevent these thefts. Consider installing motion-sensor lights outside your home or business to deter thieves, storing tools and wire cutters in a secure spot while you’re away, and if you work in construction, do not leave any wires or plumbing unattended or leave loose wire at the job site, especially overnight.

If you notice anything unusual, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, or a hanging wire, call your local electric co-op immediately. If you see anyone other than utility personnel or contractors around substations or other electric facilities, call the police.



Photo - GMFC



The arrow shows where the copper wiring was cut off. The photo at right is an example of extreme copper theft in Michigan. Thieves used a chain saw to topple a transformer power bank pole and other tools to get the copper coils inside the transformer. A large quantity of oil from the transformer spilled on the ground, which is also a disregard for environmental safety.

Hanging Baskets Add Beauty and Color

Every year people spend good money buying hanging baskets to add a little color to a patio or other living space. But by mid-summer there are complaints that plants, once so pretty, are now looking like a wig on a scarecrow.

There is a way to keep hanging baskets looking good all summer, but first you have to choose the right varieties.

Petunias

Popular for the last few decades, petunias hold their beautiful blooms all summer long. However, they're not exactly maintenance-free. They require regular deadheading and constant watering. Wouldn't you rather be at the beach or lounging in a chair than sweating over a hanging basket as you pluck every last spent bloom?

So, let's cool it on the petunias. Maintaining three to four baskets of petunias instead of a dozen will save you a lot of deadheading time. Placing them in a protected area in partial shade or dappled sunlight will further reduce maintenance time. Another thing folks may not know about petunias is you can cut them right back to the rim of the container about midsummer. Then, place them in full sun, water and feed well, and they'll come back better than ever.

Mix it up

There are other plants that make great-looking hanging baskets. A favorite are the tuberous and fibrous begonias. I always thought

these did best in the shade. Not so. They also can stand full sun most of the day (10-12 hours) and require very little deadheading. What's more, they'll flower right up until the threat of a fall frost.

Geraniums

Geraniums are another good choice. They require much less deadheading. When deadheading is necessary, there are fewer blooms to maintain. Geraniums also don't mind a little (note the "little") neglect during the summer, especially in the watering department. They flower better when they're a little on the dry side. And don't forget, there is a beautiful trailing type of geranium that comes in white, pink and deep red.

Top Tips

Here are some more tips for maintaining beautiful hanging baskets while (hopefully) getting more R & R this summer:

1. Water regularly. Hanging baskets will require almost daily watering in hot weather. Rain doesn't count as a watering unless there is a flood warning!

2. Water well with a large watering can, or better yet, one of those water wands. Water should be streaming out the bottom of the container when you're done watering.

3. Feed regularly. Plants in a hanging basket require lots of fertilizer. However, for the sake



This dipladenia (or mandevilla) is also good for hanging baskets because it's very tolerant of direct sun, beautiful, and easy to maintain.

of sparing the lakes and streams of harmful fertilizer run-off, I suggest you use an organic or slow-release fertilizer, along with occasional feeding with a water soluble fertilizer, to keep them fed all summer.

4. To keep plants from drying and looking ragged, hang the baskets in a spot near your home that is protected from strong winds.

"It really depends on the variety in the hanging basket, but keeping them well watered and fertilized is key to having successful hanging baskets all summer," says Danielle Ernest, public relations and brand development coordinator for Proven Winners. "If they get a bit leggy, go ahead and give them a haircut."

5 Hanging Basket Choices

Calibrachoa

This petunia-like plant, also known as "million bells," comes in many colors. Ones to look for are Superbells® "Blackberry Punch Calibrachoa," and "Coralberry Punch Calibrachoa," both from Proven Winners. Calibrachoa requires a little less maintenance than petunias, but is nearly as showy. Hang this one in a protected, partial shade area to keep it looking good all summer.

Scaevola

This is another common variety for hanging baskets. It's leafy, with medium-sized flowers that come in white and deep lavender.

Bacopa

With its petite white flowers, bacopa is a nice complement to baskets of large flowering begonias in a backyard living area. "Bridal Showers," a variety that is loaded with little white flowers, is a common variety. Bacopa demands a little break from the sun or it too will fizzle out before the season ends.

Petunia

Okay, for you petunia devotees, there are some irresistible varieties out there, including Proven Winners' "Pretty Much Picasso®," a "supertunia" with violet purple flowers edged in lime green.

Vines and Foliage

Don't forget the vine plants. These no-fuss plants are sometimes mixed in with flowering plants in a hanging basket. Look for trailing plants like vinca vine, licorice vine, English ivy and Boston ivy.

Memories and History of Vernors Ginger Ale

It's a true Michigan product with the same great taste that it had in the beginning.

I lived in the northwest section of Detroit from 1936 to 1953. My family was middle-class, but we did not have any extra money for luxuries and pop was not an item on my mom's shopping list. A pound of hamburger went a long way in a variety of dishes. If we ever did have soda, it was Vernors. (My father did not believe that caffeinated pop was good for you, and he also thought we might become addicted.)

A very special treat was a boston cooler (not named after Boston). My mom would put vanilla ice cream in the ginger ale. Once in a great while I would be surprised to find Vernors in my glass of milk. Another way my mom used it was on special days, like Thanksgiving, when it would be mixed with grape juice for a special zing.

My brother, Gar (of Petoskey/Pickerel Lake and St. Petersburg, FL), remembers the large Vernors bottle plant and headquarters on Woodward Avenue just one block from the Detroit River.

My sister, Cathy (of Lewiston, NY, and summers at Pickerel Lake), remembers the taps they had to pour the ginger ale and a circular bench in the middle of the floor.

I remember the excitement of going there and my father saying we could drink as much of it as we liked. It cost 5 cents a glass right from the tap.

I still love it today. It's good for settling the stomach and to drink along with play-

ing cards or on a hot summer day. My husband and I occasionally have a boston cooler for dessert. My mom always served her evening guests a boston cooler. It was her trademark.

