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MICHIGAN Country Lines



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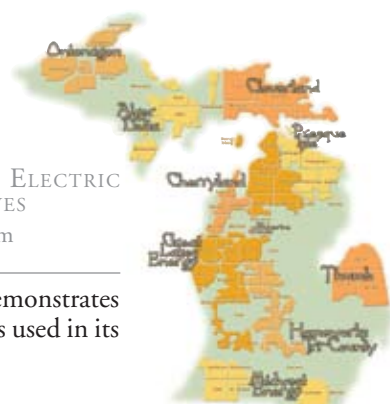


MICHIGAN'S ELECTRIC
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COVER

At Cross Village Rug Works, weaving apprentice Jamie Kornmeier demonstrates weaving that can incorporate washed wool (dyed or natural), which is used in its natural state—right off the sheep's back—and is a pleasure to touch.

Photo: Andree Serra — Elk Rapids — drephotography.com





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Midwest Energy Cooperative

Power Generation Needs To Be Balanced

It's been dubbed the "Field of Dreams," so named for Sam Field and his son, Connor. According to a recent article in the *Detroit Free Press*, the twosome and a couple of friends have built a 700-panel solar array in Galesburg. Their hope, according to the article, is to bring a burst of sunshine-generated electricity to Michigan and a return on their million-dollar investment.

The men have been labeled as "pioneers" for their vision and initiative because they designed and built the entire system from scratch. Sam said they believe in renewable energy and decided not to wait for someone else to create it. As quoted in the article, "Somebody's got to take the risk."

I applaud people with a vision and the commitment to see that vision to reality, but the whole thing just rubs me the wrong way.

This undertaking, while not yet online, is currently the biggest solar project in the state and is expected to provide enough electricity to Consumers Energy to power 20 to 25 homes. So, in essence, Mr. Field and his cohorts are becoming a monopolistic utility. They're apparently not generating this solely for their own use, but with the intention of selling it back to the utility to power other homes.

So what's my beef with this sense of entrepreneurship? Nothing, except the fact that Consumers' experimental program for renewable generation will buy renewable energy from homeowners and companies at 45 to 65 cents per kilowatt hour (kWh). The article indicates that the program "has filled up quickly and now has a waiting list of eager sellers."

Well, 'duh'!

Despite the reputation I seem to have earned as being anti-renewable, I fully support efforts to explore and implement clean and reliable energy generation. What I don't support, however, is paying a premium—more than four to six times

the retail cost of coal generation—to those who can and choose to implement their own generation facilities. People in Michigan are struggling now to pay 10 to 11 cents per kilowatt hour for coal-generated electricity. What do you suppose is going to happen to those rates when utilities start shelling out 45 to 65 cents per kilowatt hour to those like Mr. Field and company who essentially establish their own generation utility?

Reliable and affordable energy generation is a huge issue facing our country. We must explore options, and these options must include a mix of renewable energy. But at the same time, we must be cautious and conservative as we test and pilot programs. I've said for years that electricity is an undervalued commodity and energy supply prices are going to have to rise in order to provide for our increasingly electronics-dependent society and usage habits. But a four-to-six fold increase in generation costs will only further devastate a state economy that is already in a dire situation.

I also want to note that sources in the article, like Mark Bauer from Bauer Power, are, in my opinion, overly optimistic about Michigan as a "great" solar state. The 4-kilowatt solar array at our Energy Park has been on-line now for a year and has generated a total of 4,169 kilowatts. An average home uses about 1,000 kilowatt hours per month. Michigan is a great state in many respects, but I'm not convinced that solar is one of them.

We have to keep exploring and testing and finding the right balance of generation to meet our needs, but we can't do it on the backs of the ratepayers. Will energy prices go up? Yes, they have to. But it's up to us as entrepreneurs and utilities and others to make sure that we always maintain a bias for those who will, in the end, pay for our vision.



Robert Hance
President/CEO

Mike Roush Hits the Road

Meet one of your co-op's longest-serving employees. **Carla Lowe**

In 2009 Mike Roush celebrated 35 years of service with Midwest Energy Cooperative, but the way he tells it, his Midwest career started at age 12.

"I delivered newspapers to Midwest to all the office girls when I was 12," Mike laughs. "They all knew me and would say, 'Here comes Mikey with our papers.'"

