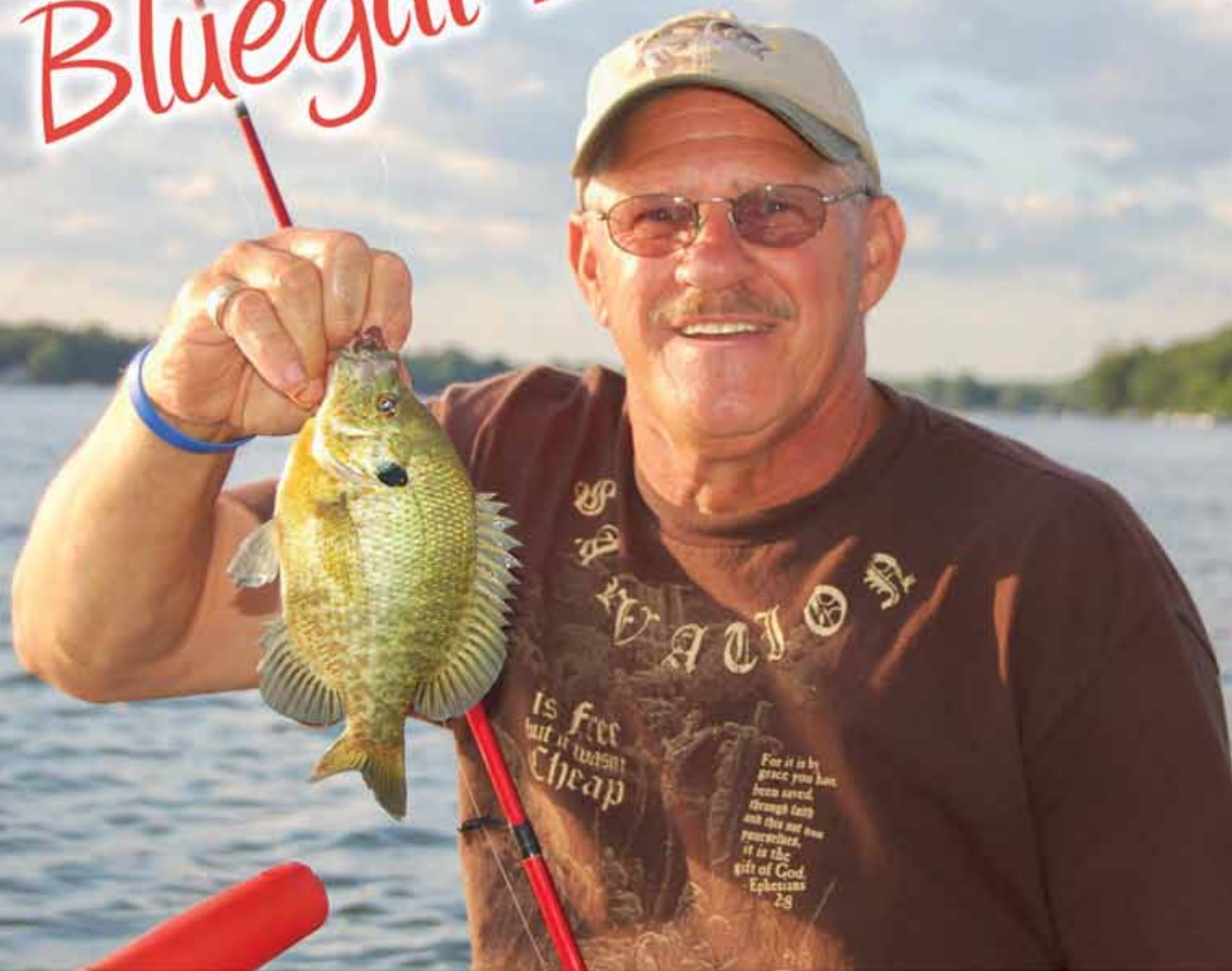


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COUNTRY LINES

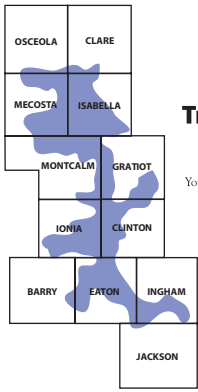
Meet
Bluegill Bob



2 Co-op Bylaws
Provide Structure

3 Preserving Nature
At Hall's Lake

7 Plan To Attend Your
District Meeting



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

E-mail: 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

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Chairman

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Secretary-Treasurer

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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

Co-op Bylaws Provide Structure, Continuity



Spring could be considered “co-op season,” because it’s the time of year when several cooperative principles come to life here at HomeWorks Tri-County Electric.

