

MICHIGAN Country Lines



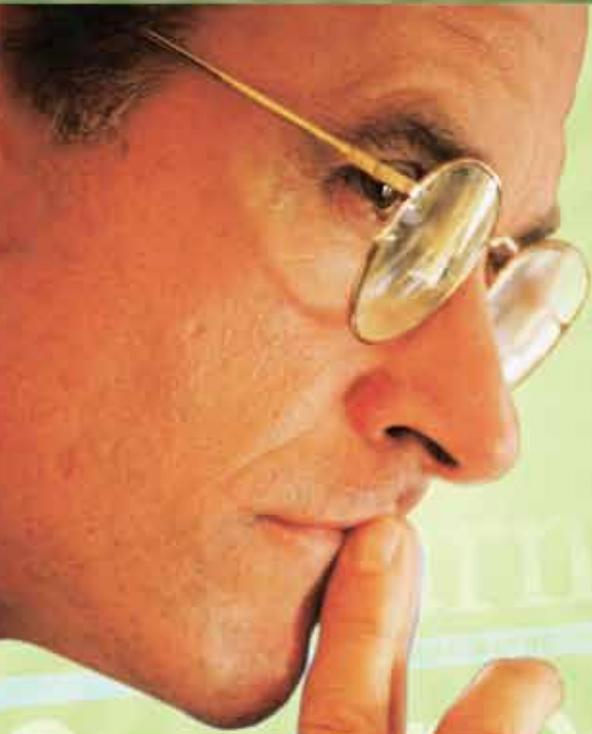
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Ice Climbing
in Michigan

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SMART HOMEOWNERS CHOOSE GEOTHERMAL

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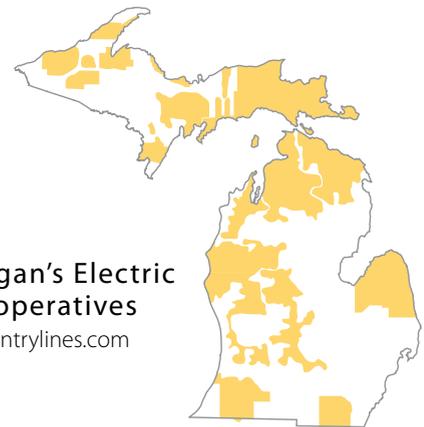
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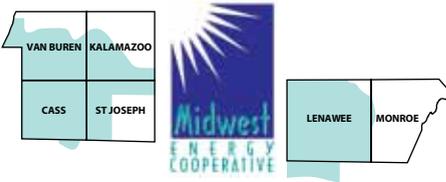
On the Cover

Ice climber Paul Garrison works his way up one of many ice curtains that line Sand Point along the Lake Superior shoreline in Munising.

Photo - © Shawn Malone

Michigan's Electric
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Co-op Connections Card Puts Value in Your Wallet

As your electric utility, it's important for Midwest Energy Cooperative to provide you with safe and reliable power. But our service and commitment go beyond the wires as we strive to offer additional value that can positively impact our members and our communities.



Robert Hance
President/CEO

savings of 10 to 60 percent on prescription drugs. The logo and information on the back of your card is recognized at over 60,000 national, regional and local pharmacies. The pharmacy discount has been used nationwide by Touchstone Energy co-op members, resulting in a combined savings of nearly \$20 million on

prescriptions.

Sometime in March or April, you will receive a mailing from the Co-op Connections program. *Don't throw this away*, as it includes a program introduction and your own Co-op Connections card. That's all

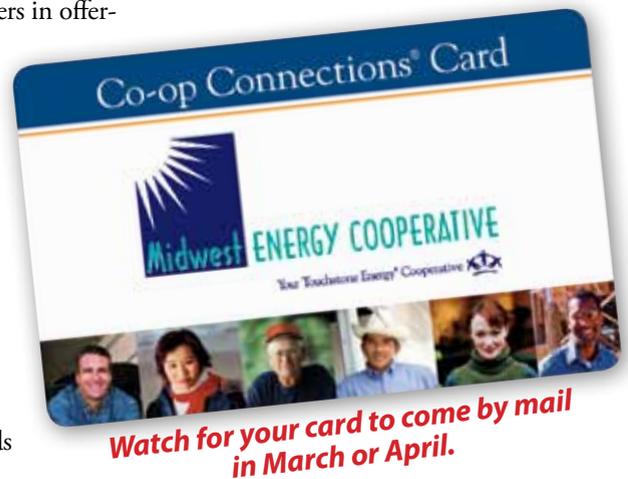
A Money-saving Tool

During these tough economic times, it's helpful to find ways to save money, and Midwest Energy is getting ready to offer you a tool to do just that. We are joining other Touchstone Energy® co-ops serving some 22 million member-owners in offering the Co-op Connections® program. This card-based member benefit program is designed to deliver added value by offering valuable discounts at participating local and national businesses.

The program is *simple* and *free* to use. Using your Co-op Connections card, you will have access to discounts that have been established nationwide by other member-owned electric cooperatives. Thousands of national and local vendors participate, giving you many ways to save money as you buy goods and services. The card also offers online discounts for over 100 national retailers such as Barnes&Noble.com, Hertz rental cars, Best Western hotels, and ProFlowers.com. Log-on to connections.coop to check out the national and online discounts, and use the easy search engine to find discounts near home or anywhere you plan to travel.

Save on Prescriptions, Too

One of the newest and most valuable benefits is the pharmacy discount. While it is not insurance, the discount can mean



you need to start enjoying the savings! And while you start saving, Midwest Energy will work with businesses in and around our service territory to develop offers that you can take advantage of right in your own backyard!

Our chief priority is and always will be keeping the lights on, but your cooperative is also committed to bringing additional value to our members and the communities we serve. The Co-op Connections program is just another way to accomplish that goal. That's the cooperative difference.

Co-op Energy Day

In December, Kathy Sheldon's fifth grade students at Adrian Middle School threw out the books and worksheets and rolled up their sleeves to learn about energy efficiency and conservation. Sheldon implemented the hands-on curriculum after participating in a train-the-trainer program offered by Midwest Energy Cooperative last November.

"I was so eager to bring this back to my students and let them learn these concepts through hands-on experimentation. It becomes so much more real when they can see the information and principles in action versus just hearing about it," Sheldon said.

Sheldon said her students were very excited about using the energy curriculum. At each of the four learning stations, they worked in groups to develop a hypothesis, then test the hypothesis and log the results. "It was exciting to see them connect the dots between what we had studied and what they were seeing in action," Sheldon said. At the end of the unit, each student will be given an energy efficiency and conservation kit to take home and use with their families.

"Kids are sponges at this age, and to teach and equip them skills that they can take back to their homes and families, and ultimately carry with them into adulthood, is invaluable," she added. "I'm so thankful I had the chance to participate with the initial training and bring it back to my school."

One learning station in the energy efficiency curriculum, shown in these two photos, required students to determine how effective insulation is in maintaining water temperature. The students poured hot water into two metal canisters, one of which was wrapped with insulation. Then, they monitored and recorded the water temperature in each can and discovered that the insulated can worked best for maintaining the temperature.



Above: Teacher Kathy Sheldon answers questions from two students as they launch into one of the experiment stations. **Right:** The students learned about energy consumption of everyday household appliances by using a Kill-A-Watt meter to measure energy usage.



See more photos from the energy curriculum day at Adrian Middle School. ↓



Get the free mobile app at <http://gettag.mobi>



Find Us on Facebook!

Midwest Energy Cooperative has gone social, and we encourage you to join us.

In December we launched our Facebook page, adding yet another medium to keep you informed about the goings-on within your cooperative. Facebook is a social website that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family, coworkers and customers. It's a quick and easy way to share information, from the birth of a new grandchild to the launch of a new program.

If you are one of more than 500 million active Facebook users, you already

know the power behind this medium. Social networking sites like Facebook are opening up new, interactive lines of communication, allowing us to engage with people who don't use traditional methods of communication like magazines or newspapers. Some people embrace new communication platforms as they come out of the gate, while others choose to actively ignore them. Regardless of which camp you're in, the reality is that social media platforms are not going away, so our goal is to do what we can to meet you "where you are."

Log-on to our website TeamMidwest.com for a quick link to our Facebook page and



click the "Like" button to start receiving our news feeds. We welcome your comments and feedback and look forward to a great new dialog!

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Efficiency Tax Credits Drop, But Don't Disappear

Benefit reverts to \$500 lifetime cap for upgrades.

Energy efficiency improvements are great for lowering electric bills. But sometimes the up-front cost can be a drawback.

Since 2005, Congress has enacted a series of tax breaks for consumers who take steps to make their homes more energy efficient. In December, the outgoing 111th Congress approved extending some popular efficiency tax credits through Dec. 31, 2011, but at greatly reduced levels.

"While we were hopeful that the tax credits would be higher than what was approved, we are encouraged that this valuable incentive for homeowner investment was retained," says Art Thayer, director of energy efficiency programs, Michigan Electric

Cooperative Association.

The federal "Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010" reduces the total lifetime credit that can be claimed on energy efficiency improvements made between 2006 and 2011 (excluding 2008, when no credit was available) from \$1,500 to \$500. It also lowers the percentage of efficiency upgrade costs consumers can recover, from 30 percent in 2009-2010 to 10 percent in 2011.

"Basically, energy efficiency tax credits revert to levels approved for 2006 and 2007, before the federal stimulus bill pumped up the program," Thayer explains. "There's also a lifetime cap of \$500 for any work that's done. But if you

haven't applied for an energy efficiency tax credit before, this extension gives you a chance to recoup some of the costs needed to make your home more efficient."

There are also maximum allowances for different upgrades. For installing more efficient windows, the credit is limited to \$200, with a \$300 cap for "any item of energy-efficient building property." Other restrictions include:

- ▶ **Furnaces** (\$150): Must have at least 95 percent (up from 90 percent) annual fuel utilization efficiency (AFUE). Oil furnaces and boilers were returned to the single furnace category at 95 percent AFUE.
- ▶ **Advanced main air circulating fan** (\$50): Must utilize less than 2 percent of a furnace's total energy consumption.
- ▶ **Central air conditioner** (\$300): Must have a seasonal energy efficiency ratio (SEER) of at least 16 and an energy efficiency rating (EER) of at least 13.
- ▶ **Air-source heat pump** (\$300): Must have at least a heating seasonal performance factor (HSPF) of 9, SEER of 16, and EER of 13.
- ▶ **Biomass fuel stove** (\$300): Requires a thermal efficiency rating of at least 75 percent.

produced in America during 2008, 2009 and 2010.

"While consumers cannot take these types of credits directly, these units may be promoted by manufacturers, or by state or utility efficiency programs, during the next two years," notes the Tax Incentives Assistance Project. The group tracks efficiency incentives at energytaxincentives.org.

Renewable Tax Credits Remain Active

Renewable energy tax credits created by the federal stimulus bill don't expire until Dec. 31, 2016. These cover 30 percent of materials and installation for residential solar panels, solar water heaters, small wind turbines, and geothermal heat pumps. Details are available at energystar.gov/taxcredits.