Today, Vernors is part of the Dr. Pepper Snapple Group. I called to see where it was made and they said at various plants, but some is still made in Detroit. Eighty percent of the sales for Vernors is in Michigan, but Ohio and Illinois also sell quite a lot of it. My husband and I have had trouble buying it in Florida, but you *can* find it there. It is in Florida because of the Michigan retired folks who go there in the winter. It was not mass distributed until 1980.

James Vernor opened a drug store on Woodward, where it was first sold at his soda fountain. In 1896, he closed the drug store and went into the ginger ale business. It passed thru several owners but was sold in 1966, and Vernors shares the title of America's oldest surviving soft drink with Hires Root Beer.

The legend about Vernors is that James Vernor had been trying to come up with a drink that was like one he had tasted from Dublin, Ireland. He said "it was deliciously



©drpeppersnapplegroup.com



Marjory Burden Priest

different," and that is still the motto for it today. James was a pharmacist clerk at Higby and Sterns Drug Store in Detroit when he was called off to fight in the Civil War in 1862. He stored a secret mixture of 19 ingredients including ginger and vanilla in an oak cast. Four years later he returned to discover that the aging process had deliciously transformed his mixture into the distinctly robust taste of Vernors that we drink today. His son said later that he came up with it after the war. Nevertheless, today's Vernors is still aged in oak barrels the way James Vernor did it years ago. It's a true Michigan product with the same great taste that it had in the beginning.

The bottle today shows the little gnome mascot used in 1900. It says, "A Michigan original from 1866." It also says in a circle that it is "Barrel Aged 3 Years • Bold Taste." So, let's give Vernors a thumbs-up for being a Michigan favorite for 145 years!

Thanks to Marjory Priest for submitting her favorite Michigan-made product.

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Tell us about *your* favorite Michigan-made product and we may write about it. Please share why you like it, and if you have a unique story to go with it, please include that and send to czuker@countrylines.com or mail to *Michigan Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. We are especially looking for products that people may not have heard much about. Photos are encouraged, but they must be attached as a jpg to an email or sent as a print (photos printed on computer paper are not acceptable).

Strong Dads Make Strong Families

There is a ruckus in the playroom. I look in; my daughters, ages 5 and 3, are pink marshmallow puffs of dress-up—feather boas, high heels and tutus out to there. My husband has pulled down a large plastic toy bin from the closet. The three of them are gathered around, sinking their hands deep into the bin and coming up with awful-looking creatures adorned with molded plastic muscles and alien faces.

My husband whispers theatrically, “Long ago, in the land of Eternia...”

When Trevor first began telling the girls stories about He-Man and the Masters of the Universe (a cartoon he watched as a child), I was horrified. The epic battles between good and evil, the archenemy Skeletor and the darkness of it all contrasted too much with the Madeline books I’d been pushing. But when Trevor revealed that he’d kept all of his corresponding toys, I knew He-Man’s days were over in our house. My girls would recoil at those creepy things.

Alas, they love the toys. And while some of them do have a bit of magic to their design, I know that’s not the reason. When the toys come out, Trevor and the girls run through the house together, weaving enchanted tales of heroism and hiding under the dining room table creating “command central.” It is unlike anything else they do in their sparkle-filled lives. It’s invariably special.

And as it turns out, research says it’s doing them some good. One study found that children who were securely attached to their fathers were better problem solvers than children who were not attached to their dads. In a study of preschoolers, children whose fathers were responsible for at least 40 percent of childcare tasks had higher cognitive development scores and a greater sense of mastery of their environments than children whose fathers were less involved.

On the flip side, children who live absent their biological fathers are, on average, at least two to three times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to have educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of abuse and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with both parents. And in the U.S., one out of every three kids lives apart from their biological father.

It’s costing everyone a pretty penny, too. The federal government spent at least \$99.8 billion on programs like child sup-



port enforcement and anti-poverty efforts to father-absent homes in 2006.

But we are not without hope on the father front. Groups like the National Fatherhood Initiative are working to encourage men to get going on the daddy business by educating fathers who don’t feel confident with their kids, by equipping families and communities with resources for their fathers, and by raising a collective high-five for the dads who are out there playing catch with junior.

It’s true that I don’t love when my daughters tell our priest about how Evil-Lyn and Stinkor were defeated by Snout Spout just before we headed out to Mass. And packing a tin He-Man lunchbox crafted 30 years ago (certainly without the safety standards we enjoy today) is not what I had envisioned five years back, when our ultrasound picture painted a pink future. Yet they’re two of the reasons I list when I tell Trevor why I think he’s a great dad.

Without dads, our kids are only getting half of the story. And even when they’re zany, when they rile the kids up before bed or when their basketballs end up in the flower garden, they’re doing just what nature intended—helping kids (and their brains!) grow.

Lisa Doublestein is a regular Country Lines freelance writer, educator and mom.

BEING A GREAT DAD ISN'T TOUGH

Here are some easy ways to share your interests with your child—it’ll be fun for both of you!

PLAY SPORTS: Both boys and girls love to learn about and play like the teams you cheer for.

GO FOR A HIKE: Tell your kids why you enjoy being outside. Point to bugs, trees and plants as you go. Ask your kids what they like about the outdoors.

LISTEN TO MUSIC: As long as the language and content is appropriate, sing along and dance to the tunes you like with your child.

PLAY GAMES: Children ages 3 and up can learn simple card games like Uno, War and Go Fish, and board games like checkers and Candy Land. These pave the way for more complex games you can play as they get older.

LEARN: Ask your kids to tell you about what they like. Let them “teach” you about what they’re into these days. Praise them for their efforts and skills.



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Casseroles & Pot Pies



A staple at potlucks and gatherings, casseroles come in as much variety as the people who serve them. Thanks to all who sent in casserole and pot pie recipes! Find hundreds more recipes at countrylines.com.