With financial statements closed and audited for 2012, your board of directors will authorize allocation of the margins, or profits, back to your membership account, based on your energy purchases during the year.

Our final margin was slim this year, but there will still be an allocation, the details of which we’ll report in *Country Lines* magazine. These allocations are paper transactions that build your capital credit equity in HomeWorks.

Following our policies, the board will also decide whether the co-op’s financial position is strong enough to allow for a cash retirement of capital credits. If they do authorize a retirement, most members will see it as a credit on their energy bill, and again we’ll report it to you in *Country Lines*, as well as with a special notice included with your bill.

Two other big co-op events coming up are the district membership meetings in May, and director elections that take place at those meetings. This year, board seats in District 1 at Charlotte, District 5 at Fulton, and District 7 at Remus will be voted on by those members.

All of these activities are not only covered by the cooperative principles, such as democratic member control and members’ economic participation, they are spelled out in your co-op’s bylaws.

A copy of the bylaws, updated by the board of directors last fall, is included in

this issue of *Country Lines* for your reference. Think of it as the instruction manual for HomeWorks. You can also find a copy of the bylaws at homeworks.org.

Some people like to read instruction manuals, and some people don’t. But it’s good to know the information is available to you when you do need it.

The bylaws outline our structure and provide continuity as the board and staff change over the years.

Bylaws cover everything from the basics of membership (Article II), to the business agenda of district meetings (Article III).

They describe the board of directors, the qualifications necessary to serve as a director, and how directors are elected (Article VII).

Our nonprofit operations, including the allocation of margins and retirement of capital credits, can be found in Article XIV.

Whether you ever get around to reading our instruction manual, as a member-owner of HomeWorks you will continue to benefit from the structure they provide.

Mark Kappler
General Manager

Take note!

HomeWorks Tri-County offices will be closed Fri., May 3, for employee training.

Please call 800-848-9333 to report outages; pay bills anytime at 877-999-3395.



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

Working Together to Preserve Nature at Hall's Lake

A small corner of western Isabella County is staying natural, and publicly accessible, thanks to the efforts of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy.

Located a few miles north of Blanchard, the 70-acre Hall's Lake is the site of a natural preserve that includes 3,200 feet of shore line on the lake's east side.

While the west side is developed with seasonal and year-round homes, many served by HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative, the east side has an undeveloped 175-acre wooded buffer. This buffer harbors a variety of micro habitats from cat-tail edges to bogs, glacial moraine, and tree-covered hills.

"We started back in 2008 with our first



purchase of 22 acres," explains Stan Lilley, executive director of the Conservancy and himself a member-owner of HomeWorks.

"With the downturn of the economy, we weren't able to do much more until 2012, when we got some challenge grants," he adds. Those grants, and local fundraising, led to the purchase of 100 acres known as the Kabana Preserve.

Lilley says the group is now working on what they call Phase 3. They already have a \$21,000 grant toward the purchase of a 40-acre parcel appraised at \$93,000.

"Our goal isn't just to preserve Hall's Lake, and other natural areas, as open space, but to have people enjoy recreational opportunities there, even education," Lilley says.

This will be the third year the Conservancy has offered "Fourth Thursday at Hall's Lake" nature walks, led by a retired biologist from Central Michigan University in nearby Mt. Pleasant. Taking up to two hours to walk a mile-long footpath, visitors can learn about tree identification, fire ecology, and other natural science topics.

The walks are free and open to anyone, starting at 9:30 am from the end of Fowler Drive at the west side of Hall's Lake. The first walks in 2013 are set for May 23 and June 27. Visit the Conservancy's website for the email address or phone number by the fourth Wednesday to let them know how many participants to expect.



Top: Fourth Thursday walkers stop for a closer look. **Center:** The walking path at Hall's Lake. **Bottom:** One of the Fourth Thursday groups pauses for a photo after an outing.

SmartHub Puts Information at Your Fingertips

SmartHub and its mobile apps is a self-service application that gives HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative members convenient access to account information like monthly usage, payment history, quick bill pay, and more. This safe and secure app is available *free* for iOS (iPhone, iPad, iPod) and Android users and takes less than three minutes to setup.