Claiming Tax Credits

Tax credits are beneficial because they directly reduce, dollar for dollar, any taxes you owe. Be sure to keep your receipts and your Manufacturer's Certification Statement (a signed statement from the manufacturer certifying that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit) for your records. Claim the credit by using IRS Form 5695.

Looking for Help?

Some electric co-ops and state government offices offer additional subsidies or rebates to consumers who make their homes more energy efficient. You can find this information at michigan-energy.org. For a list of federal, state and local energy efficiency rebates and tax credits, visit the "Database for State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency," a project funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, at dsireusa.org.

Recycled Paper *Michigan Country Lines* is printed on recycled paper from FutureMark Paper, which taps the "urban forest" of waste paper thrown out in Chicago every day. Using recycled paper reduces the carbon emitted in paper production, the paper deposited in landfills, and water and air pollution. The energy to produce recycled paper is about one-half that required to make paper from pulp.

Scholarships Offered

Each year, the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association awards two \$1,000 scholarships to qualifying applicants. Individuals are chosen based on their scholastic achievement and extracurricular involvement during their high school career.

The applicant's parent or guardian must be a member or employee of a Michigan electric co-op, and the applicant must be planning to attend a Michigan college or school full-time.

Selection will be based on grade point average, character, leadership, academic achievement, extracurricular and community activities, and essay response.

Applications are available at countrylines.com; click on "Youth," email wolford@countrylines.com, or call 517-351-6322, ext. 205. Eligible applications must be postmarked by *April 4, 2011*.

Builders, Manufacturers Benefit, Too

The bill reinstates a credit of up to \$2,000 for builders (during 2010 and 2011) of energy-efficient residences that use no more than half the energy of a 2003 national model energy code home (the credit had expired in 2009). In addition, U.S.-based manufacturers of clothes washers, dishwashers and refrigerators will receive credits ranging from \$25-\$200 for efficient appliance models



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Solar, Wind Affordable?

We are not being told what the costs are for solar and wind power run by individuals, companies, government-run facilities, etc. Solar and wind power generating plants are subsidized by municipal, state and federal government up to 80 percent of the capital cost of the plant. Those governments are way over their heads in debt right now and should not burden you and me with more debt.

After the solar and wind plants come on-line, the utility must pay for any excess which the owners cannot use themselves. The amount utilities must pay is at least three or four times what the power cost is from coal and nuclear. A utility must be able to meet peak loads, maintain transmission lines, and pay other fixed and variable overhead costs.

This is a direct subsidy for the owner of solar and wind generating facilities which everyone else pays for in their electric bill. The utility has to raise their rates to make it possible for others to enjoy lower rates, which will add a large amount to your electric bill.

—John Birkle, Stanwood

"The Music in Our Lives"

I am a faithful reader of your "Ramblings" column in *Michigan Country Lines*. This past one ("The Music In Our Lives," Nov/Dec 2010) really stirred up something in my memory

and thanks to the internet, I have had some help!

You see, in early October I had the great fortune to tour 7 European countries, plus London. After crossing the English Channel, I saw the White Cliffs of Dover. This prompted something in my brain about that song, but could not recall the words. Since there were 50+1 on that tour (I am the #1 and say that because I was truly the Senior Citizen there), most of them were in their 60s or 70s and were no help to me. I got a blank look when I asked about the song, but it floated around in my head for several days and the words did not come. Thankfully, I have searched the internet and found the words, popular at WWII. That dates me, but there were some great songs...

And, as they say, "this is the rest of the story." And yes, I also love Tony Bennett.

A devoted reader,

—Doris Dale

Thanks for sharing, Doris. That is a terrific song: "There'll be Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover."

—Mike Buda
mbuda@countrylines.com

I am an old guy (89 in March) who grew up in the Depression and pre-World War Two years, the 1930s, so I like that old music. I lived most of my life in Hazel Park, a suburb of Detroit, although I was born on a Montana homestead,

moving to Michigan when I was about four. The house I grew up in was built on cedar posts, no foundation, no bathroom...an outside toilet, to take a bath was in a wash tub in the kitchen, heating water on a stove.



Country Lines reader and music lover, Bob English

Throughout my life I had lots of hobbies and was not very good at any of them, but enjoyed them. As a boy, I built crystal sets and one-tube radios which I would listen to radio programs with earphones in bed, and I built model airplanes (rubber band motors, couldn't afford small gas engines) and did photography...

Now, about music, I can't carry a tune, never learned to dance (can't keep time with the music) but I enjoy listening. While in high school (Big Band Era), my friend had a portable radio with a record player on top, played one 78 record at a time (33s or 45s were not yet out); he had a collection of about 20 or 30 records. You couldn't listen to too many records as the phonograph motor would drain the batteries and then batteries were not rechargeable.

In 1973, I bought a cottage on the Black River, near Alverno, to stay in when we visited my daughter who lived in Cheboygan. Still own the cottage, that's how I still get *Michigan Country Lines*. My

wife passed away in 2002, and I moved to Cheboygan to be near my daughter, a couple years later my son moved to Cheboygan.

My current hobbies are going to yard sales and auctions and buying phonograph records. I must have about 4,000 or 5,000, nothing valuable, but a lot of good tunes.

Of these, I have copied about 1,000 or more into my computer, which I listen to while playing solitary on my computer.

I enjoyed your article "The Music in Our Lives" very much, thank you for writing it.

—Bob English, Cheboygan
P.S. I did work...retired in 1972 after 30 years at Ford Motor.

Hats & Energy

I would like to respond to Carolyn Laarman's "Idea for Keeping Warm & Saving Energy."

While I think wearing a hat inside is an awesome idea to help stay warmer, this is not possible at my children's school. They have a strict "no hat/hoodie" policy in force at North Ohio Elementary in Gaylord. The only exception to this rule is at lunchtime. The kids dress for recess BEFORE they go to lunch. They sit in a crowded cafeteria for 20 minutes, fully dressed, while trying to eat and then go out in the cold for recess. I asked about it last year when my kids were in kindergarten. I was told it is easier for teachers to assist kids in dressing in the classroom before lunch and then the teachers can take their lunches while the kids eat and their prep hour while the kids are on recess, and that there are not enough aides to help after the kids are done eating.

—Billie Zinke

Tell us about your favorite Michigan-made products!

Share a few paragraphs with us about your favorite Michigan-made product and we may write about it. Be sure to share why you like it and if you have a unique story to go with it, please send that, too. Email by March 10 to czuker@countrylines.com or send to: Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, MI 48864.

Offering Stability in Unstable Times

From groceries to gas, managing a budget continues to be a huge challenge for families across our service territory. A dozen eggs is running about \$1.49 while prices at the gas pump shot up over \$3 a gallon in December, with some analysts predicting \$4 by early spring. Family budgets are feeling the pinch now more than ever!

In the propane world we are seeing a similar story, and it's the same story we see every year. Prices are low over the summer months, when propane use is at its lowest, and many providers offer great "first fill" and other deals to build their business. But as the heating season hits and temperatures plummet, prices escalate upward. Last year, one Midwest Energy Cooperative electric member, now also a happy Midwest Propane customer, told us they were charged more than \$7 per gallon for a tank fill by their previous propane provider. This week, we heard from a few prospective propane customers that they paid more than \$4 per gallon.

Sadly, these stories are not uncommon, particularly during the volatile heating season.

Unlike electricity, propane is not a regulated industry, so providers can essentially charge whatever they want and have in place any type of policy or rule that they choose.

Midwest Propane has been in business for over a decade now, and has never changed its approach to doing business. We buy our gas throughout the year and establish a fair and competitive price that we lock in, at no extra charge, for the entire heating season. It certainly doesn't mean we are always the lowest-cost provider, but it does mean that we are always fair and offer stability during the time that volatility rules. We watch out for our existing family of customers with a commitment to providing outstanding service at fair prices.

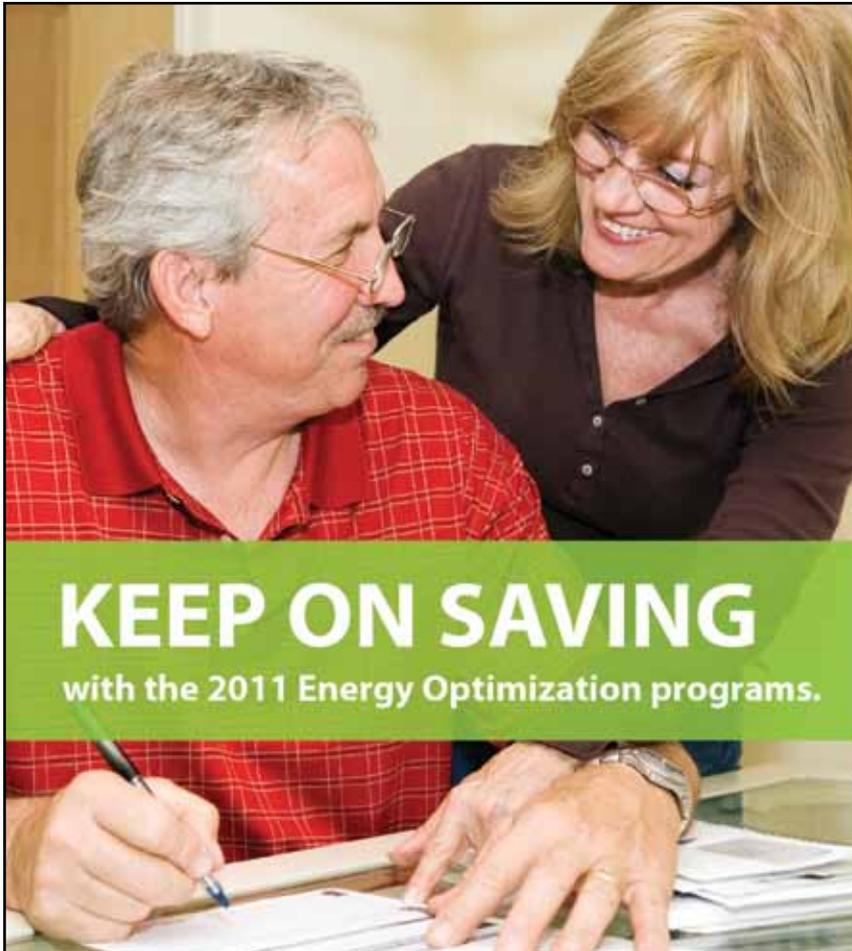
During the last week of January, the state-wide average price of propane was \$2.28 per gallon. The Midwest Propane capped rate is \$1.999, locked in through the end of May. For one delivery of 300 gallons, that equates to nearly \$90. Stability certainly has some appeal during these unstable times.

What did you pay for your last gas delivery?



Carl Brewster delivers gas on a recent winter day. Carl is one of the team of committed Midwest Propane servicemen who helps keep our customers comfortable and warm through the cold winter months.

