

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



BASKETBALL MADNESS

'Floored' By Michigan Companies

Plus!

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To Local Schools

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Spring Storms

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Calling Team Midwest

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March 2015
Vol. 35, No. 3

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Michigan Electric
Cooperative Association

Design and Layout

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Michigan Country Lines, USPS-591-710, is published monthly, except August and December, with periodicals postage paid at Okemos, MI, and additional offices. It is the official publication of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864.

Subscriptions are authorized for members of Alger Delta, Cherryland, Cloverland, Great Lakes, HomeWorks Tri-County, Midwest Energy, Ontonagon, Presque Isle, and Thumb electric cooperatives by their boards of directors. Subscriptions for nonmembers are \$6 per year.

POSTMASTER: SEND ALL UAA TO CFS.

Letters to the editor should be sent to *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Phone 517-913-3531. **E-mail:** cdorr@meca.coop

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ON THE COVER*

Upper Peninsula native Tom Izzo coaches the MSU Spartans basketball team. The flooring they—and most teams nationwide—play on is made in the U.P.

Photo—Matthew Mitchell

*Some co-op editions have a different cover.



Michigan's Electric
Cooperatives
countrylines.com



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Midwest Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Culture of Safety Crosses Many Areas



Robert Hance
President/CEO

Every year, we dedicate many hours to educating people about the dangers of electricity. From the monthly safety training for our staff, to programs for emergency responders, to interactive demonstrations for students, we are committed to a culture of safety inside and outside the organization.

Beyond the distribution of kilowatts, however, is another component of our safety culture—your privacy and the protection of your personal information.

Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear about a breach of information within a retail environment. Credit card numbers and other information are at risk with every financial transaction. We have many systems in place within the walls of the co-op, and have very strict standards and expectations with any vendor who handles our data. That, too, is a key part of our culture of safety.

In the retail environment, there is increasing regulation intended to safeguard consumer information. As a retail provider, we must follow these standards or face significant financial penalties. I certainly don't want to expose our member-owners to penalties because of our own negligence, but more importantly I don't want to put member information at risk.

We trust our people, processes and procedures, but are implementing a change to add another layer of security. Effective April 1, we will no longer take payments through our call center representatives. I understand and appreciate that many of our members prefer to pay this way, but any time personal banking information is transferred from person to person, there is a risk.

The good news is that we have other easy and convenient ways for you to conduct your business. You can still call and use our automated phone system. The system processes your payment and maintains no record of credit card or banking information. Many are now using SmartHub®, our online and mobile platform through which you can safely and securely make payments and manage other components of your account. Or, with a one-time set up, you can use our Easy Ways to Pay autopay program and have your bill paid monthly through a designated credit card or bank account.

We take all aspects of our culture of safety very seriously. Thank you for understanding this important change. ■

Statement of Non-Discrimination

Midwest Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax, (202)690-7442 or e-mail at program.intake@usda.gov.

Team Midwest Strengthens Schools With Annual Grant Program



Midwest Energy Cooperative, in partnership with Touchstone Energy, awarded \$30,000 in Strengthening Schools grants to 18 public schools across our service territory in January. A committee comprised of co-op members Della Bundle (Cassopolis), Joanne Rossman (Mattawan), and Andy Rozentals (Three Rivers), evaluated applications and determined final awards. All

applications were evaluated and awarded without knowledge of the school, district or community.

“We were amazed by the creativity demonstrated in these applications. There are great people working in our public schools to educate and shape our students and future leaders, and we’re honored to support them in bringing innovative ideas to life,” said Patty Nowlin, director of communications and community relations.

Awards were presented to the following schools and projects:

