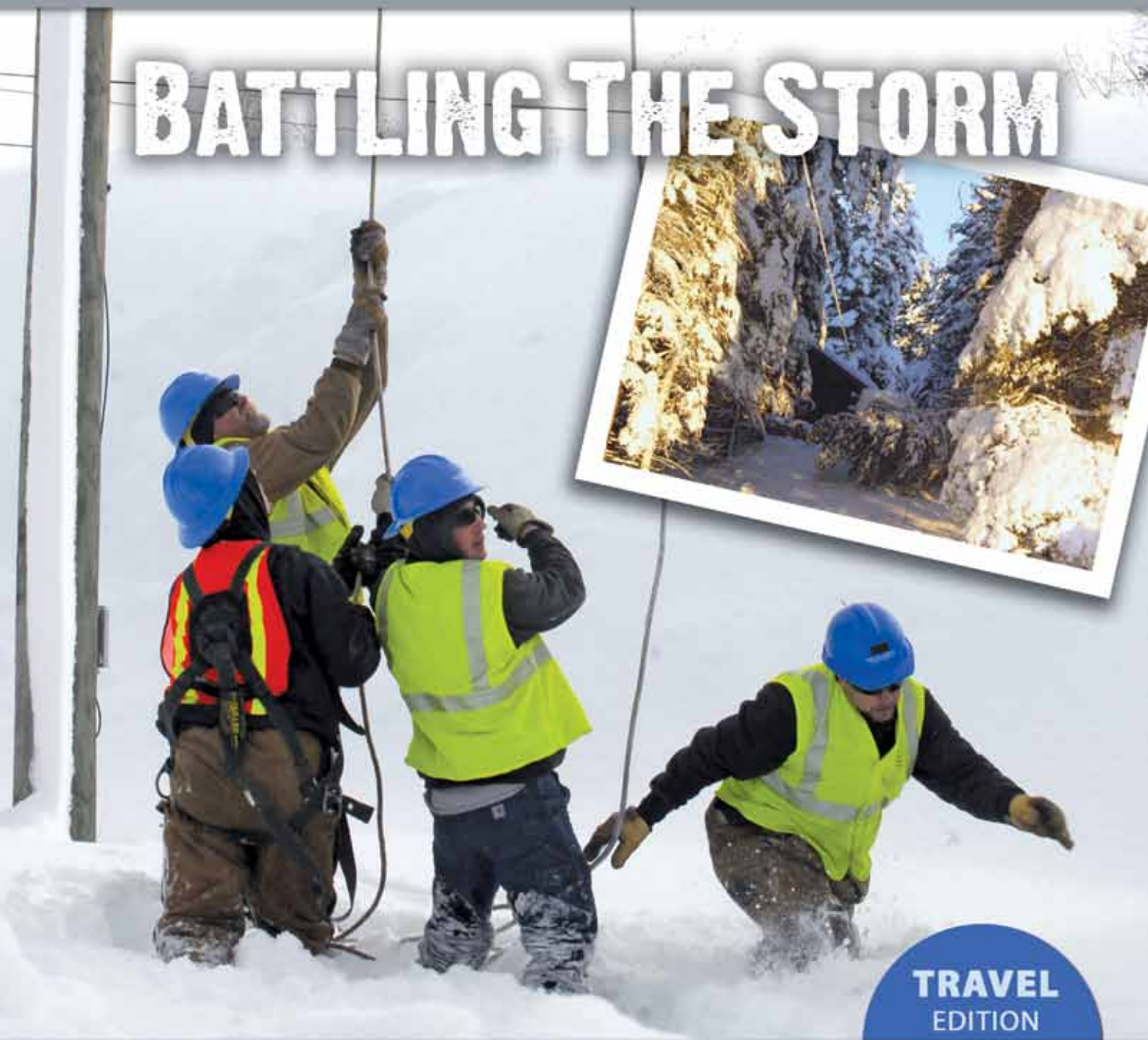


Michigan

COUNTRY LINES

BATTLING THE STORM



TRAVEL
EDITION

4 Big Storm
Doesn't Stop Us

5 Board Nominating
Petitions Available

20 Heating And Cooling
For Less



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1-800-678-0411

gtlakes.com

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Big Storm Doesn't Stop Us

The March 2012 snowstorm that knocked down trees and power lines at hundreds of locations left over 60,000 Great Lakes Energy

(GLE) members without power throughout our service area, many for several days. Some GLE employees call it the most damaging snowstorm they've seen in 30 years.