Puff Pastry Chicken Pie

- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 med. onion, chopped
- 1/2 c. frozen peas
- 1/2 c. frozen corn
- 1/2 c. frozen carrots
- 3 c. chicken broth
- 2 T. flour
- 4 T. butter
- 1 t. salt
- 1/2 t. pepper

Grease a 12-inch round deep-dish pie pan. Cut chicken into 1-inch pieces. In a large saucepan over medium heat, melt butter; add chicken and cook for 5-8 minutes. Add onion and cook until slightly translucent. Add flour and stir constantly for 2-3 minutes. Add chicken broth; continue to stir and cook until broth thickens, about 5-7 minutes. Meanwhile, remove puff pastry from freezer to thaw. Add salt, pepper, corn, carrots and peas; cook an additional 5 minutes. Remove from heat and pour into prepared pan. Place pastry sheet on top of pan; cut three slits in pastry. Sprinkle pastry with salt and pepper. Bake at 425° for 25 minutes or until top is golden brown. Remove from oven and let set for 5 minutes before serving.

Danielle Cochran, Grayling

Enchilada Pot Pie

- 2 10-oz. cans green enchilada sauce, divided
- 2 c. shredded Muenster cheese, divided
- 1 large chicken breast, fully cooked and shredded

- 1 12-oz. can refried beans
- 1 small onion, finely minced, divided
- 1 4-oz. can green chilies
- 4 fajita-size flour tortillas

In a medium bowl, mix together cooked chicken, 1/4 cup enchilada sauce, 1/3 of the minced onion, and 1/2 cup of the shredded cheese; set aside. Pour about 1/4 cup of enchilada sauce in the bottom of a deep dish pie plate or spring form pan. Place one tortilla over sauce in pan bottom. Spread beans over tortilla; sprinkle with 1/4 cup cheese and 1/3 of the minced onion. Top with second tortilla; cover tortilla with chicken mixture. Top with third tortilla; pour remaining enchilada sauce over and top with remaining minced onion. Cover with foil and bake at 400° for 20 minutes. Remove from oven; turn oven to broil. Remove foil cover from pan; sprinkle with remaining Muenster cheese and place under broiler. Broil until bubbly and slightly brown.

Mary Gorshe, Suttons Bay

Cottage Green Noodle Casserole

- 1/4 lb. green noodles
- 2 c. cottage cheese
- 1 c. sour cream
- 1 onion, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 t. steak sauce
- 2 t. seasoned salt
- 1/8 t. pepper
- 1/2 c. soft bread crumbs
- 1/2 c. shredded cheddar cheese

Cook noodles in boiling salted water until tender; drain. Combine with cottage cheese,

sour cream, onion, garlic, steak sauce, seasoned salt and pepper. Pour into a shallow 1½-quart baking dish. Combine bread crumbs and cheddar cheese; sprinkle over casserole. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Serves 4.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

Turkey or Chicken Almandine Casserole

- 3 c. chopped, cooked turkey or chicken
- 1 can cream of chicken soup, do not dilute
- 1 8-oz. can sliced water chestnuts, drained
- 1 4-oz. can mushrooms, drained
- 2/3 c. mayonnaise
- 1/2 c. chopped celery
- 1/2 c. chopped onion
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 1 8-oz. can refrigerated crescent rolls
- 2/3 c. shredded Swiss cheese
- 1/2 c. slivered almonds
- 2-4 T. melted butter

In a large saucepan, combine turkey, soup, water chestnuts, mushrooms, mayonnaise, celery, onion and sour cream; heat over medium heat until bubbly. Pour into a 9 x 13-inch casserole dish. Separate rolls into two rectangles. Place over hot mixture. Combine cheese, almonds and butter in a bowl; sprinkle over crescent top. Bake at 375° for 20-25 minutes until brown. Yield 6-8 servings.

Judi Fanning, Kalkaska

Chicken and Potato Casserole

- 8 chicken breasts, fried and cut in chunks
- 8-10 c. shredded potatoes
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 c. Miracle Whip®
- 4 oz. Velveeta® Cheese
- 2 T. chopped onion
- 1½ c. crushed corn flakes or cracker crumbs
- 1/2 c. melted butter

Spread potatoes in a greased 9x13-inch pan; top with chicken. In a saucepan, heat sour cream, soup, Miracle Whip, cheese and onion; pour over chicken. Combine crumbs and butter; sprinkle over casserole. Bake, uncovered at 350° for 45 minutes.

Lavina Coblenz, Fredericksburg, IN

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Corned Beef & Cabbage Puff Pastry Pot Pies

14 ozs. cabbage, cut into 1/2 x 4-inch strips
3 T. unsalted butter
3 T. flour
1 c. milk
1 c. grated Gruyere cheese, about 4 oz.
1 T. plus 1 1/2 t. coarse-grained mustard
1/4 t. freshly grated nutmeg
1/4 t. dried dill weed
cayenne pepper
8 oz. very thinly sliced cooked corned beef, cut into 1/2 x 4-inch strips
2 17-oz. pkgs. puff pastry, thawed
1 egg beaten with 1 t. cold water

Cook cabbage in a large pot of salted boiling water until tender, 5-8 minutes; drain. Squeeze dry in a towel. Melt butter in a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and stir 3 minutes. Whisk in milk, cook until mixture is smooth and very thick, whisking constantly, 4-5 minutes. Gradually mix in Gruyere. Add mustard, nutmeg, dill and cayenne pepper. Stir in corned beef and cabbage; cool.

Divide filling among six 1-cup ramekins. Roll one piece of pastry out on a lightly floured surface to 1/8-inch thickness. Cut out rounds 2 1/4-inches larger in diameter than ramekins, using a bowl as a guide; reserve scraps. Brush one side of each round with egg and water glaze. Arrange glazed side down on top of ramekin, pressing firmly against

sides of ramekin and pushing up slightly at rim; do not press down on rim. Seal pastry to sides with tines of fork. Repeat procedure with remaining pastry. Brush tops and sides of pastries with glaze. Score tops in grid pattern, do not cut through pastry. Roll out scraps to 1/8-inch thick. Cut out 2-inch design of your choosing. Brush with glaze. Arrange on baking sheet, glaze side up. Place pies on baking sheet. Refrigerate designs and ramekins at least 30 minutes. (These can be prepared up to 6 hours ahead).

Position baking rack in center of oven. Bake at 400° for 20-25 minutes until pastry is golden brown and filling is hot. Transfer pies to plates; arrange one design on top of each pie and one on each plate. Serves 6.

