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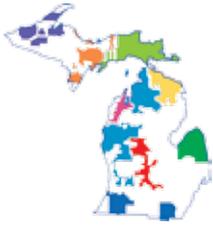
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Executive Editor
Casey Clark

Editor
Christine Dorr

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Association officers are **Robert Kran**, Great Lakes Energy, chairman; **Mark Kappler**, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, vice chairman; and **Eric Baker**, Wolverine Power Cooperative, secretary-treasurer. **Craig Borr** is president and CEO.

CONTACT US:
Michigan Country Lines
201 Townsend St., Suite 900
Lansing, MI 48933
248-534-7358
cdorr@meca.coop

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ON THE COVER*

Ofelia De Leon (far left), of Buena Vista, with his family and lineworkers when the lights came on in their home for the very first time. Ofelia had the honor of flipping the switch, and when the light came on the room radiated with happiness—lots of laughter, and tears. Linemen (L-R) Tom Ulatowski, Cherryland, Dan King, MECA, and Tony Reichle, Great Lakes Energy.

**Some co-op editions have a different cover.*

Cover photo by Garrett Hubbard



IN YOUR WORDS

Question of the Month—We Asked, You Answered.

Last month, we asked electric co-op members a question: If you could have a lifetime supply of anything, what would it be? Thank you for all the responses. Here are some answers from our members...

"Love, good health, happy family & friends, great weather and a very large pay check to share."

"Burgers and fries from Clyde's Restaurant in Manistique, MI."

"If I could have a lifetime supply of anything, it would be free electricity. I am 90 years old, a World War II Veteran, and have a bronze star (along with many other medals). I've been a member of Great Lakes Energy most of my life. My wife and I have been married 70 years this coming July. God Bless."

"Wisdom."

"Unwavering Faith."

Our new Question of the Month is:

If you could only have one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Please submit answers to countrylines.com by Feb. 1.

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CONTACT US

MIDWEST ENERGY COOPERATIVE

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MIDWEST CONNECTIONS

844-493-4237 • TeamFiber.com

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844-493-4427 • TeamMidwestPropane.com

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Colyne Sorsby, *Secretary*, Cassopolis

269-476-2718
Colyne.Sorsby@teammidwest.com

John Green, *Treasurer*, Dowagiac

269-470-2816
John.Green@teammidwest.com

Ron Armstrong, *Lawton*

269-299-0239
Ron.Armstrong@teammidwest.com

Arell Chapman, *Onsted*

517-292-3040
Arell.Chapman@teammidwest.com

James Dickerson, *Bloomington*

269-370-6868
Jim.Dickerson@teammidwest.com

Harry Gentz, *Blissfield*

517-443-5537
Harry.Gentz@teammidwest.com

Ben Russell, *Constantine*

269-435-8564
Ben.Russell@teammidwest.com

Fred Turk, *Decatur*

269-423-7762
Fred.Turk@teammidwest.com

PRESIDENT/CEO

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Investing In Members, Building "Utility Of The Future"



Robert Hance
President/CEO

My oldest grandson turns 13 this month, and I've been reflecting on some of our best times together. He's a thrill-seeker like me, and we look forward to making the roller coaster rounds on our annual trips to Cedar Point. I love the anticipation that stirs in my belly as the cart slowly creeps to the top, and the utter rush as you cross that apex and speed down the rails and around the curves.

I've got a similar anticipation brewing in my belly right now. Midwest Energy is on the cusp of some huge initiatives and opportunities, and bracing ourselves as we approach the apex. We know 2016 promises to be a transformational period as we enter year two of our five-year plan to upgrade our utility system and bring a fiber internet solution to southwest Michigan.

These are two very unique projects on parallel paths, both of which set us up as the "utility of the future." When you combine a smart utility grid with what is commonly referred to as the "Internet of Things," life as we know it changes. From the utility perspective, we gain access to information and data that will allow us to serve you more efficiently and effectively. From the consumer perspective, you have an improved experience with your utility, and access to a whole new world of advanced home technologies—products and services that will save energy and make life more convenient than ever before.

The reality is we don't know what all of this looks like, and that's the scary part of this ride. New technologies are introduced almost daily that combine the benefits of high-speed internet with home automation driven by the smart grid. The fiber optic initiative we launched last year sets us up to deliver both. While we're trying to prepare for a future filled with unknowns, we're still operating the electric utility with great reliability and customer care, and a highly successful propane operation. There's no such thing as status quo these days!

We're experiencing a lot of literal and figurative growing pains. We're dealing with very real space constraints as we add materials and staff to implement and manage what has quickly become a highly-anticipated and very successful fiber internet service. At the same time, we've added a whole new business requiring a huge learning curve for our existing staff, fully expecting them to deliver the level of service that our members have come to know and expect from the Midwest brand.

What do I want you to know? We're buckled in tight and ready to barrel down the rail as we invest in our membership and change the landscape of our service area. Good things are coming in 2016 as we continue to build the utility of the future. ■

Good Food, Great Dialog Await

Ever wish you could bend the ear of Midwest Energy leaders with some of your burning questions? Things like:

- What is the Monthly Service Charge?
- When will I get fiber internet?
- Why do you hate trees and the environment?
- How can I report my outage or pay my bill online?
- Who decided to stop taking credit card payments over the phone?

We're launching our 2016 Dinner & Dialog events—your opportunity to meet face-to-face with Midwest leadership to ask questions and learn more about your co-op. No question is off-limits!

