

A Service of **HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative**

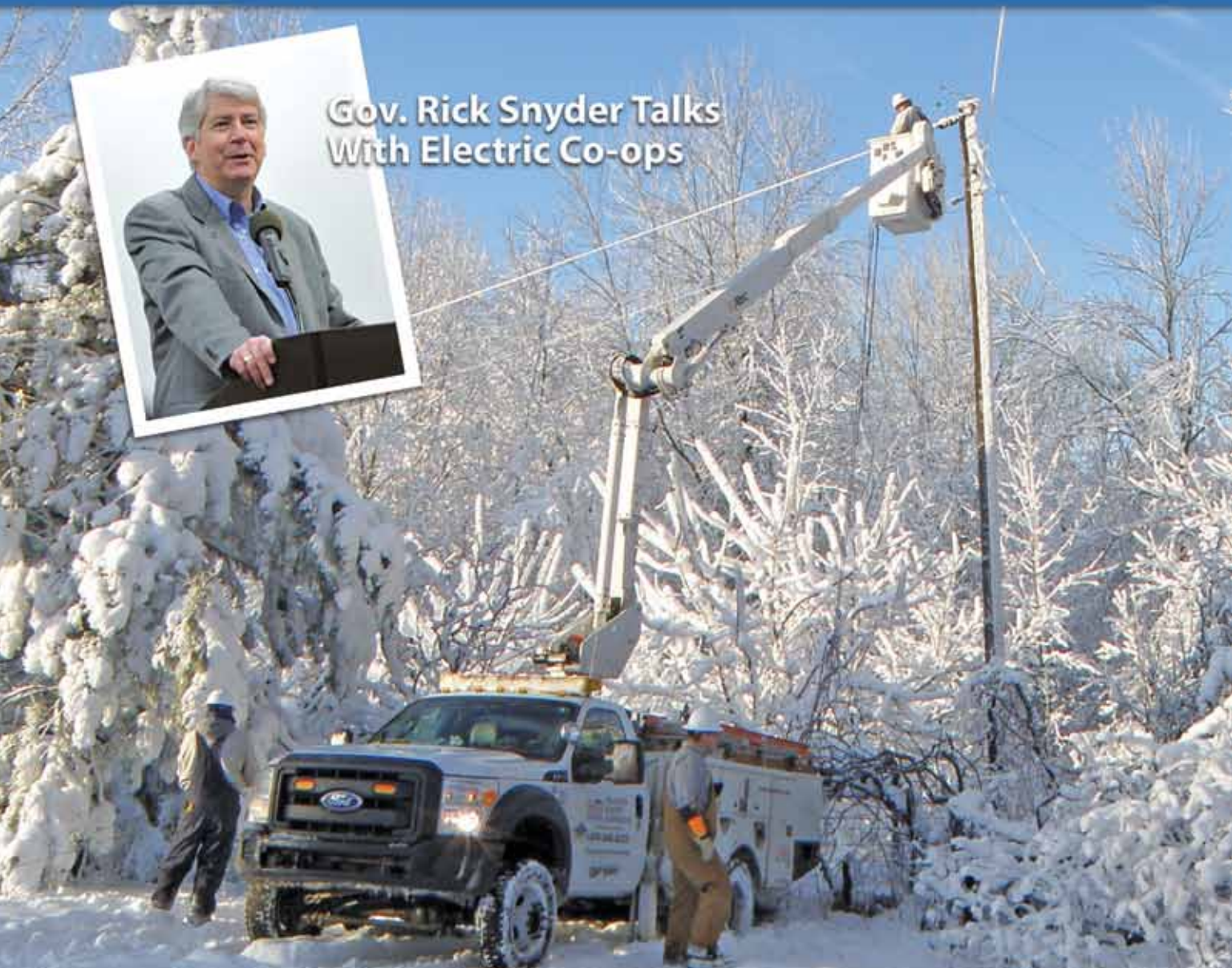
January 2012

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES



**Gov. Rick Snyder Talks
With Electric Co-ops**



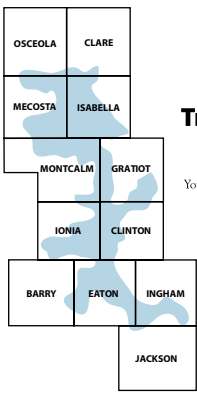
HomeWorks Crews On The Job:

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75 Years!