Faye Starr, Bloomfield Hills

Sweet Hot Turkey Salad Casserole

2 cans crescent rolls or sheet dough
2 c. cooked, chunked turkey
12 ozs. whipped cream cheese
1 c. crushed pineapple, well-drained
1 c. shredded Swiss cheese
1 c. dried cranberries, cherries or currants
1 c. fresh, diced apples
1 c. crushed pecans or cashews
3/4 c. diced red onion
black pepper to taste
Spray a 9 x 13-inch baking dish with non-stick spray. Place one roll of crescent rolls or sheet dough in bottom of pan; set aside. In a large bowl, gently fold all other ingredients together, except second crescent roll or sheet dough, until mixed well. Place mixture in baking dish; spread evenly. Top with remaining crescent roll or sheet dough. Bake at 350° for 35-45 minutes. Serve immediately.

Robin Musselman, Charlotte

Chinese Beef Casserole

2 lbs. ground beef
1 c. chopped onion
1 c. chopped celery
1/4 c. soy sauce
2 cans cream of mushroom soup
1 14-oz. can bean sprouts, undrained
1/2 t. pepper
1 c. uncooked long grain rice
1 8-oz. can sliced water chestnuts, drained
2 c. frozen peas, thawed
1 5-oz. can chow mein noodles

Brown meat, onion and celery; drain. Stir in soup, bean sprouts, soy sauce and pepper; bring to a boil. Pour into a greased 3-quart baking dish. Stir in uncooked rice and water chestnuts. Cover and bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Uncover; stir in peas and sprinkle with chow mein noodles. Bake 15-20 minutes longer until heated through. Yields 8 servings.

Linda Slais, Lewiston

Herb-Baked Fish & Rice Casserole

1 1/4 c. hot chicken broth
1/2 c. uncooked white rice
1/4 t. Italian seasoning
1/4 t. garlic powder
1 10-oz. pkg. frozen chopped broccoli, thawed and drained
1 2.8-oz. can French's® French Fried Onions
1 T. grated Parmesan cheese
1 lb. unbreaded fish fillets, thawed if frozen
paprika to taste
1/2 c. shredded cheddar cheese

In an 8 x 12-inch microwaveable casserole dish, combine broth, rice, Italian seasoning

and garlic powder. Cook, covered on high for 5 minutes, stopping to stir halfway through cooking time. Stir in broccoli pieces, 1/2 can French fried onions and Parmesan cheese. Arrange fish fillets diagonally in a single layer on top of rice mixture and sprinkle lightly with paprika. Cook, covered on 50 percent power for 18-20 minutes or until fish flakes easily with fork and rice is done. Rotate dish halfway through cooking time if your microwave does not have a turntable. Top fish with cheddar cheese and sprinkle with remaining half of onions. Cook uncovered on high for 1 minute or until cheese melts. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

Patricia Coyle, Watervliet

Italian Casserole

1 lb. spaghetti noodles
1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
1 large onion, diced
1 can tomato soup
1 can cheddar cheese soup
1 t. dried oregano
1 t. onion salt
1 t. garlic salt
grated cheese of choice

Brown ground beef and onion; drain. Add soups; stir until well-mixed. Stir in spices and simmer while preparing spaghetti according to package directions. Drain spaghetti; combine with sauce and pour into a 4-quart casserole dish. Top with grated cheese of choice. Bake covered, at 350° for one hour.

Joan Clairmont, Bark River

Meat Pie Roma

1 lb. ground beef
1/2 c. chopped green pepper
1/2 c. chopped onion
3/4 c. water
1 6-oz. can tomato paste
1 t. salt
1/2 t. oregano
1/4 t. garlic powder
1 can refrigerated biscuits
1/3 c. grated Parmesan cheese, divided
6 oz. sliced mozzarella cheese

Brown meat; drain. Add green pepper, onion, tomato paste, water and seasonings; simmer 10 minutes. Line a greased 9-inch pie plate with biscuits; sprinkle with 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese. Fill with 1/2 of the meat mixture; top with 2 slices of cheese. Top with remaining meat mixture and Parmesan cheese. Bake at 400° for 15-20 minutes. Cut remaining cheese into strips; place on top of meat pie and return to oven. Bake until cheese melts. Makes 6-8 servings.

Cathy Nichols, Portland





Photo—Hamilton Parker Company



Photo—Greenscaping Landscapes Architecture

How to Pave a Patio

Are you tired of tracking mud and dirt from the yard into the house? Do you want an outdoor space for entertaining or just getting out of the house when it's nice outside?

If you answered yes, then a patio may be right for you, and there are many choices for do-it-yourself installation on virtually any budget. Selection of materials is a good starting point to help determine how much money you'll need to spend.

To choose the right kind of paver for your space, your first decision is—clay or concrete? “Select the color and style that you want to achieve, and that will give you the benchmark to decide which manufacturer is most likely the right fit,” explains Adam Lewin, president of Hamilton Parker Company, a building supply company with stores in Delaware and Columbus, OH.

Clay pavers are popular because they have a deep color that doesn't fade over time. Manufacturers like Belden Brick (distributors in Bay City and Grand Rapids, MI), Pine Hall Brick (seven MI distributors) and Whitacre-Greer offer products that are perfect for home use. Concrete pavers, like those produced by Reading Rock, offer an especially wide choice of sizes, shapes and colors.

Lewin recommends that you narrow down your choices by considering the kind of look you want. For example, do you want a blend of colors or a solid appearance; a style that's classic old-world, rustic or clean lines; beveled edges or a dry, pressed look?

A low-cost option is to create your own patio by using reclaimed concrete. Re-using old or broken concrete pieces that are readily available from construction or demolition sites also helps the environment by reducing the amount of debris that goes into landfills. Install them as you would any other pavers, but understand that they may be quite heavy and of varying thickness. For added interest,

choose different sizes and shapes.

Regardless of the pavers, most do-it-yourselfers choose a sand-based patio base over a mortar-joined one because sand is more forgiving (and less expensive) and allows for much easier removal when necessary.