Mike turned in his paper route for a real position with Midwest when, as a teenager, he was hired to work in the warehouse. The basement flooded on his first day, and his task was to mop the floor and restore the basement to its normal condition.

"Nixon was president then, and disco wasn't even popular yet," he recalls. "I got lucky. I had long hair past my shoulders, a Fu Manchu moustache, and bell-bottom hip hugger jeans. I guess since I showed up to work on time for a week straight they figured I was a keeper."

Thirty-five years later Mike is still around, overseeing the process of providing reliable electric service to over 35,000 customers as the vice president of operations.

It is his love for people that has kept Mike at Midwest Energy for so long. He has many fond memories of interactions with co-op members through the years. "I remember going to a customer's house once and meeting a gentleman that was a Navy veteran. He shared photos that he'd taken while in the Navy with Johnny Carson. I also met a lady that had an old car from the 1920s. The car was made the same year she was born, and she absolutely loved it. She insisted on taking me for a ride around the countryside and drove me down some roads I never knew existed."

Mike is equally fond of his employee



Above: Mike and Roxanne Roush navigate the curves during a 2006 ride on the "Tail of the Dragon." Considered by many as one of the world's best motorcycling roads, the section of U.S.-129 begins in North Carolina, ends in Tennessee, and features over 300 curves in an 11-mile stretch of highway.



Left: "Papa" Mike sports a cowboy hat alongside granddaughters Paige (right) and Miranda ("Randa Roo").

family. "I've got a great group of guys working in my line crews. They are devoted to getting the job done quickly and correctly."

Outside the halls of Midwest Energy, Mike devotes himself to two favorite pastimes: his family and his Harley.

Mike is a real ladies' man where family is concerned. He and Roxanne, his wife of nearly 35 years, have two daughters: Stacey and April. Stacey and her husband Richard have two daughters: Paige, age 5, and Miranda (affectionately dubbed "Randa Roo"), age 3. April and her husband Chris are expecting their first child, a daughter, in March. Becoming a grandpa ("Papa") has been a highlight in Mike's life!

After his ladies, Mike's pride and joy is his 2002 Harley-Davidson Fat Boy. "We've been all over the country on that thing," Mike exclaims with a sparkle in his eye. "We've gone to the Upper Peninsula a few times, to Key West, along the mountains in Tennessee ... I love the

people that you meet along the way."

Mike eagerly shares stories about his expeditions on the Fat Boy. He remembers one ride through New York when he stopped at Sporty's Iron Duke Saloon. There were several guys in the crowd getting to know one another as they took a break from the road. As one guy asked Mike what he did for a living, the lights started to blink and the power went out. It made for a good and timely chuckle when Mike explained that he worked for an electric utility in Michigan.

Few people spend a lifetime in one work setting, and Mike is thankful for the work and opportunities he has had at Midwest. From mopping floors in his bell-bottoms to mapping electrical lines by hand to overseeing system development and reliability initiatives, Mike has seen it all. Though retirement is still years away, Mike knows, as a career-long employee and co-op member, that Midwest always has been and always will be an important part of his life.



Myc Manon (left) and Bud Stanley of NRECA International inspect a downed power line during their damage assessment in Port au-Prince.

Electric Co-ops Send International Program Team to Haiti

NRECA International, an arm of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, in coordination with USAID and other international and local partners, sent a four-person rapid-response team to Haiti to assess the damage of the electric power sector following that country's catastrophic earthquake.

The NRECA International Foundation has been present in Haiti since 1998. The Foundation coordinated donations of money, material and volunteer labor from the U.S. cooperative community to help Haitians in Pignon, a small town in the north-central region, establish the Cooperative Electrique de Pignon (COOPELEP), the first electric co-op in Haiti.

The NRECA Foundation is contributing \$50,000 to the initial Haiti earthquake relief effort, and is spearheading a fundraising effort for additional contributions from the greater NRECA membership.

"Providing safe, reliable power will be vital to the massive assistance effort now underway in Haiti," said Glenn English, CEO of NRECA. "NRECA's International Foundation and our member cooperatives stand ready to help with money, materials and manpower."

The response team appraised the short-term measures needed to repair critical segments of the electric power system in Port-au-Prince, and identified the emergency power requirements for hospitals, health centers, refugee camps, and other public facilities both in Port-au-Prince and border towns along the Haitian-Dominican frontier.

