

A Service of **Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association**

March/April 2011

# Michigan

## COUNTRY LINES

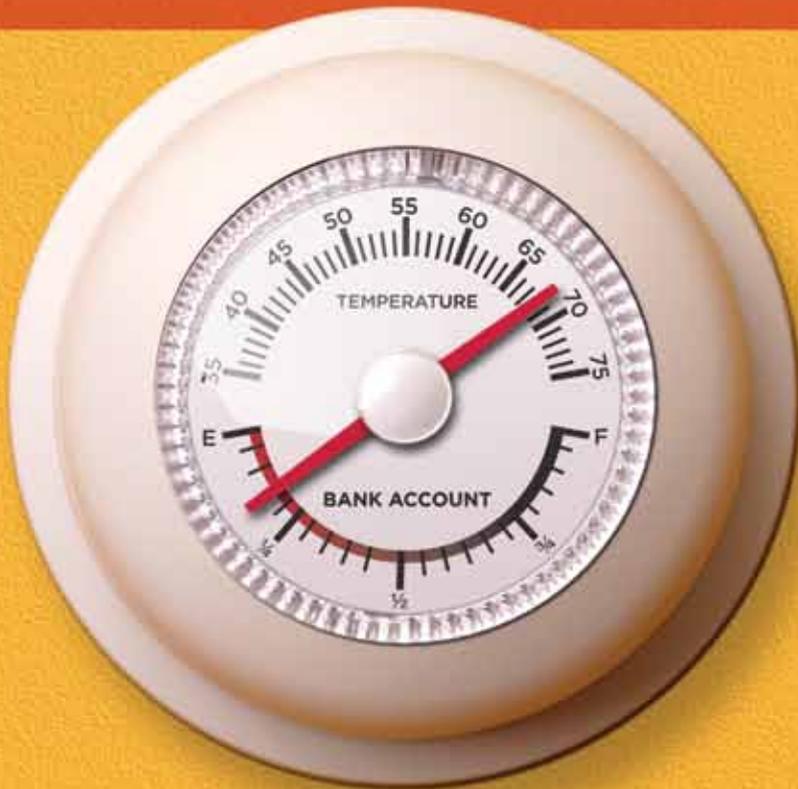


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SPECIAL  
**GARDENING**  
EDITION



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Michigan Country Lines, USPS-591-710, is published monthly, except August and December, with periodicals postage paid at Okemos, MI, and additional offices. It is the official publication of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864.

Subscriptions are authorized for members of Alger Delta, Cheryland, Cloverland, Great Lakes, HomeWorks Tri-County, Midwest Energy, Ontonagon, Presque Isle, and Thumb electric cooperatives by their boards of directors. Subscriptions are \$6 per year.

Postmaster: send address changes to Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864.

Letters to the editor should be sent to the same address. Phone 517-351-6322. Email: knudtson@countrylines.com.

Association officers are Brian Burns, PIE&G, chairman; Ken Swope, Midwest Energy, 1st vice chairman; Tony Anderson, Cheryland, 2nd vice chairman; Eric Baker, Wolverine Power, secretary-treasurer; and Steve Boeckman, Great Lakes Energy, past chairman.

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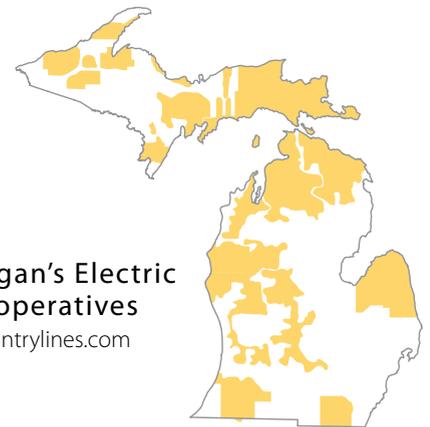
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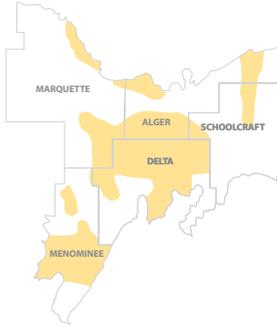
## On the Cover

The Heuers, of mid-Michigan, celebrate their family of biological twins and three adopted daughters. They have been foster parents to nine children.

Photo - Elizabeth Price, pricelessphotography.com

Michigan's Electric  
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# Voting By Mail Is Here!

The second cooperative principle is Democratic Member Control. Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members through active participation. Members are elected to serve on the board of directors, which is instrumental in setting the strategic direction and exercising governance over the cooperative as a whole. Board members are accountable to the membership.

Every year, sometime between March and May, members in three of our nine districts take action to exercise their democratic control. They do so by participating in the election process and selecting members to represent them on the board. And, there have been some recent changes to this process.

## Seasonal Members Eligible to Run for Board

In 2010, the board took steps to enhance the ability of *all* our members to more fully participate in democratic control of the cooperative. Previously, only full-time permanent residents could run for the board of directors. About one-half of Alger Delta's members are seasonal and were ineligible to run for the board. That didn't fully align with the principle of democratic control, so the board took action to change the bylaws and allow seasonal members to stand for election.

## New Voting Process

All members—including seasonal members—

have always been allowed to vote. In past years, all voting took place at the district meetings. To vote, members had to attend the district meeting in person, but the board helped lighten this load recently when they approved voting-by-mail. Now, all eligible members can cast a ballot, even if they cannot attend the district meeting.



**Tom Harrell**  
General Manager

## Districts 5, 7, 8 Vote Now

Members who take electric service in a district where an election is scheduled will receive their ballot on a cover wrap attached to this magazine. Only the "Official Ballot" (back page of the cover wrap) will be accepted for voting, so please read the instructions carefully. Even if there is only one person running for the board from your district, please vote. This will help establish the new process and confirm your support for the candidate.

Voting by mail means that members can vote at their convenience. Even though we call this new process voting-by-mail, there are several options for casting your ballot. You can mail it, drop it off at the co-op office in Dafer, or bring it to your district meeting and put it in the ballot box. Votes will be counted at the district meeting and the election winner announced.

As in the past, we will also hold informational meetings (see p. 32 for dates) in the districts where no voting is scheduled. These meetings are a good opportunity to hear directly from the co-op's leadership. I hope to see you there!

# Major Improvements Completed

The Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association completed a major step in overall system improvement on Jan. 31, 2011, when it moved service to all Big Bay electric consumers to the cooperatives' new Big Bay substation.

The new substation feeding the Big Bay portion of our electric system is fed from American Transmission Company's 138,000-volt line. "This is one of the final steps in rebuilding the Big Bay line and will help improve power quality and service reliability in this part of our system," says Tom Harrell, Alger Delta's general manager.

Over the past few years, the co-op com-

pletely rebuilt the power line that feeds members along County Road 550, and in Big Bay and Powell Township. The new line is built on taller, stronger poles and has more capacity to deliver energy.

The line rebuild project, including the new substation, was initiated when the co-op entered into an agreement to provide energy to the Kennecott mine in northwest Marquette County. As part of the deal, Kennecott agreed to pay for the infrastructure improvements necessary to take electric service from the co-op. Kennecott paid about \$8 million for the line rebuild and service to its mining operations.

# Meet the Director Candidates

Mail-in ballot voting instructions are on the cover wrap of this issue.

## District 5

Gourley, LaBranche, Cornell



**Kevin  
Webber**

### Current Occupation and Positions:

Co-owner of K&K Contracting and Construction, Inc.; Vice President, Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association

### Other Occupations and Positions:

Trucking /Owner-Operator, Hobby Farming

### Community Activities and Volunteer Service:

Gourley Township Volunteer Fire Department; Board Member, Wilson Seventh Day Adventist Junior Academy

### Candidate Comments:

"I've worked hard to build a business, a home, and raise a family in Wilson. I serve my community through the volunteer fire department, the Alger Delta board, and my church activities.

I was first elected in 2002. Some things I have done to better represent the people I serve include completing the Certified Cooperative Director training and now I am working on my Board Leadership Certificate. In addition to serving as vice president, I am on the Employee Relations Committee and the Finance and Rates Committee.

Two big challenges facing Alger Delta are the high cost of energy in the central U.P., and economic development. The board is working to address these and other issues while focusing on our core purpose. It is our goal to provide service at the lowest cost possible, consistent with sound business practice.

"Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve you."

## District 7

Stonington



**Gail  
Petersen**

### Current Occupation and Positions:

Retired; Secretary/Treasurer, Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association; Board Member, Michigan Electric Cooperative Association

### Other Occupations or Positions:

Social Worker, Bay and Arenac counties; Member of the Richfield Township Planning Commission; Job Placement Specialist, Progress Industries, Newton, IA

### Community Activities and Volunteer Service:

Trinity Lutheran Church, Stonington Booster Club, UPCAP Resolution Services Mediator, Rapid River Reading Buddies

### Candidate Comments:

"I became a member of ADCEA when my husband and I retired to the Upper Peninsula in 1992. Having been raised on a farm in central Wisconsin, I remember the day we got electricity—made possible when the Roosevelt Administration gave low-interest loans to farmers so they could run lines and access power. We still depend on those loans. I take seriously the responsibility of providing reliable electric service to my friends and neighbors.

I was elected to represent District 7 in 2002. Serving on the board entails much responsibility; for example, establishing board policy, setting rates, adhering to regulations and ensuring an adequate power supply, to name a few. I also serve on the Executive Committee as secretary/treasurer.

I was appointed to serve on the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association Board of Directors in 2003. I have completed the Credentialed Cooperative Director training program and am currently earning my Board Leadership Certification."