Eight regional dinner events will be held in February and March—six in southwest Michigan and two in southeast Michigan. We pick up the dinner tab for you and your guest, asking in return only for your active participation in what we hope is a meaningful and productive two-way conversation about what's going on at Midwest.

Members are invited by random selection, and invitations will be mailed this month. We limit



attendance to about 40 co-op members, based on the size of the venue and in an effort to promote a meaningful and productive exchange. If you are interested in attending one of the meetings, please contact Nicole Barfell at 269-445-1112 or sign up at TeamMidwest.com. We will add you to our preferred waiting list and contact you if we have openings at any of the meetings. ■

Supporting Today's Students, Tomorrow's Leaders

Every high school senior considering a higher education path could use a little extra cash to help cover future expenses, and Team Midwest is again offering some support with our annual scholarship program.

High school seniors whose families receive monthly service from Midwest Energy Cooperative, Midwest Propane and/or Midwest Connections at their primary residence are invited to apply for one of the four \$1,000 college scholarships. Scholarship applications must be submitted by March 11, and awards will be made in April.

Selection for the scholarship is based on academic performance, extracurricular activities, community involvement and/or employment, and honors and awards. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a four-point scale is required and an official transcript must be submitted for final approval.



To celebrate the innovative nature of Team Midwest, we're taking an innovative approach this year and asking students to upload a short, creative video with their online application. Full details can be found with the online application at TeamMidwest.com. ■

Saving Energy In The Kitchen

By Brian Sloboda

Most of us spend a lot of time in the kitchen. Whether you are considering replacing an appliance or simply looking for ways to be more efficient, here are some tips to help you save energy—and money.

Most people don't think about their refrigerator that often—as long as it's working. Older refrigerators use more energy. Upgrading this appliance can bring a major return on your investment. Look for rebate programs, too!

Cooking also uses a lot of energy. To save energy while cooking, placing the lid on a pot of boiling water will trap heat and cause the water to boil faster. And there is no need to preheat the oven when cooking a large piece of meat, like a turkey or ham (you do need to preheat when baking, or cooking smaller dishes). If you are planning on using the oven for a long period of time, consider turning

down your home's thermostat. Cooking will add warmth to the home because the heat from the oven can raise the temperature in the kitchen and surrounding rooms.

Even after the meal is over, you can save energy. Make sure your dishwasher is full before it's started. Next, make sure you are using the right setting on your dishwasher. Newer models have sensors that detect how clean your dishes are. When these "auto" cycles are used, they will get dishes clean without wasting energy or water. The sanitize setting should rarely be used since it is energy intensive. It is also a good idea to make sure the filter at the bottom of the washtub is cleaned to help the washer work at its optimal level.

As you can see, there are many different ways to practice efficiency in the kitchen, and maybe even save enough money to have dinner out sometimes! ■

Be Prepared For Winter Storms

By Abby Berry

When winter temperatures drop and storms hit, it can be challenging to stay safe and warm. Your electric cooperative cares about your safety, and we want you to be prepared.



Heavy snow and ice can lead to downed power lines, leaving you without power. During a power outage, our crews will continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but there are a few things you can do to prepare yourself.

- **Stay warm** – Use a safe alternate heating source, such as a fireplace or wood-burning stove, during a power outage. Exercise caution when using, and never leave the heating source unattended.

If you are using gasoline, propane or natural gas-burning devices to stay warm, never use them indoors. Remember that fuel and wood-burning sources of heat should always be properly ventilated. Always read the manufacturer's directions before using.

- **Stay fed** – Be sure to have several days' supply of food on hand. Crackers, cereal, canned goods, bread, and other foods that do not need to be cooked, are good options. Five gallons of water per person should also be available in the event of an extended power outage.
- **Stay safe** – When an outage occurs, it usually means power lines are down. Try not to travel during winter storms, but if you must, bring a survival kit along, and do not travel alone. If you encounter downed lines, always assume they are live and stay as far away from them as possible.

Winter weather can be unpredictable and dangerous, and planning ahead is important. For more winter safety tips, visit ready.gov/winter-weather. ■



Photo: Garrett Hubbard

Electric Cooperatives Donate Suitcases Packed With A Purpose

The recent Partners for Power team reached their goal to build an electric line extension in Guatemala that changed the lives of about 54 families in the small community of Buena Vista. But our team's work did not end there. The 10-person team distributed over 450 pounds of donated items sent over with the Partners For Power project.

The suitcases were filled by a team effort of employees from Cherryland Electric Cooperative, Great Lakes Energy, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, Midwest Energy, Wolverine Power, and Cloverland Electric. The much needed items included school supplies, shoes, backpacks, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, mouthwash, stuffed animals, sweatshirts/t-shirts of all sizes, small sewing kits, stocking caps, baseball hats, soccer balls, a basketball, a football, air pumps, soccer nets, and basketball nets. The electric cooperatives were eager to help out and make a difference for the villagers in Buena Vista.

To distribute the supplies fairly, the team of linemen divided the items into three stations, grouped by age, so that everyone received something. "The villagers have worked so hard on this entire project with us," said Wolverine Power safety coordinator, Matt Monroe. "It was fun to be able to give their



families one more surprise before we headed back home."

Partners For Power also sent a basketball backboard, rim and hardware, along with individual pieces of plexiglass, glass cutters, and caulk to replace broken school windows in the village.