If you don't have a smart phone, you can still manage your account online because the services offered by the SmartHub app are also on our website.

When you visit HomeWorks.org, click "My Account" at the top, or "View My Account" under Quick Links, to be taken to SmartHub information. If you previously used our eBill service, you are already registered for SmartHub. Once logged in, you can:

- pay or view your bill;
- review account history and usage;
- set up auto pay or paperless billing; or
- change your address or phone number.

SmartHub is easy to navigate. It's simple and quick to make a payment or view your

meter readings. You can compare bills and find out what day of the week or month you typically use the most electricity.

Members with smartphones or tablet devices can download the SmartHub app from iTunes or the Android Marketplace. The app allows you to make a payment or view your usage on-the-go.

The mobile apps also provide a "Call the Office" button that dials HomeWorks for you, along with maps to our office locations.

The SmartHub app is encrypted during every transaction run and no personal information is stored on your mobile device.

NOTE: Mobile devices do offer the ability to store your log-in information for apps installed on the device. If you choose to store your log-in information, any person who has access to your mobile device can access your account.

Did you know? You can choose to stop receiving a paper bill each month and download your statement as a pdf document from SmartHub at homeworks.org.

PDF files can be enlarged on your screen, and they're simple to file on your home computer. Save paper and postage—it's easy!



Pay Bill Now
No registration required.

Look for these "buttons" on homeworks.org to log in to SmartHub or use the Pay Bill Now service.

Notice to Members of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative

A Special Member Meeting is set for 9 a.m. April 22, at the cooperative's Blanchard office

The board of directors will consider changes to the cooperative's rates and tariffs at its meeting on April 22, 2013, to be held at the cooperative office at 3681 Costabella Avenue, Blanchard, MI. The meeting will start at 9 a.m. and is open to all members of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative.

The session will begin with an opportunity for members to provide direct input to the board of directors, without filing a formal request under cooperative policy. Members are asked to come to the lobby by 9 a.m. and request to speak to the board; staff will direct interested members to the meeting room. Time constraints on each member's comments will be at the discretion of the board president, but members are asked to keep comments to less than 5 minutes.

The following item will be considered. Members will have an opportunity to address the board on the proposed changes prior to board action.

- 1) Reconcile the 2012 Power Supply Cost Recovery Factor collections. The Power Supply Cost Recovery Factor is applied to Tri-County Electric Cooperative's retail member-customers' monthly kilowatt-hour use. It represents the power supply costs as established by the cooperative in conjunction with Wolverine Power Cooperative. The factor is established annually, and reviewed monthly.

Notice of changes or additions to the cooperative's rates or service rules shall be sent to all members, as required by P.A. 167, by publication in *Michigan Country Lines* at least 30 days prior to their effective date.

Participation: Any interested member may attend and participate. The location of the board meeting site is accessible, including handicapped parking. Persons needing any accommodation to participate should contact HomeWorks Tri-County Electric at 800-562-8232 a week in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance. Comments may also be made before the meeting date by calling General Manager Mark Kappler at 517-647-1281, or by email at mkappler@homeworks.org.

Notice of the board meeting shall be sent to all members, as required by P.A. 167, by publication in *Michigan Country Lines*.

Co-op Bylaws Are Updated

In the center of this *Country Lines* issue, you'll find a copy of the HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative bylaws, as updated by the board of directors in September 2012.

The bylaws require a vote of the membership to make changes to the board's qualifications, classifications or term of office. Except for those specific items, the board may amend the bylaws at any time with a two-thirds vote.

Several of the changes made were house-keeping items and updates to match current practices, such as:

- including electronic media as an official form of communication;
- making it an option to issue membership certificates to new members, rather than a requirement;
- updating "office of the cooperative" to "offices," inclusive of both the Blanchard and Portland offices;
- updating board and district officer titles from President and Vice-President to Chairman and Vice-Chairman; and
- removing references to U.S. government oversight since the cooperative no longer borrows federal funds.

Section 2.3 Membership adds new criteria to determine when an applicant for service becomes a member of the cooperative, stating "an applicant becomes a Member and consents to be a Member of the Cooperative upon using or agreeing to use ... service and completing the membership procedure."

The same section also contains new language that clarifies what happens if a member (who is not a joint member) dies and a close relative takes over service at the same location without notifying HomeWorks. Capital credits will continue to accrue to the original member's account until the co-op is notified and the membership is transferred.