The next step is to create a frame. Metal border material or treated lumber is widely used. Lay-out the selected area with stakes and string. Using a flat-bladed shovel and maddox, dig out the area to about 4 to 6 inches deep (depending on the depth of border material and pavers). It's also a good idea to use a soil compactor (from equipment rental stores).

If odd sections of reclaimed concrete are used, then mark where more soil needs to be removed with white spray paint or lime and adjust the depth as necessary to fit the sections. Cut landscape fabric to fit the area and apply so that weeds and roots won't grow up through the gravel or sand.

Carefully install the frame, making sure that the angles are true. If using pavers of uniform depth, place enough gravel or, preferably, class 2 base material, to provide a minimum depth of roughly 1 inch over the area. Class 2 base material is generated by

Patio Drainage

When planning your patio, make sure it slopes away from any structures and has adequate drainage. The patio can be built with a channel around the sides that will drain water and can be covered with metal grills that look like part of the patio. The channel can also be connected to your property's main surface drainage port, likely a storm sewer, by buying drainage pipes.

Visit doityourself.com/stry/how-to-plan-patio-drainage-to-avoid-drainage-problems for more details.

LEFT: Paved walkways help reduce muddy traffic in your home.

RIGHT: It's important to consider drainage issues when planning your patio.

ripping up old roadbeds and used as a base for new roads. Level the gravel using a piece of scrap lumber.

Pour sand on the gravel. A general rule of thumb is to subtract the depth of the pavers from the depth of the borders, but it's good to have a minimum of 1 to 2 inches. Level the sand carefully with a screed made from scrap lumber, or a 2x6.

Place the pavers together according to the desired pattern using string tied from one edge of the frame to the other to ensure straight placement. Fill gaps between the pavers with sand by using a kitchen broom. Mist the area with a garden hose nozzle and repeat this process twice, then again about a week later or if pavers become wobbly.

If using reclaimed concrete, dig a bed about 3 inches deep and about an inch bigger in diameter than each paver. Place the landscape fabric, add sand over the weed barrier and even out with a rake. Set the broken concrete in place and fill the gaps with sand and mist to help settle the sand. Step on each piece and rock it from side to side. If wobbly or uneven, fill in with more sand until each piece is stable.

There are other patio options for the do-it-yourselfer. While not really a patio, a “floating deck,” or a wooden deck built close to ground level is a project explained on numerous websites.

Environmentally friendly products such as PolyPavement™, a liquid soil solidifier, are sold in 5-gallon buckets and may be applied by one of two methods. Diluted PolyPavement (polypavement.com) can be either mixed or compacted into the soil or sprayed on compacted soil and allowed to dry. The resulting surface is suitable for traffic, is the same color as the soil, and twice as strong as asphalt. The downside is that not every kind of soil is suitable.

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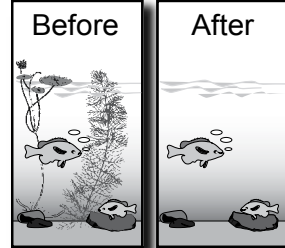
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Get Comfortable: Ways to Even Your Room Temperatures

Nearly every house has some problems keeping all the rooms evenly warm or cool.

The heating, cooling and ventilation system (HVAC) is one of the last design features considered when a house is built. In addition to keeping the house perfectly comfortable year-round, other considerations such as total installation costs and monthly utility bills are factors that must be evaluated.

There are many reasons why various rooms do not stay warm or cool enough even though they have similar-sized ducts. A common reason is the number and orientation of windows. South-facing windows

can transmit much heat into a room, causing it to overheat in summer. North-facing windows, especially old, leaky ones, can make a room chilly in winter. Both of these problems can be lessened by installing new windows or insulating shades, but there will still be some variations.

The walls of the ducts, especially on sheet metal ducts, may be losing or gaining heat as the air makes its way from the furnace or central air conditioner to the rooms. To make this even worse, heating ducts are often located under windows. This positions them on cold or hot outside walls and takes space from the wall insulation thickness.

A simple method to check this is to hold a thermometer in the register outlet air flow in each room. If there is a significant difference in the temperature, wrap insulation around as much of the duct as you can reach. Where the duct runs vertically through a wall, there is not much you can do other than open the wall and install insulated ducts.

Another reason for uneven temperatures is that not enough heated or cooled air is getting to those problem rooms. As a rough evaluation, hold your hand over room outlet registers to compare the air flow rates. If a room is far from the indoor blower, the duct creates more air flow resistance. This is exacerbated by the fact that longer ducts



Photo - ©iStockphoto.com/Slobodan Vasic

lose more heat through their walls, and have more joints that can leak heated or cooled air before it gets to the intended room.

Check the damper plates in the ducts near the furnace to be sure the ones leading to the problem rooms are not partially closed and blocking air flow. Try partially closing the dampers leading to the other rooms. You may have to close them quite a bit to notice the effect, but doing so may force more heated or cooled air to the rooms that need it. The settings of the duct dampers to each room will likely have to be changed from summer to winter because the heat gain/loss varies with the changing seasons.

Hang a thread from a stick and hold it near all the joints in the ducts to locate air leaks. Seal these leaks with tape or duct joint sealing compound. Don't just use cheap gray duct tape, as it often comes loose in a year or two. Use either aluminum foil duct tape or black Gorilla® duct tape. Gorilla tape is easier to apply and holds up for many years.

Also, don't forget to make sure the room register baffles are fully opened. Installing a deflector over the register can help direct heated or cooled air out into the room. This is particularly true when air-conditioning because cool air tends to hang near the floor and not circulate throughout the room. Move furniture so it is not blocking the air flow.

Installing a duct booster fan can help get more air flow to problem rooms. These fans are designed to fit into the ducts (round or rectangular) near the furnace blower, and some can sense when the blower starts and they turn on automatically. Others have their own thermostat or can be connected to the main blower controls.

Register booster fans, which



This adjustable duct thermostat is easy to install and it controls when the booster fan comes on.

mount over the outlet register in a room, can also help. These are easier to install than a duct booster fan, provide more room temperature control, and plug into a standard wall electric outlet. It has its own thermostat so it comes on only when the main blower is running, and the small fan motor uses only about 30 watts.