Like the October 2010 wind-storm, Mother Nature's fury brought destruction throughout our service area. Instead of howling winds up to nearly 80 mph, this storm stole quietly into the night. This type of event is rare because many inches of snow fell in a short time and it was wet, heavy snow that clung to trees, poles and power lines.

Most of northern lower Michigan had at least a foot of snow on the ground, which made restoration work extremely difficult. Line repairs proceeded at a snail's pace for Great Lakes Energy, as well as neighboring electric utilities.

Getting to outage locations took more time with this storm. Unlike the fall wind-storm, the thick, heavy blanket of snow made travel difficult and slow. Roads were sometimes blocked by trees. Big line trucks got stuck in the snow. Snowshoes, special tracked vehicles and snowmobiles were needed to get to many trouble spots, and even those sank into the snow.

Repairs also took more time, as lineworkers reported up to waist-deep snow in some places. They had to remove fallen trees and limbs before they could begin to dig out power lines buried in the snow. In some cases, snow frozen to the downed wire had to be knocked off before hoisting it back up into place. Over 50 broken poles had to be replaced, sometimes using tracked vehicles to haul them to the site. Most of this hard, time-consuming work had to be repeated over and over again at each location with downed wires.

We had a small army of private contractors and other utilities in the state helping us, totaling 50 line and tree-trimming crews. Most of the GLE crews who finished getting members back on in our

central and south regions headed north to help out, too. Crews worked long hours, only stopping when necessary and missing much time away from their own homes and families.

You can take pride in your GLE employees who look out for you. In addition to our lineworkers, our office staff was involved in getting your power back on. They include dispatchers providing valuable communication to repair crews, all available member service reps answering the phones, and other staff who patrolled our lines looking for downed wires

or helped lead visiting crews to problem areas.

It was a bad storm, but it could have been worse. In recent years we've concentrated on strengthening our core business, which is to provide you with the most reliable service possible. We've been aggressive in re-clearing trees within power line rights-of-way. New technologies are helping us reduce outage times. New lines are being built closer to roadways when possible, which makes them more easily accessible when repairs are needed. Your cooperation in allowing us to continue this progress means better service for you.

If there is a "good side" to a storm, it's the fact that we witnessed more people using the "Storm Central" and "Account Access" services on our website. "Storm Central" displays current information on how many members are without power, and where. From there, members can access their account to check on the status of the outage at their location, such as informing them when a crew has been assigned to their region. Members without power are finding ways to access this information, either at work, at a library, or with a smart phone.

Most importantly, everyone who worked the storm, including visiting crews, did their jobs safely. We appreciated your patience and words of support throughout this effort. We can't control what Mother Nature brings, but we are dedicated to looking out for you in any kind of weather.



Steve Boeckman
Great Lakes Energy
President/CEO

**Important
Safety Message!**

Connect Your New Generator Safely



Dave Matz, Great Lakes Energy's operations director, points out the safety transfer switch that allows a portable generator to be safely connected to a home.

Great Lakes Energy reminds members with new portable generators that they need to be safely installed to avoid hazards that could result in a fatality and property damage.

A meter base designed for safely connecting a portable generator to your home in an emergency can be purchased for \$350 from Great Lakes Energy.

The investment protects co-op members and lineworkers from potential dangers. An improperly connected portable generator can back-feed power into the power line and potentially electrocute both lineworkers trying to restore your service and neighbors served by the same transformer. Your generator, wiring and appliances could also be damaged when power is restored.

The electric meter fits into the special base, which has a utility/generator transfer switch for safe operation of your portable generator. The switch prevents both sources from feeding power into the home at the same time and creating a dangerous situation. It also prevents electricity from back-feeding into the power line.