The team also coordinated the installation of emergency generators at the principal hospital in Port-au-Prince.

All donations made through the International Foundation's website (nrecfoundation.coop) will be restricted for the Foundation's Haiti Relief Efforts.

Greg White Named to MPSC

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has appointed Greg White to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC). White, of Grand Rapids, most recently served as the MPSC legislative liaison and has been with the agency for 22 years. He is a graduate of Michigan State University and Grand Valley State University, where he earned a master's degree in public administration.

White was previously associate director of the Institute of Public Utility Regulatory Research and Education at MSU, and chaired the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners subcommittee on nuclear issues and waste disposal.

An independent, White's term expires July 2, 2015. He replaces Steven Transeth.



TEEN FORUM

If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be, and why?



This is my first year at Superior Central and I'm still learning a lot of new things every day about the school. But one thing that I would certainly change is the number of higher level science classes. Our school is quite small (40 kids in our senior class) and most of the higher level classes we have to take online, which is often difficult without a teacher handy. I'm planning on becoming a chiropractor someday and could use some higher level science classes for my senior year.

Jared Ollis, Wetmore



If I could change one thing about my school, I would change the racial diversity because nearly all of the students and staff are white. We have very few people of any other race. We used to have a couple of Hispanic families, a couple of African American families, and an Indian family, but nearly all of these families have relocated to other schools. If we had a variety of races in school, we could learn about other cultures. Each race

has their own set of cultures, so students of each different race could teach everyone else about their culture. More racial diversity would help all of us students in the long-run!

In college and beyond, we will meet and work with a wide variety of races. It is going to be hard for us to adjust to all the other races around us because all we have ever known is one race.

Sabrina Russell, Mendon



Our technology. It seems like every day there is an announcement over the intercom saying that the server is down. It puts a damper on my school day when that silly announcement comes on. I think to myself, "What am I supposed to do on my free hour?" The technology at our school seldom works, and when it does everyone is either on a computer or near one. I love how I can get a great education in my small town and know everyone in my school. If the technology at our school was always in top-notch condition then my school would be amazing.

Elena Smith, Howard City

Calling electric co-op sophomores and juniors! You could participate in this forum, attend a three-day camp, or even win a free trip to Washington, D.C., and see our government in action. Learn more about co-op sponsored youth programs at countrylines.com, and click on "Youth."



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Wild Blueberry Hero

As I read the article about the “Wild Blueberry Hero” in the Jan/Feb. issue of *Country Lines*, everything that Charles Day said about his Hero sounded real familiar to me. As I read further and saw the name of his hero, George Koskimaki, I about fell over. Mr. K. (as we use to call him) was my biology teacher at Roseville High School in Roseville. I graduated in 1951. He was a wonderful teacher, and I never heard of any student that felt any different. I attended a school reunion about four years ago and had the privilege of meeting and talking to him there. You were a Hero in many eyes, Mr. K. Keep picking those blueberries, and God Bless.

A former student,
Joan (Gildenpfennig) Jaworski,
Port Austin

Heater Efficiencies

In the article on space heaters, author Sloboda points out that all electric heaters are 100 percent energy efficient. Yet earlier in the article he writes that oil or water-filled heaters are more efficient. I’m confused. Can someone clarify this, please?

Tom McDonald

A good question. All electric heaters operate at 100 percent efficiency, in that the heating elements produce one unit of heat for every unit of electricity. (This does not mean they cost less to operate than other heaters, such as gas, wood or propane, because the fuel for those heaters may cost less than electricity when it comes to the amount of heat they can produce.) What the writer means—and what

we should have edited—is that the oil- or water-filled heaters store some of the heat and release it over a longer period of time, making the area being heated more comfortable by avoiding the on-and-off bursts of heat created by straight resistance heaters—the ones with glowing coils. The heavily-marketed infrared heaters fall into this category. Again, they don’t heat your house for less; they’ll heat a room if you turn the heat way down in the rest of your house. —ed.

LED Christmas Lights

We have lots of LED Christmas lights. Every year we have a string or two (two this year) quit working. So, our experience is that they last a year or two. So, let’s see: cost more, last shorter, cost less to run.... hmmm, not too sure they’re worth the money or hassle.