Read the full story about how Michigan electric cooperatives teamed up to "turn on the lights" in Buena Vista, Guatemala, on page 14. ■

New Year's Resolution—Peace Of Mind In 2016

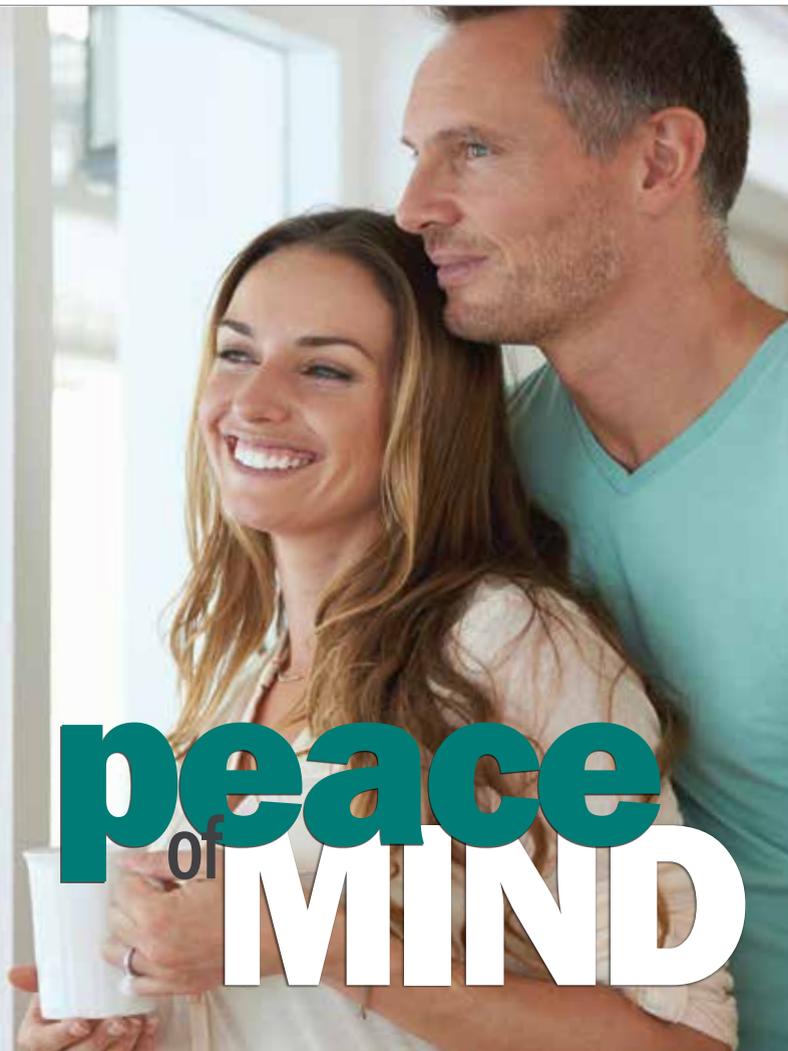
You know the story. The clock strikes midnight and millions of people make resolutions to change. But, if something is working great, why fix it? Our thoughts exactly. Midwest Energy Cooperative is keeping its most popular 2015 Energy Optimization (EO) rebates for 2016, and adding a few new options. Ring in the New Year with savings and peace of mind by participating in some top rated rebates.

Make a resolution to manage your energy use in 2016 by taking advantage of these popular customer incentives, as well as a new option for smart occupancy-sensing thermostats.

Next steps

For a complete list of EO rebates offered by Midwest Energy Cooperative visit michigan-energy.org to see which solutions are right for you, or call us at 877-296-4319 if you have questions about applications or product eligibility. ■

Rebate Name	Incentive Amount
ENERGY STAR® television	31–40" = \$25 41–50" = \$25 51–60" = \$50
ENERGY STAR® dehumidifier	\$25
Efficient HVAC—furnaces with electric commutated motors (ECMs)	\$200
ENERGY STAR® refrigerator/freezer side-by-side	\$25
Programmable or Wi-Fi-enabled thermostat	\$20
Smart occupancy-sensing thermostat	\$50
Online home audit—Home Energy Optimizer	FREE energy-saving kit (\$30 value) and a list of energy efficient home improvement options



Peace of mind, comfort and savings

We provide the savings—you enjoy peace of mind while saving energy with our Energy Optimization program.

There are many ways to save, from appliances to lighting and maintaining the comfort of your home with our efficient HVAC programs. Visit Michigan-energy.org for a complete list of opportunities and rebates.

ENERGY TIP: Receive your rebate faster by using the online application.

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.

Midwest Members Share "Selfie" Photos

Photo Contest Winners!

Winner with the most Facebook votes! Carol Miller, of Clayton: "Oh my :) "I'm on my way to pay my electric bill..."

Other Photos With High Votes!

2. Jean Sieler, of Blissfield, "Just call me Doris Day."
3. Carrie Coyle, of Cassopolis, "Up, up and away! My sister (right) and I enjoying our first hot air balloon ride, brought to us by Midwest Energy!"
4. Carole Buskirk, of Dowagiac: Looking for color.
5. Kathy Bontrager, of White Pigeon: Grandma's little mermaids!



Enter Your Photos And Win!

Team Midwest's photo contest is under way and one lucky winner will end up with a credit of up to \$200 on their December 2016 electric bill. Every month, we will announce a new theme and invite you to submit your best shot. The photo receiving the most votes each month on our Facebook contest page will be entered into the drawing for the year-end bill credit, and will also be featured in a subsequent issue of *Michigan Country Lines* for all to enjoy.

