

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

July/August 2012

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES

YOUR CO-OP'S
**ANNUAL
REPORT**
INSIDE



Great Lakes Asian Carp Threat

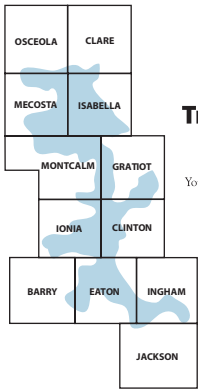
Plus: Q&A with Carp Czar John Goss



5 Communications
Through the Years

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Record Crowds



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

Blanchard office:

3681 Costabella Avenue
Blanchard, MI 49310

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

Pay by phone, anytime:

1-877-999-3395

Service questions/outages:

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

Tri-County Propane:

1-877-574-2740

High Speed Internet

1-800-668-8413

homeworks.org

Email: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

[facebook.com/HomeWorks.org](https://www.facebook.com/HomeWorks.org)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1 — Philip Conklin

5130 W. Gresham Hwy., Charlotte, MI 48813

517-726-0127

pconklin@homeworks.org

District 2 — Wayne Swiler

Vice-Chairman

11750 Ainsworth Rd., Lake Odessa, MI 48849

616-374-3141

wswiler@homeworks.org

District 3 — Carl Morton

Chairman

11280 Eden Trail, Eagle, MI 48822

517-626-2258

cmorton@homeworks.org

District 4 — Laverne Hansen

Secretary-Treasurer

1190 E. M-46 Hwy., Edmore, MI 48829

989-427-5851

lhansen@homeworks.org

District 5 — Cara Evans

10180 Roosevelt Rd., Bannister, MI 48807

989-862-5590

cevans@homeworks.org

District 6 — Ed Oplinger

10890 W. Weidman Road, Weidman, MI 48893

989-644-3079

eoplinger@homeworks.org

District 7 — Dean Floria

1163 Taft Rd., Remus, MI 49340

989-382-5230

dfloria@homeworks.org

Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

Growing Leaders Means A Future Built Solidly On Our Past

We're at the midpoint of the annual member meeting cycle right now—we've wrapped up the seven district membership meetings that were held in May, and we're planning for the annual meeting of the delegates on Aug. 18.

This year's meeting themes were built on a foundation of celebrating our cooperative's 75th anniversary, as well as 2012 being the International Year of Cooperatives.

There were a lot of good things to report about your co-op's operations. We continue to work hard to make sure you have reliable power, at an affordable price.

But a third priority, one that is essential to HomeWorks' success, is growing the cooperative's future leadership, and we do that in a number of ways.

An active, informed membership helps us stay focused on our mission: To provide our members and customers with energy, comfort, and communications solutions that will enhance their quality of life.

This year, more of you chose to be active and informed. We registered 775 members at the seven district meetings, nearly a hundred more than last year's record of 682, or a 14 percent increase. Whether it was the meal we offered, the good weather, a new meeting location, or the chance to visit with your neighbors, we appreciate getting to see so many of you each night.

On top of that, 130 kids aged five to 16 registered for a door prize, up from last year's 118. Those kids are learning the cooperative habit early!

Involving kids, and teaching them about the cooperative way of doing business, is a great way to grow leaders. We have several youth programs that reach out to high school students and to schools in our area.

This year, all four Touchstone Energy Scholarship winners joined us at the meetings to be recognized as outstanding students: Megan Benzing, Anna Makela, Lea Dean and Tyler Nadeau. Becca Kirby and Blake Warchuck, who attended the Youth Leadership Summit and the National Rural Electric Youth Tour, were also recognized for their achievements.

And our newest program, the Touchstone Energy Classroom Grants, was also highlighted. We are able to help teachers equip their classrooms with the technology and tools they need to help their students learn and prepare for the future.

Leadership comes in many forms: we value the members who alert us to a potential power line problem or other issue, just as we value the members who serve as district officers.

We are thankful for every one of you who has taken an active role, in one form or another, to make HomeWorks stronger in the past 75 years. We look forward to hearing from many generations of member-leaders to come.