- Bangor High School, \$2,000 for an integrated curriculum to study *The Pact*
- Bloomingdale Middle/High School, \$1,300 for 8th grade field trip to Air Zoo Museum
- Brandywine Elementary School, Niles, \$1,877.90 for elementary art program
- Brookside Learning Center, Cassopolis, \$2,125 for early childhood special education play centers
- Central Elementary School, White Pigeon, \$2,000 for lockable storage cabinets
- Centreville Jr./Sr. High School \$1,000 for free weights for P.E. classes and afterschool programs
- Clinton Middle School, \$2,125 for video production lab
- Coloma High School, \$2,500 for computer supplies to support students in Solidworks training
- Edwardsburg High School, \$2,500 for the robotics team
- Edwardsburg Primary School, \$350 for 1st grade field trip to WNDU weather station
- Howard Elementary, Niles, \$1,000 for state science standard leveled library of nonfiction books
- Lawrence Public Schools, \$2,000 for campus-wide wireless access
- Morenci Middle/High School, \$251.66 for *The Giver*, *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* book study series
- Northpointe Learning Center, Cassopolis, \$2,500 for “PC Eye Go” to support students with significant motor impairments
- Paw Paw Middle School, \$2,376 for Minecraft afterschool program
- Pullman Elementary, Bloomingdale, \$1,200 for Chromebooks
- Three Rivers High School, \$400 for positive school climate initiative
- White Pigeon Middle School, \$2,496.95 for MobyMax tables and accessories

Information and applications for the 2015–16 funding cycle will be available at TeamMidwest.com beginning in April. ■

Fuel Mix Report

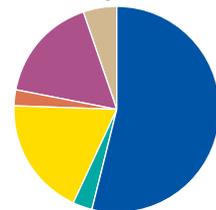
The fuel mix characteristics of Midwest Energy Cooperation as required by Public Act 141 of 2000 for the 12-month period ended 12/31/14.

COMPARISON OF FUEL SOURCES USED

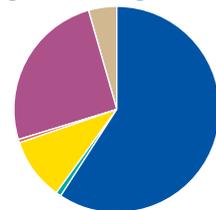
Regional average fuel mix used		
Your co-op's fuel mix		
FUEL SOURCE		
Coal	53.6%	60.4%
Oil	3.5%	0.7%
Gas	18.4%	8.9%
Hydroelectric	3.2%	0.5%
Nuclear	16.0%	24.6%
Renewable Fuels	5.3%	4.9%
Biofuel	0.5%	0.7%
Biomass	0.1%	0.4%
Solar	0.0%	0.1%
Solid Waste Incineration	0.0%	0.0%
Wind	4.6%	3.2%
Wood	0.1%	0.5%

NOTE: Biomass above excludes wood; solid waste incineration includes landfill gas, and wind includes a long-term renewable purchase power contract in Wolverine's mix.

Your Co-op's Fuel Mix



Regional Average Fuel Mix



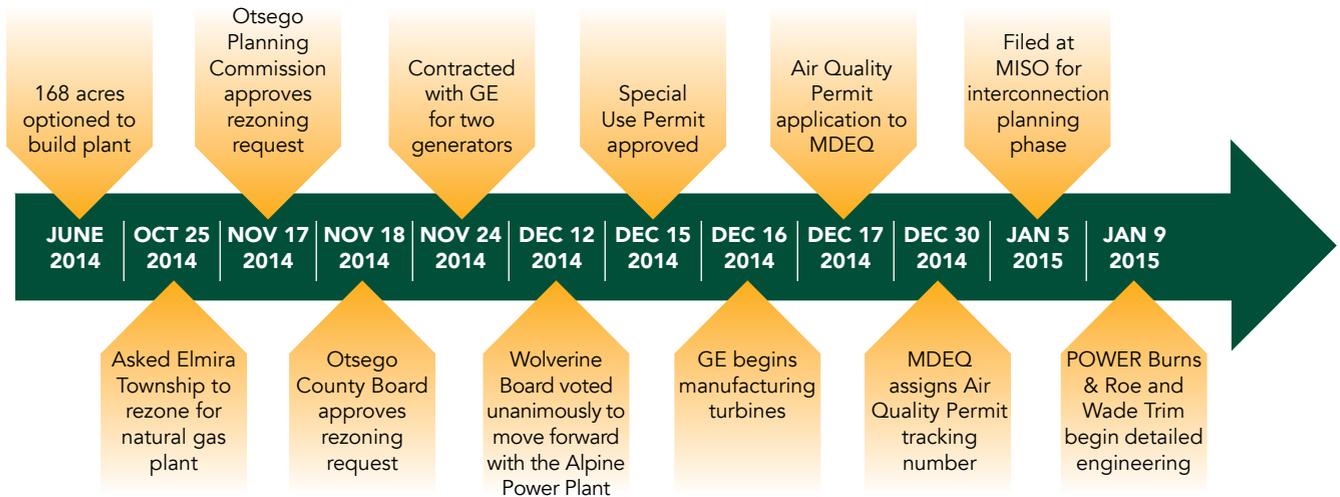
EMISSIONS AND WASTE COMPARISON

TYPE OF EMISSION/WASTE	lbs/MWh	
	Your Co-op	Regional Average*
Sulfur Dioxide	4.2	7.6
Carbon Dioxide	1,470	2,170
Oxides of Nitrogen	1.5	2.0
High-level Nuclear Waste	0.0054	0.0083

*Regional average information was obtained from MPSC website and is for the twelve-month period ending 12/31/14.