Installation of the meter base and generator wiring should be done by a licensed electrician. A professional can help size a portable generator to safely meet your emergency needs and will ensure the work is done correctly.

The meter base is rated for a 200-amp service with a 100-amp maximum for the generator input. The top of the meter base is locked and the bottom area is left accessible for wiring in the portable generator.

Instruct your electrician to install the necessary equipment that will enable you to safely and quickly connect and disconnect the portable generator during an emergency.

For more details, contact us at 888-485-2537, ext. 1303.

Board Nominating Petitions Available

Nominating petitions are available for Great Lakes Energy members who would like to seek election to the cooperative's board of directors.

Four board positions, all for three years, will need to be filled. The terms of directors Paul Byl of Shelby, Mark Carson of Boyne City, Dale Farrier of Kalkaska, and Robert Kran of Free Soil expire this year.

Members will receive their mail-in ballots in the July/August 2012 issue of *Michigan Country Lines*. Winners will be announced Aug. 22 at the GLE annual business meeting.

To get their names on the ballot, qualifying member-owners of the cooperative who maintain a primary residence within our service area must file a nominating

More information on this year's director election, including the mail-in ballot, will appear in the July/August 2012 issue of Michigan Country Lines.

petition with the co-op secretary.

Petitions must be signed by at least 50 active GLE members. Co-signers of a joint membership count as one signature. For the signature to be valid, complete information about the member must be provided. The cooperative will verify the member information. Incomplete petitions will not be counted. All petitions must be

signed no more than 90 days prior to submission to the cooperative.

Petition circulators are advised, but not required, to collect well over 50 signatures because some may not be valid.

Signed petitions returned by mail or in person must be received in the co-op's Boyne City office no earlier than Thursday, May 24, 2012, and no later than Friday, June 8, 2012.

Petitions can be mailed to: Secretary of the Cooperative, Great Lakes Energy, P.O. Box 70, Boyne City, MI 49712. They can also be dropped off at the Boyne City office during normal business hours, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Petition forms are available by contacting 888-485-2537, ext. 1331.

Maintaining High Standards

Great Lakes Energy met all 10 state-mandated standards for electric service and reliability in 2011, which is the fifth straight year for this accomplishment.

“Meeting the standards is important because the people we serve are more than just customers; they’re members who expect the very best from their cooperative,” says GLE President/CEO Steve Boeckman.

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) requires state-regulated electric utilities to annually report how well they were able to meet standards established to protect consumers from unacceptable levels of electric service and reliability. Standards to help measure utility performance in emergency outage situations are included.

Standards and 2011 Results

1. Complaint Response. Utility must respond in three business days or less to at least 90 percent of any formal complaints filed against it with the MPSC.

GLE score: 97 percent ✓

2. Call Blockage. No more than 5 percent of incoming calls should receive a busy signal.

GLE score: 0.01 percent ✓

3. Meter Reading. At least 85 percent of the meters must be read within the approved time period.

GLE score: 99.09 percent ✓

4. Wire Down Relief Factor. At least 90 percent of the time, a utility must respond within four hours to nonutility employees, such as firefighters, who request relief from guarding a downed power line.

GLE score: 100 percent ✓

5. New Service Installation. At least 90 percent of new services must be installed in



Great Lakes Energy crews rebuild a power line knocked down by trees during a summer storm last year.

15 business days or less. Great Lakes Energy handled 481 new service installations last year, excluding those installed in combination with primary lines.

GLE score: 98.5 percent ✓

6. Average Call Answer Time. Calls must be answered on average in less than 90 seconds. In 2011, the cooperative handled 355,000 calls through its Call Center, outage and operator queues.

GLE score: 32 seconds ✓

7. Outage Restoration (normal conditions). At least 90 percent of the customers should have their power restored in eight hours or less.

GLE score: 97.9 percent ✓

8. Outage Restoration (catastrophic conditions). At least 90 percent of the customers should have their power restored in 60 hours or less.

GLE score: 100 percent ✓

State rules define catastrophic conditions as either severe weather conditions that result in service interruptions to at least 10 percent of a utility’s customers or events of sufficient magnitude that result in a government issued state of emergency declaration.