## District 8

Nahma, Isabella



**Nick  
Denessen**

### Current Occupation and Positions:

Retired; Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association Board Member

### Other Occupations and Positions:

Owner of Denessen Electric, Factory Electrician, Electrical Contractor, Master Electrician, Overhead Crane Operator

### Community Activities and Volunteer Service:

Member of RSVP, Escanaba Elks, Big Bay De Noc Snowmobile Club; work with senior commodities distribution; Nahma Historical Society; Rapid River 4 Township Seniors

### Candidate Comments:

"I have been serving on the board of directors since 1998. I've been a co-op member since 1946, when the co-op first came to the Nahma area. Looking back on all the progress made, especially the past three to four years, makes me want to be a part of the new plans, technologies and progress we're making. Because of my electrical background, I feel that I have an understanding of the problems facing the Cooperative, such as growth and rates. I believe I can make a positive contribution toward resolving these and the other issues we face."





**Magazine Online?**

I like that you put your articles online, but is there a way to receive our subscription electronically instead of the paper form? Downloading the magazine in one pdf document would be preferable to the paper copy or going to the website and jumping around from one article to another. Hopefully enough members would sign up for this where there would be a significant savings from printing and mailing. Thank you.

— Erik Booth

*Good news—a pdf copy is already available online! Go to [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com) and click on “Find Your Co-op.” Choose your co-op and click “Download Latest Co-op Magazine PDF.”*

*We’re working to have a digital edition (maybe even one that can be sent automatically to a smart phone or iPad) and an online archive of back issues available this year, but we would still have to send*

*a paper copy because of legal notices the state requires your electric co-op to share with you. Also, not all readers have computers. — Ed.*

**Mystery Photo**

I’m answering the Mystery Photo contest (Jan.). Yes, it’s on M-72, Kalkaska County, the old one-room schoolhouse still in use! Now I have entered my name, etc., many times and wondered how many copies and where were they sent before I got mine? I cannot call in, as a senior on fixed income, I don’t do long distance calls, and have no computer email so I have to reply by mail and lose two or three more days before my entry gets there. It’s like, ‘what’s my odds on getting picked...?’

I have been a co-op member for 40 years.

Thanks for everything.

— Thomas Campeau, Frederic

*All readers have an equal chance because the winner is chosen by a drawing from names of those who guessed correctly (see note below).*

**Recycled Paper**

As a former printer and International Paper Company employee, I have combined work experience

of over 45 years in making paper and putting ink on it. As a Great Lakes Energy customer, I enjoy reading *Country Lines* magazine.

I have particular interest in your use of recycled paper. While I applaud your efforts to do something favorable for the environment, I would ask if you know how much “sludge” waste material is created in recycling paper? The recycling process may have improved since I last visited a recycling paper mill at the beginning of the recycling days. But, when I last visited a recycling mill I saw a fleet of filthy and “grungy” trucks parked nearby. I asked what they were used for and was told they transported the “sludge” created in the recycling process to the dump. My next question was, “How much sludge is created in the process?” The answer was 6 tons for each ton of usable paper. With that much waste to dispose of, what real gain is there in using recycled paper?

— William Sheaffer, Gaylord

*Glen Johnson, of FutureMark Paper, our supplier, responds:*

*The times, and de-inking of reclaimed paper recycling processes have changed, and our numbers are dramatically different than your experience. We reclaimed 115,987 tons of paper in 2010, so we can recover 98.5 percent of the reclaimed paper we buy and process. A dramatic improvement over the 75 percent previous, and a huge improvement over the ’60s-’70s.*

*We do get some post-consumer*

*rubbish (collection systems are terrible now) such as cans, staples, glass and plastics. In 2010, this totaled 1.36 percent of the purchased reclaimed paper, and that is compacted and recycled for metal and plastic recovery. — Ed.*

**Ice Climbing**

Article on ice climbing may not have been accurate...visit [google.com/search?q=ice+climbing+deaths&rls=com.microsoft:en-us&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1](http://google.com/search?q=ice+climbing+deaths&rls=com.microsoft:en-us&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1)

— J. Kuchnicki

*Thanks for the catch...it does look from your query that there were some ice climbing-related deaths in the world, although we still found none reported in Michigan. — Ed.*

**Bad Bugs**

I found Don Ingle’s article on foreign insects (*Feb.*) very interesting. There are a few measures we could take to eliminate some of these bugs. Most of the wood shipping pallets are ground up and used as decorative mulch. Talk about moving wood. This stuff is hauled home by unsuspecting homeowners and scattered around their trees and shrubs. This mulch has to be loaded with the eggs of the insects. These pallets should be banned. Only reusable plastic pallets should be allowed for any shipping. It will take an act of Congress to stop foreign countries from using wood products as shipping.

— Dennis Parsons, Bitley

MYSTERY PHOTO

Everyone who identifies the correct location of the photo below by **April 10** will be entered in a drawing for a **\$50 coupon redeemable for electricity from your electric cooperative.**

Call in your entry to *Country Lines* at 517-351-6322, ext. 306, email [jhansen@countrylines.com](mailto:jhansen@countrylines.com), or mail it to *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, 48864. Include your name, address, phone number and co-op. The winner will be announced in the May 2011 issue.

The **January** contest winner is **Cheryl Darlington of Rapid City**, who correctly identified the Crawford Excelsior School on M-72 East in Kalkaska County.



January photo



**Do you know where this is? ▶**

**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](http://countrylines.com); click on “Youth,” email [wolford@countrylines.com](mailto:wolford@countrylines.com), or call 517-351-6322, ext. 205. Eligible applications must be postmarked by *April 4, 2011.*



© iStockphoto.com/Damian Gadal

**Separated at birth?** Reader Debby Graham's dog, Tucker (L), and Bandit, adopted by our Ramblings columnist, Mike Buda.

### Bandit The Dog

Our family enjoyed Mike Buda's article about Bandit (*Feb.*). We are also blessed with an Australian sheperd named Kiowa. As you were describing Bandit, it was as if you were describing our dog! Good luck with your adoption and many healthy and happy years with your Aussie!  
— Scott, Lynda & Carly Holcomb

Thank-you so much for writing this wonderful article [about Bandit]. We have had several phone calls about adopting dogs from the Animal Placement Bureau because of it. Anyone interested in our organization or viewing photos of the dogs that are up for adoption can visit our website at apbpets.com

— Patti Lundy

The Animal Placement Bureau (APB) still has four or five Aussies available. One looks like

Bandit (her name is Jessie), and then we have a red tri-male and a Blue merle female—they are on PetFinder. The others are on the APB website. Thanks.

— Cheryl Thompson

Imagine my surprise after opening the February issue of *Country Lines* and seeing a picture that looked almost exactly like our little Tucker. Our 15-year-old English shepherd died in April 2009, and it really devastated us. We already had a 10-year-old-brown Australian Shepherd and I wanted to get another Aussie. So we picked one out and got him in May 2009.

...I completely know what you mean about Bandit's joy of romping in the snow. That is one of Tucker's favorite things, of course besides the rubber Frisbee and squeaky tennis balls...oh yeah, and did I mention sticks and tree branches? That boy sure can catch – it's amazing.

Bandit is beautiful in his picture in the magazine. After seeing Tucker's picture, you will know why I had to do a double-take at the dog in the picture (see both dogs, above).

— Debby Graham

*At least 12 readers sent letters about Mike Buda's February column on his rescue dog, Bandit.*

*We print as many reader letters as space allows, but MCL stories and more letters can also be read at countrylines.com. Thanks.*

# GRILLS GONE WILD

## Enter Our Crazy BBQ Grill Contest!

Send us a photo of your home-made or custom BBQ grill—the crazier the better—along with a short description of your grilling tradition. If we print your entry in the May issue of *Michigan Country Lines* magazine, you'll receive a \$50 credit on your co-op electric bill.

- Entry deadline is *April 15*; one entry per co-op member. Special consideration will be given to photos with people in them.
- Complete the form below and attach a short description of your grilling tradition. Please identify anyone in your photo.
- **EMAIL** your photo as a high-resolution JPEG file (as an attachment) to photos@countrylines.com, or **MAIL** glossy prints, along with the form below, to: Crazy BBQ Grill Contest, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48879. (Prints will *not* be returned.)

**We're looking forward to some grillarious entries!**



### CRAZY BBQ GRILL CONTEST ENTRY FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Electric Co-op: \_\_\_\_\_

### 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.

# 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.

## 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 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://dsireusa.org).



Teens,

You could win a trip to Washington, D.C.!

If you're a 10th or 11th grade high school student who will be 16 or 17 by June 2011, and your home or cabin is served by Alger Delta Electric Cooperative, you are eligible to apply. You may be selected to attend Co-op Teen Days and then be considered to **win a free trip to Washington, D.C.**

For an application or to learn more, call Debbie Miles at 906-428-4141, or email [dmiles@algerdelta.com](mailto:dmiles@algerdelta.com).

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



**Alger Delta Electric**  
ALGERDELTA.COM

Michigan Electric Cooperative Teen Days

Tustin, Michigan  
April 27-29

National Rural Electric Youth Tour

Washington, D.C.  
June 11-16

# Yeah, That's How We Roll

Moving forward in the electric co-op world means rolling with the changes.

**C**hange—it's a word we hear frequently these days from our elected officials in both Lansing and Washington, D.C. It also describes the challenges faced by your electric co-op.

From changes in political leaders and issues to the new look of this magazine, the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association (MECA) and its co-op members are seeing change in nearly all facets of the electricity business.

Change is requiring our team to build relationships with the 29 new senators and 58 new representatives in the Michigan Legislature, and our four new members in the U.S. Congress. We are working very closely with all the new legislators representing portions of rural Michigan to help them understand the many unique attributes of electric co-ops and how we differ from other types of utilities. We are also helping them understand the many challenges co-ops face in providing electricity to rural areas, and especially related to the current economic woes faced by rural residents.

In Lansing, we are working hard to evaluate and understand the impact of the many proposed changes in how our state's revenues are collected from

residents and businesses. And, how the Snyder Administration is proposing those monies be allocated to the varied state departments and agencies that provide services to our residents.