Midwest Energy purchases 100% of its electricity from Wolverine Power Cooperative, which provided this fuel mix and environmental data.

Wolverine Power Moves Forward With Natural Gas Plant



Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative Inc., of Cadillac, is moving forward with a new 432 megawatt natural gas-fueled electric power plant, located in Elmira Township, near Gaylord. The Alpine Power Plant will use natural gas to generate electricity during times of peak demand and to compliment the ever-increasing amount of intermittent renewable energy in our state, like wind and solar. The Alpine Power Plant is scheduled to be completed by Spring 2016.

“The members of the planning commissions and boards of Elmira Township and Otsego County have voted unanimously to approve our applications, sending the message that this project is widely supported,” said Ken Bradstreet, project spokesman. Visit alpinecleanenergy.com to learn more and keep updated on this project. ■

New Touch-Control Faucets Save Water, Energy

The right kitchen faucet can have a strong impact on your water and energy savings.

Today, one-handle faucets are common, as their size and shape impact water use, but the newest, most efficient models can be controlled by the wave or touch of a hand. By not adjusting a handle, water is not wasted by readjusting the temperature. This provides a lot of savings—especially when washing dishes by hand.

A standard faucet uses more water and energy when washing dishes by hand than running a properly-loaded, efficient dishwasher. With a touch-control faucet, hand-washing dishes can be more efficient than a dishwasher. Also, fewer germs are spread because the faucet is touched less often with dirty hands, and the attractive finish lasts longer.

There are two “no-hands” models. One senses touch from your body (hand, forearm, elbow). For example, when rinsing dishes, you can hold several plates in each hand and tap anywhere on the faucet with your arm to control the water flow.

The other model has a sensor on top (a hand-wave controls it), and another on the faucet neck that triggers when your hands are in hand-washing position.

Tall faucet spouts with a pull-down sprayer are also efficient. Depending on under-cabinet clearance, pick the

tallest that fits, as the height is handy when rinsing a large pot. Choosing one with a pause button also lets you temporarily stop the flow without waving or touching the fixture.

Whichever faucet you have, never ignore a dripping one, since even a slow leak increases energy costs. After heating and cooling, heating water is the greatest energy user, but cold water also uses a lot of energy to purify, pump and treat.

Companies offering touch-control faucets include: American Standard, 800-442-1902, americanstandard-us.com; Delta Faucet, 800-345-3358, deltafaucet.com; Kohler, 800-456-4537, kohler.com; Moen, 800-289-6636, moen.com; and Pfister, 800-732-8238, pfisterfaucets.com. ■



Photo—Moen

—James Dullely



SOUP FOR THE SOUL

In a slow cooker or on the stove, these soups are the ultimate in comfort food.

Easy Taco Soup (pictured)

1½-2 lbs. ground beef
1 large onion, diced
2 15.5-oz. cans pink or red kidney beans
15.5-oz. can pinto or chili beans
15.5-oz. can shoe peg corn (or whole kernel corn)
14.5-oz. can diced tomatoes and green chilies

2 14.5-oz. cans, any brand, Mexican-style tomatoes
4.5-oz. can diced green chilies
4.6-oz. can black olives, drained and sliced
1¼-oz. pkg. taco seasoning mix
1-oz. pkg. ranch salad dressing mix

For Garnish:

tortilla chips
sour cream
grated cheese

chopped green onions
sliced black olives

Brown the ground beef with onions. Drain excess fat, then transfer to large crock pot or large pot on stove. Add beans, corn, tomatoes, olives, chilies, taco seasoning and ranch dressing mix. You may need to add ½ c. of water for desired consistency. In the crockpot, cook on low for 6 hours. On the stovetop, simmer on low about 1 hour. Break the tortilla chips and put in bottom of bowls and cover with soup. Top with your choice of garnishes.