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Makes A Difference

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An Energy Audit



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Partners in Power

When you cook dinner, watch the news, or post family photos on Facebook, you don't really think about what's behind the power that makes these things happen.

You're not supposed to. If we're doing our jobs right, your ON switches always work when you want them to.

But that power has to be generated, and then carried across miles of transmission line, before it gets to the substations where we take over with the power lines that stretch to each of your homes.

Wolverine Power Cooperative is our most important partner, taking care of the generation and transmission details for us on your behalf. In fact, their efforts are responsible for about two-thirds of your monthly energy bill.

Power generation and transmission facilities both take a lot of money to build, operate, maintain, and upgrade.

For example, in 2009 Wolverine purchased what's known as the Sumpter Plant, with four natural gas-fired turbines near Detroit.

Last year, they purchased a share in the Ohio Valley Electric Cooperative's power plant network located along the Illinois and Ohio rivers.

Both of these investments were made when the economy made the transactions financially beneficial to Wolverine. Still, there are increased costs associated with owning power plants, such as property taxes and depreciation.

Wolverine's leadership, which includes two HomeWorks board members, felt paying a little more now, when these prime investments were available, would be a good trade-off for locking in a long-term power supply – and long-term price stability.

In addition, a long-term contract with Detroit Edison (DTE) expired at the end of 2011. If a new contract had been available, it would certainly have included higher rates, reflecting DTE's own increasing costs.

Michigan's renewable power portfolio requirements also mean passing along the higher costs of purchasing energy generated by wind, hydro and other renewable sources.

The bottom line is that your energy costs will go up as of Jan. 1, an increase authorized by your board of directors at the special member meeting on Sept. 26.

If you use 1,000 kilowatt hours in a month, you will pay \$2.53 more for your electricity (plus about 11 cents more sales tax, at 4 percent).

For a little over \$4 a day, on average, you get the value electricity provides, from hot water to TVs and video games, outdoor lights, power tools, and so many other comforts and conveniences.

For us, there is a comfort in knowing Wolverine Power is working on our behalf to make sure that electricity is there 24-hours-a-day.



Mark Kappler
General Manager



COVER PHOTO – A HomeWorks line crew repairs a downed line after a sudden storm swept through Ionia, Eaton and Clinton counties Nov. 29-30.

Blanchard office:

3681 Costabella Avenue
Open 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Portland office:

7973 E. Grand River Avenue
Portland, MI 48875
Open 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Electric bill/account questions:

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

Service questions/outages:

517-647-7554 or 1-800-848-9333
(24 hours for emergency calls)

Tri-County Propane:

1-877-574-2740

WildBlue:

1-800-668-8413

www.homeworks.org

E-mail: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

www.facebook.com/HomeWorks.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

Pioneers in Rural Power: Looking Back

Franklin Delano Roosevelt
William V. Clegg
Lawton Heeneey
Jasper L. Terry
Dorr L. Cady
James E. Houston

You may only be familiar with the first name on that list, but all six were pioneers in rural electrification. Their hard work and inspiration are keys to your home having reliable electric power today.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act in 1935, after realizing people who lived in rural areas could not enjoy the quality of life found in cities of the time. If electric power was even available to them, it could cost four times

Do you have Tri-County Electric history to share?

Over the next year, we'll be spotlighting memories and materials from members who have already shared their stories with us. Call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252 to let us know about yours.



as much as city folks paid.

William Clegg, Lawton Heeneey, Jasper Terry, Dorr Cady, and James Houston met on March 29, 1937, in Lansing to form Tri-County Electric Cooperative, named for the three home counties of Eaton, Ingham and Jackson.