9. Outage Restoration (all conditions). Power should be restored to at least 90 percent of the customers in 36 hours or less under normal and catastrophic conditions.

GLE score: 100 percent ✓

10. Same Circuit Repetitive Interruption. No more than 5 percent of the utility’s electric circuits should experience five or more outages in a 12-month period.

GLE score: 0.046 percent ✓

Reliability improvements in the last seven years have benefitted thousands of members and contributed to Great Lakes Energy’s success in meeting state performance standards. They include more intensive work to keep trees away from power lines; upgrading miles of older, less dependable lines and employing new technologies to find and correct line problems more quickly and effectively. These and other improvements also enable Great Lakes Energy to restore power more quickly when severe weather conditions cause massive, widespread damage to its distribution system.

However, the co-op’s work is not done yet, as it will take time to extend that same high level of reliable service to all members.

Visit Us at the Home Shows

At the Great Lakes Energy booth you will find:

- Marathon electric water heater
- Convectair electric space heater
- Energy Bike
- Energy-saving programs and other products and services



Newaygo Home & Garden Show

April 14 • Newaygo Middle School

West Michigan Home & Garden Show

April 27-29 • Mason County Fairgrounds, Ludington

Coloring Contest: Still Time To Enter!

HEY KIDS! If you're 10 or under you can enter our coloring contest. This year's coloring page is a picture of the Touchstone Energy balloon. Great Lakes Energy is a Touchstone Energy Cooperative.

Download the entry form and contest rules at the "Your Community" section of gtlakes.com. Entry forms can also be picked up at any GLE office. Entries must be received by **April 20**.

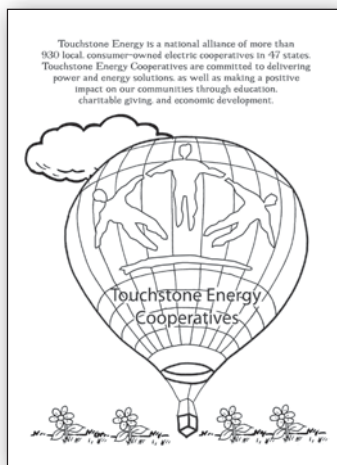
Age Groups

- 4 and under • 5-7 years old • 8-10 years old

Prizes

One grand prize for each age group: deluxe set of art supplies, valued at \$25. Plus, you will be pictured in one of our publications.

One second and one third prize for each age group: new crayons and markers, valued at \$10.



Download the entry form and coloring page at gtlakes.com or pick them up at one of our offices.

New Paperless Bill Option

Paperless electric bills are now available with the new Electronic Bill Presentment (EBP) option. By eliminating paper bills for participating Great Lakes Energy members, EBP saves paper, reduces bill printing and mailing costs, and helps the environment.

Members can request to be notified by e-mail when their monthly billing statement is available to view online. Billing statements can be saved and stored by members on their own computers or they can access an online archive of up to 13 months of billing history through their GLE online eBusiness account.

Members—including those who currently use GLE's eBusiness feature for online information about their electric accounts—will see a page that encourages them to sign up for EBP when they log-in or click on the "Account Access" link on GLE's website. Once enrolled in EBP, they will receive a monthly email advising their bill is online and ready to view.

Unlike the bill summaries that appear on members' eBusiness accounts, EBP statements are exact replicas of the physical bill.

When members combine EBP with automated bill payment, GLE can realize a nearly paper-free circle of distributing bills and receiving payments.

Great Lakes Energy reps can walk members through the process of enrolling in EBP and automated bill payment, including viewing statements through eBusiness accounts. To enroll, visit gtlakes.com and click on "Account Log-in" at the top of the page, or call 888-485-2537.



Attend Our Free Energy Seminar

You're invited to attend a free energy seminar Saturday, April 21, from 10 a.m. to noon at our Great Lakes Energy office in Newaygo.

Hear presentations on geothermal and air-source heat pumps, Marathon® electric

water heaters, and more. Local heating and cooling companies and Great Lakes Energy staff members will be on hand to answer your questions relating to electric heat and electric water heaters.