The following companies offer booster fans: Aero-Flo Industries, 219-393-3555, aero-flo.com; Field Controls, 252-522-3031, fieldcontrols.com; and Suncourt Manufacturing, 800-999-3267, suncourt.com; and register deflectors: American Metal Products, 800-423-4270, americanmetalproducts.com; and Deflecto Corporation, 800-428-4328, deflecto.com.

Have a question for Jim? Send inquiries to James Dulley, Michigan Country Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit dulley.com.

James Dulley is a nationally recognized mechanical engineer writing about home energy issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.





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Wolverine Partners with DNR On Wildlife Habitat Project



Wolverine Power Cooperative partnered with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) this spring to build new habitat for wildlife species along its transmission right-of-way in the Haymarsh Lake State Game Area.

“Early in the year, I contacted the DNR wildlife office serving Mecosta County to discuss routine vegetation maintenance planned for our transmission system in the area,” says Adam Helminiak, utility forester for Wolverine. “My conversation with Pete Kailing, wildlife biologist for the DNR, led to a mutual interest in wildlife habitat improvement projects.”

After a field visit to Wolverine’s right-of-way northeast of Big Rapids, Kailing suggested forming brush piles using detailed specifications for rabbits, grouse, ground-nesting song birds, and other wildlife. Wolverine and its clearing contractor, Trees, Inc., used trees produced from vegetation maintenance work to form the structures.

“In addition to ensuring the reliability of our transmission system through our right-of-way maintenance work, we were able, in this instance, to take our efforts a step further to enhance wildlife habitat in the area,” Helminiak explains.

Wolverine has worked with a number of groups, including the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), Conservation Resource Alliance, and the Walloon Lake Trust and Conservancy, to improve wildlife habitat on its rights-of-way. The cooperative received the NWTf’s Energy for Wildlife Corporate Achievement Award in 2009, which recognizes success in integrating wildlife conservation into right-of-way management.

“One of our four core values at Wolverine is environmental stewardship,” Helminiak says. “We are committed to the thoughtful use of our natural resources.”



Piles of brush were stacked along Wolverine’s right-of-way in Mecosta County to create new habitat for small animals, including rabbits and grouse. Wolverine worked with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources on the project.

DEQ Holds Public Hearing for WCEV Air Permit

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) held a public hearing on the air quality permit for the proposed Wolverine Clean Energy Venture (WCEV) power plant in May in Rogers City. The DEQ considered comments from the public regarding new emission regulations enacted by the federal government that apply to the WCEV development. Department staff members will review the public comments and then approve, approve with modifications, or deny the air permit. The WCEV development has two components—a baseload power plant and a wind farm.

Information For All HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Members

Your cooperative offers a program called the Tri-County Electric People Fund, which is funded through the voluntary rounding up of your monthly utility bill to the next whole dollar amount. An all-volunteer board of directors appointed by the member-elected board of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative is charged with distributing the funds throughout the co-op's service area to support charitable efforts in and around the communities we serve.

People Fund dollars have been granted to educational programs, fire departments, medical emergency groups, recreational senior organizations, numerous local charities, and many local families and individuals. A copy of the People Fund's annual report, detailing contributions, is available and has been highlighted in previous issues of *Country Lines* magazine. All grants made are also listed on our website, homeworks.org.

Your participation in the Tri-County Electric People Fund is *voluntary*. If at any time you wish to discontinue participation in the People Fund, please let us know and we will be happy to remove your account.

If you are participating, your monthly bill is rounded up to the next whole dollar amount. If your bill is \$78.42, it would be rounded up to \$79. The 58 cents is then contributed by HomeWorks on your behalf to the People Fund, to be used as explained above. A customer's average annual contribution is about \$6. Your annual contribution to the People Fund is tax deductible and is reported on your monthly statement in January of the following year.

For more information on the Tri-County Electric People Fund, you can contact the co-op office by mail, or call 877-466-3957, menu option one.

Help Members Find Unclaimed Checks

Some former HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative members, Rural TV of Michigan, and HomeWorks Tri-County Propane customers were due to receive capital credits or inactive account refund checks, which remain uncashed.

We have tried to deliver these checks by mail, to the last address given to us by the person or business listed. If you know one of the people listed below, or have a current address at which we can contact them, please call HomeWorks at 517-647-7554 or 800-562-8232.

You can also contact us by email at tricoenergy@homeworks.org (or use the "Contact Us" link at our website, homeworks.org.)

Tri-County Electric Cooperative Capital Credit Refunds (2006-07)

Werner Estate, Virginia	Portland, MI
ANR Production Co.	Jackson, MS
Fairchild, Tami	Mt. Pleasant MI
Harnack, Michael R.	Stanton, MI
Klick, Robert	Weidman, MI
Lake Isabella Resort	Plymouth, MI
Mobil Oil Corp.	Dallas, TX
Morey Estate, Norval K.	Weidman, MI
Mush, James S.	Stuart, FL
Ore-Ida Foods Inc	Greenville, MI
Reed Jr., George D.	Lansing, MI
Schneider, Edwin A.	Perrinton, MI
Walker, Mark	Paw Paw, MI
Wayne M. Marzolf	Clare, MI
Wilson Communications	Detroit, MI

Rural TV of Michigan Refund (2006)

Tinning, Thomas	Eaton Rapids, MI
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Tri-County Propane Refund (2007)

Option One	Irvine, CA
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People Fund Reaches Out to Families, YMCA, Library

Young athletes in Ionia County, Vermontville area readers, and Eaton County residents who need hospice services will benefit from your donations to the Tri-County Electric People Fund.

Each month when you round up your energy bill to the next dollar, you help support grants like these, made by the People Fund board on April 13:

- \$500 to Ionia County YMCA to buy equipment for recreation programs.
- \$1,544 to Vermontville Public Library toward e-reader start-up costs.
- \$2,600 to Eaton Community Hospice in Charlotte to purchase furniture.
- \$2,500 to a Mecosta County family toward housing expenses.
- \$1,900 to a Clinton County family toward housing expenses.