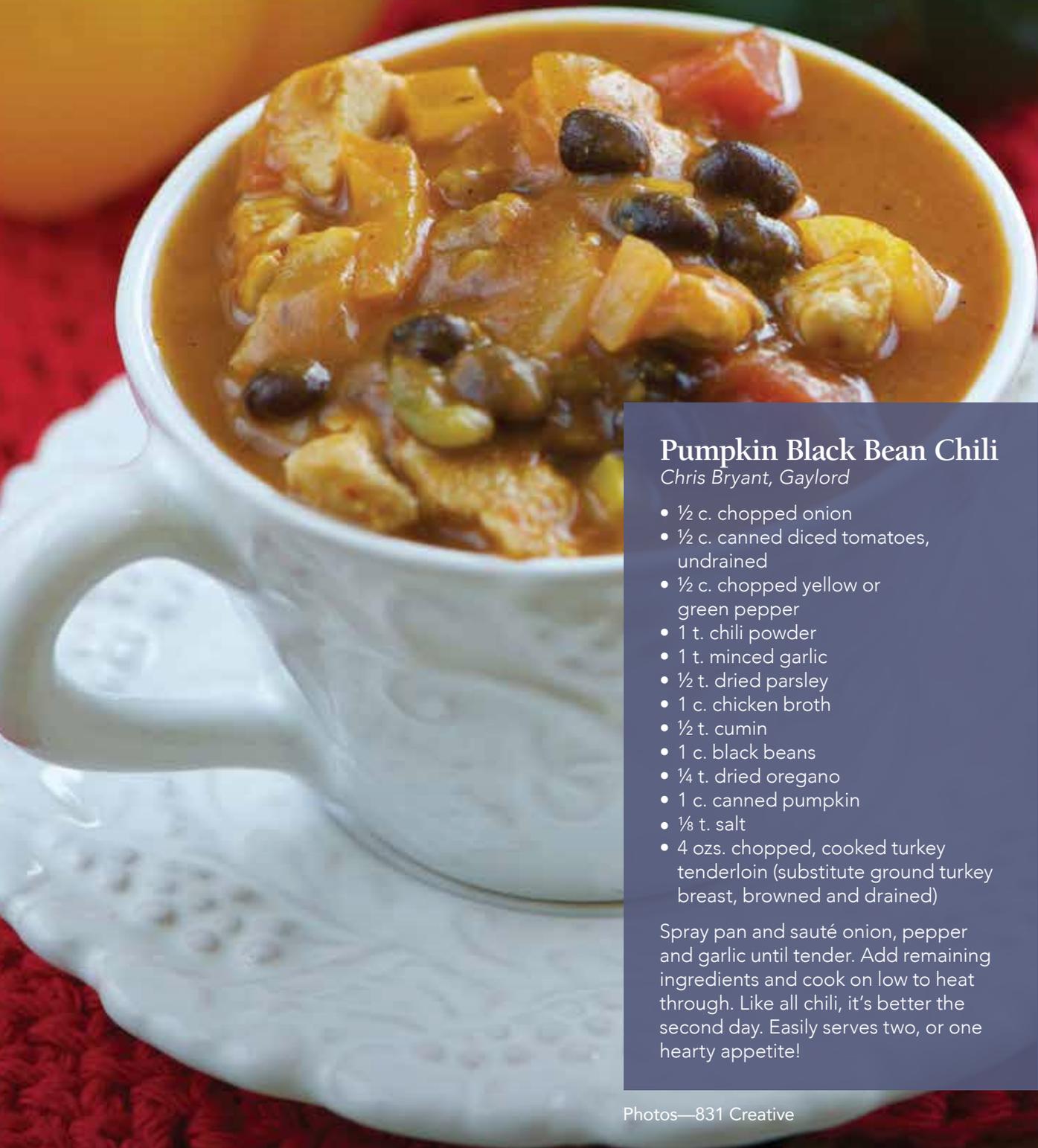
How to submit? Just visit facebook.com/TeamMidwest and click on "Photo Contest" from the menu tabs. Not on Facebook? You can also enter at TeamMidwest.com/photo-contest. Make sure to vote, and encourage others to vote for you, too! A high resolution photo (at least 1 MB) will be required to print your photos in *Michigan Country Lines*. We look forward to seeing your photos!

Our January theme is **"Winter Fun."** Photos can be submitted from **Jan. 1 to Jan. 20**. The winning January photos will be featured in the March issue of *Michigan Country Lines*.

Our February theme is **"Birds of Beauty."** Photos can be submitted from **Feb. 1 to Feb. 20**. The winning February photos will be featured in the April issue of *Michigan Country Lines*. ■

CHILI

Warm up this season with these comforting chili recipes.



Pumpkin Black Bean Chili

Chris Bryant, Gaylord

- ½ c. chopped onion
- ½ c. canned diced tomatoes, undrained
- ½ c. chopped yellow or green pepper
- 1 t. chili powder
- 1 t. minced garlic
- ½ t. dried parsley
- 1 c. chicken broth
- ½ t. cumin
- 1 c. black beans
- ¼ t. dried oregano
- 1 c. canned pumpkin
- ⅛ t. salt
- 4 ozs. chopped, cooked turkey tenderloin (substitute ground turkey breast, browned and drained)

Spray pan and sauté onion, pepper and garlic until tender. Add remaining ingredients and cook on low to heat through. Like all chili, it's better the second day. Easily serves two, or one hearty appetite!