New **Section 2.7.3 Provision of Cooperative Services-Member Equipment** covers requirements and responsibilities of connecting to cooperative equipment in more detail, with the goal of allowing such connections while maintaining the cooperative's ability to operate safely, reliably and efficiently.

Section 2.9 Grant of Property Rights strengthens language that requires members to provide safe and reliable access to the use of their property when needed, as well as

easements or other rights-of-way.

Two different sections now define the standard of conduct for co-op directors (**Section 7.8**) and officers (**Section 9.13**), while a third clarifies the meaning of conflict of interest transactions (**Section 8.9**).

Section 7.9 Removal has also been revised, and describes how and when members may seek removal of a director for acts "significantly and adversely" affecting the cooperative.

A copy of the bylaws may also be downloaded in pdf format at homeworks.org. And, each new member is provided with a copy of the bylaws in their new membership packet.



Time Set Aside for Members to Comment Before Board Meetings

The first 15 minutes of every board meeting are available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. The next several board meetings are scheduled for **April 22 at Blanchard**, and **May 20 at Portland**.

Members who need directions to the office or wish to have items considered on the board agenda should call 517-647-7554.

Mark your calendar for the 2013 District Member Meetings!

DISTRICT 1 – May 16 ELECTION

St. Mary's Catholic Church Hall
Charlotte (*new location!*)

DISTRICT 2 – May 22

St. Edward's Church
M-50, west of Lake Odessa

DISTRICT 3 – May 14

Eagle Park Hall (Fairgrounds), Eagle

DISTRICT 4 – May 20

Vestaburg Elementary School Gym
B Ave, south of M-46, Vestaburg

DISTRICT 5 – May 13 ELECTION

Fulton Elementary Gym
M-57 at Ely Highway, Middleton

DISTRICT 6 – May 21

Beal City High School, smaller gym
Beal City (*new location!*)

DISTRICT 7 – May 15 ELECTION

St. Michael's Parish Center
M-20, 2 miles west of Remus

If you're not sure which district to attend, visit homeworks.org or watch your mailbox for your invitation.



Come learn more about **your** co-op and the Tri-County Electric People Fund, celebrating its 20th Anniversary in 2013!

Members are asked to bring a non-perishable food item, to benefit a local food pantry.

Meetings start at 6 p.m. with a light supper.

All registered members at each meeting are entered into a drawing for energy certificates (up to \$50 value!) and the grand prize of an iPad. Youngsters (age 5-16) can win an iPod Touch.

(*Must be present to win.*)

And On This Farm Were Some Rebates...

Michigan's farmers know how much energy goes into the daily operations of running their agribusiness. The state is aware too, as the industrial sector (including all agribusiness) accounts for 25 percent of Michigan's total energy consumption.

The Farm Services Program, available through HomeWorks Tri-County's Energy Optimization (EO) Program, rewards farmers for installing energy-efficient equipment and measures to help reduce energy use. Read on to find out how you can manage your annual operating costs and cash-in on energy-efficiency rebates.

"As Michigan works to save energy, a great deal of focus is on our local farms," says Art Thayer, energy efficiency programs director for the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. "Energy Optimization offers solutions that help our farming members better manage energy consumption, thereby making their businesses more productive."

Prescriptive Rebates

Dozens of EO rebates are available for purchasing and installing energy-efficient farm

equipment. Rebates offset the cost differences between standard equipment and energy efficient models—putting your choices on an equal playing field and keeping things

lighting systems, dairy parlor and milk harvesting/cooling equipment, in-floor radiant heat, thermal blankets for greenhouses, crop irrigation horsepower reduction, and installation of variable frequency drives for irrigation pump motors.

Popular Farm Services Rebates

- Lightbulbs or fixture replacements \$1–\$100/item
- Circulation or exhaust fans..... \$2/blade-inch
- Low-energy livestock waterer \$50
- Milk house electric water heater.....\$250/unit
- Dairy refrigeration system tune-up Up to \$150

affordable. When weighing replacements or upgrades, consider the long-term investment return that comes with energy efficient models. While standard equipment just uses energy, energy efficient options are "givers"—putting money back in your pocket and saving energy year after year.