Mark Kappler
General Manager



Join the conversation at
[facebook.com/HomeWorks.org](https://www.facebook.com/HomeWorks.org)

Keeping Members Informed Is Always a Priority

Over our 75 years, we've used many different mediums to provide information to our member-owners, from bill inserts to district membership meetings.

Regular publications, mailed to each member's home, have brought recipes, operations updates and safety warnings, among other stories, to members through the years.

The *Cooperative News*, right, was an eight-page tabloid that included farming tips, safety warnings, news of war production efforts, a list of new members, and the top 15 users of electricity, ads, jokes, poems, letters from members, and even domestic notes such as "D.H. Stout of Route 2, Morley, Michigan, have (sic) a new refrigerator."

Michigan Country Lines began as a tabloid newspaper (below, right) in the early 1980s, after the state's 13 distribution co-ops formed the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. As it still does today as a magazine, the publication includes reader favorite recipes, lifestyle tips, and much, much more.

To see full copies of these two issues in pdf format, visit homeworks.org and click on the 75th Anniversary tab.

Why We Send You Country Lines

As a member of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative, you receive *Michigan Country Lines* magazine in your mailbox 10 times every year. Sure, it's full of great articles, valuable energy-saving tips, and—of course—delicious recipes. But why does your electric co-op send you this magazine?

Country Lines is the most economical and convenient way to share information with our members. It takes the place of many mailings we would otherwise make to get information to you about our services, director elections, member meetings, and the staff and management decisions you should know about as an owner of the co-op. The magazine also carries legal notices that would otherwise have to be placed in local media at a substantial cost.

And, sending *Country Lines* to you helps the co-op fulfill one of its basic principles—to educate and communicate openly with its members.

The board of directors authorizes the co-op to subscribe to *Country Lines* on your behalf at a cost of \$4.06 per year, paid as part of your electric bill. The current magazine cost is 41 cents per copy, less than the cost of a first-class stamp.

Country Lines is published for us, at cost, by the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association in Okemos. As always, we value your comments about your magazine.



Touchstone Energy Aids Classrooms from Winn to Woodland

At right, Winn Elementary students join third grade teacher Mary Verhaar in celebrating a Touchstone Energy Classroom Grant, which helped provide a mobile iPad lab for the school.

Below, fifth grade students at Woodland Elementary School show off their new laptops, purchased by teacher Mary Jenks with a Classroom Grant. The grant helped provide a laptop for every two students in the classroom, giving them access to accelerated programs in reading, math and robotics.



Attendance Up 14 Percent at Co-op District Meetings



For the fifth year in a row, more members registered at the annual district membership meetings, with 775 signed in. Overall attendance was nearly 1,500 at the series of seven meetings, including 130 children under the age of 16.

Clockwise from above, Christina Pulling offers a HomeWorks gift to youngsters who attended at Vestaburg; Jo Bengel provides ice cream cups as a sweet way to end supper at Eagle; members at Weidman listen to co-op updates; Dylan Curl won the iPod Touch for youngsters at Charlotte, and Chris VanSyclele was the winner at Remus; a view from above at the Fulton meeting.



Photos - Neal Swain, Matt Miller, Tom Manting, Sara Urie, and Chris Jensen



People Fund Grants Help Stock Area Food Pantry Shelves

The Tri-County Electric People Fund made nine grants totaling \$14,950 at the May 16 meeting, including:

- \$1,500 to Hope's Pantry, Stanton, to purchase food pantry and personal needs items;
- \$1,500 to Eaton Clothing & Furniture Center, Charlotte, for their Back to School event;
- \$700 to Wheatland Township Library, for a copier/fax machine and supplies;
- \$1,000 to Siren Eaton Shelter, for utilities at shelter houses;
- \$2,500 to Lakeview Ministerial Association, to purchase food pantry items;
- \$2,000 to Helping Hands of Eaton County, to purchase food pantry items;
- \$2,500 to Montcalm County 4-H Association, for new fairground construction fees;



Peggy Pirhonen and her fellow People Fund board members gave updates on the program at the recent district member meetings.