What did you pay over the summer? Are you happy with the price and service? If you're not satisfied with the answers to those questions, please contact us at 800-492-5989 to learn more about the Midwest Propane difference.



Last year our Energy Optimization programs helped participating members save over 30 million kilowatt hours of electricity across the state of Michigan. That adds up to big energy bill savings—with even more chances for you to save this year! Watch for information about the 2011 Energy Optimization programs at michigan-energy.org or by calling 877-296-4319.



New Regulations on Horizon

The EPA is moving beyond Congressional intent on greenhouse gas emissions.

Efforts by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate emissions of greenhouse gases from stationary sources, like power plants, as pollutants under the federal Clean Air Act have drawn objections from Congressional and state leaders and others who say the law—last revised in 1990—was never intended for such purposes.

“EPA is not equipped to consider the very real potential for economic harm when regulating [greenhouse gas] emissions,” stated governors of 20 states in a March 2010 letter to congressional Democratic and Republican leaders. “Without that consideration, regulation will place heavy administrative burdens on state environmental quality agencies, will be costly to consumers, and could be devastating to the economy and jobs.”

Created in 1970, EPA fashions regulations to protect the environment and safeguard public health as authorized in bills passed by Congress. Over time, its jurisdiction has grown to cover numerous items that impact electric bills, including power plant emissions, coal combustion byproducts, and water.

While EPA has begun promulgating a series of climate change-themed rules that will boost the cost of electricity and other energy prices—resulting in higher prices for consumers and businesses—few actions have been as controversial as its move to curb greenhouse gas emissions, notably carbon dioxide, from stationary sources. A 2007 U.S.

Supreme Court ruling determined that EPA can regulate greenhouse gas emissions from new motor vehicles under the Clean Air Act if the agency determines they threaten public health and welfare. In April 2009, EPA took the formal step of issuing an endangerment finding on the emissions and soon began developing greenhouse gas regulations that have since expanded to include power plants (as of January 2011).

Electric cooperatives are urging Congress to delay EPA regulation of greenhouse gas emissions from power plants until there is sufficient time to consider a legislative solution.

“It is the responsibility of Congress to decide this issue, not EPA,” declares National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) CEO Glenn English. “The Clean Air Act remains the wrong tool to handle greenhouse gas emissions from stationary sources—it was designed to reduce specific pollutants on a local or regional level where proven technology existed. When it comes to controlling carbon dioxide emissions from coal- and natural gas-fired power plants, tested, commercially viable solutions are not available.”

He concludes: “In many ways, regulating carbon dioxide emissions under the law is akin to using a hammer to tighten a screw. You may eventually get the screw hammered in, but better tools are needed—ones that don’t put your electric bills at risk during these tough economic times.”

“In many ways, regulating carbon dioxide emissions under the law is akin to using a hammer to tighten a screw.”



Our Energy, Our Future
A Dialogue With America
OurEnergy.coop

COOL AS ICE

Never heard of ice climbing? Climbing bloggers and others call it “one of Michigan’s greatest wonders.” Here, Linda Wappner climbs in “the Amphitheater”—one of the many ice curtains that line Sand Point Road, near Munising.



Michiganders fish, snowmobile, ski, skate and slide their way through winter, but ice climbing may be a sport you haven't heard of for battling Cabin Fever. Surprisingly, ice climbing has been here for over 30 years, and our state has the third largest ice climbing festival in the U.S., just behind New Hampshire, with Colorado ranking first.

The Michigan Ice Fest (Feb. 4-6; 906-226-7112 or michiganicefest.com), near Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Munising, is a chance to see if this sport is your cup of hot chocolate.

The nonprofit event is bringing in five of the best professional climbers in the U.S. and the world to teach how-to and safety, says Fest organizer Bill Thompson, a seasoned climber and co-owner of Down Wind Sports in Marquette, which provides rental gear and equipment demos at reasonable rates for the three-day weekend; lessons are additional.

The pros are 30-year climbing veteran (including Himalayan expeditions) Mark Wilford; Michigan native Sam Elias, who specializes in solo climbing (the most free and dangerous type); Roger Strong, a leading mixed-terrain climber, best known as the captain on the first two seasons of "The Deadliest Catch" on the Discovery™ Channel; worldwide climbing guide Majka Burhardt; and Steve House, the best all-around climber in the U.S. and best high-altitude climber in the world.

"Having these guys come [to teach ice climbing] is kind of like having Larry Byrd, Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson come in to do a basketball clinic," Thompson says.

Last year's event drew over 400 men, women and kids, from first-time climbers to guys who get paid to climb. "In the evenings," Thompson says, "we pack everyone together in a room above Sydney's Restaurant and make some of the professionals get up and tell us stories. It's a

great time to meet new people or catch up with old friends."

While some enthusiasts even night-climb with a head lamp, Thompson believes the sport is actually safer than others. "It's probably safer than snowmobiling," he says. "No one in Michigan... or the world...has died while ice climbing, and about 30 people die every year just in the U.P. from snowmobiling." The Ice Fest is about teaching people proper technique and safety to lessen those risks, and to shorten the learning curve.

Megan Ostrowski, 22, a local ice and rock climber, agrees. "It's safe if you do it right...I'm accident prone but have never gotten hurt," she laughs, and believes it's something most anyone can do because you don't need previous climbing skills to try it. Climbers wear safety gear, but the biggest danger, she says, is ice breaking off. However, she hasn't seen anyone with injuries other than a few lip or face cuts.

Lake Superior's shore, mostly near Munising, Grand Island and Big Bay, is about the only Michigan area where you can do natural ice climbing, Thompson says, but if going north isn't an option, you can still try this sport. Artificial ice climbing is offered at Peabody Ice Climbing (peabodyiceclimbing@gmail.com or 810-908-1735), with two towers, 45 and 75 feet tall, located on an old farm in Fenton. It's a good place for seasoned climbers to train and beginners to learn. Indoor rock climbing walls and climbing gyms are also good training, Thompson says, and have helped ice climbing gain popularity in the last six years.

People are drawn to rock climbing, he explains, partly because it's something you can't just go and buy gear for and do on your own, and it takes place in spectacular, beautiful areas. "There's something romantic about climbing in general—it's very unique."

Winter Camping?

If ice climbing isn't your idea of celebrating winter, how about winter camping? At least 10 Michigan state parks offer this unique experience, including Algonac, Bay City, Fort Custer, Ludington, North Higgins Lake, Tahquamenon Falls and the Waterloo Recreation Area-Portage Campground. Mitchell, Traverse City and Rifle River parks offer heated restrooms and many offer mini cabins with varying amenities. You can even rent round, pointy-top yurts at Pinckney and Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park.

Most parks plan plenty of winter activities, including a free fishing weekend in February, snowshoe-making classes, cross-country skiing by lantern, and snowmobile trails. Or, stop at Muskegon State Park Winter Sports Center to enjoy the new quarter-mile skating trail in the woods, as well as skating rinks and a luge run.

Visit michigan.gov/dnre or contact Maia Stephens (stephensm3@michigan.gov or 517-373-8378) for camping plans, and michigan.org or the "GO-Get Outdoors" website for activities at state parks, recreation areas and harbors.



Photos = © Shawn Malone

Above: A helmet, ice tools and boot crampons are some of the gear needed for ice climbing, as shown by Aaron Wener, making his way down after a climb. **Left:** At 6 feet 2 inches tall, Brian Malone stands dwarfed by magnificent ice curtains, formed as water seeps along the Grand Island cliffs in Lake Superior, across from Munising. For the **cover** shot, photographer Shawn Malone, an Alger Delta Co-op member, dangled 80 feet in the air from a harness to get the angle.



RED TAPE OVERLOAD

A flurry of government regulations are set to hit your electric bill.

The cost of electricity hinges on several things—availability, prices for power plant fuels and materials, and the amount of power consumers demand. Now a slew of volatile federal rulemaking has hit power producers.

Perhaps the most pressing challenge facing electric utilities involves U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases as pollutants under the federal “Clean Air Act.” On Jan. 2, EPA began restricting the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by fossil fuel-burning power plants and other stationary industrial sources.

This action will significantly impact electricity production. Fossil fuels like coal and natural gas fuel 70 percent of America’s electricity generation. Since electric co-ops are more dependent on coal than investor-owned utilities and municipal electric systems, the end result will be higher electric bills.

“Clearly, EPA is wielding the Clean Air Act as a bludgeon, pressing it into service because the outgoing Congress was unable to agree on how to curb greenhouse gas emissions blamed for contributing to climate change,” notes Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Association (NRECA) based

in Arlington, VA. By failing to pass legislation addressing carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases, Congress essentially left the decision-making up to the EPA. But the Clean Air Act was never intended to regulate carbon dioxide—it was enacted to fight smog and acid rain with proven technologies. No viable, commercially tested solution exists to remove carbon dioxide emissions from power plants.

“Co-ops expect EPA’s rulemaking will eventually have the practical effect—absent breakthrough technology—of eliminating coal as a power plant option,” remarks English. “On top of this, the cost of switching from coal, which has traditionally been plentiful and affordable, to other fuels will be high.”

Only two alternate baseload generation sources can meet America’s demand for safe, reliable and affordable electricity—natural gas, which is priced on a volatile commodities market (and has carbon dioxide emissions to contend with), and nuclear power, requiring a long lead time for construction.

“Electric co-ops are urging Congress and the White House to approve a two-year moratorium on EPA regulation of carbon dioxide greenhouse gases—a delay giving lawmakers

Even if Congress grants a reprieve on greenhouse gas regulations, **RED TAPE** from other EPA rulemaking efforts will trigger higher electric bills.

the opportunity to fashion climate change legislation that protects consumers and keeps electric bills affordable,” English stresses.

Even if Congress grants a reprieve on greenhouse gas regulations, red tape from other EPA and various government rulemaking efforts—the “Clean Air Transport Rule,” cooling water intake requirements, and a decision on treating coal ash as hazardous waste, for starters—will trigger higher electric bills.

Clean Air Transport Rule

Released in 2010, EPA’s Clean Air Transport Rule aims to cap emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from power plants across 31 eastern states and the District of Columbia. The regulation enables “downwind” areas whose air quality is compromised by power plants to their west to meet federal standards. By 2014, EPA claims the Transport Rule, when combined with other state and federal measures, will reduce power plant sulfur dioxide emissions by 71 percent and nitrogen oxides emissions by 52 percent from 2005 levels—at a cost to utilities of \$2.8 billion per year.

The Transport Rule requires 180 coal-fired power plants to install new pollution-control technology, activate existing pollution controls, or shut down. A second-round version under consideration could impose even tighter standards.

“We’re expecting a number of existing power plants to simply be retired,” notes Kirk Johnson, NRECA vice president of energy & environmental policy. “The cost to comply with the regulation will simply be too much.”

Cooling Water Intake Requirements

Power plants use water from lakes or rivers to cool generating equipment. The federal “Clean Water Act Section 316(b)” sets standards for cooling water intake structures, requiring plant operators to use “best available technology” to protect the environment.