Not only did they pass articles of incorporation and bylaws for the new cooperative, they also:

- authorized construction of power lines in Eaton, Ingham, Jackson, Livingston, Clinton, Calhoun, Ionia and Washtenaw counties;
- authorized a \$400,000 construction loan contract with the Rural Electrification Administration (REA);
- authorized further borrowing, as needed, to \$2 million;
- authorized contracts for energy and construction; and
- authorized 350 miles of line for 1,975 members.

These were big steps for men who were already busy with farms and families—and no electric power to assist them.

The REA was two years old, and Tri-County Electric was just the 25th cooperative



In this 2007 photo, crews trim trees and brush from the right-of-way near Tri-County Electric's "Pole #1" that is still in service southeast of Eaton Rapids.

to request funding. The founders had to find sources of power to energize those lines—from the Eaton Rapids dam, from other farmers who had generators with excess capacity, and from the City of Portland.

From these simple beginnings, the cooperative has grown to serve over 25,000 meters in parts of 13 counties: Barry, Clare, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ingham, Ionia, Isabella, Jackson, Mecosta, Montcalm, Osceola, and Saginaw. (Apparently we never built those lines authorized for Livingston, Calhoun, or Washtenaw counties.)

Over the next year, we plan to celebrate 75 years of service to you in many ways. Watch *Country Lines* or check our website to see what form those celebrations will take!



Youth Leadership Summit

Look on pages 7 and 10 for details about the new Michigan Youth Leadership Summit.

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Co-op will sponsor up to four area high school sophomores or juniors to the Youth Leadership Summit, and two will go on to the Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. Applications are due **March 15**.

Visit homeworks.org for more details.

Need Help With College Costs?

Click on homeworks.org after Jan. 1, 2012, for information on winning your share of \$2,500 in HomeWorks Touchstone Energy® Scholarships offered to members.

High school seniors are eligible for one of two \$1,000 Touchstone Energy scholarships, based on a combination of merit and need, to students served by HomeWorks Tri-County.

We also offer two \$250 adult education scholarships.

Look for application forms and complete guidelines at homeworks.org, or call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252 (jayne@homeworks.org). Applications are due **March 15**.



Teachers Win Energy Grants

Seven area teachers won Touchstone Energy® Classroom Grants in 2011 for projects that will benefit their students for years to come.

“Touchstone Energy cooperatives like HomeWorks Tri-County demonstrate four basic values—innovation, accountability, integrity, and commitment to community. These grants are a great way to spotlight our values,” says manager Mark Kappler.



Touchstone Energy®
The power of human connections

The winning grants for this year include (below and on opposite page):

- \$2,395 for an ActivClassroom board to Gaylia Ross, 2nd grade teacher, Boyce Elementary, Ionia;
- \$1,841.16 for electrical box kits to Yasmin Oberlin, Industrial Arts teacher at Eaton Rapids High School;
- \$2,500 to upgrade government surplus laptops, to Daymond Grifka at Fulton High School, Middleton;

- \$1,000 to help sponsor the Alma High School robotics team, represented by Kayla Bloom, Charlie Morey and Samantha Smith;
- \$1,000 to help sponsor annual camp for sixth graders at Central Montcalm Middle School, Stanton;
- \$2,500 for the Skyward tutoring program, to Amber Fogarty, counselor at Portland Middle School, shown with HomeWorks’ Chris Reed, left, and principal Todd Marsh; and
- \$2,500 toward a mobile computer lab, to Brian Rehmann, and \$740.60 for two electronic balance scales to Brian Pohl, both teachers at Pewamo-Westphalia High School.



Central Montcalm Middle School sixth-grade.



Second-graders at Boyce Elementary with teacher Gaylia Ross (L) and principal Stacey Bovee.



Robotics Team members at Alma High School.



Industrial Arts students at Eaton Rapids High School, with teacher Yasmin Oberlin.



Students at Fulton High School, with teacher Daymond Grifka.

Teachers: Apply Now for 2012 Grants!