Bill Ross, Shelby

Will Miss Hough

I received my January copy of *MCL* all the way down here in southern Texas and my heart sank when I read “Farewell to Paradise.” How Mr. Hough touched my love for Michigan, and I will indeed miss his column. The stories I have about paradise, chipmunks, and the great outdoors don’t compare to his column, which I look for every time I get my new issue. Thank you, for bringing Michigan to me, Mr. Hough—1,500 miles away—when I need it the most!

Christa Chisholm, Sugar Land, TX

Investing Math

I was shocked to read the article by Linda Wacyk (“It’s January. Got Bills?”) that claimed a \$100 investment in a basic savings account would grow to \$12,000 in 20 years and that a 6 percent bond or stock would grow that same \$100 to \$42,000+. Her math is way off—6 percent annual growth on an initial principal of \$100 would only grow to just over

\$320 after 20 years. The “basic savings account” would likely be far, far less.

Even if the person continued to add \$100 to the investment every year for the 20 years, the 6 percent annual growth wouldn’t even get to \$4,000.

Please be more responsible with your math.

Randall Keicher

Some numbers caught my eye ... a \$100 investment in a savings account can become \$12,000 in 20 years? Surely you jest. Please inform me of such a savings account so that I can invest in it, too. By my calculations, a \$100 deposit at a generous 3 percent interest rate and a monthly compounding over 20 years becomes almost \$200. Same with the stock investment, unless, of course,

you’re Hillary and put it into cattle futures. You might want to run your own number check on this one.

Dr. Willard Lyman, via email

The author responds: “Kudos to some calculating readers. The investment specialist quoted admitted the math in his example was a mistake. To reach the promised \$42,000, a family would have to add about \$1,000/year to the initial investment. The example was intended as a lesson on the power of investment with compounding interest. Instead it illustrates how essential it is to teach kids financial literacy skills. With a strong foundation—and the help of online financial tools like those offered at mijumpstartcoalition.org our kids won’t be misled by others....well-meaning or not!”

Great gift idea!

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VIEW FROM THE TOP A collection of Jim Hough's columns from the past 10 years in *Michigan Country Lines*.

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District Meetings Are Coming!

Some people wanted to learn more about electricity, and some wanted to learn how to manage energy costs. Most wanted to take advantage of a free dinner.

Whatever the motivation, 100 percent of those people responding to a survey following the 2009 district shareholder meetings were very happy that they chose to spend an evening with their electric cooperative and would highly recommend the event to others.

In February we will begin the rounds of 2010 district meetings, hitting the road to each of our nine districts to meet informally with small groups of customers over dinner. Our goal is to assemble a diverse group of people, invited by random selection, with whom we can have a meaningful dialogue about the cooperative and the energy landscape.

We understand that everyone is very busy, and the thought of a boring lecture over dinner holds little appeal. We also know that you are not interested in a sales pitch. We promise to deliver a memorable evening that you will consider time well-spent. We will address the energy landscape and what you can do to manage your usage and costs. You will come away with new and innovative information and ideas to help you navigate the volatile energy market.

One returned survey said: "It certainly felt that we have a utility that truly is not only on top of their game, but also one that seems to care about what people think and puts some value to their customers' opinions. I didn't feel like just a number anymore! I'm a believer, as Midwest apparently also is, in our proven ability to reinvent ourselves when needed to not only answer the challenges of our needs, but to come up with a way that has the whole world held in the suspense of 'what will they come up with next?' Your efforts deserve our confidence that we are all part of a much bigger picture."

If you are one of the members invited to the 2010 district meeting, we hope you will join us. To submit your name for consideration for your district meeting, call 800-492-5989, or email pr@teammidwest.com. We limit the number of attendees in an effort to have a more meaningful dialogue, but will happily include others in the evening's festivities if we do not reach our capacity.



Travel Opportunities for Teens

Many kids who attend Michigan Electric Cooperative Teen Days come away with great new information and lifelong friendships. But parents often see even more change in their student.

Shirley Thomas, now a senior at Cassopolis High School, attended Teen Days 2009 as a representative of

Midwest Energy Cooperative. While Shirley is already a very involved student, the Teen Days experience affected her in ways that her parents, Tony and Lisa, readily noticed.