Congratulations



to Ann Brown of Niles. Her name was drawn from all readers whose recipes we printed in 2015 and *Country Lines* will pay her January electric bill (up to \$200) as a prize.

Ann and her family have been Midwest Energy Cooperative members since her father built their home back in 1940. Her winning "Campfire Chicken" recipe was an original created by her mother. "My dad liked to grill and camp. When we couldn't go camping he would cook out in the backyard and this was a favorite recipe." Ann is a home healthcare nurse and enjoys cooking, sewing and knitting.



White Chicken Chili (pictured)

Donna Theriault, Petoskey

- 3 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 T. olive oil + extra for drizzling on chicken
- 2 lg. onions, sliced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 c. chicken broth
- 1 c. dry white wine
- 2 cans Navy or cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- ½ c. lime juice
- 1 small can green chilies
- 1 T. ground coriander
- 1 t. ground oregano
- ½ t. ground cumin
- ¼ t. cinnamon
- 1 c. Monterey Jack

Drizzle olive oil, and sprinkle salt and pepper on chicken. Roast seasoned chicken on cookie sheet at 350° for 40 minutes, or until cooked through. Cool chicken and shred with fingers. Put 1 T. oil in large pot. Add onions and garlic and stir until onions are golden, about 20 minutes. Add broth and remaining ingredients, except cheese. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add cheese to melt just before serving.

Angie's Chili

Mary Scodeller, Lansing

- 1 ½ lbs. 80/20 ground beef
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 28-oz. cans whole tomatoes
- 2 15.5-oz. cans kidney beans
- 15.5-oz. can mild chili beans in chili sauce
- Spartan chili mix envelope
- 1 pkg. French's original chili seasoning mix
- ¼ t. salt
- ¼ t. pepper
- ¼ t. seasoning salt
- ¼ t. garlic powder
- ¼ t. chili powder
- ¼ t. ground cumin

Brown meat with the chopped onion. Drain fat, crush tomatoes and add to meat. Add all beans, seasoning mix, and other seasonings. Simmer on medium to high heat for 20 minutes, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and simmer another 30 to 45 minutes. Very good and great for a crowd.

SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE!

Thanks to all our readers who send in recipes. Please send in your favorite "Side Dish" recipes by **Feb. 1** and "Snacks and Appetizers" recipes by **March 1**.

A RECIPE WINNER EACH MONTH IN 2016!

Contributors whose recipes we print each month will be entered in a drawing and *Country Lines* will pay the winner's electric bill with a \$50 bill credit! A winner will be selected every month!

Enter your recipe online at countrylines.com or send to (handprinted or typed on one side, please): *Country Lines Recipes*, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Please note the co-op from which you receive your electric service.

Members Honor Creativity, Learning With ‘Strengthening Schools’ Grants

Students from 17 regional public schools will enjoy new opportunities this semester after Midwest Energy awarded \$30,476.20 in Strengthening Schools grants. The grants are funded with partnership dollars from Touchstone Energy Cooperative.

A committee comprised of co-op members evaluated and scored 89 applications totaling more than \$156,000, then determined the final awards without knowledge of the school, district or community. Committee members included Della Bundle of Cassopolis, Kathy Herrera of Morenci, and Melisa Shafer of Edwardsburg.

Bundle reflected on the process after serving a second year on the committee. “It’s heart wrenching to not be able to give to every school, but wonderful that through true community spirit, we help bridge the gap where budgets fall increasingly short.”

“For me, being a co-op member equaled being a satisfied customer, but when I joined this effort, my status changed from consumer to champion,” she continued.

Awards were presented to the following schools and projects:

- Bloomingdale High School, \$2,466.72 for smart drone and accessories for digital curriculum
- Brandywine Elementary, \$2,000 for special education classroom activity seating
- Cassopolis Ross Beatty Junior/Senior High School, \$2,000 for technology for student-run art classes
- Centerville Junior High School, \$1,800 for STEM program curriculum and materials
- Coloma Community Schools, \$2,500 for a projector and interactive SMART board
- Dowagiac Middle School, \$2,459.90 for Sphero and Galaxy tablets
- Dowagiac Union Schools, \$1,300 for the Greenhouse Club
- Hudson Lincoln Elementary, \$2,500 for Inspiron laptops
- Lawrence Junior/Senior High School, \$2,500 for a “Newcomer” class
- Lenawee Intermediate School District, \$2,500 for a watershed water quality data collection program
- Marcellus Elementary, \$1,600 for music and physical education classroom supplies



Dowagiac Union High School students Genesis Avila (left) and Mary Levenson transplant lettuce at the student-led greenhouse. The school was awarded \$1,300 to support the program, which engages students with learning about growing plants and sustainable practices, beautifying school grounds and community areas, and marketing and managing plant sales.

- Mattawan Early Elementary, \$300 for writing workshop program supplies
- Niles Howard-Ellis Elementary, \$2,000 for Little Bit Science kits
- Onsted High School, \$2,000 for digital art portfolio technology
- Paw Paw Later Elementary, \$700 for English language learning program technology
- Tecumseh Middle School, \$1,400 for after-school robotics club supplies
- Three Rivers Andrews Elementary, \$450 for behavior modification/sensory toys

“It was truly a pleasure to honor the creativity and learning needs in our community through participating in the grant review,” Shafer said. “We all worked in a true cooperative manner to share our resources and I’m excited for the students’ opportunities that will result.”