Applications are due Feb. 15 for the 2012 Classroom Grant program. Public or private schools that serve children of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric members can receive a grant of up to \$2,500 for innovative programs that enrich students' education. See examples on these two pages.

Visit homeworks.org, or call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252, for an application and guidelines.



Chris Reed, HomeWorks' operations coordinator (L), presents a grant to Portland Middle School counselor Amber Fogarty and principal Todd Marsh.



Students from Pewamo-Westphalia High School science classes, with teachers Brian Rehmann (L) and Brian Pohl.

More Connections Card Values

Your HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Co-op Connections Card® links you to over 22,000 local and national business discounts. Besides local businesses, Touchstone Energy® offers discounts from a variety of national businesses and chains, such as rental car companies and hotels.

Healthy Savings

Effective Jan. 1, all of our member-owners and their families can take advantage of Healthy Savings benefits for free. This is *in addition to* the pharmacy savings which members have been using since 2009, saving nearly \$90,000 on 3,618 prescriptions.

The deals include:

Dental: 15-50% savings on general dentistry, such as cleanings and fillings, and on specialty care such as root canals, crowns, orthodontia, and more.

Vision: 10-60% savings on eyewear and eyecare, 10-40% savings on replacement contact lenses, even savings on LASIK and other laser surgeries.

Hearing: Free screening and 15% savings on hearing aids at over 1,350 locations nationwide; 40-60% savings on 100 makes and models of hearing aids by mail.

There are also discounts for lab and imag-

ing procedures, and for chiropractic care through the Healthy Savings network.

New cards with the official logos will be distributed in the May issue of *Country Lines*. Until then, you will need to print out your own card on the Connections.coop website; click on "Prescription and Healthy Savings Discounts" in the left menu, and follow the on-screen directions.

My VIP Savings

If you're looking for an online shopping partner that gives you cash back from over 1,000 name brands like Target, Best Buy, Walmart and the iTunes Store? Sign up once at "My VIP Savings," following the link at Connections.coop, and you can accumulate cash back in your personal account.

Coupons.com

Digital coupons are more popular than ever. By clicking on the Coupons.com link at Connections.Coop, your computer printer will be kept busy printing out coupons that save you cash on your favorite groceries, cleaning products, and more.

■ For more local discounts, visit connections.coop and search by zip code. More businesses and discounts will also be listed in coming issues of *Country Lines*.



New! Local Offers

Several area businesses now offer discounts to HomeWorks Tri-County Electric members using the Co-op Connections Card. Here are a few to check out:

■ **Aire Service of Mid-Michigan, Grand Ledge**, 517-627-4822. As an Aire Serv Preferred Customer, you will receive "member" only incentives not available to non-member customers. Not valid with any other offer or on previous purchases.

■ **Ark's Electric Inc., Pierson**, 616-636-8289. \$100 off the purchase of a general home standby generator system with installation.

■ **Chasco Plumbing & Heating, St. Johns**, 989-224-3034. 10% off a service call, or up to \$100 off repair.

■ **Vollman Ford, Portland**, 517-647-1990. \$100 gas card with new or used vehicle purchase. 10% off parts & service (oil changes not included in offer).

Your Board in Action

Meeting at Portland Oct. 24, your board of directors:

- Reviewed the proposed 2012-2015 Construction Work Plan with a professional engineer from Utility Systems Engineering.
- Authorized staff to retire \$610,000 in Wolverine Power Cooperative capital credits, to the oldest accounts first, in December 2011.
- Read and approved board policies “103 – Director Compensation,” “115 – Director Emeritus,” and “201 – Safety.”
- Reviewed September 2011 preliminary financial statements, and learned there were 119 new members for the month.
- Acknowledged the September/October safety report, including several public incidents and three safety training sessions held.
- Met with district officers to review the cooperative’s governance and election procedures.

Meeting at Portland November 28, your board of directors:

- Learned about Tri-County’s system maintenance plans to strengthen the system, reduce outages, and reduce costs.
- Heard an update from the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association regarding its legislative, Energy Optimization, safety, communications and youth programs.
- Authorized general manager Mark Kappler to sign a letter committing Tri-County to participation in MECA’s Energy Optimization collaborative for the 2012-2015 program.
- Reviewed and approved the 2012 capital



Dean Floria, left, is congratulated on reaching 15 years of service to the board by chair Carl Morton at the October meeting.

and operating budgets.

