

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES

The Art of Island Living

Writer/Photographer Julie McKay Covert

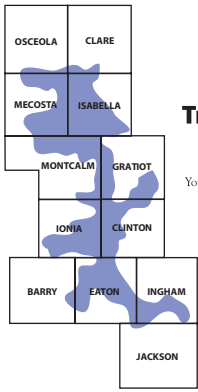


Your Guide To The
Michigan Legislature

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Electricity

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Employees Retire



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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3681 Costabella Avenue

Blanchard MI 49310

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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

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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

The Value of Electricity



At HomeWorks Tri-County, we have three top priorities: provide you with safe, reliable access to electric power; offer that service as affordably as possible; and do both of those things in a fiscally and environmentally responsible fashion.

You've told us, at meetings and in surveys, that you value these same priorities. That's why they are the foundation of our strategic plan, our work plans, and our daily activities.

What else does "value" mean to you, when it comes to electricity?

For instance, cell phones and other digital devices are a part of our everyday lives. Everyone, it seems, is connected—making phone calls, texting, playing games, checking the internet, or reading email. This instant communication is a luxury we pay for, generally without complaint.

But when it comes to electricity—a necessity in our modern world—why do so many of us grumble when the electric bill comes every month?

We expect electricity to be there at the flip of the switch, and when it's not, we get angry or frustrated.

As your electric co-op, we have a special responsibility to make sure your electric service is safe, reliable and affordable. But when compared to other commodities, electricity remains a great value.

For example, over the past 10 years, gas prices shot up 12.66 percent on average annually, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The cost of a loaf of white bread rose 3.73 percent annually, and a dozen

eggs jumped 7.39 percent in price per year.

In comparison, electricity has increased just 3.7 percent a year nationally for the past decade. When you consider how reliable electricity is, the value goes up even more.

The average HomeWorks member has power 99.97 percent of the time. That's a pretty good number, and we're working every day to increase our service reliability and control costs through innovative technology.

In the past 30 years, the amount of residential electricity used by appliances and electronics has increased from 17 percent to 31 percent. Those cell phones I mentioned earlier? Nearly one-third of all U.S. households have four electronic devices, such as cell phones, plugged in and charging, according to the Residential Energy Consumption Survey by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. More homes than ever use major appliances and central air conditioning. Owning digital video recorders (DVRs), computers and multiple TVs has become commonplace.

Clearly, our appetite for electricity shows no signs of slowing down. So, the next time you flip a switch, use your toaster, or run your washing machine, remember the value electricity holds. And know that we at HomeWorks are looking out for you by working together to keep electric bills affordable, controlling costs through innovation, and putting you, our members, first.

Mark Kappler
General Manager



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

5-Alarm Smokehouse: A Fresh Source For Quality Meats

Opened a year ago to offer custom deer processing, 5-Alarm Smokehouse & Custom Butchering has also grown quickly into a destination shop for quality meats.

Owner Jeff Brown, a Fremont Township firefighter for over 20 years, opened 5-Alarm because he didn't like the way his own game was being processed, with parts being mixed into other hunters' venison to make sausage, for example.

"Here we do one deer at a time, even the specialty items. We'll do one four-pound mix for sausage, for example."

"We do custom butchering," adds front-end manager Jerry Nesbitt, former owner of the Blanchard Thriftway.

"Right now we have six cattle hanging to cut, and two hogs, with eight or nine more coming in next week. We'll be busy right up until hunting season."

Mike Woodbury, new this year, is the cutting room manager. "He's an excellent cutter," Nesbitt says. Nicole assists Mike with weighing and packaging, and Arica works the front counter.

So far, 5-Alarm has grown mostly through word-of-mouth, and marketing to local

businesses and restaurants. They also offer a quick lunch special for employees of local businesses, with sandwiches made to order, chips and a soft drink for just \$4.99.

The building was designed and constructed with meat processing in mind. A geothermal heating and cooling system provides the consistent year-round temperatures 5-Alarm needs.

From being in the construction business himself, Jeff was familiar with how well geothermal heating and cooling works, and he knew it would pay for itself.

The geothermal system also operates the chillers, keeping it cold enough to make a big difference in the hanging time before livestock is butchered.