"Shirley connected with people in different ways and it helped her to better realize what she is capable of doing," shared Tony. "The experience gave her more confidence, which will really help her get out there and meet new people when she enters college," Lisa added.

Shirley was also one of the students selected to represent Michigan at the 2009 Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., last June, and Tony believes that presented additional benefits. "Meeting (Congress-

man) Fred Upton was a great opportunity for Shirley and any young person in these small communities. This enables them to use these people as a source of information

which may open up doors they may not have known existed."

This year's Teen Days event will be April 28-30 at the Kettunen 4-H Center

in Tustin, and Midwest Energy is currently accepting applications. Students will meet, mix and mingle with other teens from across the state while participating in unique, fun and interactive learning opportunities. High school sophomores and juniors are eligible to apply and four students from Midwest's service territory will be chosen to attend. Two of those students will be selected for Youth Tour, an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., with 1,200 other teens from around the country.

For more details or to apply, please visit TeamMidwest.com, or call 800-492-5989. Also check out youthtour.coop to see videos and photos.

The Midwest Energy 2009 Teen Days group is pictured above, from left: Sabrina Russell, Shirley Thomas, Alexis Courtney, and Brandon Gregg.

Scholarships Available

Midwest Energy Cooperative invites high school seniors to apply for one of four \$500 college scholarships to be presented this spring. To qualify, the student's immediate family must currently receive monthly electric service from the cooperative at their primary residence.

Selection for the scholarship is based on academic performance, extracurricular activities, community involvement and/or employment, and honors and awards. Applicants are also asked to submit a short essay. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.5 on a four-point scale is required.

Visit TeamMidwest.com to download an application, or call 800-492-5989. Scholarship applications must be postmarked by *Friday, March 19, 2010*, and winners will be notified in late April.

'Facts' Take on a Life of Their Own

Recently I received a forwarded email, the kind many of us get every day, from a friend who read a story, purported to be true, about a weather report supposedly printed in the *Marquette Mining Journal* a few years ago. The weather report went as follows:

"Up here in the Northern part of Michigan we just recovered from a Historic event --- may I even say a "Weather Event" of "Biblical Proportions" --- with a historic blizzard of up to 44" inches of snow and winds to 90 MPH that broke trees in half, knocked down utility poles, stranded hundreds of motorists in lethal snow banks, closed ALL roads, isolated scores of communities and cut power to 10's of thousands. And guess what; no one howled for the government. FEMA was not called on to send assistance. Our Mayor's did not blame the President or anyone else. Our Governor did not blame anyone either. CNN, ABC, CBS, FOX, or NBC did not visit - or even report on this category 5 snow storm.

No one looted. Nobody - I mean Nobody demanded the government do something. Nope, we just melted the snow for water. Sent out caravans of SUV's to pluck people out of snow-engulfed cars. The truck drivers pulled people out of snow banks and didn't ask for a penny."

The email story included amazing photos of snow drifts so high they towered over road crews working to clear the way. It turns out that although some of the "facts" in the email were true, the story was not. It seems various versions of the story have been circulating on the internet for several years. Like many of the forwarded emails we get, the mixing of some "facts" and a compelling story makes for good reading, takes on a life of its own, and is often changed to meet the readers' or sender's needs. I am sure if I lived in North Dakota the "weather bulletin" would have been printed in the *Bismarck Tribune*.

The "facts" are that the weather report did not come from Northern Michigan nor was it reported in the *Marquette Mining Journal*, and it does not appear that it ever was a real weather report. The "report" can be traced back to an October 2005 snowstorm that hit the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming. A National Weather Service report said the storm had been the earliest on record to hit the area. And, a request did in fact go to FEMA seeking assistance. As for hearty citizens plucking stranded motorists from their cars, I am sure that did happen, although the bulk of the digging fell to police, emergency workers and the National Guard, which were mobilized to help, as is often the case following serious weather events. As for the pictures, it turns out they were from the opening of the Trans Labrador Highway in Northeastern Canada and were going around the internet in 2004.

What this story does show me is that often you have to take most every "story" with a grain of salt and work to separate the "facts" from the "truth." For example, there was recently a report on the status of net metering (an incentive where owners of small renewable energy systems get retail credit for at least part of the electricity they generate) in Michigan. The report cited several conclusions that caused me to dig in a little deeper, and here's what I found:

Claim: Solar PV (photovoltaic energy) is approaching price parity, in other words, the cost of generating electricity by solar devices is becoming competitive with other sources of electricity.