- Noted write-offs of bad debt for Jan. – Dec. 2010 totaled \$115,137.
- Reviewed October 2011 preliminary financial statements, and learned there were 119 new members for the month.
- Acknowledged the October/November safety report, including one public incident and four safety training sessions.
- Learned how Touchstone Energy® benefits the cooperative, and what projects will be supported by the 2012 budget.
- Met with realtors to hear about current market conditions regarding the sale of the Ionia property.
- Approved a small increase, based on the 2011 Consumer Price Index, to the Director Emeritus compensation paid under “Board Policy 115.”

In Memory: Velma Ludwick

Velma Ludwick, 77, died Sept. 4, 2011, following a lengthy illness. Velma was “the voice of HomeWorks” for several years, serving as the first point of contact when members called the office.

Velma joined us in December 1989 and retired in September 1998 to enjoy her family and friends, play with her grand-dogs, and work the *New York Times* Sunday crosswords.

She is survived by seven children, 10 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, a brother and a sister, an extended family, and many friends.



Spare Change Helps Food Pantries

With your energy bill round-ups, you made it possible for the Tri-County Electric People Fund to make 15 grants, totaling over \$25,400, in October and November.

These grants included:

- \$1,500 to M-46 Tabernacle Pantry, Riverdale, for food pantry expenses;
- \$5,000 to God’s Helping Hands of Mecosta County, for their Christmas Food Box program;
- \$3,550 to Reynolds Township Library, Howard City, to purchase early literacy station software;
- \$2,388.62 to an Isabella County family to help with a new well; and
- \$2,500 to a Mecosta County family to assist with a new roof.
- \$500 to Christmas Outreach, Mt. Pleasant, for food pantry expenses;
- \$1,000 to Hope’s Pantry in Stanton, for food pantry expenses;
- \$4,000 to Enrich of Ionia County, as a challenge grant toward roof repairs;
- \$1,000 to Richland Township Library, Vestaburg, to purchase books;
- \$500 to Yes Center Inc., Grand Ledge, for their after school program;
- \$500 to Basic Need Center, St. Johns, to purchase pantry items;
- \$223.36 to an Isabella County family for medical needs;
- \$314.49 to a Montcalm County family for utility expenses;
- \$1,700 to an Isabella County family to buy a range and insulate their home; and
- \$300 to an Isabella County family for eyeglasses.

How To Apply For a Grant

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

Note: Applications must be received by Jan. 17 to be considered at the Jan. 25 board meeting.

How You Can Help

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



Matt Rosendaul (front) demonstrates how an infrared camera can locate cold spots. Below, he shows me how a blower door test is set up.

Home Energy Audit Gives A Starting Point

If you've ever wanted to make energy efficiency improvements to your home but wondered where to start, Matt Rosendaul can help.

Matt, owner of Great Lakes Home Performance LLC, in Eagle, is certified through the federal Energy Star® program. He uses technology and experience to give you the information you'll need to make the wisest choices.

And he understands how the average homeowner feels, since he became a certified energy auditor out of personal necessity. At the time, the sports bars he owned and managed kept him busy with long hours. But his home, a Victorian-era building in Charlotte, racked up monthly utility bills of nearly \$700.

"I didn't know where to start," he says, "but I've always been a hands-on person. I knew there was science behind the sales pitches I'd heard about various energy improvements, so I went to the state's Energy Office.

"One thing led to another and I found my calling—and, it keeps me busy."

Today, Great Lakes Home Performance is run from his home, served by HomeWorks Tri-County Electric. His wife is the administrative staff, keeping the books. Two field technicians help him work on over 200 new



Photos - Jayne Gaham

construction and remodeling projects a year, all over Michigan.

His own home demonstrates the cost savings of various energy measures.