The changes proposed by Gov. Snyder are bold and intended to place our state and its residents on a sound financial footing for the future. However, they will be very painful for all of us. Michigan's electric co-ops look forward to engaging in the political dialogue as many of these measures work their way through the Legislature.

In Washington, D.C., change is coming swiftly in the form of many proposals for new rules from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. While Michigan's electric co-ops are proud of their environmental stewardship, a number of these rulemaking proposals are very problematic and could result in significant, and in some cases, unnecessary costs for power plants that generate electricity throughout the Midwest.

These proposals involve actions such as limiting the operating hours of the small generators some co-ops use as backup power during times of high electricity demand to more stringent regulation of

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combustion byproducts from fossil-fuel generation plants.

The MECA team is working very closely with our colleagues from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to ensure that these provisions are not overly burdensome on the power generation plants that co-ops rely on to provide you with affordable electricity.

You are also seeing change in the look of this magazine (see editor's note below), which is published specifically for you as an electric co-op member-owner. The new format is intended to help you, our readers, better view the magazine's content.

It's good to know that some things won't change, however, like the quality of service and reliability that you receive from your electric co-op. As for all of us that serve you through your electric co-op, we'll keep rolling with the changes.



## A Fresh New Look

**W**elcome to the new face of *Michigan Country Lines*!

This magazine is published especially for you, because you get your electric service from a nonprofit cooperative. Besides sharing interesting stories about Michigan people, places and

things, it's the most economical way for you to get important news about your electric co-op, of which you are also an owner.

In a time when many printed publications are experiencing declining readership, surveys have shown that our reader participation rate is the second-highest of the 32 co-op statewide magazines in the country. But we'll still continue working to improve the

quality of *Michigan Country Lines*.

You'll notice that the cover masthead has a cleaner, bolder typeface. The headlines running along the bottom of the cover are larger and easier to read. Inside, the contents page is reorganized and simplified, so you can quickly find the stories you want to read.

But don't worry, the things you enjoy most about the magazine haven't changed. It will continue to be packed full of interesting stories, tips for saving energy and money on your electric bill, news about your co-op, and—of course—recipes!

We'd love to hear what you think about our new look. Send me an email at [knudtson@countrylines.com](mailto:knudtson@countrylines.com).

Thanks for reading with us!

— Gail Knudtson, editor



# Finding a 'Forever Family'

Some Michigan families are turning foster homes into "forever" homes.  
**Linda Wacyk & Lisa Doublestein**

**W**hat could be a more natural wish for a child than having a family to call your own? For more than 15,000 Michigan children, however, that's a wish still waiting to be fulfilled.

These are children who have been removed from their biological homes—most often due to abuse or neglect. About one-third of them live with relatives. The others live with unrelated foster care families or in other settings supervised by the Department of Human Services (DHS).

No matter where they live now, though, all these children have one common desire: they want their own "forever family."

"Foster care is seen as a short-term solution to an emergency situation," says Edward Woods III, a DHS spokesperson who manages foster care and adoption. "It is founded on the premise that all children have the right to physical care and educational and emotional nurturance."

The Heuer family, who lives in mid-Michigan, is one of more than 7,000 licensed family foster care homes, providing a substitute family life experience for children in need. Andrew, 40, and Renatta, 41, along with biological 12-year-old twins Ian and Evan, have fostered nine children over the years.

"We both grew up in Africa as missionary kids," Renatta explains, "and we both saw the need for homes for kids in poverty."

## How Does Foster Care Work?

When a child is taken from his or her family, a team of foster care workers, foster parents and the courts work with parents for up to a year to correct what-

ever problems caused them to lose custody: getting a job, going to rehab, secure housing, or more.

"The primary goal during foster care is to reunite the child with his or her parents," Woods says. "The foster family plays an important role in the treatment plan for the child and family."

If parents progress and begin meeting those needs, they can start visiting their child. When the child cannot be reunited with the parents, the children are prepared for permanent placement with relatives or unrelated adoptive families. Under certain circumstances, a foster family may adopt children in their care.

Three of the Heuers' foster daughters found their "forever family" through adoption by their foster family.

"Our littlest daughter, Naomi, we got straight from the hospital," Renatta explains. She was a crystal meth baby; she and her mom tested positive, and she was pulled from her mom right away. I look at her now at age 6, and it's a joy to know that she has no issues."

Older daughters Niki, 12, and Ikeya, 8, were 9 and 5 when they arrived at the Heuers' home. Their mother was first pregnant at age 15.

"Where would they be now if we hadn't taken them in? Men would be coming in and out. We know we've done something to prevent that cycle from continuing with them."

## Waiting for "Forever"

About 4,000 Michigan foster children are currently available for adoption, meaning a court has terminated their parents' rights. And DHS is working hard to find permanent homes for all of them.

"We know that children do best when they are placed

in a safe, loving and stable home,” Woods says. “Adoption is a great way for children to achieve permanency.”

The Heuers stress that foster parents are under no obligation to adopt, but many make that choice. And unlike international adoptions, the state picks up adoption costs for children in foster care, making it more affordable for families. But the process is not without its price.

“The biggest issue is the heartache of the children’s situations,” Renatta admits. When you see what some of these children are living through, just the hopelessness of it—those things, for me, are the hardest.”

Then there is the risk that birth parents could appeal a court’s termination, derailing the adoption.

“We had twin babies last fall for a year,” Renatta says. “When we went to court to terminate the parents’ rights, it was overturned on a technicality. It was very fast, all in one day, and it was a shock. We were planning to adopt them. And then, the mother lost them again. It still is heartbreaking.”

The Heuers currently are preparing to say goodbye to a 3-and-a-half-year-old son who will soon be adopted by a local family.

“Our attitude was, ‘This is our responsibility—to be their family for however long they need us. We don’t know if we’re going to be able to keep them, but we’re going to love them every day until we have to give them back,’” Renatta says.

## Michigan Recession Takes a Toll

Finding safe, stable and loving homes for over 15,000 children would be a challenge at any time. But tackling it in the midst of a deep recession has exacted a price—on children, their families, and the state itself.

“We lost a lot of workers in 2002. Caseload ratio went higher than the remaining staff could manage,” explains Woods, who applauds people still working in the field.

In 2006, Michigan operated the nation’s seventh largest foster care system, with about 19,000 children in its custody. At that time, the New York-based Children’s Rights Advocacy Group filed a class action lawsuit in federal court alleging that the state violated children’s rights by failing to find enough safe foster homes, allowing delays in adoption referrals, and providing inadequate services for children aging out of the system. Moreover, they charged that too many foster children lacked adequate mental health care or even routine medical and dental exams, citing at least five children who died in foster care.

The state settled the case with a 2008 binding agreement that calls for sweeping reforms. Now, Michigan has made significant progress in reuniting families, completing adoptions, and working with partners to improve access to adequate health care. In fact, Woods says, 3,030 children were adopted from foster care in 2009—more than any other year, and also earning the state a \$3.5 million federal adoption incentive award.

Yet, a second round of early incentives in 2010 has left DHS scrambling for workers once again. But

the department, now directed by Maura Corrigan, is determined to live up to its commitment to find safe, stable and loving homes for every child who needs one.

“We are hiring up to 700 workers for Michigan’s



Photos - Elizabeth Price, pricelessphotography.com

children,” Woods says. We need foster care workers, people with backgrounds in social work, sociology and psychology. We want to recruit the best and the brightest to stay here in Michigan.”

## The Need is Great

Despite improvements, between 500 and 600 children each year age-out of Michigan’s foster care system when they turn 18. On their own with little support, some end up homeless or in jail. That is just one of the reasons it is so important to get them out of the system and into loving homes.

Foster families are needed in every sort of community: rural, suburban and urban, he adds, and the primary goal is to find homes that best fit a child’s interests and needs. The DHS is also recruiting mentors ([michigan.gov/mentormichigan](http://michigan.gov/mentormichigan))—adults who are not ready for full-time parenting, but have love and support to offer a child. Volunteers are also needed to advocate for the best interests of children in court. Your local court clerk should be able to get you started.

“You don’t have to be rich, married or own your own home to be a foster or adoptive parent,” Woods says. “There is little to no cost to adopting, and most expenses are reimbursed. Foster and adoptive parents may also receive support toward the cost for caring for the child, and the child has insurance for medical care.”

Renatta admits that providing foster care was way out of her comfort zone, but she was motivated by the extreme needs that she saw.

“If somebody doesn’t love these children, they may never have love,” she adds. “Even if it’s for five months, if that child doesn’t go into a loving home, they never have had love. Our little boy is going to leave us, yes, but he’s going to leave knowing that he was a treasured child in my home.”

**Opposite, left:** The Heuers enjoy some backyard fun for the camera.

**Above:** Renatta and Andrew Heuer enjoy a card game with their family of biological twin boys and three daughters they fostered and later adopted.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**BECOME A FOSTER PARENT.** Michigan needs many more foster parents, and foster parenting can open doors to adoption. Learn more at [adoptuskids.org](http://adoptuskids.org) or call 888-200-4005.

**MAKE THEM VISIBLE.** Learn and share the facts about Michigan’s waiting children. View selected profiles at [mare.org](http://mare.org).

# Say 'Hello' to A No-Dig Garden



Photo - Judy Thomas, cvog.blogspot.com

Say goodbye to tilling, digging and costly garden chemicals, and say hello to no-dig gardening. Use this proven method to grow vegetables and flowers naturally—and with less work.

The rationale for traditional row gardening and tilling is to remove weeds, loosen and aerate the soil, and bury organic matter. Tilling can remove existing weeds, but it almost always brings dormant weed seeds to the surface where they can germinate. When organic materials are moved deeper, less oxygen is available for converting the materials into nutrients. Since the nutrients then need to be replaced, traditional gardeners usually rely on synthetic fertilizers.