Information and applications for the 2016–17 funding cycles will be available at TeamMidwest.com beginning in April. ■



Steve Hunsberger (left) and Prentice Carpenter find that different tools make quick work of a yard full of leaves.

Midwest In The Community

Neighbor helping neighbor—that's how your Team Midwest family approaches daily work and efforts to give back. We live, work and serve right here in your local community, and strive to actively live our Community value in meaningful and impacting ways. Here are just a few of our recent efforts to strengthen and support our communities and members.

United Way Day Of Action

On a colorful fall day in November, five members of the Team Midwest family joined 640 other volunteers from across the region for the annual United Way of Southwest Michigan Day of Action for Seniors. Our team worked with five local families on fall clean-up efforts, such as raking leaves, cleaning gutters and weatherizing windows. Most importantly, they engaged and showed love to vulnerable neighbors in a meaningful and personal way.



Nicole Barfell goes to the source helping with fall clean up.



Students sign the banner following the impactful Rachel's Challenge program to help prevent bullying.

Rachel's Challenge

Midwest continued efforts to promote positive change in school cultures by bringing the Rachel's Challenge program to over 1,000 Bloomingdale and Clinton students, teachers and community members in October. The curriculum includes student-empowering, educator-motivating programs and strategies that equip students and adults to create and sustain safe, caring and supportive learning environments essential for academic achievement. The programs are based on the writings and life of 17-year old Rachel Scott, the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999. At the end, students accept Rachel's Challenge by signing a banner that is hung in the school as a reminder of the impactful message. ■

It Really Does Take A Village

Partners For Power

By Emily Haines Lloyd

Photo: Garrett Hubbard



In rural Guatemala, not far from the border with Mexico, is a tiny village called Buena Vista and it is just that—a “good view.” Set amongst the mountains, with peaks poking through the clouds—it’s a magical sight. At least during the day.

At night, the small town disappears into the fog banks and darkness due to a simple reality—Buena Vista did not have electricity.

Which is why in early 2015, Michigan electric co-ops partnered with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) International, an organization that helps developing countries gain access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity, to bring power to approximately 54 families in Buena Vista. Lineworkers from five electric co-ops in Michigan packed over 1,500 pounds of luggage, equipment and tools and traveled to Buena Vista to do just that.

“On the day we arrived, we realized that all of the villagers—men, women and children—had gathered there to greet us. It was humbling to see so many smiling faces, all filled with such joy and gratitude, because they knew we had come to help bring them electricity,” said Brad Parkhouse, HomeWorks





Photo: Garrett Hubbard

Tri-County lineworker. “They expressed how grateful they were to us for coming, and we told them how happy we were to be there. It was emotional, really.”

The Michigan lineworkers discovered that local residents had already hand-dug and set all of the electric poles. With the mountainous terrain, the lineworkers remarked how difficult that task was, particularly without the power tools that would have been used stateside for such an undertaking.

Over 12 days, the Michigan lineworkers and their unofficial team of about 40 local residents prepared poles (by climbing them the old fashioned way, no bucket trucks here) and hanging wire.

“I thought I was a hard worker until I met these people,” said Trevor Stratton, Wolverine Power lineworker. “They’re pulling wire into the valleys where the elevation drop is incredible...I don’t know how we could ever do this job without them.”

While electric power is taken for granted by those in the United States, it is seen as nothing short of a lifeline to this community—which is likely why the local people were so committed to making it happen

in their small town. It promises improvement in health care, safety, education and economic growth. Power is the spark that changes communities, provides opportunities, and ignites imaginations. While the social and economic impact is nothing short of staggering—the experience for the team of 10 linemen did not lie in the metrics, but the experience itself.

“One of the locals, Ofelia De Leon, invited several of us to be with his family when the lights came on in their house for the very first time,” said Dan King, Michigan Electric Cooperative Association safety instructor. “You could feel the anticipation in the air as we all gathered together inside their small mountain home. Ofelia had the honor of flipping the switch, and when the light came on everyone began clapping. The room radiated with happiness—there was plenty of smiling, laughter, and even some tears. It was a very emotional experience, and by far my proudest moment in 26 years of linework.” ■

For more information about Partners for Power and to see more amazing photos please visit partnersforpower.org.

Prepaid Metering Puts The Power In Your Hands

Managing energy consumption often means changing behaviors, and that is never easy! With Midwest Energy Cooperative's OWN IT prepaid metering program, you can pay for your electric service in advance and avoid one large payment based on the energy you already used.

"When we shop, we evaluate purchases based on cost and benefit, and the connection is immediate. National surveys on prepaid programs clearly show that users think more about how they use their electricity and reduce usage when they've already made the financial investment," says Candy Riem, vice president of marketing and member services.

OWN IT prepaid metering gives you the power to manage your budget by choosing when, how and what you pay each month for electricity. You simply fund your account, and your consumption is billed and deducted daily, based on a breakdown of current rates and fees, plus a \$3 program fee. Your service is remotely disconnected if the account balance is depleted and reconnected when a payment is received. No more deposits, late charges or collection/reconnection fees!

For more information or to sign up for the program, please contact us at 800-492-5989. ■

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does OWN IT prepaid metering cost me anything?

There are no fees to convert an existing account to OWN IT. If you have an existing balance, it must either be paid in full or converted into a payment agreement and paid over time through your prepaid account. If you choose to pay it over time, a percentage of each payment made will be applied to the agreement until it is paid in full.

What will happen if I run out of funds in my OWN IT account?