Custom Rebates

If you want energy solutions tailored to your farming operation or wish to move forward with renewable energy, the EO Custom Program may be for you. Rebates are based on annual per-kilowatt-hour (kWh) estimates. Custom projects may include advanced

FREE Engine Block Heater Timer (\$35 value)

Even though the weather is warming, engine block heater timers are still available. Instead of needlessly warming vehicle engines all night long, these

devices prevent energy waste by turning the motors on two to four hours before you need them. Visit michigan-energy.org/heattertimer or call 877-296-4319 to request your free timer while supplies last.

Energy Optimization—Something for Everyone

HomeWorks Tri-County knows that farmers are too busy to research the latest energy-saving equipment or ideas, so we've done it for you. The EO program puts you in touch with quality products and big energy savings. Visit michigan-energy.org or call 877-296-4319 for more information.

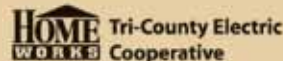


Upgrade your bulbs and SAVE BIG!

Think beyond incandescents. For every light in your home—floodlights, chandeliers, sconces, 3-ways, globes, dimmables—there's an energy-saving CFL or LED. Receive instant in-store savings on CFL and LED bulbs at participating retailers.

Visit michigan-energy.org/RetailersSearch to locate the participating retailer nearest you.

ENERGY TIP: ENERGY STAR® bulbs use 75% less energy than incandescents and last 6 times longer.



ONLINE: michigan-energy.org PHONE: 877.296.4319

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.

Major Projects Keep Our Electric System Strong

An electric system like the one that serves your home needs to be checked regularly to make sure it can still meet the needs of you and your neighbors.

We look for problem areas that are just beginning to develop, for example, where there's been sudden growth or a large new motor added for irrigation or a small business. These circuits may need to be upgraded to higher-capacity wires or need regulators and capacitors to maintain voltage from the substation to the end of the line.

In 2013, our engineers have planned several major workplan projects.

- We're rebuilding four miles of the Westphalia 1 circuit from Parks Road to just north of Kinley, on Tallman Road. We'll bring the line closer to the road for easier maintenance.

- In Rolland Township, 2.5 miles of the Altona 2 circuit will be converted to a heavier conductor (wire). This will strengthen the entire system, since this line is a direct tie to circuits from two other substations.

- Just over three miles of the Martiny 4 circuit, along 21 Mile Road from 80th past 110th, will also be converted to a heavier conductor. The project will complete a tie-line between the Altona and Hersey substations.

"These projects will increase the strength of the lines, reduce line loss, and improve voltage during load transfers," explains system engineer Chris Jensen. "Together, they represent an investment of over \$1 million in materials and labor into keeping our electric system strong for many years to come."



Lineworkers Jeremy Zbytowski and Kyle Balderson are shown connecting a newly-installed utility pole to the system (the old pole and transformer are shown at right.) Crew leader Chris Teachout directs from the ground.

Photo - Chris Reed



Looking for value and convenience from your propane service?

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Auto-Fill Service: HomeWorks is able to estimate when your tank is in need of a fill, and automatically deliver to you. No more worrying about running out of gas, or calling ahead to schedule a fill.



Tri-County Propane

Call 1-877-574-2740 today!

HomeWorks Tri-County Propane is not regulated by the Michigan Public Service Commission.



Look Up, Stay Alert During Outdoor Work, Play

As the weather turns to warm, adults and kids alike will head outside to perform winter clean-up and play. Before they do, remind them to look up, down and around, and be alert for power lines and other electrical hazards—it's the best way to stay safe from electrical shock, and even death.

"Here at HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative, using proper procedures and safety measures is a matter of life and death," explains Chris O'Neill, safety coordinator. "We take safety seriously at home, too. Accidents happen, but if we educate ourselves and our children, we can keep them to a minimum." See a few safety tips below...

For Kids . . .

Never fly a kite on a rainy day or anywhere but an open space. A high point in the sky makes a kite a grounding point for lightning, and kites could easily become tangled in power lines.

- Don't climb trees that are near power lines and poles—both evergreens and leafy trees can disguise danger.
- Never climb a power pole.

- Stay far away from power lines lying on the ground. You can't tell just by looking if electricity is still flowing through them. If there's water nearby, don't go in it. Water is the best conductor of electricity.

- Obey signs that say "danger" and "keep out" around large electrical equipment, like substations. These signs aren't warnings; they're commands to keep you safe.



For Adults . . .

Power lines tend to become part of the landscape, so before climbing a ladder to trim branches or access your roof, look around to make sure you are not in close proximity to electric lines.

- Remember that power lines and other utilities run underground, too. Call 811 to have utility lines marked before you start digging.