Melody Brown, Big Bay

Butternut Cheesy Bacon Chowder—Gluten Free

4 c. chicken broth
1 butternut squash, roughly 3–4 c.
1 c. diced onion
1 c. diced celery
1 ½ t. salt

¼ t. black pepper
2 c. bacon or diced ham, cooked
2 c. shredded sharp cheddar
1 ½ c. heavy whipping cream
fresh chives, optional

Combine first six ingredients and cook until vegetables are tender. While vegetables are cooking, fry your meat of choice and drain. Using a blender, purée the vegetables and return them to the pot (an immersion blender works best). Add meat, cheese and heavy cream to the cooked vegetables. Heat through for about 5 minutes, but do not boil. Garnish with fresh chives, if desired.

Anna Kinsey, LeRoy

Mushroom Barley Soup

1½ lbs. cubed beef
1 T. vegetable oil
2 c. finely chopped onion
1 c. diced carrots
½ c. diced celery
4-oz. can mushrooms, undrained
1 garlic clove, minced

14.5-oz. can beef broth
14.5-oz. can chicken broth
2 c. water
½ c. pearl barley
1 t. salt
½ t. pepper
3 T. chopped parsley, for garnish



In a soup pot, brown meat in oil. Remove meat with a slotted spoon and set aside. Sauté onion, carrot and celery in drippings until tender, about 5 minutes. Add meat back into pan along with all other ingredients; bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 1½ to 2 hours or until barley and meat are tender. Stir in parsley.

Geraldine Rutkowski, Ubly

SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE!

Thanks to all who send in recipes. Please send in your favorite **"Camping"** recipes by **April 1** and your favorite **"Burgers/All American"** by **May 1**.

Enter your recipe online at countrylines.com or send to (handprinted or typed on one side, please): *Country Lines Recipes*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Please note the co-op from which you receive your electric service.

Contributors whose recipes we print in 2015 will be entered in a drawing and *Country Lines* will pay the winner's January 2016 electric bill (up to \$200)!

Visit countrylines.com for more reader recipes!

Photos—831 Creative

BE PREPARED

Before Mother Nature rears her ugly head with spring storms, take time to think through what you need in the event of an extended power outage.

Following are suggested items to keep on hand and easily accessible in the event of a power outage.

Everyone should consider the unique needs of their own family in order to create an emergency kit that provides for individual circumstances.

- **Water** – At least one gallon per person, per day for drinking and sanitation. If you have pets, have extra available.
- **Food** – At least a three-day supply of non-perishable food, focusing on items that can be eaten without being cooked. Don't forget a hand-operated can opener.
- **Flashlights** – and fresh batteries.
- **Telephone** – Make sure it's corded. Cordless phones will not work when your power is out.
- **Communications** – Battery-powered radio and/or television. Midwest Energy works with regional news media to provide regular updates about major power outages.
- **Clock** – Battery-powered or wind-up.
- **First-aid kit** – and hand sanitizer. Fill prescriptions and have any needed medical supplies on hand.
- **Extra blankets.**
- **Candles and matches.**
- **Personal sanitation** – Moist wipes, garbage bags and plastic ties.
- **Wrench or pliers** – to turn off utilities.

Learning more about current outages

We strive to provide timely and useful information during major outage situations. During any major outage or emergency situation, we provide regular updates to local media outlets to keep you informed about outage numbers and locations. The same update information is posted on the red emergency banner across the top of our homepage at TeamMidwest.com, and shared via our Facebook and Twitter accounts. Get quick access to our social media sites by clicking on the individual icons found at the top right side of our homepage.

Our Outage Central map, also available via our homepage and in the SmartHub app, provides a quick snapshot of outages by zip code. ■

Convenient Outage Reporting

Midwest offers easy and convenient ways to report your power outage. Please do not use e-mail or social media such as Facebook or Twitter to report your outage as these platforms are not staffed 24/7.

Online and Mobile Power

Tools: When you're in the dark and trying to report your power outage, there's nothing more frustrating than a fast busy signal or sitting in a crowded phone queue waiting for the next available customer care representative.



SmartHub® offers a set of Power Tools, allowing you to report your outage from the convenience of your computer or mobile device. Log-in to your account to report your outage through the online portal at our website, use the free SmartHub app available through your iTunes or Google Play store, or text your outage from your cell phone. A short registration process is required for new users of these convenient platforms. Learn more by clicking on the Power Tools ad at TeamMidwest.com.