"Our home was built in 1965, and it needed all the improvements. We used to use 1,800-2,200 gallons of propane a year. Last year, after we made the upgrades, but using the same 80 percent efficient boiler, we used 575 gallons.

"We did things like R32 foundation walls, R60 attic insulation, to make it air-tight. With solar panels, we could be close to net-zero energy use," he says.

Whether you choose a quick energy audit, which involves a blower door test and a visual inspection of all energy elements from windows to furnace, or a comprehensive audit that involves software modeling of your home, Matt can give you a list of your best bets for energy upgrades.

And the consultation doesn't end when the audit is completed. "I encourage homeowners to have their contractors call me for more information—in effect, they're leasing my brain power," Matt says.

The most common energy flaw, he notes, is air infiltration, "the non-obvious things you can't see," such as the connections between the house and garage, or into the attic or basement. You can only find these with a blower door test, trained eyes, and maybe an infrared camera, he says.

Matt's easy tips: Go for low-hanging fruit, by installing compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) and a programmable thermostat. Get your furnace tuned up to make sure it's running efficiently.

Then, fix the obvious stuff first. Before blowing in cellulose insulation to your attic, air seal around the attic access door. (Most houses don't have enough attic insulation, Matt says. In Michigan, "enough" is R49-50, or about 13-15 inches of cellulose.

Make sure the foundations are insulated—a lot of people underestimate how much is needed. Consider your basement a conditioned space, even if it's uninsulated or unfinished.

Crawlspaces, especially if they're vented, cause high energy bills. Insulate them and seal the ductwork.

Visit greatlakeshomeperformance.com for more tips like these, information about home energy audits, or to take advantage of Matt's free library.

Nick Rusnell
is HomeWorks
Tri-County Electric
Cooperative's Energy
Advisor



NEW! Programs to Help Control Your Electric Use

This is the time of year when it's nice to bring things back into balance. All that yuletide and holiday fun can be hectic and expensive, after all. Well, good news! There are now rebates and incentives available from your cooperative to help manage your electric bill.

Your cooperative is part of a collaborative group of Michigan electricity providers that offers Energy Optimization programs that serve valuable members, like you. These programs help reward your energy-saving actions.

New year. New programs. New ways to save.

Beginning in 2012, there will be new and improved Energy Optimization programs from your cooperative. These updated pro-

grams will help you get more from your cooperative—more comfort, more savings and more living. Plus, you'll gain understanding and information on how to better

manage your energy use.

An energy efficient home also saves you time and can resolve common problems like mold, ice dams and drafts. Energy Optimization programs can make your home more durable and resistant to the elements, too.

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative will offer:

- Home energy audits
- Business programs
- Weatherization
- Appliance recycling
- Farm services
- Appliance rebates
- HVAC rebates

Check it out

The next time you visit your cooperative's office, ask what Energy Optimization programs are available to you. You can also visit michigan-energy.com or call 877-296-4319 for more details.

You must be a Michigan resident and electric co-op member to be eligible for these programs. Other restrictions may apply. Visit michigan-energy.org for a complete list of participating utilities.



Better ways to manage your electric use.
New year. New opportunities. Watch for new and improved energy saving programs in 2012. From income specific home weatherization to rebates on appliances, you'll love the rebates and incentives coming your way.

something NEW

LEARN MORE
Online: michigan-energy.org Phone: 877.296.4319

E Energy Optimization **HOME WORKS** Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Energy Optimization programs and incentives are applicable to Michigan service locations only. Other restrictions may apply. For a complete list of participating utilities, visit michigan-energy.org.



Photo - © iStockphoto.com

GARAGE DOOR SAFETY:

An Open and Shut Case

Garage doors add convenience and security, but should be inspected regularly.

Automatic garage doors may be a routine part of leaving and arriving home, but you should be aware of the potential for injury. Underwriters Laboratories Inc., recommends these tips to make garage door safety an open and shut case:

■ **Always keep automatic garage doors fully open or fully closed.** Some folks may leave a small opening at the bottom for pets to get in and out for food or shade. But a small opening could also be an invitation for a child to try to crawl through and get stuck. Another push of the button could send the heavy door down—causing injury—instead

of bringing the door up when trying to free anyone stuck underneath. If you encounter someone stuck in an automatic door, call your local fire department.