No-dig gardening lets nature do the work. It uses worms, bugs and microbes to provide nutrients and disease prevention. Plants deliver part of the carbon energy they produce into the soil, and microbes convert this energy into organic materials and minerals that plants need.

"I remember my own 'Ahhhh!' moment," says no-dig gardening author Patricia Lanza, "when I put all the pieces together that allowed me to make wonderful growing

spaces without the use of power tools or purchased material."

With no-dig methods, Lanza says, there's less fuss over the planting area. Free organic material, such as grass clippings and compost, are used in layers on top of a newspaper ground cover. Don't cut through the paper before planting.

One strategy is to first remove all weeds and grass from a garden area. Materials such as rotten manure, decayed sawdust or compost go straight on the surface as a layer of mulch 2 to 6 inches deep. Worms, beneficial bugs and microbes get busy beefing up the soil. They create a healthy habitat for roots to flourish.

## Sheet Mulching

One no-dig method is sheet mulching. Newspaper or cardboard is spread out on the garden area and topped with landscape mulch. Again, weeds should be removed first if there's no time to let them die out and decay under a new blanket of sheet mulch.

Sheet mulch blocks daylight and suffocates existing grass and weeds that decompose over time (before the actual sheets do) to become part of the biosphere that garden plants need

to thrive. Ideally, the newspaper or cardboard should be spread out before a heavy rain, but a garden hose can also do what's needed to keep the sheet thoroughly wet. When ready to plant, use a hand shovel to cut out holes for planting seeds or seedlings.

## Straw-bale Gardening

This is a simple twist to the no-dig method and similarly, it requires no herbicides, insecticides or fungicides. A wide variety of vegetables (except top-heavy ones like corn), fruits and flowers can be planted in conditioned straw bales.

On the minus side, the bales eventually need to be replaced and the aesthetics may not be suitable for yards in suburban subdivisions.

Straw baled in plastic twine is preferable to bales with sisal twine or wire because plastic does not decompose or rust. Straw that has begun to decompose is ideal, since it shortens the conditioning time that fresh straw needs.

The bales need to be placed over a mesh or other barrier to prevent pests such as moles from pilfering the plants. Also, place the bale so that the twine binding runs parallel around the sides of the bale to help preserve its shape. Thoroughly watering the bale and adding a high-nitrogen fertilizer on top begins the conditioning process, lasting five to seven days.

Keeping the straw bale moist is a must. A layer of nursery mix, garden soil or compost on top creates a planting medium for seedlings and seeds. One bale can host two tomato plants, six cucumber plants, or 12 bean plants.

## Raised-bed Method

Planting in wood or masonry containers filled with compost or manufactured soils—known as raised-bed gardening—has been in practice for centuries. Like other no-dig methods, this approach keeps the soil aerated, allows more crops to grow in less space, reduces weeding, and requires less fertilizer than traditional row gardens.

Using raised beds that are 4-foot-wide puts the working space within easy reach from both sides, but beds can be narrower for

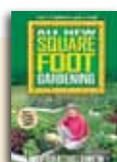
## Required Reading



"Lasagna Gardening for Small Spaces"  
Patricia Lanza  
Rodale Press, Inc.



"No-Dig Gardening & Leaves of Life"  
Esther Dean  
HarperCollins Publishers



"All New Square Foot Gardening: Grow More in Less Space!"  
Mel Bartholomew  
Cool Springs Press



"Weedless Gardening"  
Lee Reich  
Workman Publishing

## 3 Easy Steps to Your Own No-Dig Garden

- 1 CHOOSE:** Pick a spot and mark it. Keep in mind that a garden should receive six to eight hours of sunlight and not be subject to strong wind.
- 2 PREPARE:** Cover the area with thick layers of wet newspapers, overlapped. Cover the paper with several inches each of peat moss, compost, grass clippings, chipped leaves, humus, spoiled hay, seaweed, aged manure or whatever is handy. Water the layers of organic material until they feel like a squeezed-out sponge.
- 3 PLANT:** Pull a section of the layers back, down to the paper. Put the plant on the paper, move the organic material back around the roots and press the soil to remove excess air and water. Try to use one part nitrogen-rich material (grass clippings, compost or manure) to four parts carbon-rich material (chopped leaves, peat moss, straw, spoiled hay or peat humus) for a perfect mix. Use what is readily available and free!

kids to help. Bed length can vary according to preference, and they can be elevated on tables or other platforms to ease accessibility for folks who find it uncomfortable to stoop or kneel.

### Square-foot Gardening

This is a spin on the raised-bed method. A typical setup uses a framed 4-foot-square raised bed, divided into 16, 1-foot squares – ideal for limited space. Wooden strips divide the bed into a grid that provides plants in each square enough growing room and separation. Plant a different crop in each section. The number of seeds or seedlings per square varies according to plant size.

### Upside-down Gardening

This is another limited-space, no-dig alternative. Start with 5-gallon buckets for tomatoes or cucumbers. Drill a 2-inch hole in the bottom, place a slit coffee filter over the hole, then insert an inverted seedling through the slit (root ball faces up). Fill the bucket with a compost-soil mixture and hang the bucket from a tall post in a sunny spot. Low-growing spices or flowers can grow in the top of the bucket. Kits are also sold for upside-down gardening.



Photo: B. Blechmann

## Grow a Delicious Landscape

**T**ough economic times have spurred a comeback for fruit and vegetable gardening. More and more electric co-op members with little or no gardening experience are looking to their yards as a source of produce. And, the resurgence of using edible plants as ornamentals is reshaping the face of gardening. Planting produce in front yards and along walkways also adds convenience and accessibility.

Simply put, edible landscaping puts food-producing ornamental plants in the home landscape. Most edible plants need well-drained soil and a minimum of six hours in full sun daily, but some tolerate partial shade. Do some plant research to make sure you pick the proper locations, and examples of tasty landscaping plants and recipes follow.

Often described as a plant to deter squash bugs, beetles and aphids, **nasturtium** is an annual or perennial flowering plant. Its attractive, edible flowers and leaves are eaten in salads and dressings.

### Nasturtium Salad Dressing

- 1 c. mayonnaise
- 2 T. lemon juice
- 2 T. honey
- 1 T. salad oil
- 1/4 t. dry mustard
- 4 nasturtiums flowers
- nasturtium leaves
- pinch curry powder

Place all ingredients in blender for 45 seconds. Makes 1½ cups.

**Jerusalem artichokes**, or sunchokes, can liven a landscape with their bright yellow blossoms. American Indians grew them for their edible tubers long before European settlers arrived. French explorer Samuel de Champlain found cultivated plants on Cape Cod in 1605. The sunchoke was

named “best soup vegetable” at the 2002 French cuisine festival in Nice. They can also be roasted.

### Sunchoke Soup

- 1 lb. sunchokes
- 1 large shallot, diced
- 4 T. butter
- 4 c. chicken stock
- 1/2 t. dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 c. heavy cream
- salt and pepper

Scrub sunchokes and peel off blemishes. Cube into 1-inch pieces. In a large pot, melt butter and sauté shallot until translucent. Add sunchokes, thyme, salt and pepper. Sauté 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Stir in stock with bay leaf and bring to boil. Reduce heat. Cover and simmer 20 to 30 minutes or until sunchokes are tender. Remove bay leaf. Let the mixture cool and purée in a blender. Return to pot and add cream. Salt and pepper to taste.

The first varieties of **Swiss chard**, a popular leafy vegetable, have been traced to Sicily. Fresh, young chard is good raw in salads; mature chard is usually sautéed. Bitterness in the leaves and stalks fades with cooking, and its refined flavor is more delicate than spinach.

### Sautéed Swiss Chard

- 1 bunch Swiss chard
- 3 T. virgin olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- salt and pepper

Wash chard and remove stems. In a skillet, sauté garlic in olive oil. When garlic turns golden, add chard and sauté until wilted. Add tomato sauce and simmer 10 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste.

*Continued on page 17*

# Energy Efficiency Doesn't Have to be Expensive

## Energy Efficiency Shopping List

Planning energy efficiency upgrades at home? Take this handy shopping list with you to your local home improvement store.

CFLs (4-pack)	\$6
Caulk	\$2
Weatherstripping	\$4
Outlet sealing kit (10)	\$20
Attic door insulator kit	\$40
Programmable thermostat	\$40
Mastic	\$12
Water heater blanket	\$20

Investment: **\$144**

Potential Annual Savings:

**\$700**

Sources:

HomeDepot.com,  
TogetherWeSave.com

It's easy to get overwhelmed by two words: energy efficiency. What should I do? How should I do it? Do I have to replace my entire heating and cooling system to see savings?

The easy answer is no, you can do a lot of upgrading with little money.

On your next trip to the home improvement or local hardware store, take this shopping guide with you. It lists five areas where a few simple energy efficiency investments will produce savings right away.

### Lighting

Since lighting accounts for about 11 percent of home energy use, switch your traditional incandescent lightbulbs with compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs). An Energy Star®-qualified CFL uses about 75 percent less energy than a traditional bulb, lasts up to 10 times longer, and can save about \$40 in energy costs over its lifetime. A four-pack of 14-watt CFLs (equivalent to 60-watt incandescents) runs about \$6.

### Filling the Cracks

A tube of caulk and a roll of weather stripping can go a long way toward saving money on your electricity bill. It's easy to find where cold air leaks in around doors and windows—simply hold your hand out and feel. Caulk around windows, dryer vents and fans for about \$2 a tube, and weatherstrip around doors for about \$4 a roll.

There are also some not-so obvious places for air to flow in and out of your home, notably outlets and behind switch plates. To see if you have air flowing through your outlets or switch plates, light a stick of incense, hold it in front, and watch for the smoke to be disrupted. You can find special sealing kits for outlets and switch plates for about \$2.