The EPA began reviewing the standards in 2010, launching a cost-benefit analysis of imposing stricter regulations. The rule is expected to be unveiled this month.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the nation’s bulk

power grid watchdog, estimates this EPA rule will have the greatest potential impact on American energy reserves. If strictly enforced, NERC contends one-third of U.S. electricity capacity may need to be retired.

Coal Ash Debate

To ensure the safe disposal of fly ash and other residues produced by coal-fired power plants, EPA is considering designating the materials—for the first time—as hazardous waste.

Classifying these “coal combustion byproducts” (CCBs) as hazardous could cost billions and force increases in electricity rates. Each year, the U.S. electric utility industry produces about 130 million tons of CCBs (roughly 8 percent from power supply cooperatives).

“In previous analyses, EPA determined CCBs do not warrant regulation as hazardous waste under the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act; oversight was generally in place at the state level to ensure adequate management,” points out Johnson. “Nothing about CCBs has changed since then. Electric co-ops contend coal ash is appropriately regulated and oppose efforts to have it branded as hazardous waste.”

Carrying the hazardous label in any form (EPA could classify CCBs as “special wastes,” making them subject to all permitting, handling and disposal requirements that apply to toxic items) will severely hamper beneficial uses of CCBs, Johnson warns. “No matter how you slice it, CCBs will be considered unsafe.”

Currently, one-third of fly ash (used as a cement replacement) and more than one-fourth of scrubber sludge (converted into synthetic gypsum for wallboard manufacturing) are recycled. For every ton of cement replaced by fly ash, a ton of greenhouse gas emissions is avoided.

More than 10,000 co-op consumers sent letters to the EPA in 2010 voicing their concern and asking EPA not to brand coal ash as hazardous. EPA had not reached a final decision as of press time.

Perry Stambaugh writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for NRECA. Megan McKoy-Noe, CCC, contributed to this article.

We’re expecting a number of power plants to simply be retired. The **COST TO COMPLY** with the regulation will simply be too much.

—Kirk Johnson, NRECA

Beware of Dramatic Heating, Cooling Claims

Get the facts before buying into a “miracle” electric heater or evaporative cooler.

If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” That saying rings especially true when it comes to claims about energy-saving devices, particularly those that indicate they can dramatically cut your heating and cooling costs.

Electric Heaters

Ads made to look like news stories abound for “Amish style” fireplaces, a “miracle device” that supposedly can slash your heating bills. In actuality, the appliance is simply a space heater hidden inside a false fireplace with a wooden mantle.

If you were to use a space heater eight hours a day, five days a week for a month, it would cost about \$15. But whether it can cut your heating bill depends on several factors.

Space heaters only warm a small area. You may save some money if you turn down

the thermostat (sometimes to as low as 50 degrees), site the space heater in a room with people in it, and then close off that room from the rest of the house. But space heaters cannot come close to replacing energy-efficient central heating or weatherization improvements. So, while it’s technically possible to cut your heating bill by 50 percent using space heaters, for most people, it’s impractical.

Evaporative Coolers

On the flip side are evaporative coolers that say they will inexpensively cool a room in your home. The inside of the unit consists of cold water and frozen ice packs, like you would use in a lunch box. The water wets a curtain; a fan blows air through the curtain and over the ice packs, theoretically providing a cool breeze. Evaporative coolers operate best in low-humidity regions.

But do they actually work? A *Consumer Reports* experiment found that even in desert-like conditions, one device cooled a test room only 2 degrees over four hours.

“When it comes to saving energy, there are no magic solutions,” asserts Brian Sloboda, senior program manager for energy efficiency at the Cooperative Research Network, the research arm of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. “Anyone promising to slash your utility bill by double digits is stretching the truth to the breaking point.”

The bottom line: there’s no substitute for good old-fashioned energy efficiency measures like weatherstripping around doors, caulking around windows, adding insulation to your attic, plugging leaks in ductwork, and regularly cleaning or replacing furnace filters. Visit ConsumerAffairs.com for more information.



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Garages | Machine Storage | Equestrian | Hobby Shop | Farm Shop | Homes

A “Two Pronged” Approach to Home Electrical Safety

Consumers can depend on a pair of important safety devices to protect them from electrical hazards in the home: ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) and arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs). Each device protects against different dangers: GFCIs address shock hazards while AFCIs fight fire hazards.

Get Grounded!

According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, GFCIs have cut the number of home electrocutions by one-half. By detecting ground faults—an unintentional electric path between a source of current and a grounded surface; essentially, current leaking to the ground—a GFCI protects you from severe or fatal electric shocks. It can also prevent some electrical fires.

If you have ever experienced an electric shock, it probably happened because part of your body contacted an electrical current and provided a path for the current to go to ground. If your body provides the path, you can be seriously injured.

The GFCIs constantly monitor electricity moving through a circuit. If the current flow differs from that returning, the device quickly switches off power.

Fighting Fire

The AFCIs, a relatively recent technology, help prevent home fires caused by arcing faults in damaged or deteriorated wires and cords. Home wiring problems, such as sparking, are associated with more than 40,000 home fires each year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. These

fires kill more than 350 and injure 1,400 victims annually.

Nominal arcs may happen in the brushes of a vacuum sweeper or light switch; dangerous arcs can occur in frayed cords. When unwanted arcing occurs, it generates high temperatures that can ignite nearby combustibles such as wood, paper and carpets.

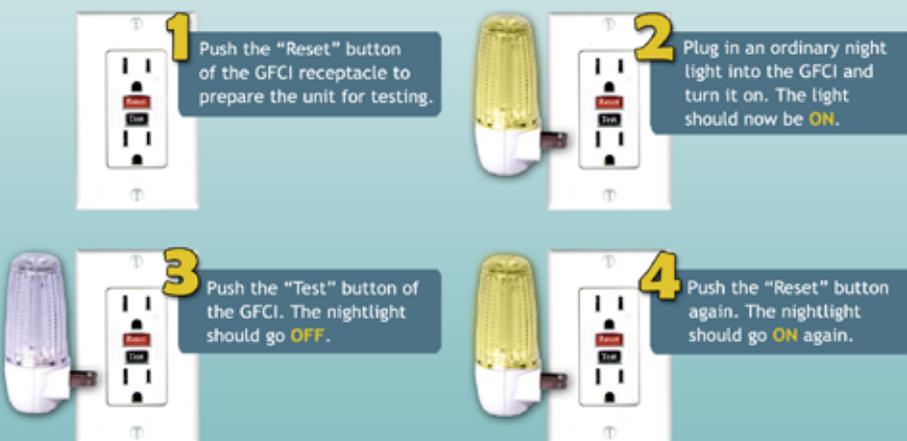
Conventional circuit breakers only respond to overloads and short circuits. By the time a fuse or circuit cuts power to defuse these conditions, a fire may have already started. The AFCIs use unique current-sensing circuitry to discriminate between normal and unwanted arcing conditions. In the event of an arcing fault, the AFCI shuts off electricity flowing through a circuit.

For more information on where to install GFCIs and AFCIs, visit cpsc.gov.

How to test electrical outlets

Since the 1970s ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) have saved thousands of lives, helping cut the number of home electrocutions in half. The safety devices prevent deadly shock by quickly shutting off power to the circuit if the electricity flowing into the circuit differs from the amount returning. The safety devices should be used in any indoor or outdoor area where water may come into contact with electrical products.

GFCIs should be tested once a month to make sure they're working properly. To test a device, follow these four steps:



Source: Electrical Safety Foundation International



Stay Clear, Stay Safe!

A downed power line could cause serious injury or death. Follow these simple tips to stay safe:

- Assume all power lines are energized and dangerous. Even lines that are de-energized could become energized at any time.
- NEVER touch a downed power line! Immediately call 9-1-1 or your electric co-op to report it.
- If someone is injured as a result of contact with electric current, call 9-1-1 immediately. DO NOT try to assist them—you could be injured or killed.
- If a power line falls across your vehicle while you are in it, stay inside until help arrives.

Raising Ethical Kids

Nellie is crazy about stories. And not just any stories. At three-and-a-half, she favors stories about familiar characters facing fanciful dilemmas.

Nellie: Grandma, tell me a story about Nellie and Annie and their cousins who fall into a Strawberry Shortcake story and they meet a polar bear at the North Pole and he gets lost and turns into a dolphin.

Me: Rrrrrriiiiiight.

Like storytellers of old, adults try to spin a moral into each story. Fictional Nellie and Annie walk away learning about honesty, perseverance and (this is a biggie) obedience. Why miss an opportunity to impart good values through the vehicle of imagination?

If ever there was a time to find engaging ways to influence our kids' beliefs and behaviors, it's now. Parents compete for the attention and interest of today's plugged-in, media immersed children. Stories can be a powerful tool in helping children "see" ethical behavior in action.

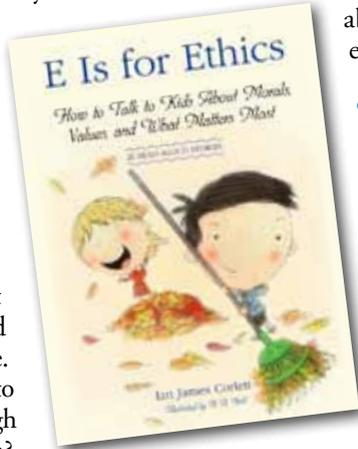
Fortunately, anthologies of "character stories" are available to help imagination-challenged adults. A new book called "E is for Ethics: How to Talk to Kids About Morals, Values, and What Matters Most," goes one step further. Author Ian James Corlett adds thought-provoking questions after each simple story—geared towards kids three to 10 years old—to foster family discussion about specific ethics.

"This book was not meant to be an authority on all things ethical, says Corlett, an award-winning animated film maker and veteran in children's television programming. "It is meant to help parents who may not be able to whip up a batch of 'teaching' stories at the drop of a hat and to spark discussions with their kids."

As it turns out, discussion is good, because ethics training takes more than just listening to good stories. It's a way of life that begins when your little one is born and takes place every single day.

"When we had our own kids I became very meditative about how to best build strong

character," explains Corlett, a father of two. "My background in writing and creating children's programming gave me a unique perspective on how to reach kids. We started our weekly 'family fun time' discussions as soon as our kids could sit up and listen. Even very young kids have an amazing ability to grasp these topics, especially if they are presented



“Modeling ethical behavior starts by showing a child respect, no matter how little he is.”

in a 'story time' setting.”

Corlett chose topics for the book that would appeal to a broad range of families, no matter what their background or faith. Each of his 26 stories demonstrates a different human ethic such as forgiveness, courage, loyalty, gratitude, and acceptance.

"I strongly believe that every family wants to build kids who have strong character," Corlett says.

Ready to start? Researchers point to some winning strategies—including storytelling—that will help you give your child a strong ethical foundation that will last a lifetime.

Raise sensitivity

Morals and ethics are really all about having empathy and making choices that are good for others. Expand children's emotional vocabulary by describing the emotions you see them expressing. When discussing moral transgressions, use the same words: "Tim feels sad when you don't share your toys."