Jeff is a green builder by trade, and worked with Dan Rons of Custom Heating & Plumbing in Mt. Pleasant to set up the systems and insulate the building properly.

They used foam insulation in the building's block construction, cell foam for ceilings, and a fiberglass insulation made for use on steel ceilings in the remainder of the building.

He also appreciated working with HomeWorks Tri-County Electric staff members, including Missy Robson, manager of customer service, and Nick Rusnell, energy advisor. They answered his specific questions about geothermal systems and how they could work for his business. Missy and Nick also helped Jeff set up dual-fuel metering, which cuts his energy costs even further.

The geothermal system cools the back room, kill floor and cutting room (kept at a constant 50 degrees), and regulates moisture as livestock hangs for butchering and gives a better aging process.

Jeff estimates it saves \$500-\$700 a month, especially in the summer.

It also works well in winter. Last heating season, Jeff says, he used just 3 percent of a 250-gallon LP tank for backup heat in the retail area.



Jerry Nesbitt shows off a tray of Winn Dogs in front of the 22-foot meat case. Half of the case houses various beef cuts, while the other half holds pork, chicken and sausages.

5-Alarm Smokehouse & Custom Butchering ... at a glance



- Open 9-6 Mon.-Fri., 9-3 Sat. Call 989-866-MEAT (6328).
- Located at 6438 S. Winn Road, just north of Winn.
- On Facebook at "5-Alarm Smokehouse and Custom Butchering."

- Senior citizens (60 or older) get a 15 percent discount every day.
- 5-Alarm offers several different meat bundles at an average of 20 percent off the case price.
- With some grocery items available, and a USDA meat case, they accept Bridge Cards.
- Specialties are homemade brats in several flavors, including cherry, and Winn Dogs, homemade all-beef hot dogs made from a 90 percent lean mix of ground beef. They also offer extra-thick bacon and cut meat to order.
- If you need wild game processed, 5-Alarm's team will give your trophy their full attention until the job is complete, making sure you get meat cuts and specialties from your own harvest.



Jeff Brown is a hunter and firefighter, and the decor at 5-Alarm Smokehouse, above right, reflects his passions.

—Jayne Graham

Co-op Employees Retire From Portland

Four HomeWorks employees recently retired from the Portland office after accumulating nearly 75 years of service to the co-op and its members.

Billing supervisor Diane Willard was hired in 1973 after attending Lansing Business University and working at Michigan Millers Insurance. Her aunt, Kate Rogers, planned

ing three brothers and a sister, and numerous nieces and nephews. “Summers will be very busy for me, visiting family. But it will be so strange not to get my vacation time okayed by Missy (Robson, manager of customer service.)”

Diane retired Dec. 6, while the other three employees have official retirement dates in

babysitting. She and her husband, Joe, enjoy four grandchildren, including twin infants in Grand Rapids with daughter Jennifer, and two boys with son Joe, who just moved back to Michigan.

Judy Huhn joined HomeWorks in 2003 after a career with several large corporations such as Michigan Bell/AT&T, EDS, and TRW. Her first assignment was running the system that processed all payments coming into the office. When that task was outsourced, she joined the customer service support team, greeting walk-in customers and handling office mail.

Judy recalls the renovation of the Portland office in 2010 as one of the biggest changes she’s seen at the co-op. “There hasn’t been a lot of turnover among the employees, but we did see the end of our Rural TV business, propane growing, and now high speed internet—those were some significant changes for our members,” she adds.

She plans to enjoy retirement with her husband, Duane, “resting and being domestic,” Judy says.

Propane driver Mike Fender grew up in the propane business, following in his father’s footsteps. Growing up on a farm near Laingsburg, Mike learned how to operate and maintain most kinds of heavy equipment, good experience for his military service as a Seabee, and for his future career.

After 29 years with Farmers Petroleum, Mike joined HomeWorks in September 2001. Besides his daily tasks, Mike has been an ambassador for Tri-County, driving a bob-tail truck in area parades from Westphalia to Lake Odessa. “I like to see the joy on the kids’ faces when I throw candy to them, and I liked cleaning the truck up so it looked good for the parades.”