How To Apply For a Grant

Write to 7973 E. Grand River Avenue, Portland, MI 48875. We'll send you an application form, grant guidelines, and other helpful information. You'll also find information and application forms on our website at homeworks.org.

How You Can Help

Tri-County customers can opt in or out of the voluntary Operation Round Up program at any time. Just enclose a note with your bill payment, or call us at 800-562-8232.

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FOR SALE, KALKASKA, MI – 100 seating, active restaurant with 2-bedroom home on approximately 5 acres, near many trails and lakes, \$279,000. Contact swamp lady59@yahoo.com

LAKE COUNTY HUNTING ACREAGE – 80-400 acre parcels available. Cranberry Lake 80 acres, \$145,000. Sauble River 80 acres, \$139,000. North West Realty, 231-745-4646. NorthWestRealty.biz

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9.9 ACRES LOGAN TOWNSHIP – Mason County, septic, well, power, great hunting, \$26,000 or make offer. 231-750-4129, leave message.

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163.8 ACRES, ISABELLA COUNTY – Beautiful piece of hunting property. Small older trailer, small barn, electric, pond, mixture of cedar swamp, wooded rolling high ground and 20 tillable acres, \$320,000. 616-209-2230.

MUSKEGON RIVER, RIVER FOREST – Lot 17, near Hersey. 240 feet frontage, gorgeous sunset view down the river, older but functional mobile. Peaceful retreat, asking \$42,900. 269-731-2822.

HISTORIC HOME AND ESTATE SALE – July 8-10, 2011. Perrett family mansion for sale and antiques ranging from 1880s to present. 404 W. Mansion St., Marshall, MI 49068. This Victorian-era federal-style marvel was built in 1855 with a grand view of the Brooks Memorial Fountain. Being part of the Marshall historic landmark district, it boasts 10-foot ceilings, 4 bedrooms, 2½ baths, 2 fireplaces, a summer porch and all original doors, woodwork and hardware. Asking price \$225,000. For private tour or questions, please call Marie, 989-217-0934.

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Source: Alliance to Save Energy



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New Energy Star® Rebates Save Energy, Money

If you're looking for ways to save energy and lower your energy bills, Energy Optimization has some new rebates that may be just what you're looking for.



We're still offering rebates on CFLs; in fact the rebate has increased to \$1.50 per CFL, with a limit of 12 per member.

We offer CFLs for just 50 cents each in our Blanchard and Portland offices, so you can get an instant rebate – no filling out forms or waiting for the check!



The \$50 rebate on an Energy Star clothes washer continues. These washers reduce energy and water use by over 40 percent, compared to older models, and they spin clothes two to three times faster to extract more water.



You could upgrade your clothes dryer at the same time as the washer, and get an additional \$25 rebate.

To be eligible for this rebate you must replace an electric dryer that has no moisture control sensor with an electric dryer with a moisture sensor. This sensor automatically shuts off the machine when the clothes are dry so the running time is reduced and you use less energy.

We'll give you \$25 when you replace an older, less efficient dishwasher with a new ENERGY STAR® dishwasher.

To be eligible for the clothes washer and dishwasher rebates, you must have an electric water heater.



Another energy-saving idea is to replace your current ceiling fan with an Energy Star® qualified ceiling fan with a light kit.

We're offering a \$15 rebate for each ceiling fan with a light kit that you purchase and install, with a limit of four per member.

Reduce your "phantom" electricity costs by purchasing a smart power strip and we'll give you a \$20 rebate, with a limit of two per member.



A smart power strip will either automatically stop the draw of energy for all peripheral devices when it has detected that the primary device has gone into sleep or standby mode or, on some models, when the primary device is turned off.

Visit michigan-energy.org for a full listing of rebates, programs and qualifications, or call 877-296-4319 to learn more.

*Nick Rusnell is
HomeWorks Tri-County
Electric Cooperative's
energy advisor*



Your Board In Action

Meeting at Blanchard on April 25, your board of directors:

- Heard a presentation from Wolverine Power Cooperative regarding proposed rate increases, to take effect July 1, and adopted a resolution in support of Wolverine's rate filing with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.
- Reviewed a 10-year financial forecast and the co-op's current loan portfolio.
- Learned the co-op has begun developing its next four-year construction work plan.
- Made a \$1,000 donation to the NRECA International Foundation, helping underdeveloped countries build electrical systems to rural areas using the cooperative model.
- Read and approved "Board Policy 303—Wage and Salary Administration," and "Board Policy 304—Use of Cooperative Vehicles."
- Reviewed results of a past cost-of-service study, and possible affects of moving more of the co-op's distribution costs from the energy charge to the monthly availability fee.
- Adopted a resolution setting each district's annual membership meeting date and official membership count.
- Reviewed March 2011 preliminary financial statements, and learned there were 91 new members in the past two months.
- Acknowledged the March safety report, with three safety meetings held.



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**Energy Efficiency
Tip of the Month**

Consider using solar lights for outdoor lighting. Solar cells convert sunlight into electricity that can be stored in a battery and tapped at night to make light. Check manufacturer's instructions to make sure your solar lights are situated to receive sufficient sunlight to recharge each day.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Energy

Member Meetings Draw Record Crowds



Photo - Nick Rusnell

Alyvia Spousta, 5, of Bannister, was this year's first prize winner, taking home an iPod touch from the District 5 meeting at Fulton.



At Chippewa Hills High School in Remus, District 7 members enjoyed a light meal and a neighborly visit before the meeting. Margit Kriskywicz of Stanwood sat with Louise and Douglas Christiansen from Rodney.



Photo - Randy Halstead

This year's program featured a Hot Line Safety demonstration put on by retired Great Lakes Energy lineworkers Bob Kettle, left, and Wayne Bumstead. These families braved the cool temperatures at Eagle to see the demonstration.



Photo - Randy Halstead

ABOVE: Former board member Pete Ondrus talked with system engineer Chris Jensen after the meeting at Fulton. **RIGHT:** Nick Rusnell, at right, demonstrated how a smart power strip works after the Eagle meeting.