Talk with older children about scandals in the news. Ask: "What do you think that person really did wrong?" If your child believes that getting caught was the only downside of unethical behavior, then point to the damage done to others as a result.

Talk about and model ethical decision making

Modeling ethical behavior starts by showing a child respect, no matter how little he is. Then, watch for teachable moments as daily dilemmas emerge.

"When you see someone pop change into a charity jar, take that opportunity to talk about what just happened," Corliss suggests. "Or when someone is polite and holds a door open, talk to your kids about ethics, values and kindness."

Talk about the ethical dilemmas you've faced or that your children might face with friends or at school. What choices could they

make? What might result from each choice? (Using questions rather than preaching generally works better.)

Motivate and reward

Help children see why behaving ethically matters. Acknowledge ethical choices when you see your children making them. Help them feel proud of their own good deeds, which becomes motivation for ethical behavior.

Build character

Teach children to put others' needs first, even when it's hard to do. Reward perseverance, teach them to wait for what they want, cultivate courage, and support their leadership in situations that call for it.

Be patient—and have fun!

These lessons take time, and very young children especially will not absorb them easily. But over time they can learn to become ethical citizens in a modern world.

"Spend time with your kids. That is the single most important thing you can do as a parent," Corlett advises. "When a solid dose of fun is added, I think that kids really do grasp ethics, even if it involves deep or abstract concepts."

Linda Wacyk is a regular Country Lines freelance writer, educator, grandmother and content empty-nester.



Building Pickford Library

Grassroots efforts build better communities, especially in hard times.

It's reminiscent of the grassroots efforts that brought electric power to the Eastern Upper Peninsula in the 1930's to form what is now Cloverland Electric Cooperative. The residents in and around Pickford (population 1,584), have pulled together the resources to open a public library in an abandoned shoe store in a mostly deserted section of Main Street. What's more, they did it during an economic downturn.

The library, which opened its doors in October 2010, is more than just a collection of books. It's a meeting and learning place for residents in this rural area and, surprisingly, a potential driver of economic growth.

"Studies have shown when people come to libraries they do more downtown," explains librarian Kenneth Miller, director of the Bayliss Library in nearby Sault Ste. Marie. He also said more people use libraries during a sour economy.

The new library, which is a branch of Bayliss, has just about everything you find in a larger library: internet access, a statewide lending library, and an invaluable research tool commonly referred to as MeLCat (Michigan eLibrary Catalog and Resource Sharing System).

Pickford library, however, has maintained a decidedly country charm with the old store front, tall ceiling and hardwood floors. The building, which is over 75 years old, was chosen by architects for its solid construction and by organizers for its spaciousness and potential for expansion.

Getting the branch library opened in this small community was no walk in the park. Miller, a 35-year library veteran, had his doubts when the idea was first proposed in 2008, mostly because of the cost associated with starting and maintaining a library. But then he didn't know Pickford resident Melanie Greenfield. A tireless volunteer and former business owner, Greenfield got the idea for opening a library after attending a community foundation meeting where the idea was casually tossed around. The rest, as they say, is history.

With the wheels now in motion, Greenfield gathered as many people as she could to start the fundraising efforts. What followed were

some of the usual fundraisers: bake sales, a used book sale, proceeds from restaurant dinners, including the "Flying Pancake Breakfast," and a portion of the proceeds from a Farmer's Market and Fall Fest. Even 4th grader Cassie Beemish got into the act, selling cookies she baked from her grandmother's recipes.

"We needed to prove ourselves," Greenfield recalls of those early days of fundraising. "If we wanted it, we needed to make it happen." At the time, the group was looking to raise \$117,000—enough to open the doors and run the place for three years.

And make it happen they did. Soon, larger donations were coming in from outside the area, including \$5,000 dollars from an anonymous donor in Traverse City, and most recently over \$34,000 from the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Besides cash donations, local businesses donated their time, talent and materials. Marble Construction worked on the most pressing concerns with building improvements; Josh and Jared Dyer did the plumbing; Savoie Electric wired the building; and Ledy Cabinetry donated the materials for and built a beautiful marble circulation desk. Lighthouse.net, a subsidiary of Cloverland Electric Cooperative, supplied and installed the equipment needed for internet service.

"Every time we turned around somebody was giving us something," says Miller, who is astonished to this day at how the community pulled together to bring a library to this mostly farming community. So is Bob Hunter, a library board member who was impressed by how much support came from outside of Pickford.

Bayliss library donated expensive shelving units, but something even more valuable: their expertise. Miller and his experienced staff made the 20-minute drive out to Pickford to help volunteers and new librarian Michelle Satchell arrange the furniture and other items so that patrons can read, study,



Micki Schmitigal and her daughter Jill enjoy some story time together at the Pickford Library.

play with puppets, and simply relax.

The fundraising efforts aren't over nor are plans to expand on the services currently offered. Satchell hopes that the spacious room in the back of the library can be used for various classes, especially in the midst of cuts made to school programs, such as art, in the Pickford area schools.

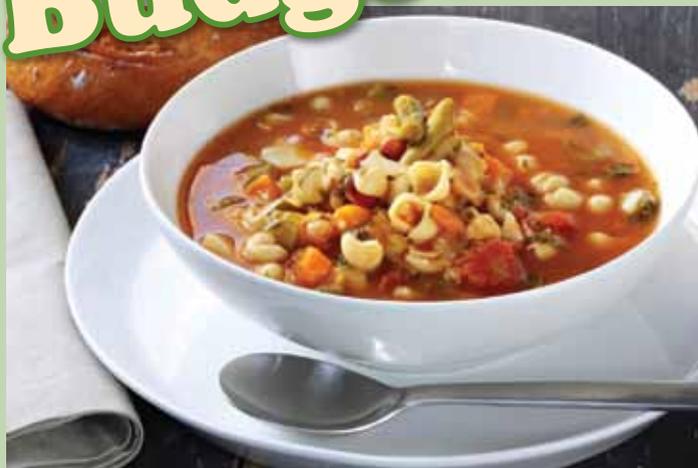
The real challenge may be in keeping the doors open, which will depend largely on a successful millage and additional fundraising efforts.

"I didn't think at first (it would be sustainable), but I think there is a group of people out there that will make it happen," Miller adds.

For information on making a donation to the library or hours of operation, call 906-647-1288.

What's building in your community? Email a few short paragraphs describing it to knudtson@countrylines.com or send to G. Knudtson, *Michigan Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864.

Budget Friendly



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You won't skimp on delicious or nutritious with these recipes sent in by readers. Find hundreds more at countrylines.com.

Mexican Wedding Cake

- 2 c. flour
- 2 c. sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 t. baking soda
- 1 20-oz. can crushed pineapple, with juice
- 1/2-1 c. chopped walnuts, reserve 1/4 cup

Frosting:

- 1 stick butter or margarine
- 1 t. vanilla
- 8 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 2 c. powdered sugar

Mix all cake ingredients together and pour into an ungreased 9x13-inch cake pan. Bake at 350° for 35-40 minutes until a toothpick inserted near the middle comes out clean; cool. For frosting, beat butter, vanilla, cream cheese and powdered sugar with an electric mixer until smooth. Spread on cooled cake. Sprinkle with remaining nuts.

Dee Cook, Fenwick

Steak and Vegetable Braciole

- 1/2 c. shredded carrot
- 1/3 c. chopped zucchini
- 1/3 c. chopped red pepper
- 1/4 c. sliced green onions
- 2 T. grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 T. snipped fresh parsley
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 t. ground black pepper
- 2 lbs. boneless round steak
- 2 c. marinara sauce
- hot cooked pasta of choice

Cut meat into six serving-size pieces. Place each piece of steak between two pieces of plastic wrap. Using a meat mallet,

pound steak pieces to 1/4-1/2-inch thick. For filling, in a small bowl, combine carrot, zucchini, sweet pepper, green onions, cheese, parsley, garlic and black pepper. Spoon 1/4 cup of filling onto each piece of meat. Roll up meat around filling; secure with clean kitchen string or wooden toothpicks. Place meat rolls in a 3 1/2 or 4-quart slow cooker. Pour marinara sauce over meat rolls. Cover and cook on low setting for 8-10 hours or on high setting for 4-5 hours. Remove string or toothpicks; discard. Serve over hot cooked pasta.

Jenn Rekus, Detroit

Taco Pie

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 15 oz. tomato sauce
- 1 tube Pillsbury® Pizza Crust
- 8 oz. shredded Mexican blend cheese

Brown ground beef with onion; drain. Add taco seasoning, tomato sauce and amount of water specified on taco seasoning packet; simmer 10 minutes. Spray a 9x13-inch baking dish. Press pizza crust over bottom of pan. Top with meat mixture and cheese. Bake at 400° for 20-25 minutes.

Marge Bagnell, Mancelona

Zesty Minestrone Soup

- 1 med. onion, chopped
- 2 c. diced zucchini
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 T. vegetable oil
- 1 t. oregano
- 2 T. chopped parsley, fresh or dry
- 1 10-oz. pkg. frozen corn, in butter sauce
- 3 14.5-oz. cans diced tomatoes, with green chilies
- 1 can black beans, rinsed and drained

- 4 c. water
- 1/2 c. dry pasta, elbows or small seashells

Microwave corn according to directions on package; set aside. In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Sauté zucchini, onion and garlic until tender. Stir in corn, tomatoes, beans, water, oregano and parsley. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes. Add pasta and cook until tender, 8-10 minutes.

Carlyn Page, Traverse City

Soupa

- 1-1 1/2 lbs. hamburger
- 1 onion, minced
- 1 24-26 oz. can tomatoes, diced or crushed
- 1 49.5 oz. can chicken broth
- 12 oz. tomato paste
- 1 lg. head cabbage, coarsely shredded and chopped
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 loaf white bread, sliced

Brown hamburger, drain and add onion, tomatoes, salt and pepper. Simmer 15 minutes. In

a large bowl, dissolve tomato paste with chicken broth. Butter a large covered roaster pan. Spread half of the cabbage on the bottom; salt and pepper to taste. Layer half of the bread over the cabbage. Spread hamburger mixture over bread and top with remaining cabbage. Salt and pepper to taste. Layer remaining bread over cabbage. Pour broth mixture over all. Bake, covered, at 325° for 2 1/2 hours. Do not uncover during cooking.