And don't forget about applying weatherstripping around your attic hatch or pull-down stairs. You may also want to install an insulator box to place over the opening. A kit costs around \$40.

Sealing these cracks can save you around \$200 a year, according to TogetherWeSave.com, a website by Touchstone Energy® cooperatives, the branding program of the nation's electric co-ops, that shows how little changes add up to big savings.

### Programmable Thermostat

Beginning at \$40, a programmable thermostat is a larger investment, but you could save \$180

a year with the proper settings. For the biggest impact, program your thermostat to raise the temperature during summer and lower in the winter while you're out of the house. You can also program it to dip lower at night while sleeping. The thermostat can be set to automatically revert to a comfortable setting shortly before you arrive home or wake up.

While programmable thermostats are helpful, they're not for everyone. These gadgets are best for people who are away from home for extended periods throughout the week.

### Sealing Ductwork

More than 40 percent of your home's energy use goes for heating and cooling, so it's important to keep that air in the home. Leaky ductwork remains one of the main culprits of hot and cold air loss.

If your home's ducts are exposed, inspect them for leaks and seal them. Look for holes and joints that have separated, and then seal them with foil-backed tape, about \$6 a roll, or mastic, a type of sealant that costs about \$12 a tub.

You can apply the mastic with a regular paintbrush. Make sure the tape is marked with the Underwriters Laboratories, Inc., "UL" symbol, which means it has been independently tested for safety.

Properly sealing ductwork can save about \$170 a year, according to TogetherWeSave.com.

### Water Heater Insulation

Blankets aren't just for keeping people warm. A water heater blanket can save you 4 percent to 9 percent in water heating costs—a big ticket item since 12 percent of your home's energy use goes toward water heating. How do you know if your water heater needs more insulation? Touch it. If it's warm, wrap it. Choose a blanket with an insulating value of at least R-8, which runs about \$20.

TogetherWeSave.com also reports that you can save more than \$70 per year by keeping your water heater's thermostat set at 120 degrees F.

### Larger Projects

If you want to make larger investments in your home, adding insulation or upgrading appliances are great starters. For more information on insulation, visit EnergySavers.gov. To learn about the most energy-efficient appliances, visit EnergyStar.gov.

A Custom-Crafted Design Exclusive

# Gone Fishing

LEATHER JACKET

*Dramatic artwork from wildlife master and tournament fisherman Al Agnew captures every angler's dream*



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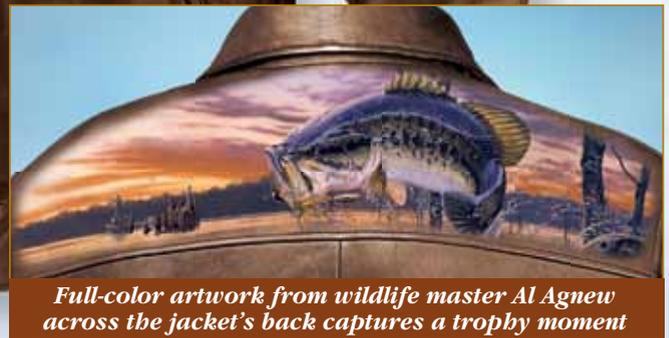
With striking full-color images from wildlife artist and tournament fisherman Al Agnew practically jumping off the back, as well as embroidered on the chest, this brown bomber-style leather jacket is one that proud fishermen will enjoy wearing. The jacket is styled in a classic waist-length full cut, with knit cuffs and waistband to keep out the cold.

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[www.bradfordexchange.com/bassjacket](http://www.bradfordexchange.com/bassjacket)

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*Full-color artwork from wildlife master Al Agnew across the jacket's back captures a trophy moment*

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# Game On!

A toy collector celebrates Michigan-made Carrom board games.

**P**aul Kruska simply loves toys, and he loves Michigan, too. That's why, even at his adult age, the Shepherd resident owns many antique Michigan-made toys and still wants more.

Kruska still has board games he played with as a child that were made by the Carrom™ (CARE-om) Company. These boards, on which kids can play up to 100 different games from bowling to checkers, are probably the oldest of all his antique toys, which he says is a testament to how well-made they are.

"I have the original Carrom board that I owned as a child, plus a few other games made by Carrom," Kruska says. "As kids, we all played Carroms. If you played too long, your 'flicking' finger would get sore." He recalls a mechanical shooter the company made to alleviate that problem. His Carrom collection also includes a golf game, skittles, and a bagatelle game.

Carrom is still making the same high quality games they have since 1890, plus some new ones that continue to earn them orders. Kruska says Carrom products are highly sought by toy and board game collectors who appreciate their uniqueness and durability.

With just 20 employees in Ludington, the company churns out about 10,000 Carrom board games a year, plus 40,000 other games such as Nok Hockey™, bowling, shuffleboard, skittles, and more (carrom.com). They also produce 3,000 table games such as basketball, foosball and stick hockey.

Following a few slower years in this poor economy, "Carrom experienced a great 2010 Christmas season," says operations director, Sharon McCumber. She credits excellent employees who "take real pride in the fact that Carrom products are still mostly handmade."

Kruska regards toys as more than playthings, and theorizes that toys we use as kids may shape what we become. For example,



This 100-year-old Carrom game board is from the company's historical collection. Admiring its condition are collectors Ben Nelson (L), a member of Great Lakes Energy from Scottville, and Paul Kruska, a member of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Co-op, who has 12 Carrom games in his antique toy collection.

he and his brother had fun with chemistry and erector sets. Kruska became a pharmacist and his brother is an engineer.

Dating back to the 1800s, Kruska has discovered 209 toy companies besides Carrom that made toys here, and this hobby connects him with fellow toy collectors who appreciate the history represented by their collections.

"The fun part of this is finding and visiting different towns that had toy manufacturers," he says. They include Wyandotte Toy Co. near Detroit (metal trucks and cars); an old building in Jonesville where they made Suzy

Goose play sets; and the Daisy® BB gun factory in Plymouth, which left in 1958.

Antique toys remind people of simpler times when they bonded during the friendly competition of a board game after dinner.

Kruska plans to share what he's learned by publishing a book about Michigan toy companies and is seeking more information and sources (contact [pkruska@yahoo.com](mailto:pkruska@yahoo.com)). His dream project, however, is to create a mini-museum in Shepherd featuring collectible toys made by Michigan companies and a few other manufacturers.

## MADE IN MICHIGAN

**Tell us about *your* favorite Michigan-made product and we may write about it. Please share why you like it, and if you have a unique story to go with it, please include that by **March 20** to [czuker@countrylines.com](mailto:czuker@countrylines.com) or send to *Michigan Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Thanks to Paul Kruska for telling us about Carrom games.**

## Grow a Landscape, from p. 13

The violet blossoms of **chives** add a splash of color to any landscape. Chopped chive leaves are a delicate condiment for soups and other dishes, and the round tufted flowers are used as garnishes whole and broken apart in salads, cooked vegetables and casseroles.

## Asiago-Chive Biscuits

2 c. biscuit mix  
2/3 c. 2 percent or skim milk  
1/4 c. melted butter  
3/4 c. grated Asiago cheese  
1/2 c. finely chopped fresh chives

Toss ingredients in a large bowl. Turn onto a floured surface. Roll to 1-inch thick. Cut into 12 squares. Space apart on a cookie sheet and bake at 400 degrees for 12 to 15 minutes.

Gardeners and gourmets are rediscovering the delicious **daylily**. Not to be confused with true lilies, daylilies grow from tuberous, fleshy roots rather than bulbs. Asians have enjoyed them for centuries, and the roots can be eaten raw or added to salads, soups and stews. The flavor is similar to asparagus. Raw or boiled, stir-fried or steamed, they are

good with other vegetables. The blossoms add a flowery zest to soups and vegetable dishes.

## Stuffed Daylilies

1 c. diced cooked chicken  
1/4 c. mayonnaise  
1 3-oz. pkg. cream cheese (softened)  
1/4 c. diced celery  
1/2 t. lemon zest  
2 t. ranch dressing

Mix well. Fills about 8 large or 12 small daylily blossoms.

## More Edible Ideas

- Incorporate plants such as lettuce, radish or cabbage into your flowerbeds and borders.
- Plant herbs with flowers in a container.
- Use gooseberries instead of barberry for a good hedge, and train raspberries up a fence.
- Plant flowering cabbage in the fall as an alternative to mums.
- Design an edible flower garden using nasturtium, violas, borage and calendula.

Add food-producing plants to your landscape by simply replacing a strictly ornamental plant with an edible one. Or, add annual and perennial herbs and veggies into existing landscape areas to add interest.

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# Say CHEESE!



This commonplace food never goes out of style, and the varieties are endless! Thanks to all who sent in their favorite cheese recipes. Find hundreds more recipes at [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com).

## Cream Puffies

*1/2 c. softened butter*  
*8 oz. shredded sharp cheese*  
*1/2 t. Worcestershire® Sauce*  
*dash of cayenne or Tabasco*  
*sauce*  
*chopped pepperoni or sausage,*  
*optional*  
*1/2 c. sifted flour*  
*1/2 t. baking powder*

In a large bowl, mix together butter, cheese, Worcestershire sauce, cayenne pepper, pepperoni or sausage, if using. Combine flour and baking powder; work into mixture in bowl, mixing well. Shape into a ball; wrap in wax paper and chill. Shape into balls the size of large marbles. Place balls on an ungreased baking sheet about 2 inches apart. Bake at 450° for 7 minutes. Serve warm.