- \$2,500 to a Montcalm County family to assist with housing expenses; and
- \$750 to a Mecosta County family to help with housing expenses.

How To Apply For a Grant: Write to 7973 E. Grand River Avenue, Portland, MI 48875. We'll send you an application form, grant guidelines, and other helpful information. You'll also find information and application forms on our Web site at homeworks.org.

NOTE! Applications must be received by July 31 for the August 8 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 1-800-562-8232.

Your Board In Action

Meeting at Portland May 21, your board of directors:

- Reviewed the first week of district membership meetings, including overall increased attendance and positive member comments.
- Read and approved "Board Policy 502 – Meter Tampering and Power Diversion" and "Board Policy 503 – Neutral to Earth Voltages."
- Reviewed proposed changes to Articles III-VI of the cooperative's bylaws.
- Learned there were 90 new members for the month.
- Acknowledged the April-May safety report.

Time for Member Comments

The first 15 minutes of every board meeting are available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. Upcoming board meetings are set for **July 23 at Blanchard** and **Aug. 27 at Portland**. Members who need directions to either office, or who wish to have items considered on the board agenda, should call 517-647-7554.

Save With Your Co-op Connections Card

These local businesses now offer you discounts on their products and services. Simply show your Co-op Connections card at the business to receive the discount.

■ **Cheeky Monkeys**, 176 Kent St., Portland, 517-647-0031. Cardholders receive an instant discount of 10% from any order of bakery, lunches, or beverages. Open 7 a.m.–6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturday.

■ **Portland Muffler Man**, 738 E. Grand River Ave., Portland, 517-647-4181. 10% discount; excludes oil changes.

■ **U.S. 27 Motorsports & Trailers Inc.**, 5301 N. U.S. 27 Hwy., St. Johns, 989-224-4907. 10% off your parts purchases or 10% discount on service repair labor.

■ **Thompson Interiors**, 1039 Fourth Ave., Lake Odessa, 616-374-1135. \$5 off the 1-gallon size Armstrong Once'N

Done, or \$3 off the 1/2-gallon size of Armstrong Once'N Done. Must present card to receive discount.

■ **Remus Lumber**, 9105 25th Ave., Remus, 989-967-3570. \$10 off a purchase of \$50 or more; not valid on already discounted items.

■ **Stratz Heating & Cooling**, 20960 19 Mile Rd., Big Rapids, 231-796-3717. 10% off a service call; must present card to receive discount.

To search for local and national businesses currently offering discounts on everything from fitness to furniture repair to hair care, visit Connections.coop, or visit homeworks.org and click on the card logo to go directly to our local listings.

Your card can be used when you travel, too, as many co-ops across the country participate in the program.



HomeWorks Tri-County Electric members have saved over **\$99,000** on prescriptions since 2009 by using their Co-op Connections Card at local pharmacies!

Thanks for Buying Energy-Saving Tools!



Members at the Remus meeting discuss the energy-saving products with Missy Robson (far right) and me.

	Your price	Save (ea.)	Limit
CFL bulb (13W)	\$5.00	\$ 1.50	12
Smart power strip	\$5.00	\$20.00	2
LED night light	\$1.00	\$ 1.00	4
Aerator kit	\$5.00	\$10.00	2

It was a pleasure to speak with so many of you at our district member meetings in May.

Even better, a lot of you took advantage of our Energy Optimization special offers: we sold 69 smart power strips, 298 CFLs, 190 LED night lights, and 22 water aerator kits at the seven meetings.

All four products are still available at our Blanchard and Portland offices, if you're interested. Below left are the prices, how much you'll save with your instant rebates, and the total each member can purchase.

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



A Sunny Forecast for Propane Prices

Looking at the price of propane is something like looking at a weather forecast... we're coming out of a period of stormy weather, and there's a little bit of sunshine on the horizon. That's not to say there won't be a storm or two along the way, though!

Over the past few years, the volatile prices for propane have caused a lot of uncertainty. Homeowners weren't willing to commit to a heating source that wasn't reliable and economic.