Marilyn Eaton, Lake

Chicken Noodle Soup

1 roasting chicken or 4 boneless chicken breasts
5 carrots, sliced 1/4-inch thick
4 stalks celery, sliced
3/4-1 c. diced onion
1/2 t. salt
Noodles:
2 eggs, beaten
4 T. milk
1 t. salt
2c. flour

Clean and cut-up a whole chicken; place pieces into an 8-quart stockpot and cover with 2 quarts water. Add salt and bring to a boil. Cook until chicken is tender; remove

from pot, reserving broth. Remove skin and bones from chicken pieces; tear meat into small pieces. Return chicken pieces to broth and add carrots, celery, and onion; cook for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, combine eggs and milk; add salt and flour, mixing to a soft dough. On a floured surface, form dough into a ball. Roll dough out very thin. Cut dough into 1/2-inch by 1 1/2-inch strips. Drop noodles into boiling soup and cook about one hour, until noodles are tender and cooked through. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Pat Essner, Lake Odessa

Grandma Rose's Rice Bake

1 c. cheese, cut into small cubes
2 c. cooked rice
2 T. butter
3 eggs
1 c. milk

Mix rice and cheese in a bowl. Beat eggs and milk together in another bowl. Pour egg mixture over rice mixture; stir well. Pour into a buttered 2-quart baking dish; dot with butter. Bake at 325° for 30 minutes.

Pat Thomas, Ewart

Saucy Stuffed Peppers

8 oz. box Spanish rice mix
1 lb. ground beef
1 26-oz. jar pasta sauce
2 lg. green bell peppers
1 t. black pepper
1 t. dried Italian seasoning
1/4 c. grated cheese
1 c. shredded cheese, any variety

Prepare rice mix as directed; set aside. Wash and clean peppers. Cut in half lengthwise. In a bowl, combine cooked rice and ground beef. Generously fill peppers with mixture. Place peppers in a casserole dish. Pour pasta sauce over peppers; sprinkle with black pepper, Italian seasoning and grated cheese. Cover and bake at 350° about 45 minutes. Uncover; sprinkle with shredded cheese and bake until cheese melts and peppers are tender.

Mike Harrington, Wayland



Send in your recipes! If published, you'll receive a kitchen gadget. Send in: **CHEESE recipes by Feb. 10, MARSHMALLOW recipes by March 10** and **BBQ recipes by April 10**. Mail to: Country Lines Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email jhansen@countrylines.com.

Feta-Stuffed Chicken

1/4 c. crumbled basil-and-tomato feta cheese
2 T. cream cheese
4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves, about 1 1/4 lbs.
1/4-1/2 t. black pepper
dash salt
1 t. olive oil
1/4 c. chicken broth
1 10-oz. pkg. fresh spinach, trimmed
2 T. walnut or pecan pieces, toasted
1 T. lemon juice
lemon slices for garnish

In a small bowl, combine feta and cream cheese; set aside. Using a sharp knife, cut a horizontal slit through the thickest portion of each chicken breast half to form a pocket. Stuff

pockets with cheese mixture. Secure openings with wooden toothpicks. Season chicken with salt and pepper. In a large nonstick skillet, cook chicken in hot oil over medium-high heat about 6 minutes on each side until it is tender and no longer pink; remove from skillet. Cover and keep warm. Add chicken broth to skillet. Bring to boiling; add half of the spinach. Cover and cook about 3 minutes just until spinach is wilted. Remove spinach from skillet, reserving liquid in pan. Repeat with remaining spinach. Return all spinach to skillet. Stir in nuts and lemon juice. To serve, divide spinach mixture among 4 dinner plates; top with chicken breasts and garnish with lemon slices.

Jennifer Hansen, MECA



Cool Whip Pie

1 20-oz. can unsweetened, crushed pineapple, do not drain
1 3.5-oz. box instant vanilla pudding
8 oz. Cool Whip®, thawed
1 9-inch graham cracker pie crust

In a large bowl, pour pineapple in its juice. Sprinkle pudding mix on pineapple; blend until pudding mix is dissolved. Fold Cool Whip into pineapple mixture. Spoon mixture into a graham cracker crust. Cover; refrigerate at least 2-3 hours or freeze until ready for use.

Robert Serocke, Goetzville

Lemon Tuna Cakes

2 cans tuna fish, well drained
3/4 c. real mayonnaise
2 c. Italian dried bread crumbs
1 T. parsley
1/2 t. salt
1/4 t. pepper
1 t. hot sauce
2 T. lemon juice
4 c. cooked noodles, any style
1/4 c. vegetable oil

In a large bowl, combine tuna, mayonnaise, bread crumbs, parsley, salt, pepper and hot

sauce; mix well with a fork so there are no lumps of tuna. In a large skillet with a lid, heat vegetable oil over medium heat. Using 1/4 of the mixture at a time, form tuna mixture into burger-sized patties, about 5-inches in diameter and 1-inch thick. Fry patties in hot oil for 3-5 minutes on one side, turning when browned and cooking about 3 minutes more on the other side, cooking until browned. Sprinkle lemon juice evenly over all patties. Serve with hot noodles of choice.

Danielle Cochran, Grayling

State's Forests Face New Foreign Insect Threats

While some resource managers are keeping their focus on invasive fish, such as the Asian carp or other foreign-sourced aquatic or land-based plants, one veteran Michigan forester is keeping his eyes on new threats to the health of the state's 19 million acres of forest.

Bill Botti, a retired veteran DNR forester and current executive director of the Michigan Forest Association, says each new foreign insect and plant disease invader from other parts of the world brings a threat to our valuable state forestlands.

Michigan is considered one of the most forested states in the U.S. Our many woodlands support thousands of jobs in forest industries that provide people with needed wood and fiber products and one of the largest recreational tourism bases in the country. In the Upper Peninsula alone, forestry is the number one industry and job source.

With so much at stake economically, each new exotic threat to forest health is now being given serious attention within the forest community. Forests also support the wild game sportsmen seek; they protect, shade and cool streams where fishing is high in interest; and they offer hiking and skiing trails, birding, nature preserves and wildflowers.

All of these forest experiences are at risk.

The emerald ash borer is a prime example of a recently arrived invasive insect that has cost major damage to the state's native ash trees. First discovered in southeast Michigan in 2002, it has now spread to both peninsulas. Many thousands of acres of valuable ash have been destroyed in trying to stem this invader's spread.

"Once one of these insects becomes established in this country, we move it all around in firewood," Botti explains. "We know better, but we just can't seem to break the habit."

New threats seem to appear every year. "Thousand Cankers Disease of walnut has (now) been found east of the Mississippi—in Tennessee. The disease is carried by the walnut twig beetle, which is thought to be native to northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest," Botti adds. Perhaps the beetle won't thrive in the colder climate of the North, but hang-on to that thought.

Foreign insect invaders are not new to Michigan. It was once thought that Dutch elm disease wouldn't cause any damage in

northern Michigan because the vector, the European elm bark beetle, couldn't survive the cold winters. Wrong! Dutch elm disease, which just about wiped out most of our stately American elms, has been in this country for many years, arriving in shipping cargo from Western Europe.

One of the older foreign invaders to do major damage is the Gypsy moth, which still has periodic outbreaks that threaten many hardwoods. This



An invasion by the Asian longhorn beetle (above, right) could cause tremendous damage to Michigan's woodlands.

moth came from Europe and in spite of major efforts to halt its damages—from aerial spraying to the removal of infected trees—this pest is still with us.

With today's increased world trade, new invaders keep appearing, Botti says. "One worrisome exotic is the Asian longhorn beetle that has caused tremendous damage in New York City and Chicago." A large outbreak was found in Worcester, MA, a year or two ago and is being treated aggressively. This bug especially likes maples, but will also kill poplars, willows, elms, chestnut and others. Botti notes that shipping between states opens the door for a wider spread, so tracking its spread is vital to Michigan's important maple woodlands.

Just as many of the current invasive fish, mussels and threats from other foreign invaders were brought in via Great Lakes shipping, new insects are being found more frequently and with further potential impacts on our native forests.

"These pests are moved around the world

in wood products with bark still attached," Botti says. "Seems as if it would be simple to stop—just outlaw crates or pallets with bark on them. But policing that is very difficult—especially when inspectors are more concerned about searching for bombs or explosives."

Each invading foreign insect holds new threats to Michigan's valuable forests that are every bit as serious as the Asian carp threat is to the Great Lakes, but Botti

notes we haven't given it as much public attention as the invasive fish.

"Maybe this year – the International Year of Forests – we will give it some more public attention."

"Early detection of any pest offers the greatest opportunity for administering control options. Private landowners and citizens alike are encour-

aged to play a more active role in early detection of forest pests, foreign or domestic," adds Rick Lucus, conservation district forester in Osceola/Mecosta counties.

"Forest owners should get in the habit of watching for needle and leaf discoloration, missing foliage, shoot and branch injury, and/or shoot and branch galls on your trees.

"When any of these signs appear, collect a sample and bring it to your nearest Conservation District office, MSU Extension office or MDNRE Service Center for identification and control recommendations," Lucus advises.

Owners of large wooded acreages might consider discussing their situation with a consulting forester. The Michigan Forest Association (MFA) has listings of consulting foresters who serve your area. Contact miforest@acd.net for more information.

MFA represents the 350,000-plus private, nonindustrial forest owners and tree farmers who own more than one-half of Michigan's forests. The author also edits Michigan Forest Magazine for MFA.



Don Ingle is an avid outdoorsman and award-winning outdoors writer that submits regularly for Country Lines.



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This story breaks my heart every time. Allegedly, just two years after the discovery of tanzanite in 1967, a Maasai tribesman knocked on the door of a gem cutter's office in Nairobi. The Maasai had brought along an enormous chunk of tanzanite and he was looking to sell. His asking price? Fifty dollars. But the gem cutter was suspicious and assumed that a stone so large could only be glass. The cutter told the tribesman, no thanks, and sent him on his way. Huge mistake. It turns out that the gem was genuine and would have easily dwarfed the world's largest cut tanzanite at the time. Based on common pricing, that "chunk" could have been worth close to \$3,000,000!

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Inspect Ductwork Before Cleaning

Healthy indoor air should be a goal for any family. This is particularly true in today's more energy efficient, airtight houses where the air quality is often worse than outdoor air. In addition to some dust from the ducts, there are many sources of indoor pollutants, including cleaning, cooking, and the release of gases from synthetic materials in the home. Many of these can be removed from indoor air with a combination of whole-house, furnace-mounted air cleaners and smaller individual room air cleaners.

Much of the dust in heating and air-conditioning ducts tends to adhere to the duct surface, so it never gets into the air circulating throughout the house, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Just because you see some dust collecting on the grill over air registers does not mean the ducts are very dirty and need to be cleaned.

Other than just a benign, fine layer of household dust, some potentially harmful particles can be hiding inside the ducts. For example, especially in humid areas, mold spores can cause serious allergic reactions in some people.

Bacteria can also live in some ducts under certain conditions. Very fine particles from cigarettes or wood-burning fireplaces can become airborne and cause respiratory problems. Test kits are available to take a sample of the dust from inside the ducts and have it tested for mold and other harmful contaminants.

Although it is commonly referred to as "duct cleaning," if you choose to have it done, it is important to have the entire HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) system cleaned. This includes the furnace and air conditioner blower, heat exchanger/coils, and drain pans in addition to the ductwork. Air conditioner evaporator coils can collect a lot of dirt because they get damp when the unit is running, and dust in the air sticks to the wet surfaces. This reduces the energy efficiency of the entire system.