*Pam Schriener, Watervliet*

## Homemade Cheese Sticks

*1 pkg. won ton wrappers*  
*2 eggs*  
*1/4 c. milk*  
*1/2 lb. block mozzarella or*  
*pepper Jack cheese*  
*Italian bread crumbs*

wash. On a sheet of waxed paper, brush one side of wrappers with wash. Place one cheese stick on each wrapper. Roll wrapper up around cheese, folding in ends to seal. Dip each stick back in egg wash and roll in bread crumbs. Deep fry at 350° about 3 minutes until golden brown. Serve with dipping sauce. Leftovers can be frozen for later use.

*Alden Argersinger, Elsie*

Cut cheese into 1/2 x 1/2 x 5-inch-long strips. Whisk eggs and milk together to make an egg

## Salmon and Cream Cheese Frittata

*8 large eggs*  
*1/2 c. milk*  
*1/4 c. fresh chives or 1 t. dried*  
*salt and pepper to taste*  
*2 t. olive or salad oil*  
*2 oz. cold cream cheese, cut in*  
*1/2-inch pieces*  
*2 T. chopped red or sweet*  
*onion, optional*  
*3 oz. thinly sliced salmon or*  
*smoked salmon, chopped*

Whisk together eggs, milk, chives, basil, onion, salt and pepper. Heat oil in a 12-inch, oven-proof frying pan. Pour egg mixture into pan. Scatter cream cheese and onion over top. When eggs are set on bottom and top is almost set but still moist, remove from heat. Sprinkle salmon over top of frittata and press. Place frittata under broiler, about 6 inches from heat. Broil until set, slightly puffed and golden, about 1 1/2 minutes. Cool 5 minutes; slide onto platter and cut into wedges.

*Diane & Ed Strzelinski,*  
*Boyne City*

▶ **Send in your recipes!** If published, you'll receive a kitchen gadget. Send in: **BBQ recipes by April 15, CASSEROLE & POT PIE recipes by May 15, and EGGPLANT recipes by June 15.** Mail to: Country Lines Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email [jhansen@countrylines.com](mailto:jhansen@countrylines.com).

## Cup-a-Dip

*1 c. finely chopped onion*  
*1 c. Hellman's Mayo®*  
*1 c. grated sharp cheddar*  
*cheese*

Mix ingredients well; put in a pie pan. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Serve with crackers of choice. Keeps well and reheats well.

*Joyce Runberg, Beaver*  
*Island*

## Gorgonzola Butter

*8 ozs. gorgonzola cheese*  
*2 garlic cloves, minced*  
*1 stick unsalted butter, softened*  
*1 T. fresh tarragon, minced*  
*1 T. fresh basil, minced*  
*1/2 t. ground pepper*

Place all ingredients in a food processor; process until well blended. Serve on crusty bread or breadsticks or use as a steak topping. Serves 8-12.

*Eva Braganini, Mattawan*

## Baked Cheese Grits

*2 1/2 c. milk*  
*3/4 c. uncooked regular grits*  
*1/2 t. butter or margarine*  
*1/2 t. salt*  
*1/3 c. fresh-grated Parmesan*  
*cheese*  
*1 5-oz. jar Old English*  
*cheddar cheese spread*

In a saucepan, bring milk to a boil; add grits and cook until thick, about 10 minutes, stirring often. Stir in butter, salt and cheeses. Spoon into a lightly greased 1-quart casserole dish. Bake at 325° for 20 minutes. Yields 6-8 servings.

*Jacqueline Muma, Hastings*

## Cheese Bread

1 3/4 c. milk, scalded  
3 c. shredded cheddar cheese  
1/4 c. sugar  
2 t. salt  
2 T. butter  
1 pkg. dry yeast  
1/4 c. warm water  
5 c. flour

Combine hot milk, cheese, sugar, salt and butter; stir until cheese melts; let cool. Dissolve yeast in warm water; add to milk mixture; let stand 3 minutes. Add flour and

mix well. Turn dough onto a lightly floured surface; knead until smooth and elastic. Place dough in a large greased bowl; turn dough over to grease other side. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 1/2 hours. Punch down; divide in half. Cover and let rest 10 minutes. Shape into two loaves; place in greased 9x5x3-inch loaf pans. Cover and let rise until doubled in size, about 1/2 hour. Bake at 350° for 35-45 minutes. Remove from pans and cool on wire racks.

*Janice Harvey, Charlevoix*

## Three Cheese Enchiladas

1 1/2 c. shredded Monterey Jack cheese  
1 1/2 c. shredded cheddar cheese  
3 oz. cream cheese, softened  
1 c. picanté sauce, divided  
1 med. red or green bell pepper, chopped  
1/2 c. sliced green onions  
1 t. ground cumin  
8 7-or-8-inch flour tortillas  
shredded lettuce, chopped  
tomato, sliced black olives

Combine 1 cup Monterey Jack cheese, 1 cup cheddar cheese, cream cheese, 1/4

cup picanté sauce, chopped peppers, onions and cumin; mix well. Spoon 1/4 cup of this mixture down the center of each tortilla; roll up and place seam side down in a well greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Spoon remaining picanté sauce evenly over enchiladas; cover with remaining cheeses. Bake at 350° for 20 minutes or until hot. Top with lettuce, tomato and black olives; serve with additional picanté sauce if desired. Yield 2-4 servings.

*Janice Thompson, Martin*

## Spirited Apricot Brie

1/2 c. or more apricot jam  
1 T. grated orange peel  
1 T. brandy or orange juice  
1 T. lemon juice  
1/4 t. cinnamon  
1 1/2 lbs. Brie

Mix jam, orange peel, brandy, lemon juice and cinnamon in a shallow microwavable dish just large enough to also hold

the brie. Cover and microwave 1-2 minutes until it starts to bubble. Add brie; return to microwave and cook, uncovered about 1 minute, being careful not to liquefy brie. Turn onto a plate and pour sauce over brie. Serve with crisp green apple slices, grapes, baguette rounds, crackers, etc.

*Kim Jared, Petoskey*



## Warm Seafood Cheese Dip

8 oz. block Monterey Jack cheese  
8 oz. block sharp cheddar cheese  
8 oz. Velveeta Cheese®  
1/4 c. milk  
1 T. garlic powder  
2 T. white wine  
2 T. brandy  
2 cans shredded crab meat  
1 can tiny shrimp

Melt all cheeses in a saucepan over low heat. Add milk, garlic powder, wine and brandy; mix well. Stir in crab meat and shrimp; cook over low heat or transfer to a crock pot to keep warm. Serve with crackers or pour into a round bread bowl. Serve with assorted breads cut in cubes for dipping.

*Barbara Alwine, Jones*

## Roasted Beet and Walnut Salad with Blue Cheese

8-10 med.-sized beets, about 2 lbs.  
2 T. cider vinegar  
1 1/2 t. Dijon mustard  
1/2 t. sugar  
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
1/4 c. olive oil  
1/2 c. coarsely chopped walnuts, toasted  
4 oz. blue cheese, coarsely crumbled

Rinse beets; trim stem ends and roots to 1 inch. Wrap beets individually in aluminum foil. Place beets on a baking sheet and roast at 350° until tender, about 1 hour; remove from

oven and set aside until cool enough to handle. Wearing latex gloves, unwrap beets and remove skins. Whisk together vinegar, mustard, sugar, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in olive oil; continue whisking until thickened. Set aside. Cut beets into 1/2-inch diced pieces; place in bowl. Add dressing; toss well to coat. Just before serving, toss beets with walnuts. Transfer to a shallow serving dish. Sprinkle with blue cheese. Serves 8.

*Dianne Wittbrodt Keelan, Williamsburg*

## Specialty Cheese Cake

1 3/4 c. graham cracker crumbs  
1/4 c. chopped walnuts or pecans, optional  
1 1/2 t. cinnamon  
1/2 c. melted butter  
3 eggs, well beaten  
2 8-oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened  
1 c. sugar  
1/4 t. salt  
1/4 t. almond extract  
3 t. vanilla  
3 c. sour cream

In a 2-quart glass baking pan, mix together graham crumbs, nuts, cinnamon and butter. Pack firmly on bottom and up sides of pan. On medium speed, beat together eggs, cream cheese, sugar, salt, almond extract and vanilla. Stir in sour cream; mix well. Pour mixture into crust. Bake at 375° for 25-35 minutes. Top will begin to brown. Refrigerate until cool before serving.

*Kathy Spalding, Thompsonville*

# Spring's Little Stinkers

Pest-control advice from an old friend backfires in the worst way.

## The Skunk Files



### Musk

The official name for that unmistakable “skunk smell.”

### 8-15 Feet

Distance a skunk is able to expel musk, creating a mist that extends even farther.

### 62-66 Days

The skunk's gestational period. Skunks mate in late February to early March. Females will deliver between two and 12 young.

### Kit

A young skunk, born from early May to early June.

### 2-4 Weeks

Age at which a kit is able to spray musk from its glands.

**Y**ou can get an early hint of spring's approach by sniffing the air. The clear and unmistakable scent of a skunk often confirms the season's change—but not in a way most prefer.

A member of the large family of weasels, skunks are armed with scent glands that should be classed as “weapons of mass disruption.” The common skunk is one of the first critters to shake off winter's torpor, making his presence known wherever his travels take him.

And, encounters between skunks and humans *will* occur. At such times, skunks hold the edge since getting sprayed with a little of their juice is a daunting thing, and sometimes there is no choice when one decides your home surroundings are a good place to hang out. From experience, I can attest that getting reliable advice on handling such situations is important, but choose your advisor with care.

A skunk found a garage door at my home that wouldn't close all the way down, and took up residence. I had to evict the intruder, but entering the garage and confronting the little stinker seemed not the best way to go. So, I turned to a local conservation officer for advice. Unfortunately, that was “Duff” Laubaugh, Michigan's only one-eyed C.O. (in a confrontation with a miscreant, the bad guy's gun discharged and Duff lost an eye). Duff passed on years ago, but left a memory about who to trust.