Receive the latest update on Energy Optimization (EO) programs that offer incentives to help you save energy. Learn about other incentive programs offered by Great Lakes Energy, such as special billing discounts for electric heat and water heating.

Door prizes will be awarded. Winners will receive energy-saving gifts.

Space is limited, so please register by calling 1-888-485-2537, ext. 8958, or email events@glenergy.com.

Receive Country Lines While You're Away

You can continue to receive your *Michigan Country Lines* magazine even if you're away from home for an extended time.

Simply contact us if you plan to be away for more than a month, and give us the address where you would like the magazine sent. Contact us again when you return home to ensure there will be no interruption in your magazine mailings.

Contact us by dialing 888-GT-LAKES (485-2537), ext. 1817, or by visiting the member services section of gtlakes.com, found under "Your Home" and by clicking on "Change of Address."



Find us on Facebook.
facebook.com/greatlakesenergy

Change Is Good

That's what a Shelby couple found with their air-source heat pump.

For years, Great Lakes Energy members Linda and Carl Kotzian heated over 1,300 sq. ft. of their Shelby home with fuel oil and wood. A central air conditioning system kept them comfy in the summer.

Three years ago, the couple realized it was time to make a change. They had an air-source heat pump installed. Linda, who is also GLE's senior communication/marketing specialist, and her husband are pleased with their decision.

Several developments led to their move to a heat pump. Their central air conditioner was nearly 30 years old and required more

maintenance. Carl developed back problems which limited his ability to make firewood. Heating oil prices increased and now average over \$3 per gallon. In addition, Great Lakes Energy offers a \$250 rebate and lower electric rate for qualifying air source heat pumps.

Rather than buy a replacement air conditioning system, they invested \$7,500 in an air source heat pump that cools their home and helps heat it, too. Great Lake Energy's Controlled Heating program allows their heat pump to be separately metered at a 3 cents/kilowatt-hour discount. In return, GLE reserves the right to interrupt it during periods when its costs to purchase power are the greatest.

Today, they use less fuel oil, which means more money stays in their pockets.

"We were looking for something that would economically heat us in the fall and spring so that we would only have to rely on the more expensive fuel oil during the very dead of winter," Linda explains.

By taking advantage of a more efficient system and GLE's lower rate, they received an unexpected benefit. "The fact that our cooling bills also drastically decreased was a much-appreciated bonus," she adds. When temperatures topped 90 last summer, their highest monthly cooling bill was \$20.10.

Their heat pump operates most efficiently when the outdoor temperature is above 35 degrees, which made it an ideal heating choice for fall and spring. In a normal winter when daily highs are often well below that temperature, their oil furnace takes over.

An air-source heat pump moves heat naturally found in the outside air into the home. According to the Department of Energy, "when properly installed, an air-source heat pump can deliver one-and-a-half to three times more heat energy to a home than the electrical energy it consumes. This is possible because a heat pump moves heat rather than converting it from a fuel, like in combustion heating systems."

In the summer, the heat pump works like a refrigerator by transferring heat from the inside to the outside. Heat is transferred through a refrigerant that circulates through the heat pump.

Home construction and lifestyle are equally important to reducing home heating and cooling costs.

The Kotzian home has 6 inches of insulation in the walls and 8-10 inches in the ceiling. Most of the windows and doors are well-insulated.

The thermostat is normally set between 68-70 degrees in the winter and 72 degrees in the summer.

"Since Carl is retired and home most of the time, we keep the temperature at even, comfortable settings," she says.

How much does it cost to operate their air-source heat pump? See the related chart.

Air-Source Heat Pump Operating Costs for the Kotzian Family in Shelby

| | 2010 | | 2011 | | 2012 | |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|------|---------|
| | kWh | cost | kWh | cost | kWh | cost |
| JAN | 20 | \$1.55 | 160 | \$12.69 | 280 | \$23.06 |
| FEB | 120 | \$9.26 | 40 | \$3.10 | | |
| MAR | 320 | \$24.69 | 320 | \$24.75 | | |
| APR | 260 | \$20.06 | 360 | \$27.84 | | |
| MAY | 180 | \$13.89 | 320 | \$24.75 | | |
| JUN | 80 | \$6.17 | 140 | \$10.83 | | |
| JUL | 180 | \$13.89 | 160 | \$12.37 | | |
| AUG | 260 | \$20.06 | 260 | \$20.10 | | |
| SEP | 120 | \$9.56 | 140 | \$10.83 | | |
| OCT | 180 | \$14.34 | 180 | \$13.92 | | |
| NOV | 280 | \$22.30 | 420 | \$32.50 | | |
| DEC | 180 | \$14.34 | 360 | \$28.07 | | |
| TOTAL | 2,180 | \$170.11 | 2,860 | \$221.75 | | |