If the contractor who services your HVAC system also does duct cleaning, you may get a discount by having both done at the same time. The typical cost for a complete cleaning ranges from about \$500 to \$1,000, depending on the size of your home and the



Photo: Widmers Cleaners

A long vacuum hose is inserted into the wall return duct. It is connected to an indoor vacuum unit with a HEPA exhaust filter.

complexity of the duct system.

You may want to have the duct system inspected before going to the full expense of a cleaning. Look for a company that will deduct the inspection cost from the total cost should you choose to have it cleaned. Technicians conduct the inspection by looking into ducts and the furnace blower unit and using mirrors at bends. They can also move a mini TV camera through the ducts.

When selecting a duct-cleaning company, there are several factors to consider. As with any project, the reputation of the company is highly important. Although the ducts can be inspected afterward to see how well they were cleaned, your best assurance is to start with a reliable contractor. Always check references with their past customers.

The National Air Duct Cleaning Association (NADCA) is the trade group that certifies HVAC system cleaning contractors. The certification is legitimate and requires extensive training. For a company to be certified, it must have a certified specialist on staff. Find a national listing of certified companies, along with its number of specialists, at nadca.com.

Also, when selecting a contractor, ask about the type of cleaning equipment each uses. If an indoor vacuum unit is used, it must have a high efficiency particulate arrestance (HEPA) filter on the exhaust to trap all the

particles. Some of the particles they dislodge from the duct walls can be very fine, and a lesser quality filter will not remove them from the exhaust air.

Another option is an outdoor truck with a built-in vacuum unit and a long hose. Because it is located outdoors, the exhaust filter is not critical. These large vacuums are very powerful to overcome the air flow resistance in the long hose. The only problem is that during winter they suck quite a bit of the heated air out of your house during the cleaning process.

Some duct-cleaning companies may suggest spraying a chemical biocide inside the ducts to kill mold and bacteria and to keep them from growing in the future. If you do have this procedure done, make sure they use EPA approved chemicals designated for sheet metal ducts.

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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Danny Young Memorial Renewable Energy Park

2010: A Year at a Glance

After the second full year of operation, the Danny Young Memorial Renewable Energy Park continues to be a valuable resource for individuals considering residential renewable energy applications. Besides collecting another year of data to share on generation output, we collected some important reality lessons about the process and the technology that we have detailed in the sidebar on this page.

Here is a look at the year in review:

January: *In Oct. 2009, the wind turbine failed and was not replaced until Feb. 2010.*

Solar output 108
Wind output 0

February: *A new 2.4 kW wind turbine went online Feb. 5, replacing the original 5 kW unit that failed late in 2009.*

Solar output 162
Wind output 56

March:

Solar output 449
Wind output 61

April:

Solar output 501
Wind output 137

May: *The new wind turbine that was installed in February went offline on May 16 after the inverter failed. The vendor verbally agreed to repair the inverter at their cost.*

Solar output 504
Wind output 49

June: *We awaited word from the turbine vendor about repairs to the inverter. Our calls went unanswered and unreturned. Also during the month, severe storms hit over several weeks and the solar inverter was damaged by an apparent lightning strike to the facilities. A new inverter was ordered.*

Solar output 86
Wind output 0

July: *We continued attempts to reach the turbine vendor about repairs to the inverter. With no returned calls, we visited the facility and discovered they had gone out of business. We contacted the turbine manufacturer, who referred us to a local technician to troubleshoot. The technician discovered that the unit had been modified so drastically during installation that it could not be put back together the way it was intended to operate, and recommended installation of a new unit. The new unit was ordered. The new solar inverter was installed on July 14, 2010.*

Solar output 317
Wind output 0

August: *The third wind turbine was installed on Aug. 3.*

Solar output 560
Wind output 14

September:

Solar output 439
Wind output 63

October:

Solar output 450
Wind output 95

November:

Solar output 261
Wind output 96

December:

Solar output 111
Wind output 85

Total generation for:

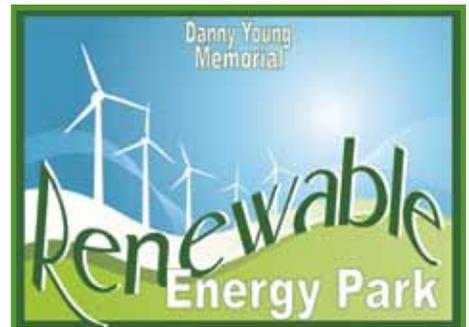
Solar 3,948
Wind 656

Total generation life-to-date:

Solar (installed Jan. 2008) 12,798
Wind (originally installed Dec. 2008) .. 1,784

Cost per kWh generated life-to-date

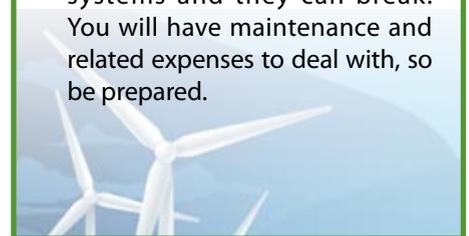
Solar \$0.99
Wind \$5.57



We've learned a lot since installing the Renewable Energy Park in our backyard. Our goal from the beginning was to be a resource to individuals interested in residential renewable energy, and we've learned so much more than we ever anticipated. Here are some key highlights:

- When all systems were working properly, and with an apples-to-apples comparison, the solar output has clearly bested the wind output. Our team fully expected that wind would be a better generation source in this region.
- From a purely economic standpoint, implementation of residential renewable energy in this region simply does not make sense. Is it a bad thing to do? Absolutely not. Just understand what your motive is before diving in.
- Before you start, be thorough in your research of possible vendors and installers. Ask a lot of questions and do a lot of background work. Find out how many and what types of systems they've installed and talk to some of their other customers. This is too big of an investment to not be diligent in your process.

- Keep in mind that you're dealing with mechanical and electronic systems and they can break. You will have maintenance and related expenses to deal with, so be prepared.



Ways To Pay

Midwest Energy offers a number of convenient ways for you to view and pay your monthly bill.

E-bill and Online Payment

With Midwest Energy Cooperative's E-bill feature, you can make a secure, one-time payment with a credit card or checking account, review a current or previous bill, see payment and billing history, and even view charts showing monthly and/or average costs and usage data—all with a few simple keystrokes from the comfort of your own computer.

Visit TeamMidwest.com to access the E-bill site, and click on the "Pay Bill" icon on the home page. First-time users will have to sign up for online account access by providing your account number, the last name on the account, and a valid email address. Once you have registered, you can create your own password and log-on in the future with your email address and password.

Automatic Bill Payment

If you are looking to simplify bill paying, we offer "Easy Ways to Pay." Through this program, you can sign up to have your bill automatically deducted from a designated bank account or charged to your credit card every month. It's an easy and secure way to pay your monthly bill. You will also continue to receive a bill showing your payment amount and the due date. Sign up for this option online through the E-bill site (noted above), or by calling Midwest Energy.

District Service Centers

Midwest Energy offers three district service centers where you can make payments or speak with a customer care representative. There is also an office in White Cloud for our propane customers in that area. All offices can take both electric and propane payments. If you are unable to stop during business hours, drop boxes are available at each office. After-hours payments are posted during the next business day.

Office Locations and Hours:

▼ Adrian District Service Center

1610 E. Maumee Street
Adrian, MI 49221
Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

▼ Cassopolis District Service Center

Corporate Headquarters
901 E. State Street, P.O. Box 127
Cassopolis, MI 49031
Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

▼ Paw Paw District Service Center

59825 S. LaGrave, Paw Paw, MI 49079
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1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

▼ White Cloud District Service Center

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Hours vary. Please call ahead.
800-492-5989

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Kiosk

A payment kiosk is available 24/7 in the foyer of our Paw Paw District Service Center. The kiosk uses a modified version of our E-Bill program and allows you to pay with a credit/debit card or e-check (no cash). You can also view your bill and payment history on the easy-to-use machine.

More payment kiosks will be placed around our service territory—please watch for more information.

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When you pay your bill by mail, send a check or money order. *Do not send cash.* To help us credit your payment correctly, please include the bill stub and write the account number on your check. Allow at least five days before the due date for the payment to reach our offices.



Scholarships

High school seniors whose parents or guardians currently receive monthly electric service from Midwest Energy Cooperative, and whose primary residence is in Midwest's service area, may apply for one of the four \$500 college scholarships to be presented in spring 2011.

Scholarship selection is based on academic performance, extracurricular activities, community involvement and/or employment, and honors and awards. Applicants must also submit a short essay. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5 on a four-point scale is required.

Applications must be postmarked by *Friday, March 18, 2011*, and winners will be notified in late April. Contact Nicole Barfell at 800-492-5989, ext. 1112, or email nicoleb@teammidwest.com with any questions. The application is also available at TeamMidwest.com.

2011 Midwest Energy Cooperative Scholarship Application

Please print or type

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ADDRESS _____ CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____ EMAIL _____

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Please also attach the following:

1. A separate sheet listing academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, community involvement and/or employment, and honors and awards.
2. A current high school transcript.
3. An essay of no more than 250 words addressing the following:

Please write a letter to an elected official relaying your thoughts about a current issue or event that is important to you. You could write to the president, your senator, local mayor or even your own school board. No subject is too big or small, and nothing is off-limits as long as it is important to you. We simply want you to choose an issue about which you are passionate and will evaluate your letter based on how well your message is expressed. Applications without the requested attachments will not be considered.

Mail or deliver completed application to:

Scholarship Committee, Midwest Energy Cooperative,
901 E. State Street, P.O. Box 127, Cassopolis, MI 49031

Or email to:

nicoleb@teammidwest.com

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Surviving the Winter Season

Extrême cold temperatures and ice and snow storms make staying warm and safe a challenge. Here is how to create a winter survival kit for your home to help you and your family survive the cold grasp of winter.

The Essentials

Food: Food that requires no cooking or refrigeration such as bread, crackers, cereal, canned foods, and dried fruits. Remember baby food and formula if you have young children.

Water: In case water pipes freeze or rupture, keep a supply of tap water or purchase bottled water. The recommended amount of water to keep is 5 gallons per person.

Medicines: Roads may be inaccessible for several days due to a winter storm. Make sure to order in advance or refill any prescriptions that family members may need.

Identification: Make sure to keep forms of

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identification handy, such as social security card, passport, photo ID, and driver’s license. In addition, make sure to have bank account information and insurance policies.

Emergency Materials

- ▲ Alternate methods to heat your home:
 - Dry firewood for a fireplace or wood stove
 - Kerosene for a kerosene heater
 - Furnace fuel (coal, propane, or oil)
 - Electric space heater with automatic shut-off switch and non-glowing elements
- ▲ Blankets
- ▲ Matches
- ▲ First Aid Kit and instruction manual
- ▲ Multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher
- ▲ Flashlight
- ▲ Battery-powered radio, clock/watch
- ▲ Extra batteries
- ▲ Shovel
- ▲ Rock salt
- ▲ Non-electric can opener

When creating a winter survival kit for your home, take into consideration factors that are specific to your home and family. For instance, if your home is isolated or on the outskirts of a residential area, making it more difficult for help to reach you, make sure to stock additional amounts of food, water and medicine. Listening to weather forecasts regularly can provide you with several days notice to allow you to check emergency materials and stock up on essential supplies.