If you run out of gas in your car, it stops. Your prepaid account is similar. We contact you if there is a low balance, and disconnect your electricity if your account runs out of funds. Service is restored once you make a payment.

Can I save money?

OWN IT does not provide a lower rate, but through SmartHub® you can monitor consumption and save money by consciously reducing your energy use. Understanding how you use energy is ultimately the first step to better managing your bill and seeing real savings.

How do I make payments?

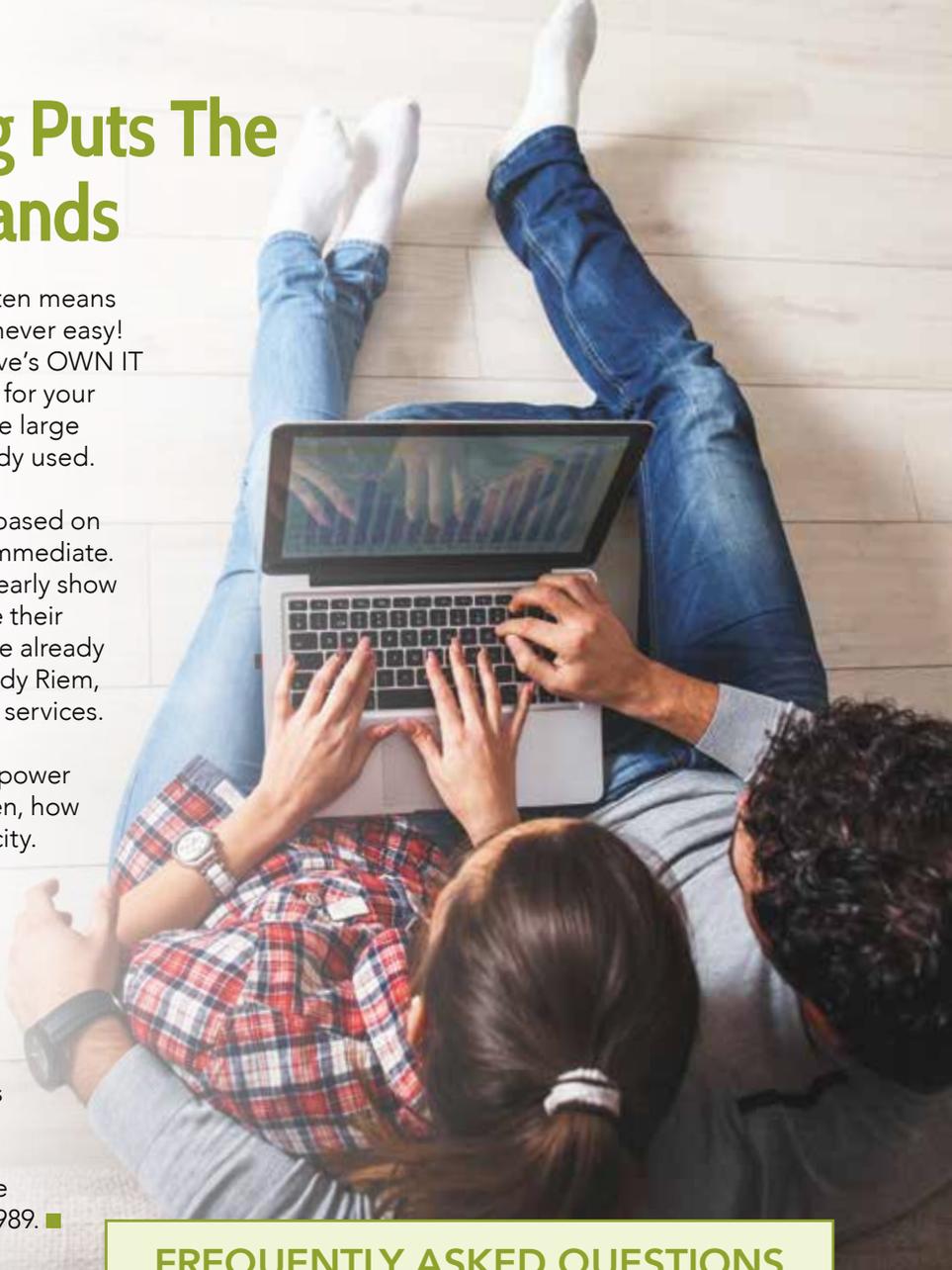
Payments may be made using cash, check or debit/credit cards. A \$25 minimum purchase is required on initial set up. After that, you can purchase electricity as needed at one of our district service centers, using our automated phone system at 800-492-5989, or through the SmartHub online or mobile account access app.

How can I check the status of my account?

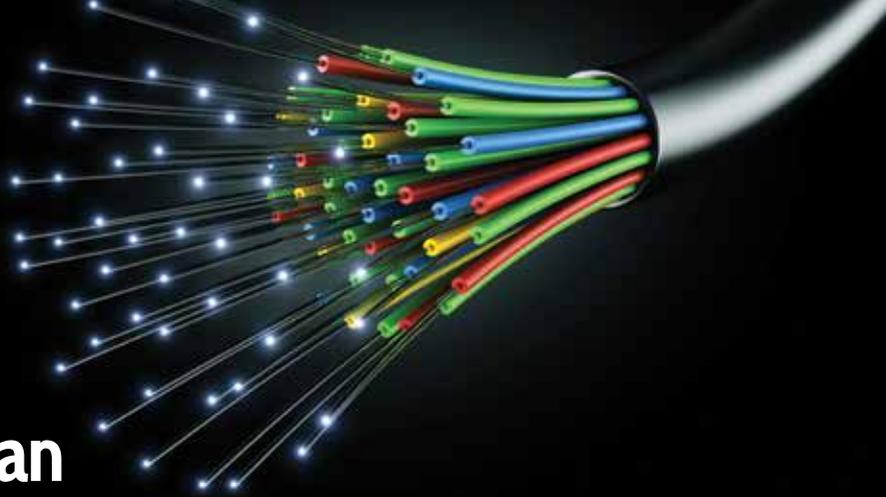
Your account balance can be checked anytime on SmartHub or through our automated phone system. You will be notified by phone and email when your account has three days of service remaining, based on historical use. You can also request notification based on a specified account balance.