But there is good news. With the new natural gas reserves being found across America, including the Marcellus Shale in the eastern U.S. and the Bakken reserve in North Dakota, this uncertainty may become a distant memory.

Going forward, it's predicted we will see an abundance of propane supply at favorable pricing. In fact, some current forecasts indicate that with current developments of infrastructure such as pipelines, we will have a glut of propane by 2020.

What does this mean for you? It's good news for propane consumers.



If you're happy with your service from HomeWorks Tri-County Propane, tell your friends! We'll give you \$75, honoring Tri-County Electric Cooperative's 75th anniversary in 2012, for each new customer you refer to us, when they sign up for our auto-fill or metered service.

With these new reserves being tapped, there appears to be a plentiful supply of natural gas for years to come. Propane prices used to follow the ups and downs of crude oil, but since most supply now comes from these natural gas reserves, it's more likely that prices will follow those of natural gas.

Rural consumers with limited heating options, such as fuel oil or wood-burners, will appreciate the lower prices that are being predicted.

At HomeWorks Tri-County Propane, prices for 2012-13 will be set by Aug. 1, so call us for the details. We believe they should be 15-20 percent less than this past year. But we're already seeing contracts for 2013-14 that are just as favorable.

Bottom line: those dark clouds of uncertain

supply and volatile pricing are passing. The skies are clearing in the long-term propane forecast.

We've been looking out for your interests since we started, with a no-fee capped price, and your money stays right here in mid-Michigan.

These are good reasons to look at us for your propane service. **We want your business.**

Randy Halstead
is the Propane Manager
at HomeWorks
Tri-County Propane, a
wholly-owned subsidiary
of HomeWorks Tri-County
Electric Cooperative



Building, Planting or Playing? Stay Clear of Power Lines

Electric utility workers see some new homes and other structures built in odd places—a home with the roof less than 8 feet from an existing power line; a swimming pool or barn right underneath a line.

“When you think about a builder hauling in materials and working in those areas, and then folks using the pool or getting too close to the roof, it’s pretty scary,” says Joe McElroy, safety director for the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association.

So, whether you’re a contractor or a do-it-yourselfer, use extra caution while working near overhead lines (never get closer than 10 feet), and consider their location in your planning. Also, call HomeWorks Tri-County (517-647-7554 or 1-800-848-9333) to let them know when you’re planning to work within 10 feet of power lines.

“Electricity flows through metal, wood, water and many other conducting materials, including human beings—all in an effort to reach the ground,” McElroy adds. “Small birds can sit on power lines unhurt

because they don’t create a path to the ground, but you and your ladder do.”

Further, a power line doesn’t have to be touched to be dangerous. Unless you are qualified to work around power lines, you should stay at least 10 feet away, or more. Since overhead lines are not insulated, touching a line or an object in contact with it can result in serious injury, or even death. Stay away, and contact your electric co-op.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration advises that the best protection is lots of space. Don’t operate equipment around overhead lines unless you are authorized and trained to do so. Other safety tips include:

- ▶ Use a nonconductive fiberglass ladder.
- ▶ If objects (scaffolds, cranes) must be moved near the lines, appoint a worker whose only job is to observe the clearance between the lines and the object and warn others if that distance is not maintained.

A power line doesn't have to be touched to be dangerous.

▶ Never touch *any* downed power line, and never assume fallen lines are dead.

If you are in a vehicle that contacts with a power line, don’t leave the vehicle. As long as you stay inside and avoid touching outside metal, you should avoid an electrical hazard. If you need to exit to summon help or because of fire, jump out without touching any wires or the exterior, keep your feet together, and hop to safety.



LEAVE THE POLE ALONE



What do yard sale signs, basketball hoops, satellite dishes and birdhouses have in common? They’re often found illegally attached to utility poles. But this isn’t just a crime of inconvenience. Safety issues caused by unapproved pole attachments put the lives of lineworkers and the public in peril.

Your local electric co-op line crews climb utility poles at all hours of the day and night, in the worst conditions, so anything attached to them can create serious hazards. Sharp objects like nails, bolts, tacks, staples or barbed wire can also puncture rubber gloves and other safety equipment, making lineworkers vulnerable to electrocution.