■ **Read instructions on how to operate and maintain your garage door properly.** Check your automatic door monthly to be sure safety precautions are working. Many garage doors boast a safety feature that triggers an automatic reversal if anything is encountered while closing. To check, place a 1.5-inch object (like a flat 2x4) in the path of the door to make sure the door correctly reverses when contact is made. Instructions

should also advise on maintaining a properly balanced door. Call a qualified repair company for service or maintenance.

■ **Do not allow children to operate a garage door.** It may seem like a harmless, simple task to allow children to push the garage opener. But activating heavy equipment should be taken seriously.

■ **Avoid walking under a door that is opening or closing.** You never know when a malfunction may take place. Steer clear of a moving door.

■ **Know when and how to use the emergency release.** You'll find a cord with a handle hanging along the track of your garage door. Always use caution when using this release, and only use it when the door is fully closed.

An automatic garage door opener is a common convenience powered by electricity. Just as electricity demands safety and respect, so does the equipment it operates.

*Chris O'Neill is
HomeWorks Tri-County
Electric Cooperative's
safety coordinator*



Notice to Members of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative Case No. U-15822 2010 Renewable Energy Plan Annual Report Summary

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) requires all Michigan electric utilities to get approximately 2 percent of their power supply from renewable sources by 2012, and increasing to 10 percent by 2015.

Under this requirement, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative submits an annual report to the MPSC regarding its Renewable Energy Plan. In 2010, Wolverine Power Cooperative, Inc., HomeWorks' wholesale power supplier, generated 143,821 megawatt hours (MWh) of renewable electricity from its Harvest Wind Farm and Thunder Bay Hydro. Of that, 116,470 MWh of renewable energy were banked on behalf of Wolverine's distribution co-op members, including HomeWorks. Wolverine will continue to generate renewable energy and bank unused renewable energy credits (RECs) for future use and compliance with statutory renewable portfolio standard requirements on behalf of its members.

A full copy of the cooperative's Renewable Energy Plan annual report that was filed with the MPSC is available on the cooperative's website at homeworks.org or by request at any of the co-op's offices.

Stay Clear!

*A downed power line may not be a dead line.
It could cause serious injury or death.*

Follow these tips to stay safe:

- ▶ **Assume all power lines are energized and dangerous.** Even lines that are de-energized could become energized at any time.
- ▶ **Never touch a downed power line!** And never touch a person or object that is touching a power line.
- ▶ **If someone is injured as a result of contact with electric current, do not try to assist him or her.** You could be injured or killed. Call 911.
- ▶ **If a power line falls across your vehicle while you are in it, stay inside until help arrives.**
- ▶ **Call 911 immediately to report a downed power line.** Then call your electric cooperative.



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

homeworks.org

Do you know the **9 Crucial Questions** you need to ask your **propane** company?

If you're a typical homeowner shopping for a propane supplier, you'll probably call three to five propane companies and make a decision based on what sounds like the lowest price.

Unfortunately, price-per-gallon can be a deceiving number. Many propane companies will attract new customers with a low advertised price-per-gallon, then surprise the customer with additional fees and hidden charges.

By asking your propane supplier the **9 crucial questions** found in our **FREE report**, you'll discover how much you *really* pay for service, and how to choose a company that will give you the **best value**. Our FREE report includes:

- The 9 crucial questions you need to ask when shopping for a propane company.
- A worksheet for easy side-by-side comparison of each propane company you call.

This report is a free service of HomeWorks Tri-County Propane. And we're so confident that we can provide you with the best value propane service, that **we'll even give you contact information for 12 of our competitors** so you can call and compare for yourself.

Get a copy of the **FREE REPORT** by visiting homeworks.org/9questions or calling 1-877-574-2740.



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Tri-County Propane
1-877-574-2740
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