In retirement, Mike and his wife, Julie, plan some traveling, but he will also spend more time with his volunteer work. He and a friend, both Viet Nam veterans with past alcohol issues, have been helping recent vets who return home with substance abuse problems.

“We have first-hand experience with dealing with this kind of thing, so they will listen to us,” Mike explains. “And it has a two-fold purpose, because we give and we receive.”

General Manager Mark Kappler notes that Diane, Tani, Judy and Mike have served the cooperative and its members faithfully and will be missed every day.



Diane Willard



Tani Ellis



Judy Huhn



Mike Fender

to retire from Tri-County Electric, so Diane applied, knowing there would soon be an opening.

Between 1973 and 2012, the billing process changed dramatically several times over, she recalls. “We used Burroughs machines to bill, inserting 8½” by 11” cards, when I started here. Today, we have computers for nearly everything, from our phones to taking payments, and we’ve been through so many system conversions I’ve lost count.”

In retirement, Diane hopes to travel and spend time with her extended family, includ-

early January.

Tani Ellis joined HomeWorks in 1996 as a part-time employee, working as a customer service support clerk. She quickly earned a full-time position as a customer service representative, and within two years of being hired was named supervisor of a CSR team.

“It’s a constant change, working here—that’s what was so interesting about this job,” she says. “I’m so fortunate to have been here. HomeWorks is an awesome place to work.” Like Diane, she is a Portland native. Her post-retirement plans include a lot of

People Fund Helps Feed Families

You helped make the holidays a little brighter for families with your continuing donations to the Tri-County Electric People Fund, through rounding up your monthly energy bills.

Meeting Oct. 30, the People Fund made seven grants totaling \$13,345, including:

- \$5,000 to God’s Helping Hands of Mecosta County, for their Christmas food program;
- \$1,500 to Tabernacle Food Pantry of Riverdale, to purchase food pantry items;
- \$545 to Crossroads Compassionate Center of Greenville, to help with mobile food truck expenses;
- \$500 to Morton Township Library, Mecosta, to buy materials for their teen room;

- \$800 to Cran-Hill Ranch, Rodney, for camper scholarships;
- \$2,500 to an Isabella County family to purchase a new oil furnace; and
- \$2,500 to a Mecosta County family to help with medical bills and utility 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 at homeworks.org.

Note: Applications must be received by **Jan. 15** for the Jan. 23 board meeting; and by **Feb. 19** for the Feb. 27 board meeting.

Scholarship, Youth Summit Applications Due March 15

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

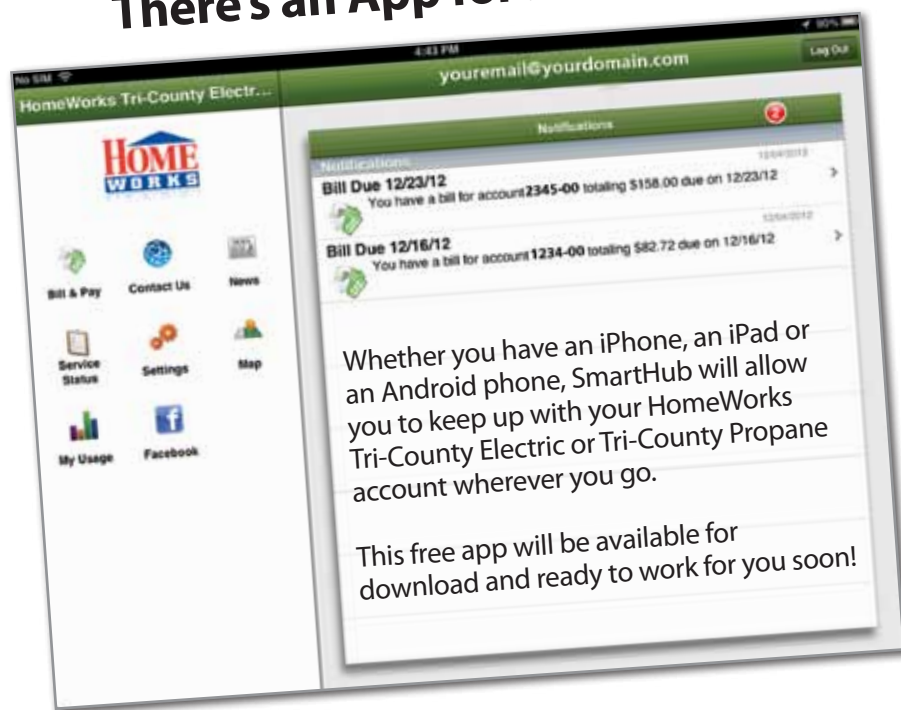
Seniors are eligible for one of two \$1,000 Touchstone Energy scholarships, awarded to students served by HomeWorks Tri-County and based on a combination of merit and need. We also offer two adult education scholarships of \$250 each.