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KIAWAH ISLAND CONDO – Near Charleston, 170 yards to beach. 2 bikes, miles of bike paths, beautiful area. Winter rate \$550/week, \$975/month. Call 989-725-7794 or email fredherring57@yahoo.com

RENTAL ON LAKE HURON – Near De Tour Village. 3-bedroom, 1½-bath house available weekly May thru Oct., \$700. \$600 if booked by April 15th. Four people, nonsmoking, no pets. Call 906-235-1652.

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- ▲ \$1.50 per word (\$15 min.) for co-opmembers running nonbusiness ads

Each initial, group of figures, phone number, abbreviation, e-mail address and website address counts as one word. Hyphenated and slashed words count as two or more words. Ads are subject to editor's approval and editing. For member rate, attach your mailing label. To pay by credit card, include card number, exp. date, address related to the card and signature with ad. M/C or VISA only, please indicate which. Send your printed or typed ad and check made payable to MECA (advance payment required) by 15th of month prior to publication to: *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864, or email jhansen@countrylines.com. Call 517-351-6322, Ext. 201, for more information.
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See our Photo Gallery at www.AmericanMetalRoofs.com

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Want to Find an Energy Auditor?



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We're all looking for ways to maximize our energy dollars by increasing our home's efficiency, but knowing where to start and what to do can be overwhelming.

As a service to Midwest Energy members, we have taken the initiative to research and interview a number of energy auditors that offer service within our territory. Listed to the right are contractors we are confident will give you the same high level of customer service that we expect from our own employees. We will also use these contractors in the future for education and demonstration projects. So, please contact any of them with confidence if you are interested in more information about their services.

Serving MI, IN, OH:

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thermal@springcom.com

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219-464-4457, 800-390-8091
energydiagnosticsinc.com

■ Green Building Consulting Homes +

P.O. Box 43497, Cincinnati, OH
513-272-2005, byankie@fuse.net

■ Think Green Midwest

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513-477-0130, Emkenn1995@aol.com

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■ Energy Saving Services, Inc.

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6645 West R Ave., Schoolcraft, MI
269-372-2496
rlkildea@sbcglobal.net

2011 Meetings Coming to a District Near You

What's behind all of the lines on my electric bill? How can I reduce my energy use? The wind blows all the time at my house—what do I need to install a wind turbine? Are power supply costs going to continue to rise, and what can I do about that?

If you've ever thought about these or other issues as they relate to your electric bill or energy use, we invite you to join us for one of Midwest Energy's 2011 district meetings. In February and March we will visit each of the nine districts across our service territory and meet over dinner with a small group of members to discuss the life of the cooperative, your electric bill and usage, and issues impacting the industry.

Our goal is to assemble a diverse group of members for dinner and dialog. We want to share pertinent information with you and hear your questions and concerns as they relate to Midwest Energy. There is no sales pitch; the only expectation we have is meaningful input from you and your fellow co-op owners.

We limit attendance in order to maintain a comfortable environment for dialog, therefore a limited number of invitations are sent to members in each district by a random drawing from the billing system. However, we also take names for a wait list from members who are interested in attending, and will happily include you in the meeting if time and space allow.

For more information, or to submit your name for the wait list, call 800-492-5989 or email your name, account and telephone number to PR@teammidwest.com.

We want to share pertinent information with you about your co-op, and hear your questions and concerns...

Electricity Theft: Not Worth the Risk

Every year, electric cooperatives across the country cope with thieves—folks who deliberately tamper with their electric meter to steal power. Not only is this practice extremely dangerous, it's a serious crime that can result in hefty fines and jail time.

"We've seen people do some dangerous things—using knives, forks, magnets, jumper cables and any number of other objects to get around paying for the power they use," explains Mike Roush, vice president of operations for Midwest Energy Cooperative. "However, these people are not stealing from us, they are stealing from their fellow co-op members and risking their lives and the lives of our workers."

Power surging through a compromised meter can cause an electrical catastrophe, according to the Cooperative Research Network, a division of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. A short circuit could produce an arc flash bright enough to cause blindness and powerful enough to launch

fragments of shrapnel-like, red-hot debris. Serious injury or death from electrocution, explosion or fire often results from meter tampering. Only trained Midwest Energy Cooperative personnel wearing protective clothing should work on meters.

"Anytime you get into a meter base, you run a risk," comments Roush. "With an arc flash, somebody could get killed or seriously maimed."

Electricity theft is not a victimless crime. Your not-for-profit cooperative loses revenue and expends resources to investigate tampering, the costs of which are ultimately passed on to the entire membership. National estimates vary, but *The Washington Post* cited revenue protection officials who claim between \$1 billion and \$10 billion worth of electricity is stolen from utilities annually.

Because everyone pays for lost power, please contact Midwest Energy at 800-492-5989 if you suspect meter tampering.

—Christine Smith

How Much is Too Much?

Learn how to estimate the energy your appliances use to see if it's time for upgrades.

You've had your fridge forever. With the exception of some crumbling parts of the seal, it's in pretty good shape and keeps your food cool. Why worry about budgeting for an upgrade?

Some homeowners forget the impact inefficient appliances can have on their monthly electric bills. Replacing a refrigerator made before 1993 with a new, Energy Star®-rated model could shave \$65 to \$100 off your electricity bill each year. To sweeten the deal, rebate programs provide further incentives for folks replacing old appliances with new, energy-efficient alternatives.

So, the question when evaluating appliance usage is: How much energy use is too much? This simple formula will help you estimate the annual energy use of any electric appliance:

$$\text{Wattage} \times \text{Hours used per day} \times \\ \text{Days used per year} \div 1,000 = \\ \text{Kilowatt-hours (kWh) used annually}$$

For example, a standard, large-screen TV uses 214 watts. Using our formula, we find that $214 \text{ Watts} \times 4 \text{ hours per day} \times 365 \text{ days per year} \div 1,000 = 312 \text{ kWh}$ annually. To calculate an estimated annual operating cost, just take that number and multiply by 12 cents and your TV costs about \$37.44 per year.

In contrast, an Energy Star-rated standard, large-screen TV uses 151.5 watts, costing you an estimated \$26.46 per year.

You can usually find the wattage of most appliances stamped on the bottom, back or nameplate. The wattage listed is the maximum power it draws. Since some appliances have a range of settings (i.e., hairdryers), the actual amount of power consumed depends on the setting used at any one time.

Once you calculate how much money you spend to run aging home appliances, compare this to what it would cost to use more efficient models. With federal incentives bringing down the price of an Energy

Star-rated refrigerator or clothes washer, the annual energy savings could be worth an up-front investment. There are other benefits, too. For example, clothes washers have become 64 percent more energy efficient since 2000, and the tub size has increased by 9 percent. With a new model, you can wash more clothes for less money every month!

Don't want the hassle of adding up the potential savings? The Touchstone Energy® cooperatives' website, TogetherWeSave.com, demonstrates how small changes like replacing an appliance or unplugging electronics

can lead to big energy savings. On the website under "Add Up Your Savings," you can walk through a typical home's kitchen, living room, and other common areas. Upgrade appliances and make other energy-smart choices in each room. Each time you make a change, you're shown how much money you could save on your annual electric bill!

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; U.S. Energy Information Administration; Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers; Natural Resources Defense Council



The energy savings could be worth the up-front investment to replace older appliances...even when they're still "pretty good."

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Dog Days of Winter

For the first time in my life, I have a dog. Or, maybe, a dog has me. I'm not quite sure yet how this relationship works.

But I do know we aren't a couple yet. I'm applying for a dog with the Animal Placement Bureau, a nonprofit organization whose primary goal is to place homeless dogs into loving, lifelong homes. The volunteer foster care network has no paid staff and no sheltering facility. The dogs in their care live with volunteers and become as much a part of their family as their own dogs.

I know this dog very well. Bandit is a 57-pound Australian Shepherd, rescued last spring from a breeder's kennels, after the awful economy left the kennel with more dogs than it could sell or adequately care for.

A mature 5-year-old, he's calm and protective, not given to barking, timid around strangers, and has a tender gaze. Typical of his breed, he is a one-person dog. He will run you over on his way outside. His joy at romping in snow is unmatched. Actually, it's more like a dance in which he whirls and twists in mid-air and then falls spread-eagle in the snow, in which he buries his nose and comes up with a mouthful of white water.

He was 'left' to me by Mike Peters, with whom I worked at the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, and who is moving to Madison, WI, to run WPPI Energy, a regional power company serving 51 customer-owned electric utilities. Because the circumstances of his travel and living arrangements won't give him the time to tend to a dog, he was faced with giving Bandit back to the Placement Bureau or giving someone he knows a chance to adopt him in his stead.

So, here I am, filling out adoption papers for a dog. Here's a sample of the questions:

What do you like about the dog you're interested in adopting?

"He is gentle, yet spirited; intelligent and

playful. He smiles."

What will your first day with your new dog be like?

"We've already had a first day. He found his way around the house, located his food dish and water, explored the yard, and warmed up to my petting. It took a couple of days for him to get comfortable."

What are your feelings about dog obedience training?

"I'm all for it if it will help improve our relationship and help him adjust to life with us."

What are your feelings about cosmetic surgery for dogs (i.e. cropped ears, docked tails)?

"Don't like it."

There are questions about grooming, vaccinations and vet check-ups, leaving the dog home alone, sleeping arrangements, crating (which is the practice of confining the dog in a crate that he has been conditioned to enjoy, a place where he can feel safe and secure), and our preferred brand of pet food.

This may seem like a lot of work to

get a dog. But to their great credit, the Placement Bureau and its volunteers have a lot invested in each dog they rescue. They want to ensure their rescue animals are placed in an environment where they can thrive. They do good and necessary work, and it's worth our effort.

Jim Hough, whose columns graced this page for 25 years, told me a dog column could never go wrong. I believe him because they always generated a ton of mail.

Learn more about the Animal Placement Bureau at apbpets.com or by calling 517-346-4505.



Mike Buda, editor emeritus of Country Lines, enjoys the pure glee in Bandit's greetings. Email Mike at mbuda@countrylines.com or comment on his columns at countrylines.com/column/ramblings/



Clockwise starting top left: Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge; Tortuguero Park Canal Cruise; White Faced Monkey; Keel Billed Toucan; Pacific Ocean Beach; Rainforest Hike

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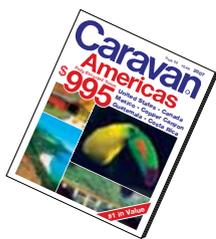
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Applications are available online at TeamMidwest.com or contact Nicole Barfell at 800-492-5989, ext. 1112, or nicoleb@teammidwest.com.

Learn more about the programs at countrylines.com, and click on "Youth." Also check out YouthTour.coop to see videos and photos.

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