To get rid of the skunk, Duff advised putting

a trickle of garbage out at night and leading away from the garage to a deeper pile in the backyard. “Then, replace the backyard light with a red spotlight bulb, open the window, and put a sandbag or other brace on the sill, sit in the dark with a scoped .22 rifle and wait for the skunk to come out and follow the garbage trail.

“When he's busy eating on the pile, aim steady and shoot him in the head,” he explained. “A head shot will stop its brain from letting the tail come up to release the scent. And that will take care of it.”

I followed his instructions to the letter, and on the night of the skunk's assassination the critter did as predicted. A careful aim and steady squeeze put a .22 round through its head and it dropped on the pile of old food scraps...but not before it let out every ounce of pent-up stink juice it had.

Skunk stink began wafting in the windows and under the doors, producing a gagging reflex that was beyond belief. I scrambled to stuff towels under the door jambs, packed every sill with more cloth, and used up four cans of odor spray while trying to see through eyes filled with skunk-activated tears.

It was then I remembered that old Duff also had a notorious reputation for practical jokes, and I had been the star of his latest. Right about then I would have shot his other eye out if he had dared to put in an appearance.

It is this prelude to warmer spring that gets the skunk to move out from its winter quarters—unfortunately, it's often under the crawl spaces or unintended entryways into or near homes. When you add that this is also breeding season for many skunks, their return to a more active stage is heralded by that unmistakable calling-card scent.

The best advice of all is to keep your yard clean, crawl spaces and garages closed tight, and hope the little stinkers don't decide they like your neighborhood.

### Skunk Smell Remover

- 1 pint 3% hydrogen peroxide
- 1/8 c. baking soda
- 1 T. grease-cutting dish soap

Should you (or your pet) have the misfortune of getting sprayed by a skunk, measure ingredients critically, mix all together, and use at once—the formula's reaction lasts a limited time.

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



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# Balance Your Home's Efficiency with Comfort

You are wise to think about the livability of a house in addition to efficiency measures.

**W**hile building a small, simple house with thick insulation and very few windows would save energy, it likely would not suit most typical American families. You should balance a home's energy efficient aspects with comfort and convenience. Often, by making minor lifestyle changes, your family can dramatically reduce utility bills even in a less efficient house.

The typical "to-code" stick-built house—a home constructed entirely or largely on-site—is not very energy efficient, but this does not necessarily mean all stick-built homes are inefficient. With adequate (more than to-code) insulation, high-quality windows and doors, and attention to construction details, a typical lumber-framed house can be very efficient. Attention to detail, such as sealing all the vapor/air barriers, is particularly important as it relates to the airtightness of a house.

Several new construction methods are much more efficient than a rectangular lumber stick-built house. These include round panelized, geodesic dome, steel-framing, foam block/concrete, structural insulated panels (SIPS), and post-and-beam houses.

A round house is particularly energy efficient for several reasons. A circle provides the greatest amount of indoor floor space with the least amount of exterior wall surface area. Since heat loss (or gain) from a house is directly related to wall surface area, less wall area results in less potential loss. Also, wind tends to flow smoothly over the exterior, resulting in fewer air leaks into and out of a house.

A circular panelized house, such as ones made by Deltec Homes ([deltechomes.com](http://deltechomes.com)), uses a series of 8-foot wide flat panels to create the round house. These panels are made specifically to your house plans and delivered to your building site ready to assemble. A

combination of insulation inside the hollow panels and thick foam sheathing on the exterior results in a high level of insulation. Being manufactured in a controlled factory environment, the panels fit perfectly together for an airtight house.

The roof is self-supporting using trusses. This provides the opportunity to have a open



These insulated concrete forms use webs between the foam side to create the width of the gap for the concrete.

floor plan which is an efficiency advantage with solar or other alternative heating methods. Many house manufacturers have energy efficiency experts on staff, such as Deltec's "Green Team," to help you design a super-efficient round house. These companies also offer predesigned green home packages and super-insulated wall designs.

Geodesic dome houses are the ultimate in circular design for the least overall exterior surface area, but the interior living space is quite different from a typical house. The most efficient and strongest ones are made of a combination of triangular foam pieces covered with concrete. Because of their shape, both circular panelized and dome houses are inherently resistant to damage from severe weather such as hurricanes.

Although it seems counterintuitive because metal conducts heat, steel-framed houses provided by folks like Kodiak Steel Homes

([kodiaksteelhomes.com](http://kodiaksteelhomes.com)) are very energy efficient. Since the steel members replace the lumber in the walls, these houses can look identical to a standard stick-built lumber house. The only difference is the walls may look thicker, only noticeable at the window and door openings.

The most efficient steel-framed houses use large steel-framing members (called red iron) spaced very far apart. This greatly reduces the amount of thermal bridges (no insulation at studs) inside the walls. The steel members are very strong and stable, so the house stays airtight without the settling typical with lumber framing.

Foam block houses are assembled somewhat similar to hollow Legos. The lightweight foam blocks are stacked on top of one another to create the walls. When stacked together, open channels are created throughout the blocks. A concrete truck pumps concrete into the top of the wall and it flows throughout the wall. When it sets up, the wall is extremely strong. The foam blocks provide superhigh insulation levels. This construction method offers much architectural design flexibility and the homeowner can easily help with the basic construction.

SIPS are very strong panels with thick insulating foam in the center. They are also called stress skin panels because the interior and exterior skins provide the structural strength for the house. These long panels are factory-crafted to fit your house plans. With the high insulation level and few joints needed between the panels, these houses are efficient.

Standard form core wall panels are similar except the skins are not strong enough to be self-supporting. These panels are often attached over attractive post-and-beam framing which supports the house.

*Have a question for Jim? Send inquiries to James Dulley, Michigan Country Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit [dulley.com](http://dulley.com).*

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



Truly Unique



## Time travel at the speed of a 1935 Speedster?

The 1930s brought unprecedented innovation in machine-age technology and materials. Industrial designers from the auto industry translated the principles of aerodynamics and streamlining into everyday objects like radios and toasters. It was also a decade when an unequaled variety of watch cases and movements came into being. In lieu of hands to tell time, one such complication, called a jumping mechanism, utilized numerals on a disc viewed through a window. With its striking resemblance to the dashboard gauges and radio dials of the decade, the jump hour watch was indeed "in tune" with the times!

The Stauer 1930s Dashtronic deftly blends the modern functionality of a 21-jewel automatic movement and 3-ATM water resistance with the distinctive, retro look of a jumping display (not an actual



*True to Machine Art esthetics, the sleek brushed stainless steel case is clear on the back, allowing a peek at the inner workings.*

jumping complication). The stainless steel 1 1/2" case is complemented with a black alligator-embossed leather band. The band is 9 1/2" long and will fit a 7-8 1/2" diameter wrist.

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# Beware of Dramatic Heating, Cooling Claims

Claims about energy-saving devices, particularly those that indicate they can dramatically cut your heating and cooling costs, are cause for caution.

**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 with claims that 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. “Any-one promising to slash your utility bill by double digits is stretching the truth to the breaking point.”

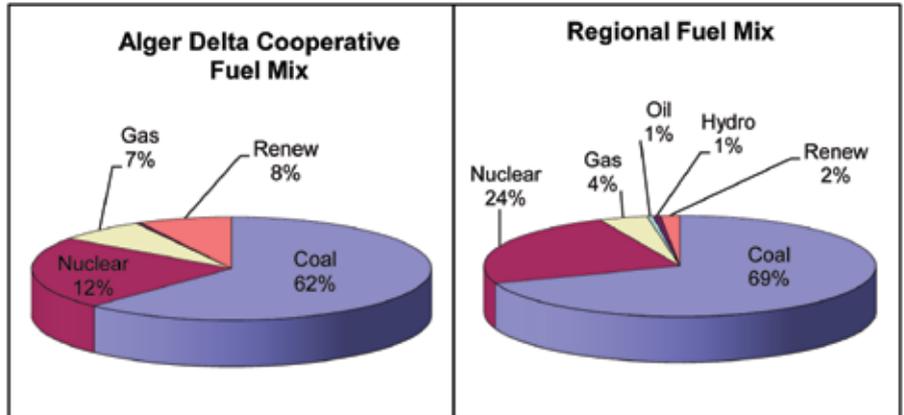
The bottom line: there’s no substitute for good old-fashioned energy efficiency measures like weatherstripping around doors, caulking around windows, adding insulation to your attic, plugging leaks in ductwork, and regularly cleaning or replacing furnace filters. Visit [ConsumerAffairs.com](http://ConsumerAffairs.com)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

## Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association

The environmental characteristics of your electricity as required by Public Act 141 of 2000.

### Comparison of the Fuel Sources Used to Generate Electricity

Alger Delta Cooperative vs. regional average for the 12-month period ended 12/31/2010.



Fuel Sources	Percentage of fuel types used to produce Alger Delta Cooperative electricity.	Percentage of fuel type used to produce electricity in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin (12/31/08).
Coal	61.6	69.4
Nuclear	22.6	23.9
Gas	7.1	4
Oil	0.0	0.5
Hydroelectric	0.4	0.6
Total Renewable Fuels	7.5	1.6
Biomass	0	0
Biofuel	0	0
Solid Waste Incineration	0.0	0.6
Wind	0.4	0.3
Wood	0.0	0.7
Solar	1	0

All of Alger Delta’s power is purchased and levels reflect a weighted average of two sources for which data was available.

### Airborne Emissions and High-Level Nuclear Waste Comparison

Alger Delta Cooperative vs. regional average for the 12-month period ended 12/31/2010.