Co-op lineworkers have even reported poles used as support legs for deer stands, lights and carports. Any person placing items on poles also comes dangerously close to energized power lines with thousands of volts of energy pulsing overhead.

Unauthorized pole attachments also violate the National Electrical Safety Code. Utilities strictly follow this code, so please help keep lineworkers—and members of your community and family—safe. Don’t attach any of these dangerous items to utility poles.

Fixtures not belonging to the co-op or another utility will be removed by line personnel, and the co-op is not responsible for any losses if an item is damaged or destroyed during removal.



Photo - iStockphoto.com

Teach Kids Safety, Too

Kids often don’t understand the outdoor dangers of electricity, but making them aware of overhead lines and these rules can help:

- ▶ *Never play or climb trees near power lines.*
- ▶ *Never climb a utility pole or tower.*
- ▶ *Never fly kites or model planes near trees and overhead lines.* If a toy gets stuck in a tree near the lines, don’t climb to get it. Call your local electric co-op or utility for help.
- ▶ *Don’t play on or around pad-mounted electrical equipment* (usually green boxes).
- ▶ *Never go into an electric substation*—not even to rescue a pet or retrieve a toy. Substations contain deadly, high-voltage equipment. Call your electric co-op or area utility instead.
- ▶ *Use caution before plugging in a radio or electrical gadgets outdoors.* Keep all electrical appliances at least 10 feet away from hot tubs, pools, ponds, puddles and wet surfaces.



Energy Star® Products Can Bring Out the Best in Your Home

Remember your grandparents' kitchen and living room? Now picture your current home. What differences come to mind? Lime green and turquoise appliances have given way to black, white and stainless steel. Console TVs have become flat screens. And, energy use is more important than ever since more appliances and electronic devices are part of today's homes.

Energy efficient merchandise offers convenience and helps you manage your energy use. Energy Star® products provide the same features that you're already used to, but can use up to 75 percent less energy than standard models.

What is Energy Star?

Energy Star began 20 years ago as a joint effort between the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This voluntary labeling program promotes energy efficient products. Computers and monitors were the first products to earn the Energy Star label.

Today, there are 60 Energy Star product categories—from lightbulbs to refrigerators—

and over 300 million qualified products are sold each year. In addition, 2,200 private employers manufacture these products, providing jobs and helping customers save energy.

To use the Energy Star label, a product must:

- Contribute significant energy savings.
- Deliver features and performance that customers demand.
- Back up energy savings claims with testing.

In short, Energy Star is a trusted brand for quality products that use less energy. Energy efficiency products are among the few products on the market that pay you back over time.

Rebates

While Energy Star-qualified products often cost more than standard versions, the initial investment is almost always recouped by the long-term savings that result. Rebates can also help offset the up-front cost. HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative offers cash-back

rebates on qualifying efficiency products, including Energy Star.

Learn more at michigan-energy.org.

Shop On

If a lightbulb burns out or your fridge is on the fritz, give Energy Star a chance. For more ways to save energy, check out HomeWork Tri-County's other Energy Optimization programs.

Online: michigan-energy.org

Call: 877-296-4319

Sample Energy Efficiency Products	Rebate
CFLs, LEDs, LED Holiday Lights	In-store discount
CFL or LED Light Fixtures	\$15-20
Smart Power Strip	\$20
Room Air Conditioner	\$20
Dehumidifier	\$20
Refrigerator	\$20
Clothes Dryer	\$25
Dishwasher	\$20
Clothes Washer	\$50
Low Flow Aerator Kits	\$10

ENERGY STAR® appliances: Feel-good purchases
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shop SMART

ENERGY TIP: Use up to 75% less energy with ENERGY STAR products.

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.



Tri-County Electric
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*Contact us for service availability in your area. Service not available in all areas.
Minimum commitment term, early termination fee and/or unreturned equipment fee may apply.
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Actual speeds may vary. Requires a clear view of the southern sky. Exede is a service mark of ViaSat, Inc.