High school sophomores and juniors can apply for the Youth Leadership Summit (April 24-26, near Evert) and the Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. (June 15-20). See page 5 and visit miyls.com to learn more about the exciting new plans for the Youth Leadership Summit.

Applications for both programs are due March 15.

Look for application forms and complete rules online at homeworks.org (click on the "Electric" tab, then "For Students and Teachers"), or email Jayne Graham at jayne@homeworks.org, or call 517-647-1252.

Coming Soon! There's an App for HomeWorks



Looking for real value from your propane service?

You're looking for HomeWorks Tri-County Propane.

If you're not completely happy with your current service, now's the time to make a change.

Capped Winter Rates: You will never pay more than our capped rate this winter. There is no additional charge to receive this price security—your rate is good for the entire heating season. Call for our current rates, or for details of our new customer promotion.

Metered Propane Service: Pay only for what you use each month, and never pay more than the current capped rate. You won't be locked-in to the cost of a whole tank of gas, or have to pay upfront for your entire heating season needs.

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!

Energy Optimization REBATES:

Back By Popular Demand!

You know the story. The clock strikes midnight and millions of people make resolutions to change. But, if something is working great, why fix it? Our thoughts exactly. HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative is keeping its most popular 2012 Energy Optimization (EO) rebates for 2013. It's your turn to save this year.

Reducing energy use is a win for everyone—homeowners, businesses, and the buildings themselves. Did you know that one of every two people prefer to make his/her home more energy efficient instead of more beautiful because of the short- and long-term benefits? That's because **saving energy gives you more control, increases your freedom, and improves your home.**

The list at right shows the energy rebates your fellow Michiganders used the most in 2012. All of these rebates help you save energy easily, keep you comfortable, and provide the best value.

Find more rebates at michigan-energy.org. Email (michigan-energy.org/contact) or call (877-296-4319) with questions about applications or product eligibility.

REBATE & FEATURES	INCENTIVE AMOUNT
ENERGY STAR® DEHUMIDIFIER	\$20
Choose any ENERGY STAR model; use 15% less energy	
EFFICIENT HVAC—FURNACES with electric commutated motors (ECMs)	\$150
Effectively converts energy to generate heat instead of energy waste; save as much as \$800 in the next 10 years	
ELECTRIC WATER HEATERS	\$50
0.93 energy factor (EF) or higher	
HEAT PUMP WATER HEATERS	\$100
Heat pump model 2.0 EF or higher	
ENERGY STAR REFRIGERATOR	\$20
FREE appliance recycling; choose any ENERGY STAR model; use at least 15% less energy	
ONLINE HOME AUDIT (Home Energy Optimizer) ... FREE Energy-Saving Kit (\$30 value)	
Pinpoint where your home wastes energy; access at michigan-energy.org , select your energy provider, and click "Home Audit"; receive free EO kit (contains five CFLs, energy efficient aerators, and a showerhead) when you complete the online assessment.	

ATTENTION FARMERS! The Energy Optimization Farm Program invites you to get a **free** engine block heater timer. Call 877-296-4319 or visit michigan-energy.org/heatertimer.

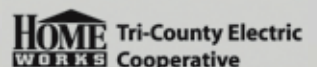


SAVE ON.

You're in for a great new year. Our most popular Energy Optimization **REBATES** are back by popular demand! You can now choose from more than 50 easy ways to save energy at home or work.