Telephone: The telephone system at your co-op is equipped with an automatic outage reporting system, an easy and efficient way to report your outage. Dial 800-492-5989 and follow the prompts to report your outage. We must have an up-to-date telephone number on your account for you to use this system. Please call 800-492-5989 to update your information.

We have a limited number of incoming lines that are more than adequate for regular business operations, but may become overly taxed in a major outage situation. If you receive a fast busy signal, it means more members are attempting to call than our incoming phone line capacity. In this event, please hang up and try again later, or use an alternative method of outage reporting.

Applications Available for Spring Semester Adult Scholarship



Cherie File prepares an electronic health record in a birthing suite at Lakeland Hospital in Niles.

Countless adults are unemployed and underemployed, and have pursued new career opportunities to support their lives and families. For many, that has required further training and education.

Midwest Energy Cooperative offers a \$1,000 scholarship to support an adult returning to school. Adults age 21 and older who receive monthly electric service from Midwest Energy Cooperative, and whose primary residence is in Midwest's service area, may apply. Funds may be used for tuition, fees and/or book expenses, and will be paid directly to the college or university.

Applicants must be enrolled for a minimum of six credit hours at a community college, a 4-year university, or an accredited trade school. Two letters of recommendation from non-family members are required. The application is available to download and print or submit online at TeamMidwest.com. Applications and all pertinent information must be postmarked by May 15, 2015. ■

Cherie File of Dowagiac was recently awarded the Winter 2015 Adult Scholarship from Midwest Energy Cooperative. The co-op member is working towards a bachelor's degree in nursing from Ferris State through SMC.

Cherie was working full-time at Lakeland Community Hospital in Niles in 2002 when she began work on her bachelor's degree. She took a break from school when she became pregnant with her third child, and planned to return in 2008. However, the unexpected closure of her husband's employer halted those plans. Suddenly unemployed, John File returned to school and just completed a bachelor's degree in elementary education. He will complete his student teaching this fall and seek a full-time teaching position.

Cherie is motivated to complete what she started. "I highly value education, and with only four classes left ... it is now time for me to return to school! My husband and I have taught our children the importance of education, and have shown them by example how important it is to obtain a college degree, no matter what your age."

Calling Team Midwest?

New Toll-Free Numbers Get You Where You Need To Be

Over the years, Team Midwest has used one toll-free number as the primary point of contact for members and customers to reach our call center. But with a propane subsidiary quickly approaching 7,000 customers and a new Midwest Connections fiber-to-the-premise operation that is expected to explode with growth in 2015, co-op officials decided it was time to add new toll-free lines to create an easier and more efficient service experience for our members and customers.

Please make note of these new numbers for any of your Team Midwest business.

Midwest Energy Cooperative
(all electric-related business)
800-492-5989

Midwest Propane
844-493-4427 (493-4GAS)

Midwest Connections
844-493-4237 (49FIBER)



BASKETBALL MADNESS

'Floored' By Michigan Companies

Tom Izzo surveys the basketball court in Michigan State University's Breslin Center and still relishes what that court represents. Fifteen years earlier, Izzo led the Spartans to the NCAA championship on that very floor in Indianapolis.

After beating Florida, MSU purchased the portable court for its own use from Horner Flooring Co. Inc., which has manufactured sports flooring in Dollar Bay, MI, since 1891, the year Dr. James Naismith invented basketball.

"You wouldn't put the U.P. and basketball together for being famous," Izzo says. "But when you think about it, it makes some sense."

The Upper Peninsula has been the center of the athletic flooring universe for over 100 years. And, Izzo's one NCAA title, six Final Four appearances, 11 Big Ten regular season and tournament crowns, 17 consecutive NCAA Tournament bids and eight National Coach of the Year awards make the Iron Mountain native one of Michigan's most prominent sports figures. So, it all makes perfect sense.

Michigan State's journey to the 2009 Final Four at Ford Field in Detroit and most recent national semifinal appearance the following year back in Indianapolis, ended on courts made by Connor Sport Court International Inc., located in the heart of Iron County. Connor Sport has been in business since 1872 and in 2005 was named the official supplier of courts for the men's and women's Final Fours.