How is my daily bill calculated?

Your meter is read daily and your bill is calculated accordingly. The bill includes electricity used for that day, as well as a day's worth of the monthly service charge, the OWN IT program fee, and any other credits or charges on your account.



Fiber Internet Growing Across Southwest Michigan



The Cass County Council On Aging (COA) recently brought the number of Midwest Connections' subscribers to 1,000 when they had fiber internet and telephone services installed at their Lowe Center facility in Cassopolis.

Bob Cochrane, CEO, said the COA relies heavily on the internet to deliver services to area seniors. "We offer WiFi access at the Lowe Center, which is very popular with our guests. We also assist with tax returns, and these have to be filed online. Last year, we had reliability issues with our service and it was challenging to get the returns filed."

The COA also offers a monthly movie, which is streamed over the internet, and Cochrane is eager to see how the new 50 Mbps high-speed service improves the viewing experience.

Midwest Connections, a service of Midwest Energy Cooperative, began offering fiber internet in two small areas of southwest Michigan early in 2014. The co-op is implementing a fiber-based communication system across its electric grid to power utility solutions into the future, and is leveraging that investment to extend high-speed internet to co-op members across southwest Michigan.

"Much of rural America has been unserved and underserved with a true high-speed internet option, and in 2013 the Midwest board made a commitment to bring a reliable and affordable solution. The upgrade to our utility system provided a perfect platform to deliver that needed service," said Bob Hance, Midwest president/CEO.

"We were very excited to reach this milestone of 1,000 installs, and thrilled to celebrate with our friends at the Council on Aging," Hance added.

Midwest Connections is entering year two of the five-year plan to bring fiber internet to its

entire southwest Michigan service territory. The territory was divided into 23 zones, based largely on electric substation service area. Construction is currently complete or underway in eight zones, and additional zones will be added to the 2016 build. A crowdsourcing approach is being used to guide future construction plans, and Midwest members are actively working to spread the word to bring service to their area more quickly. For more information, visit TeamFiber.com or call 844-493-4237.

"We're excited to now have fast, reliable service that will provide so many benefits to our team and our customers," Cochrane said. "We applaud Midwest for recognizing the need and taking a stand to affect change. Our entire southwest Michigan region will be better positioned for growth and new opportunity as a result of their leadership." ■



Ken Schult (right), administration team leader and chief financial manager for the Cass County Council on Aging, gets an overview of the new fiber installation in the agency's server room from Gary Martin, an installation tech with Midwest Connections.

The Quilt Lady

By Jack O'Malley

Eleanor Howard's story began when she was eight years old and asked her mother how to quilt. As a team, they pieced together Eleanor's first quilt and 87 years later, she still has it. "I've used that quilt on all my children's beds. I pert near wore it out!"

Speaking of children, Eleanor has five. And 15 grandchildren, along with 20 great-grandchildren. Each one has a quilt lovingly stitched by grandma. In addition, Eleanor donates many of her quilts to charity. How many has she made? "Oh, too many to



count!" Of the dozens of quilts assembled in her 95 years, one in particular stands out.

She made the quilt for her son, Albert, carefully patching each piece over two years. The result? A quilt depicting the state of Michigan, including all 83 counties, each painstakingly cut to its exact shape and featuring the product or service it's



Jack O'Malley

known for. Using appliques, stenciling, embroidery and hand painting, Eleanor had no pattern. She bought the biggest map she could find and went to work on figuring scale. The detail of Eleanor's Michigan quilt catches everyone's eye and has won multiple medals and ribbons. ■



«« Where In Michigan Is This?

Every co-op member who identifies the correct location of the photo at left by **Feb. 10** will be entered in a drawing to win a \$50 electricity bill credit from their electric co-op.

We do not accept Mystery Photo guesses by phone. Enter your guess at countrylines.com or send by mail to: *Country Lines* Mystery Photo, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Include the name on your account, address, phone number, and name of your co-op.



Nov/Dec Photo

Our Mystery Photo Contest Winner from the November/December 2015 issue is Brian Thompson, an Alger Delta co-op member who correctly identified the photo as "U.S.-31 Outlet Bridge in Charlevoix with the Emerald Isle boat."

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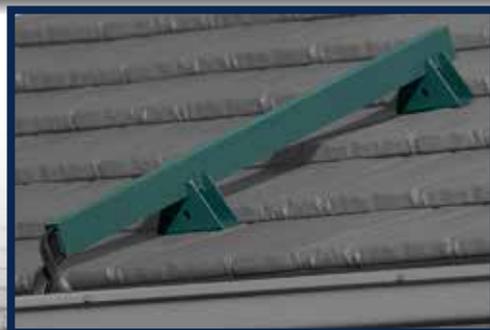


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