Fact: Actual data (teammidwest.com/documents/EconomicAnalysisJan-Oct.pdf) from Midwest Energy's renewable energy park in Cassopolis shows that the cost of generation from their 4-kilowatt solar installation for the period Janu-



Michael Peters is president and CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. His email address is mpeters@countrylines.com.

ary through October 2009 was \$.88 per kilowatt hour (kWh) generated. Larger solar installations (for example, a 500-kilowatt flat roof mounted system, not including back-up) are closer to \$.20 per kWh in sunny climates. However, in cloudy climates the same system would have a generation cost of about \$.43 per kWh, according to industry sources (solarbuzz.com/SolarPrices).

Electricity from conventional sources is about 5 to 7 cents per kWh.

Claim: "The number of net metering customers in Michigan has doubled, which demonstrates the high interest electric customers have in generating renewable electricity at home and selling back excess power to their electric utility.

Fact: Yes, the number of net metering customers has doubled each year. In real numbers, the state had fewer than 50 net metering projects statewide in 2007 and we are now up to about 250. Considering there are approximately 4.5 million electric customers statewide, I might question the statement that this demonstrates a "high interest" among electric customers in producing electricity at their homes and businesses with renewable energy.

As with the story of the winter weather report, you sometimes have to look past the interesting parts and dig into the facts. Although the "facts" may be true, the conclusions drawn from those facts may not be the whole story.

Killing

Energy Vampires

Energy parasites are costing you hundreds of dollars a year.

Brian Sloboda

Typical Power Consumption of Household Items in Watts

Device	On	Standby Mode	Off
40-inch LCD TV	200	—	1-3
42-inch Plasma TV	240-320	—	1-30
DVD player	13	10	2.3
Stereo	123	—	23.4
Xbox 360	173	168	2.2
Nintendo Wii	17	10	1
Power tool battery charger	33.7	4.2	—
Coffee maker	1,100	70	0.8

Vampires have frightened people for generations. The fangs, the wings, the immortality: it's scary stuff. While that's all legend—a subject for movies and Halloween costumes—a different breed of vampire could be lurking in your home right now. These vampires don't drink blood; they consume electricity.

An "energy vampire," also called a phantom or parasitic load, is any device that consumes electricity when it's turned "off." These electronic devices provide the modern-day conveniences we love, but they also waste energy and cost us money.

Vampire loads can be found in almost every room, but a favorite spot is the entertainment center. When the TV is turned off, it isn't really off. It's sitting there, waiting patiently for someone to press the "on" button on the remote—and waiting uses energy. TVs also use energy to remember channel line-ups, language preferences, and the time. VCRs,

DVD players, DVRs, and cable or satellite boxes also use energy when they're off.

The problem is significant. According to a study by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, the average home loses 8 percent of its

Common energy vampires include:

- TVs
- Stereos
- VCRs, DVD players, and DVRs
- Cable/satellite boxes
- Computers
- Battery chargers

monthly energy consumption to these energy vampires. A full 75 percent of the power used to run home electronics is consumed when those appliances are turned off, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

According to the Arlington, VA-based National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the average electric co-op residential member consumes roughly 13,900 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year. If 8 percent of this power is consumed when electronics are turned off, the average home wastes 1,112 kilowatt hours annually. Assuming a cost of \$0.10 per kWh, the average household spends \$111 per year to pay for these vampire loads.

The good news is that a sharp stake isn't necessary to kill these vampires. To eliminate the power consumption of an energy vampire,



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© iStockphoto.com/Robert Payne

simply unplug the device or plug it into a power strip and use the power strip's switch to kill the electricity to everything plugged into it. Power strips work like an extension of the wall outlet, and they cut all power to plugs completely when they are switched off.

Of course, there's always a catch. Some devices use standby power to make life more convenient. If you unplug your TV or cable/satellite receiver box, what happens? When plugged back in, the TV or set top box usually will have to run its initial setup program. Depending on the particular device, it could take up to 20 minutes for channels to be recognized or for the user to reset preferences, which isn't something most are willing to do every day.