- ★ **FREE refrigerator recycling**
- ★ **\$15 Rebate Outdoor CFL light fixtures**
- ★ **\$20 Rebate ENERGY STAR dehumidifiers**
- ★ **\$20 Rebate ENERGY STAR refrigerators**
- ★ **\$50 Rebate Electric water heaters**
- ★ **FREE online home audit and energy-saving kit**
- ★ **\$150 Rebate ECM furnaces**

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.

Your Board In Action

Meeting at Blanchard Oct. 22 and Portland Nov. 26, your co-op's board of directors:

- Met with district officers to discuss governance, board qualifications, and board member duties.
- Heard a power supply update from representatives of Wolverine Power Cooperative.
- Reviewed the monthly and year-to-date financial statements, and learned the Power Supply Cost Recovery factor is under-collected for 2012 and may need to be adjusted early in 2013.
- Read and approved "Board Policy 103 – Director Compensation" with minor changes; read and approved "Board Policy 115 – Director Emeritus," "Board Policy 201 – Safety," and "Board Policy 401 – Assignment of Capital Credits," as read.
- Heard an update on Proposal 3 and the CARE for Michigan Coalition from Craig Borr, president/CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association.
- Learned there were 111 new members in September and 119 in October.
- Acknowledged the safety reports for September through November, listing employee training and minor employee and public incidents.
- Authorized accounts receivable write-offs totaling \$107,759.15 for the 12 months ending Dec. 31, 2011.
- Met with representatives of Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange to review insurance coverages and limits for 2013.
- Reviewed results of the annual inventory as well as recent strategic and tactical planning.
- Reviewed employee benefits and their costs to the cooperative.
- Heard more about the first Safety Summit hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), attended by general manager, Mark Kappler; electric operations manager, Matt Miller; and safety coordinator, Chris O'Neill.

Time for Members to Comment

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 **Jan. 21 at Blanchard** and **March 25 at Portland**. Members who need directions to either office or wish to have items considered on the board agenda should call 517-647-7554.

Maintenance Projects Boost Reliability



Photo – Kevin VanDePerre

Several Blanchard-area line crews worked closely to coordinate a safe and efficient pole replacement west of Altona in late November. This project is part of our ongoing program of system-wide inspections and proactive maintenance, helping to reduce the number and length of power outages.

Rick Warchuck and Tom Hoffmeyer are in the buckets; Dan Dexter and Calvin Foster are on the ground, guiding the pole into its permanent location; and Jon Karcher was running the trucks as needed for best positioning.

Neighbors Create New Plow to 'Bully' Winter



Paul Starner demonstrates an eco-friendly, easy-to-use snow plow that he and his neighbor, Jerry Schichtel, developed and call the "Snow Bully." Their website is TheSnowBully.com.

Tired of being "bullied by the snow," Paul Starner and Jerry Schichtel, of Traverse City, decided to fight back.

They created the Snow Bully, a four-wheel steel shovel with a 34-inch blade that clears snow easily.

"It was an invention of necessity," says Starner, a Cherryland Electric Cooperative member who's in charge of marketing the product that Schichtel created.

"I have a lot of physical challenges and I don't move around very well. I needed something to move snow with that didn't take very much effort," Starner explains. "That's what the Snow Bully is."

Five years ago, Schichtel watched neighbor Starner struggle as he attempted to use his snow blower. That gave Schichtel an idea. He and his brother had already created the prototype for the Snow Bully back in the 1940s when they were growing up on a farm. It was made out of wood.

After watching Starner finish up that day, Schichtel walked over and told him about his idea to re-create his wooden snow remover.

Starner listened, and then asked Schichtel to make a modern version. It took five attempts, but they finally came up with a product both liked, and so they shook hands and became partners.

The next step was finding someone to produce the Snow Bully. Starner, who has spent his career in the real estate business, searched the state and found Mark Goodman of MDG Welding in Blissfield.

"Last winter was our first selling the Snow Bully, and wouldn't you know it, we didn't get much snow," Starner laughs. "Still, we sold 161 of them."

It sells for \$249, plus \$29.95 shipping in the U.S.