Both U.P. companies have amassed an astounding list of venues they have equipped—from high schools and colleges and professional facilities to the Olympics.

During the Spartans' last practice before defeating the Gators on the Horner floor that momentous

Monday night in April 2000, Izzo commiserated with his equally renowned boyhood rival, former Iron Mountain High School and Northern Michigan University teammate and best friend, Steve Mariucci, who at the time was the head coach of the San Francisco 49ers.

"We were laughing about it, saying me, you and this floor were made up in the U.P.," Izzo says. "I always knew about the floor companies up there and there's no question that when I'm watching a Final Four or an NBA event, I take a lot of pride in it, being a Hooper."

Proximity to a select variety of hard maple trees, which thrive in the U.P. climate, is the reason Michigan has become the world leader in athletic flooring.

The U.P. companies have
amassed an astounding list
of venues they have
equipped—from high schools
to colleges to professional
facilities to the Olympics.

"Hard maple trees obviously grow south of there, as well, but when you go that far north the growing season is real short," says Jason Gasperich, Connor Sports' sustainability director. "So, what happens is you end up with a very tight-grained, dense hardwood."

The old-growth forests have been replanted numerous times by an industry that has been at the forefront of renewable resource development. Some 40 different sawmills supply the lumber and a minimum of 30 trees—roughly



Photos—Matthew Mitchell

25 years old and up—will be used to make the court on which the Final Four will be played at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, April 4–6.

Michigan State's court has been taken apart and put back together countless times between non-sporting events, such as commencement exercises and concerts.

According to MSU Deputy Athletics Director Greg Ianni, who oversees the Spartans' athletic facilities, Horner has taken the floor back to the U.P. to be refurbished on numerous occasions, though it is nearing the end of its life expectancy.

After the surface is replaced in the next year or so, parts of it will be put on permanent display, others stored in the school's archives, and "pieces will be made available to our fan base," Ianni says. "The quality of the court has been terrific, and the irony of the fact that this floor was built in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where our head basketball coach came from, is quite unique." ■



Steve Grinczel is the online columnist for MSU's athletics website, *MSUSpartans.com*, and the co-host of the "Griff & Grinz" sports radio talk show on WQTX-FM (92.1).

He covered the Spartans for 24 years for Booth Newspapers of Michigan and lives in Haslett, MI.

Team Midwest Wants To Hear From You

Midwest Energy Cooperative is committed to providing members with reliable electricity and high levels of customer care and service. Your thoughts and opinions can help us create a better service experience for you and fellow members.

In April and May, we will work with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Market Research Services group to complete a member satisfaction survey. Members will be randomly selected for participation and surveys will be administered by phone and e-mail. All information collected is confidential and will not be shared with any outside entities. If you are contacted, we greatly appreciate a few minutes of your time to share your opinions about your cooperative experience.

We strive to provide all members with safe, reliable electricity and a superior customer service experience. By participating in the survey, you will help us make decisions that benefit you and other co-op members. Thanks for your help! ■

Offices Closed for Good Friday

Cooperative offices will be closed on Friday, April 3 in observance of Good Friday. Payments may be made at the drop box and will be posted on the next open business day.

From our family to yours, have a happy and blessed holiday.



RIGHT HERE. RIGHT NOW.

Make this the year you say **YES** to energy savings. If your business is ready to improve its bottom line and implement energy-saving strategies, we have a **solution** for you. With a number of Energy Optimization rebates available, the time to act is NOW.

ENERGY TIP: Commercial and industrial buildings use roughly 50% of the energy in the U.S. economy at a cost of over \$400 billion. That leaves a lot of opportunity for improvement!



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.

POP QUIZ:

Do you know what to do if a power line falls on your vehicle?

Do not drive away or get out. Stay inside until utility workers say it's okay. Warn others to stay away. If you must leave the vehicle – only in case of fire – jump free without touching the ground and auto at the same time, keeping both feet together, and hop to safety. A live wire touching the ground causes electricity to fan out, and walking or running allows one foot to move from one voltage zone to another. This makes your body the electricity's path, and electrocution results.

Other safety tips:

Never drive over a downed line. It could cause poles or other equipment to come crashing down.

Never touch a downed line or a person or object that is touching it! You could be injured or killed, too.

Call 911 immediately to report a downed line, then call your electric co-op or the local utility.