But there are numerous devices in the home that can be unplugged easily and safely, or plugged into a power strip without causing any inconvenience. Computer equipment, such as printers, scanners, desktop computers and broadband modems, can be "unplugged" without harm. Cell phone, tool and other battery chargers should also be unplugged when not in use. Even though the charger is not charging anything, it is still drawing power.

A new device called the "smart" strip is beginning to find its way onto store shelves. Smart power strips allow you to plug devices into a specially marked section of the strip so they will still have power when turned off. Other devices that can be turned off safely are plugged into the rest of the strip. This allows you to turn off parts of a home entertainment system, such as the stereo, DVD player, or home theater audio system, without losing the ability to record programs to a DVR or having to reprogram the TV every time you want to watch a show.

For devices that cannot be turned off, consumers should look for those with that are Energy Star® certified or ask the salesperson about the device's standby power consumption. There can be big differences in power consumption between manufacturers, and sometimes even between models from the same manufacturer.

As in the movies, it is impossible to kill off all of the energy vampires in your home—but every one that's vanquished will mean that much less of a bite out of your wallet.

Brian Sloboda is a program manger specializing in energy efficiency for the Cooperative Research Network, which evaluates and applies technologies that help electric cooperatives control costs, increase productivity, and enhance service to their consumers.

Tracking the Electricity You Use

Eat potato chips straight out of the bag and they'll be gone in no time. Pour them into a bowl first and they disappear a little slower.

The same goes for electricity. Learning to track how much electricity your home consumes remains a good way to start managing electric use billed by your electric co-op in kilowatt-hours (kWh).

Devices are appearing in stores that provide a constant, digital reading of how much electricity your home or even individual appliances are using. One type, like the Kill A Watt™ meter, fits between an electrical outlet and an appliance to give you an instant reading of how much electricity the appliance draws.

Another type connects to your electricity meter and wirelessly relays use information to a small screen inside. Called an "in-home display," the device looks like a wireless weather monitor and can help make consumers more aware of their daily energy use.

Research conducted by the Cooperative Research Network (CRN), the research arm of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, shows that most consumers who have an in-home display use less energy than those without one. And even after homeowners stop paying attention to the devices, most still use 1 to 3 percent less energy than before.

"The question of whether in-home displays catch on and become permanent fixtures in the American home is still open," explains Brian Sloboda, program manager with CRN. "However, for anyone wanting to take a proactive

approach to understanding electric consumption, the in-home display may be worth exploring. You could use the knowledge that an in-house display provides to change the way you use electricity in your home and save some money."

There's also the old-fashioned way of tracking electricity use: reading your meter. As your home draws current from power lines, your electricity meter keeps a steady record of every watt used.

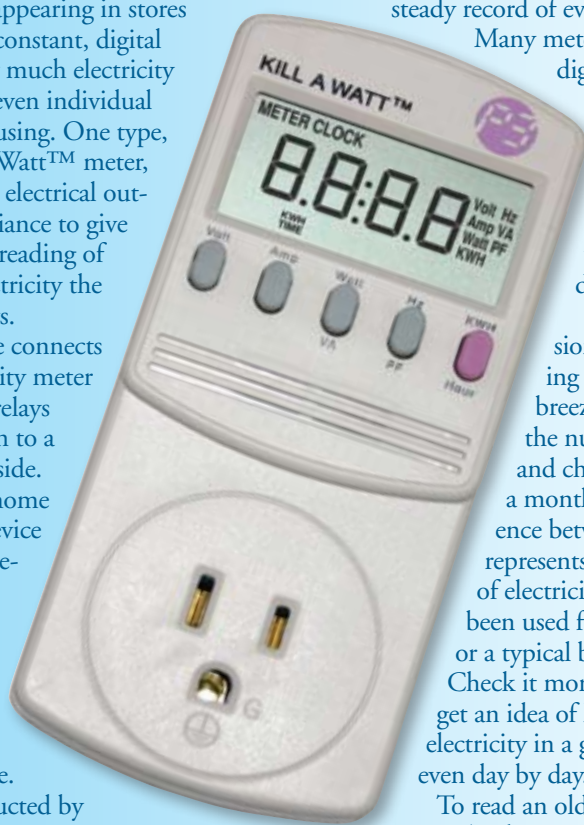
Many meters today are digital, replacing the older—though still reliable—design that uses spinning disks and dials.