"We market our product on the internet," Starner says. "People can go to our website and do it all—read about it, see pictures and videos of it in action, and then order it. The orders go directly to Mark Goodman in Blissfield and UPS ships them from his business."

Starner not only likes the ease of using the Snow Bully, he calls it "eco-friendly."

"You use calories, not gasoline," he says. "It is very friendly to the environment,

and we're in the process of creating attachments for the Snow Bully. We're working on a scraper blade, a garden cart basket, and we're also looking at an eco-mower. That would make this something you can use year-round and not use any gasoline."

So far, the Snow Bully has been an internet hit.

"We've sold it to as far away as Newfoundland," Starner explains. "And in the states, from Washington to Maine and then from New York to North Carolina."

"Social media is the new way to market. Not only do we have our internet site, we post videos on YouTube," Starner adds. "Jerry and I really don't see the product after we give the okay to have it made. People agree to buy it online, pay for it through their PayPal account, and then it's shipped from Blissfield. It's all pretty clean."

And it's all pretty satisfying to Paul and Jerry.

"There's nothing more frustrating to me than moving snow," Starner says. "That's why the 'Snow Bully' is great...it's just simple. You don't need to have much upper body strength to move snow."

**Notice to Members of
HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative**

Case No. U-15822

2011 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 (HomeWorks) submits an annual report to the MPSC regarding its Renewable Energy Plan. In 2011, HomeWorks acquired 15,499 renewable energy credits and 905 incentive credits from its wholesale power supplier, Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative, Inc. (Wolverine). Wolverine will continue to generate or purchase renewable energy and bank unused renewable energy credits for future use and compliance with statutory renewable portfolio standard requirements on behalf of all 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 HomeWorks' offices.

In Memory:
Janet Martin



Former accounting clerk Janet Martin passed away Oct. 14. Janet was born Oct. 29, 1942 in Lebanon Township the daughter of John and Eleanor (Thelen) Goerge.

Janet worked for Tri-County Electric Cooperative from 1981-2000, and was a member of Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Fowler.

She is survived by six children, Dennis (Kris) Martin of Owosso, Alan (Amy) Martin of Fowler, Karen (Phil) Pline of Pewamo, Brenda (Steve) Wood of Pewamo, Kevin Martin of Ionia and Gary (Shelly) Martin of Westphalia; 20 grandchildren; a sister and four brothers.

STATE OF MICHIGAN

BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

*** * * * ***

In the matter of the application of HOMEWORKS TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE for approval of revisions to its Large Power Service Rate – Choice, Schedule CD-C, and its Primary Service Rate – Choice, Schedule PSDS-C.

Case No. U-17148

NOTICE OF OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

On October 23, 2012, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative (HomeWorks) filed an application with the Michigan Public Service Commission (Commission) pursuant to the 2008 PA 167, §6(2), MCL 460.36(2), of the Electric Cooperative Member-Regulation Act, for approval of proposed revisions to HomeWorks' Large Power Service Rate – Choice – Schedule CD-C and its Primary Service Rate – Choice, Schedule PSDS-C, as currently set forth on Original Sheet No. D-20.00, Second Revised Sheet No. D-20.01, Original Sheet No. D-20.02, and First Revised Sheet No. D-21.00.

Any interested person may write to HomeWorks at 7973 E. Grand River, Portland, Michigan 48875, or call (800) 562-8232, for a free copy of its application. A copy of HomeWorks' application may also be reviewed at the office of the Commission's Executive Secretary, 4300 W. Saginaw, Lansing, Michigan, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, or on the Commission's website at: michigan.gov/mpscedockets. For more information on how to participate in the case, you may contact the Commission at the above address, or by telephone at (517) 241-6180.

Written and electronic comments may be filed with the Commission and must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on January 25, 2013. Written comments should be sent to the Executive Secretary, Michigan Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, Michigan 48909, with a copy mailed to Albert Ernst, Dykema Gossett, PLLC, 201 Townsend, Suite 900, Lansing, Michigan, 48933. Electronic comments may be e-mailed to: mpscedockets@michigan.gov. All comments should reference Case No. U-17148. Comments received in this matter become public information, posted on the Commission's website, and subject to disclosure.

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