- Starting that winter cleanup yard work? Sweep dried leaves and debris from outdoor receptacles.

- If they're not already, consider upgrading your outdoor receptacles—or any outlets that could come in contact with water—to ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). GFCIs immediately interrupt power

- flow when a plugged-in device comes in contact with water. Regardless, keep your outlets and cords dry and covered outside.
- Use only weather-resistant, heavy-duty extension cords marked for outdoor use.

- Don't leave outdoor power tools unattended for curious children or animals to find.



For more safety tips and information, visit SafeElectricity.org.

Sources: Electrical Safety Foundation International, Safe Electricity

Co-op Connections Supports Local Businesses

Use your Co-op Connections Card to save money on national deals, prescriptions and health care, and at these local businesses:

■ **Farwell Flea Market & Thrift Store**, 770 E. Main St., Farwell, 989-588-2933. *10% off anything over \$10.*

■ **Five Corner Party Store & Pizza**, 4971 N. Greenville Rd., Lakeview, 989-352-6633. *10% discount on purchase; not valid with other offers or sales.*

■ **Capital City Automotive, Inc.**, 2900 W. St. Joseph St., Lansing, 517-484-2555. *Free estimates, fleet labor rate – \$60 per hour, 10% off parts.*

■ **Ginkgo Tree Inn**, 309 N. Main St, Mt. Pleasant, 989-773-8733, ginkgotreeinn.com. *10% off room rental.*

■ **Reed and Hoppes Inc.**, 2661 E. Grand River Ave., Portland, reedandhoppes.com, 517-647-4441. *\$40 tow within Portland city limits; outside city limits, 5 miles free. Cars only.*

■ **M-57 Auto Body, Frame Repair, Used Cars**, 1614 E. Carson City Rd., Sheridan, 989-291-5125. *Free loaner car with repairs.*

■ **Gammy Woods Campground**, 1855 N. Coldwater Rd., Weidman, 989-506-8005, manager@gammywoodscampground.com. *Stay 4 nights, get the 5th free. Not applicable on holidays or special events.*

For more information about local, national and pharmacy discounts, visit homeworks.org and click on the Co-op Connections card.



People Fund Helps Food, Housing Programs

The Tri-County Electric People Fund made six grants Feb. 27, totaling \$6,093.94:

- Barryton Area Mobile Food Pantry, \$1,650 for two food truck deliveries;
- St. Vincent DePaul-St. Mary's of Charlotte, \$1,200 for their rent assistance program;
- Sunny Crest Youth Ranch in Sunfield, \$1,000 for their Hands-On program;
- Clinton County Senior Center, \$1,500 for their nutritional food program;
- Montcalm County family, \$420 for a year of Lifeline service; and

- Clare County family, \$323.94 for housing and medical 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 details and application forms online at homeworks.org.

Note: *Applications must be received by May 13 for the May 22 board meeting; and by June 24 for the July 3 meeting.*

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HomeWork's High Speed Internet gives you instant access to the internet and fast web surfing at an affordable cost.

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to get started with HomeWorks High Speed Internet



Introducing Exede by ViaSat. Starting at \$54.99 per month.

Extended through June 30 { **New customers: \$49+tax**
Current customers upgrade: \$99+tax

Installation with 24-month commitment & credit check.

Call TODAY for details!

HomeWorks High Speed Internet is not regulated by the Michigan Public Service Commission.



Tri-County Electric Cooperative



SAVE UP TO 50%
on the energy you use to heat and cool your home



Whether you care about living green or saving green, an electric heat pump system provides the comfort and economy you're looking for. Geothermal is a simple technology that uses the earth's renewable energy to provide high-efficiency heating and cooling. In winter, the system draws heat from the ground and transfers it to your home. In summer, it extracts heat from your home and transfers it to the ground.

Learn more at homeworks.org or by calling 800-562-8232.



JOIN US

FOR A SPECIAL ENERGY-SAVING EVENT

Monday
APRIL
22
Blanchard

**DOORS
OPEN 6:00PM**

Monday
APRIL
29
Portland

**PROGRAM
STARTS 6:30PM**

Learn how you can save on your heating and cooling bill by using a super-efficient geothermal heat pump system with our low dual fuel electric rate. There will be a brief presentation followed by an "Ask the Experts" breakout session with contractors and factory representatives.

Follow the signs at either office to the meeting room. A light supper will be available.