Type of emission/waste	Alger Delta Cooperative average lbs/MWh	A regional average of all generation in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin (12/31/08).
Sulfur Dioxide	0.50	10.4
Carbon Dioxide	985	2,049
Oxides of Nitrogen	8.58	3.1
High-level nuclear waste	0.0052	0.0083

## NonDiscrimination Statement

Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association is the recipient of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

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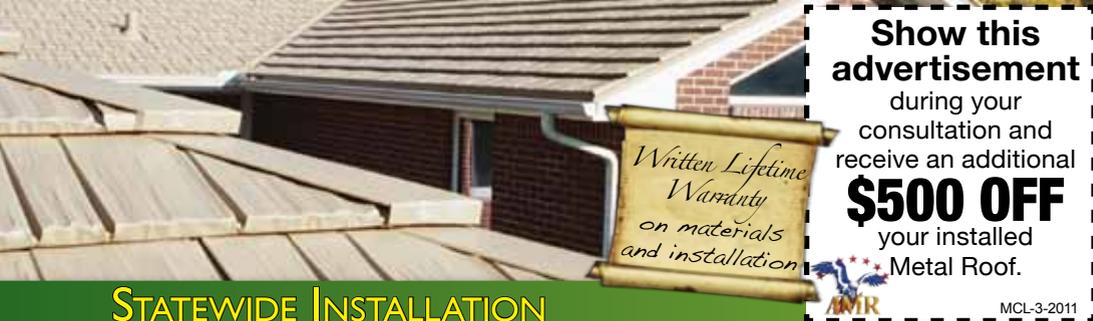
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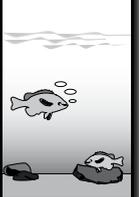
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# Building Pickford Library

Grassroots efforts build better communities, especially in hard times.

It's reminiscent of the grassroots efforts that formed electric co-ops in the 1930s to bring electric power to rural areas. 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, play with puppets, and simply relax.



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

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.

— Neil Moran

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

# STATE OF MICHIGAN

## BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

\*\*\*\*\*

In the matter of the application of **ALGER DELTA COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION**  
for approval of revisions to its  
**Large Power Service Rate – Choice, Schedule LP-C. • Case No. U-16530**

### NOTICE OF OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

On January 13, 2011, Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association (Alger Delta) filed an application with the Michigan Public Service Commission (Commission) pursuant to the 2008 PA 167, §6(2), MCL 460.36(2), of the Electric Cooperative Member-Regulation Act, for approval of proposed revisions to Alger Delta's Large Power Service Rate – Choice – Schedule LP-C, as currently set forth on First Revised Sheet No. D-9.01.

Any interested person may write to Alger Delta at 426 North 9th Street, Gladstone, Michigan, 49837, or call (906) 428-4141, for a free copy of its application. A copy of Alger Delta's application may also be reviewed at the office of the Commission's Executive Secretary, 6545 Mercantile Way, Suite 7, Lansing, Michigan, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, or on the Commission's website at: [www.michigan.gov/mpscedockets](http://www.michigan.gov/mpscedockets). For more information on how to participate in the case, you may contact the Commission at the above address, or by telephone at (517) 241-6180.

Written and electronic comments may be filed with the Commission and must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on March 28, 2011. Written comments should be sent to the: Executive Secretary, Michigan Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, Michigan 48909, with a copy mailed to Shaun M. Johnson, Dykema Gossett, PLLC, 201 Townsend, Suite 900, Lansing, Michigan, 48933. Electronic comments may be emailed to: [mpscedockets@michigan.gov](mailto:mpscedockets@michigan.gov). All comments should reference Case No. U-16530. Comments received in this matter will become public information, posted on the Commission's website, and subject to disclosure.

**ALGER DELTA COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION**



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# Who's Got Mail?

**W**e lost our mailbox this winter. In early January, someone snapped the post with the front end of their vehicle. (New and dark blue, based on the piece of plastic bumper left behind.)

I tried to drive a temporary metal post in the ground to hold a new box, but this winter even the ground in the Lansing area seems as impenetrable as it is in the Keweenaw Peninsula. There's no driving *anything* into it.

So, we make a daily postal run. The folks at the Mason Post Office are friendly and understanding. "Do you want to start up your mail?" they ask after retrieving the bundle left behind by our carrier, who has to contend with other route customers who lost their mailboxes to errant drivers or snowplows. "When the ground thaws," I usually respond.

Though not quite a relic, that mailbox doesn't seem as necessary as it once did. It was, with the phone, our lifeline to the wide world. Important things were found there: cards and letters from far-flung family and friends, gifts for birthdays and anniversaries, bills from utilities and banks, draft notices, school reports, and magazines with fresh news and comment.

Obviously, we still get and send mail, but not much of any value. Like many people, we pay our bills online and most of our written correspondence is by email. Catalogs and junk mail seem to make up the bulk of our mailbox stash now.

This pattern of disuse is repeated all over America, which is why this once vital and venerated service is in a death spiral. Plummeting mail volume leads to a chronic revenue shortage, which leads to increasing rates to raise revenue, which leads to an additional reduction in mail volume. The Postal Service says mail traffic peaked in 2006 at 213 billion pieces, then fell 20 percent by 2010.

The result is the announcement in January that the Postal Service might close up to 2,000 post offices nationwide to help stem losses of \$23 million a day. But this is not new. You might be surprised to learn that post offices have closed every year,

but two, since 1901, when their number peaked at 76,945. Today, there are less than 34,000.

Many of the post offices under closure review are in rural or smaller suburban areas. Michigan will have its share. This means some of you will be driving farther to do business with your no-longer-local post office.

Are we watching the slow death of one of our country's most iconic institutions? Starting with Benjamin Franklin, the first postmaster general, the Post Office gave us universal service at a simple rate, made mail-order possible, enabled business expansion, and provided rural delivery. (Some of this information is from "The United States Postal Service—An American History 1775–2006," which is available on [usps.com](http://usps.com), but apparently not through the mail.)

In 1890, 65 percent of Americans lived in rural areas. Although many city dwellers had enjoyed free home delivery since 1863, rural citizens had to pick up their mail at the Post Office, leading one farmer to ask: "Why should the cities have fancy mail service and the old colonial system still prevail in the country districts?"

*Does this sound familiar?* This cry was repeated for electricity in the 1920s and '30s (think electric co-ops), and is repeated again today for broadband internet service.

Even the arguments sound the same. Postmaster General John Wanamaker, who led the Post Office Department from 1889 to 1893, "thought it made more sense to have one person deliver mail than to have 50 people ride into town to collect their mail." He cited business logic and social philosophy as reasons to give rural dwellers free delivery. Businesses could expand their markets. Rural people needed the important information provided by newspapers but did not always have time to walk or ride to the Post Office. And, young people might stay on the farm if correspondence and magazines eased their isolation.

Although one Kansas farmer expressed concern that "rural people would become lazy if they did not have to pick



up their mail," more typical were reactions such as those of the Colorado woman who was "glad to have our mail fresh instead of stale."

"Farmers helped by putting out boxes for the rural carriers—everything from lard pails and syrup cans to old apple, soap and cigar boxes." In 1901, postal officials decided a standardized box would improve service, and so we ended up with today's mailbox.

When the Post Office offered package delivery in 1913, it triggered an economic boom, spurring the growth of the great mail-order houses: Montgomery Ward, in 1872, and Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1893. The year parcel post began, Sears handled five times as many orders, and five years later their revenues doubled.

By 1963, 80 percent of all U.S. mail was business mail. The development of the computer brought centralized accounting and sent a growing mass of utility bills and payments, bank deposits and receipts, advertising, magazines, credit card transactions, mortgage bills and payments, and Social Security checks through the mail.

Now, the internet is taking away more business than it's adding.

Some mail is bad. On Oct. 15, 2001, a letter containing deadly anthrax was post-marked in Trenton, NJ, and delivered to the Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. I was in the building then, along with Mike Peters, former CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, visiting Sen. Debbie Stabenow's office. We were among the last to leave the building, but it wasn't clear until later what a close call that really was.

Of course, some mail is good, like this magazine, which depends on the Postal Service to get it to your mailbox.

Thanks for joining us.

*Mike Buda is editor emeritus of Country Lines. His wife, Barbara, uses the mail much more than he does. Comment on Mike's columns at [countrylines.com/column/ramblings/](http://countrylines.com/column/ramblings/) or email him at [mbuda@countrylines.com](mailto:mbuda@countrylines.com)*





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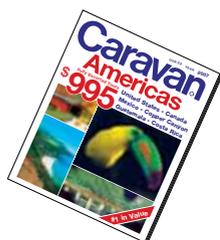
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## Mark Your Calendar! Co-op Sets District Meetings

**District meetings are an opportunity to voice your concerns and discuss issues with the co-op's leaders.**

Districts 5, 7 and 8 will elect a member to the board of directors. Members may deliver their ballot to Alger Delta, take it to the district meeting, or vote by mail. Ballots are counted at the district meeting, and the winner of the election is announced.

All other districts will host an information-only meeting.

If you are not sure what district you reside in, call Alger Delta at 906-428-4141 for assistance.

### 2011 Voting District Meetings

*These districts are electing a member to the board of directors:*

**District 5:** Gourley, LaBranche, Cornell – April 4, Gourley Town Hall

**District 8:** Nahma, Isabella – April 11, Nahma Town Hall

**District 7:** Stonington – April 14, Stonington Town Hall

**5:30 p.m.** – Light meal provided

**6 p.m.** – Meeting begins

### 2011 Non-Voting District Meetings

*These district meetings are informational only:*

**District 3:** Grand Marais – March 14, REC Center, Grand Marais

**District 2:** Harvey-Deerton – March 22, Onota Town Hall

**District 4:** Cedar River – March 24, Cedar River Town Hall

**District 6:** Nathan, Carney – April 18, Stephenson VFW

**District 1:** Big Bay – April 25, Powell Township School

**District 9:** Hiawatha – May 26, Au Train Town Hall

**6:15 p.m.** – Refreshments available

**6:30 p.m.** – Meeting begins