Lifetime Guarantee

We've been doing some remodeling. I think it's a rite of passage that you fix up the place when you retire. Either that or move. But we like our native Michigan, and we haven't agreed on a place in the state we'd rather call home, so here we are.

I've been putting drawer pulls on our new bathroom vanity and I noticed that they come with a lifetime guarantee. I don't know how these simple metal bands can go wrong, but I suppose offering a lifetime guarantee for something that can't go bad is pretty cheap. There's no downside for the company.

We've got a fancy coffee maker that's developed a tic after only three months: It turns on and off a half-dozen times before it finishes brewing a pot. When I emailed the manufacturer's customer support service, they suggested we first clean it according to their instructions (we already had) and then let them know if there are further problems. With the limited warranty, shipping wouldn't be free. Really? We made the effort to buy their product, but they can't make the effort to make sure we get something that works?

It would be nice if everything came with a lifetime guarantee, including us. However long our 'lifetime' is, we can experience any number of malfunctions, some fixable, some not, and they can appear at any age. What we can't do is send ourselves back to the manufacturer for a replacement.

What we can do is take better care of ourselves to give ourselves a chance for the best possible lifetime. It's kind of like our house: keep up with maintenance and give it an occasional makeover.

Science suggests we can do two things for the best chance at a high quality of life: stay active in mind and body, and eat well.

My family is good at eating. Our in-laws

laugh about the Buda family's seemingly constant focus on food—what we're going to have for the next dinner, what Sunday breakfast will look like, what we ate the last time we met. I guess food is our bond. We don't overeat, or go overboard on junk food, but we also don't abstain from so-called unhealthy food. My mother loves Kentucky Fried Chicken. My dad

loves cheddar cheese broth that I would liken to inside-out pierogis, the traditional Polish-filled dumplings. Since I can't find a reference to a soup like this online, I'm guessing it's the happy result of pierogi preparation gone bad. You see the potato theme here? By the way, we discovered that you can't get regular white potatoes in Minnesota, only reds and russets (think Idaho for baking). It seems the potato chip makers have cornered the market on good old Michigan white potatoes.

My favorite meal is breakfast. I've learned how to make great pancakes that are good for you, but taste so good they could double as dessert. This recipe is adopted from *The Joy of Cooking* (1997), with additions and substitutions to make them healthier. It makes about two dozen 4-inch pancakes. We freeze them, separating them with waxed paper, then thaw them at a low microwave setting before briefly crisping them up in the toaster.

If you want to give the fathers in your family a healthier meal on Fathers' Day, serve

them these pancakes for breakfast—bacon really goes well with them—or for dessert with strawberries and whipped cream.

I can't guarantee they'll fix what ails them, but I guarantee they'll like them.

Multi-grain Flapjacks

Lightly butter, oil or spray griddle and place over medium heat; heat electric griddle to 350 F.

Whisk together in a large bowl:

1 c. white whole-wheat flour (a lighter flour with all the benefits of regular dark whole wheat should be available in most groceries)

1/2 c. white all-purpose flour

1/3 c. cornmeal

1/3 c. old-fashioned or quick-cooking rolled oats

1/2 c. total of any combination of wheat germ, flaxseed meal, oat bran, or any other fad grain of the day

1/2 c. chopped walnuts

2 T. brown sugar

2 t. baking powder

1 t. salt

1/2 t. baking soda

1/2 t. ground cinnamon

pinch of ground nutmeg

Whisk together in another bowl:

2 c. fat-free or low-fat milk

5 T. unsalted butter, butter blend or substitute, melted



1/4 c. honey

3 large eggs

Pour the wet ingredients over the dry ingredients and gently whisk them together, until just combined. (For blueberry pancakes, add fresh or thawed berries to batter now.)

Spoon 1/4 cup batter onto the griddle, spreading out into rounds. Cook until the tops are dotted with bubbles, then flip and cook the underside until lightly browned. Serve immediately or keep warm in a 200 F oven.

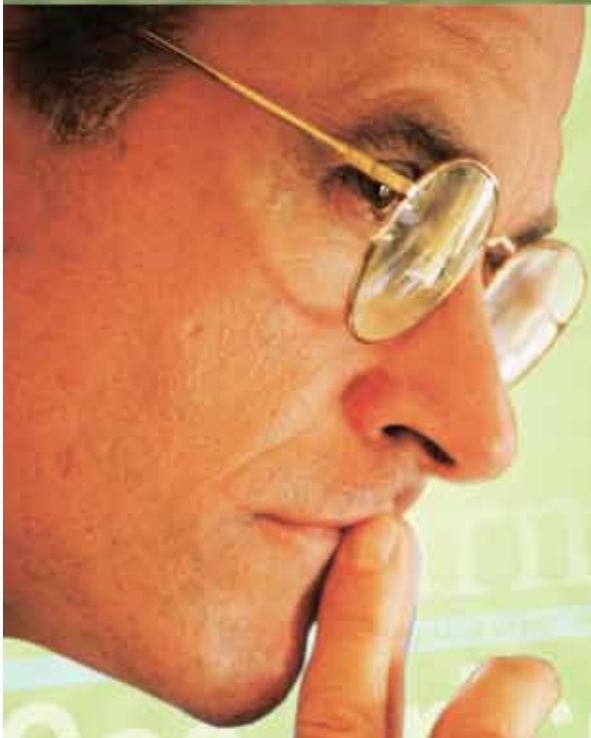
Serve with maple syrup, favorite yogurt, fruit, or a combination of these.

continues to enjoy braunschweiger. I think McDonalds' Sausage McMuffin with Egg is one of the culinary wonders of the world.

When Barbara and I visited my parents in Minnesota in April, we made them a few of their favorite meals. One is fondly called "Potatoes, Tomatoes and Meat," which consists of potatoes, tomatoes and meat. Another is Polish-style potato pancakes, with potatoes, egg and flour fried to a crispy edge and a soft center. You really can't walk after eating them. My brother Tom and his wife, Jackie, recently made them a soup with potato dumplings in a

Mike Buda is editor emeritus of *Country Lines*. Email Mike at mbuda@countrylines.com or comment on his columns at countrylines.com/column/ramblings





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