Low-usage months indicate either the main heating systems (oil/wood) provided most of the heat or mild weather conditions meant little need for heating or cooling. Costs reflect the Controlled Heating program's 3 cents/kWh discount. PSCR cost is included, but Energy Optimization Surcharge and state sales tax are not.

Easy Ways To Pay

Your co-op offers many convenient ways to pay your monthly electric bill.

■ **Prefer to pay in person?** Bring your payment to any of our GLE locations in Boyne City, Waters, Kalkaska, Reed City, Newaygo, Scottville, Hart or Wayland, with convenient drive-through windows in Hart, Newaygo and Scottville. We accept cash, check, money order, credit or debit card (processed as credit) payments.

Several local businesses also accept payments for GLE bills that are not delinquent. Visit gtlakes.com or contact us for the location of the pay station nearest you.

■ **Like paying by phone?** Call 888-485-2537. Member service representatives are available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to take your payment over the phone. They can use your bank account information to debit your checking account or will accept a credit or debit card payment.

■ **Want to pay online?** Visit gtlakes.com. You'll need to set up a user name and password. After that, you can log-in anytime 24/7



Photo - © iStockphoto.com

to pay your bill or access other information about your account.

■ **Sign up for automatic payments** to ensure your bills are always paid on time. GLE schedules deduction of the amount due each month. Automatic payments can be deducted from checking or savings accounts or charged to your credit or debit card.

■ **Want nice, even, monthly payments?** Budget billing is for you. Monthly bill amounts stay the same and are adjusted annually based on your previous year's usage. To enroll, a member must have 12 months of usage history and a zero balance at the time of enrollment.

■ **Late payment?** Call as soon as you realize your payment will be late and our member service reps will work hard to help you.

Call 888-485-2537 or visit gtlakes.com for more details on ways to pay your bill.

your small change
 Makes a

Can you give a few cents a month to help your community? The People Fund program works because there is power in numbers. A contribution of less than \$1 each month adds up fast when thousands of Great Lakes Energy members get involved.

The needs of our local communities continue to grow, and you have the power to give the People Fund a bigger role in meeting those needs. We round up your electric bill to the next dollar and the amount, which averaged just 39 cents a month in 2011, goes into the People Fund. There are no administrative costs. All donations are returned to our local communities.



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Girls on the Run program

We Need Your Help!
Enroll in the People Fund today.

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Ed and Jan Wagner of Scottville treasure their opportunity to be second-time parents to their five year-old grandson Holden. The three enjoy a Dr. Seuss book together.

Grandparents Become Grand Parents

A local People Fund grant helps smooth the transition. **Linda Kotzian**

Imagine unexpected circumstances that require you to become a parent to one of your own grandchildren.

Mason County's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) organization, launched 13 years ago through the Scottville Senior Center, helps meet the needs of relative caregivers of all ages and their "new" family members. One of the needs is for family activities that don't further strain already-stretched budgets. A \$250 Great Lakes Energy People Fund grant awarded in 2011 helped pay for one of many such events hosted by GRG.

Scottville resident Jan Wagner coordinates GRG programs and activities. She and her husband Ed have been parents to their five year-old grandson Holden for four years.

Wagner believes the situation of older relatives needing to become caregivers again is more widespread than most think. Although the group has existed for 13 years, the poor economy on top of more military deployments have added to the ranks of older caregivers.

And it's tricky for numerous reasons, Wagner relates. For one, parenting skills for some are a distant memory from as much as 30 years prior. Getting used to busy school schedules, new educational methods, extra-curricular activities, and sometimes having to juggle a job on top of that takes a toll.