Wolverine Signs 20-Year Purchase Power Agreement for 114 Megawatts of Wind Energy

Harnessing energy from the wind is one clean and efficient way to generate power. Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative, Inc. (Wolverine), a generation and transmission electric cooperative in Cadillac, MI, recently increased its renewable energy portfolio by signing a 20-year Purchase Power Agreement (PPA) with Renewable Energy Systems Americas Inc. (RES Americas) for 114 megawatts of wind energy.

Known as the Deerfield Wind Energy Project, this development will be located on 20,000 acres in Huron County, in the Thumb of the Lower Peninsula. Wolverine will receive the entire output of the 114-megawatt project, expected to be approximately 400,000 megawatt hours annually.

“Wolverine is very pleased to be adding competitively priced wind energy to its power supply portfolio for its members,” said Eric Baker, president and CEO of Wolverine. “This PPA not only further diversifies

Wolverine’s overall energy portfolio, it also positions Wolverine and its members to meet Michigan’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) requirement of 10 percent renewable power supply by 2015.”

In 2008, Michigan passed a law establishing the RPS, requiring Michigan electric providers to attain a retail supply portfolio that includes at least 10 percent renewable energy by 2015. With the addition of wind energy from the Deerfield Wind Energy Project, Wolverine more than meets this requirement.

RES Americas is a leader in the development, engineering, and construction of wind, solar, transmission, and energy storage projects in North America. They will be constructing and operating the project, which will provide up to 200 jobs during peak construction and up to six permanent jobs at the completion of the project. ■

Calling All ArtPrize Artists in Michigan!

We would like to spotlight Michigan artists who participated in 2014, or are entering the 2015 ArtPrize® competition, in the July/August issue of *Country Lines*.

For 19 days, 3 square miles of downtown Grand Rapids becomes an open canvas of art. Artists from around the world enter the contest, and viewing their work is free and open to the public.

If you are an electric co-op member who participated in the 2014 ArtPrize event, or you are entering in 2015, please send your contact information by e-mail to Christine Dorr at cdorr@meca.coop or by mail to *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. The deadline is April 20.

ArtPrize 2015 will take place Sept. 23–Oct. 11

For more information about the event, please visit Artprize.org ■



Thumbs Up For The Thumb!

Quick! Name your favorite part of our state. Many will say the U.P., Leelanau County, or Grand Traverse Bay. My hunch is some will say, “the Thumb.” We wouldn’t be the Mitten State without a thumb, so let’s pay it some homage...

Phil Parrot, a Thumb native and owner of Parrot’s Tours (parrottstours.com or 810-376-9245), in Deckerville, sends vacationers to destinations worldwide, but he’s often asked about the Thumb area by other travel professionals. Parrot’s ready response is, “There’s the Upper Peninsula, Leelanau Peninsula, and Old Mission Peninsula, but the Thumb is Michigan’s undiscovered peninsula.”

Comprised of Huron, Tuscola, Sanilac, Lapeer and St. Clair counties, it boasts 150 miles of shoreline, 2,100 miles of rivers and streams, 51,000 acres of public recreation land, 49,000 acres of state game/wildlife areas, and many annual festivals and events.

Tour the Lake Huron and Saginaw Bay shoreline along M-25 with 160 miles of quaint towns and four lighthouses. The village of Sebewaing claims bragging rights as the “Sugar Beet Capital of the World” by hosting an annual Sugar Festival with a parade, carnival and entertainment tent. Caseville, near the Thumb’s tip on sandy Saginaw Bay, hosts the well-known Cheeseburger Festival every August. Algonac sits on the largest fresh-water delta in the world, with canals and an impressive 1,800 feet of boardwalk that credit its nickname as “The Venice of Michigan.”

And, visitors will want to explore the Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic State Park. The great Thumb fire of 1881, Parrot says, burned over 1 million acres and revealed prehistoric rock carvings made 300 to 1,000 years ago.

Seek a pleasant place by visiting it and giving a thumbs up for “the Thumb”! ■



Jack O'Malley



Photo courtesy of ArtPrize 2015. Photo credit: Brian Kelly.



Jan Photo

The January Mystery Photo Contest winner is Laura Neuman, of Mackinaw City, a Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op member who correctly identified the “snow people” figures in front of the tourist information building in Paradise, MI.

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