"What we handled so easily when we were in our 20s is now so hard," Wagner says softly.

Add to that the fact that little help is available for such proxy parent situations. Raising a child also takes considerable financial resources. Second-time parents deal with expenses for clothes and school-related items, additional food, occasional medical attention, and entertainment such as books, video games, and social outings with friends.

If the child is very young, they also incur diaper and baby food expenses. If the child is older, they struggle to provide desirable extras such as cell phones, a computer, and perhaps a car.

"It's unbelievably expensive and difficult to raise a child on a fixed income, and approximately 90 percent of grandparents don't receive assistance unless they qualify as foster parents," Wagner explains.

Legal measures to establish foster or guardianship status involve court appearances, and most find the necessary processes to be confusing, frustrating and expensive.

The GRG group helps guide its members through whatever path they choose. They help limit the confusion involved with finding legal representation and other qualifying services. Members support each other by sharing their hopes, successes and even pain related to their experiences.

"We're there to hold peoples' hands and walk them through it," Wagner says.

Struggles and all, second-time parents like the Wagners find their efforts fulfilling. While Wagner observes that children under the parenting care of a relative tend to need more attention than if they were part of a "normal" family, older relatives appear to have more patience and time to deal with the challenges.

"The rewards make us feel like we haven't given anything up at all," Wagner concludes, expressing great joy in simple pleasures like having her grandchild snuggle with her after a long, hard day.

She also notes that finding the funds to indulge in family activities together is one of the biggest struggles. Among other resources, GRG organizes free family activities for its members and depends on fundraisers and grants to pay for the events.

"That's why getting the People Fund grant was wonderful," says Wagner. "We certainly appreciate all the Great Lakes Energy members who contribute and make such grants possible."

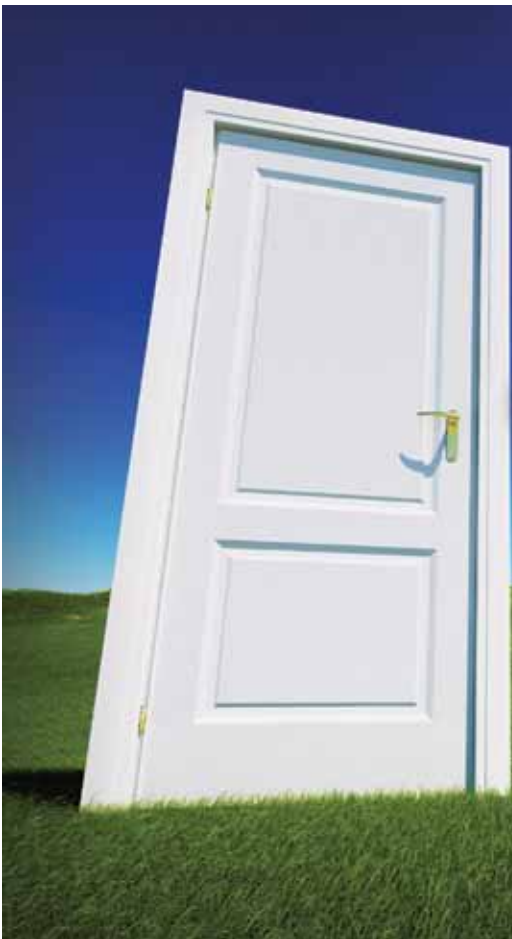
The Wagners would know. As Great Lakes Energy members themselves, they also contribute to the People Fund.

For support group listings throughout Michigan visit kinship.msu.edu, call 800-535-1218, or email kinship@msu.edu.

Those within Mason County seeking more information on the Scottville-based GRG group may email Wagner at wagnerjan@live.com.

Enroll today! The People Fund program works because there is power in numbers. A Great Lakes Energy member's contribution is less than one dollar per month when you round-up your monthly bill to the next dollar, but it adds up fast when thousands of members get involved.

You can help the People Fund expand to meet the growing needs of Michigan residents. Contact us and we'll do the rest. You can also enroll online by visiting the "Your Community" section on gtlakes.com.





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