Digital versions make tracking energy use a breeze: jot down the number you see, and check it again in a month. The difference between the two represents the amount of electricity that has been used for that month, or a typical billing period. Check it more frequently to get an idea of how you use electricity in a given week, or even day by day.

To read an older model meter (with spinning dials), write down the numbers as shown on the small dials from left to right. Some of the dials spin clockwise, some counter-clockwise, but record each number closest to the dial hand. Once you have the full reading it can be compared to later readings, as described above.

If you have any questions about reading your meter or learning more about how much electricity your home uses, please contact your electric co-op.

Scott Gates writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



Coming Clean on Washers

Wash clothes efficiently without getting caught in the spin cycle.

Washing machines perform a fairly simple function: getting dirty clothes clean.

Yet prospective buyers can be overwhelmed with all of the different models and “bells and whistles” available—top-loading, front-loading, high-efficiency (HE), water-saver, steaming, and wrinkle removing, to name only a few.

Energy-efficient washing machines, easily identified by the Energy Star® label, are a priority for any cost-conscious consumer's list. Approximately 93 percent of all American households have a clothes washer, adding up to 102 million clothes washers across America. About 9 million washing machines are sold each year, and efficient models account for slightly more than one-third of sales.

Energy Star-rated washing machines cost slightly more than their less-efficient counterparts, anywhere from \$400-1,500, depending on other features selected. To get a handle on how much electricity a particular unit will draw, pay close attention to the yellow energy guide before

making a purchase.

An energy-efficient washing machine can save the typical homeowner around \$50 a year, or \$540-\$600 over the life of the appliance. Efficient machines also save more than 5,000 gallons of water annually. The energy and water efficiencies of clothes washers are measured according to their modified energy factor (MEF) and water factor (WF). These criteria generally limit Energy Star qualification to front-loading and advanced top-loading models.

Front-loading clothes washers use a horizontal or tumble-axis basket to lift and drop clothing into the water, instead of rubbing clothes around a central agitator in a full tub. These units use less energy than conventional clothes washers by reducing the amount of hot water

needed to clean clothes. Front-loading models also squeeze more water out of clothes by using spin speeds that are two to three times faster than conventional washers, reducing both drying time and energy use.

Energy Star-qualified top-loading models typically use spray valves to rinse clothes, rather than a new tub of water. This method not only reduces the energy required for water heating, but typically saves an average of 15 gallons of water per wash, compared with conventional clothes washers.

Qualified top-loading models also boast sensors to monitor and adjust incoming water temperature. This keeps water hot enough to dissolve the detergent and provide high-performance cleaning, but cool enough to save energy and minimize hot water damage to fabrics. One limitation of efficient top-loading washers is that many models do not offer a high-temperature standard wash option.

By looking for the Energy Star logo and shopping at a store with knowledgeable staff, you should be able to leave with a new washing machine that will, over time, pay for itself.

Source: NRECA's Cooperative Research Network



What's an Energy Factor?



An Energy Factor (EF), a mandatory evaluation done on all water heaters regardless of fuel source (natural gas, electricity, oil, etc.), indicates a water heater's overall energy efficiency based on the amount of hot water produced per unit of fuel consumed daily. This includes:

- **Recovery efficiency:** How efficiently heat from the energy source is transferred to the water.
- **Standby losses:** The percentage of heat loss per hour from stored water compared to heat content of the water.
- **Cycling losses:** The loss of heat as water circulates through a tank and/or inlet and outlet pipes.

The higher the EF, the more efficient the water heater. But keep in mind higher EF values don't always mean lower annual operating costs, especially when comparing fuel sources.

*Source: U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy*

Star-crossed

Is the Energy Star rating a reliable guide to energy-efficient products? Yes—mostly, but some products aren't even rated. **Megan McKay**

Lots of Michiganders are cutting down on their energy use: improving a home's insulation, turning lights off, or exchanging traditional lightbulbs for more efficient lighting options. So when consumers shop for new appliances it's common to focus on finding a product with an Energy Star® rating.

But how do appliances get this rating, and why don't all appliances have them? The answers may surprise you.

Computers and monitors were the first products to receive an efficiency rating from Energy Star, a program launched in 1992 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy. Since then, more than 60 product categories have been added, from dishwashers to windows and DVD players. According to the program, Energy Star-rated products deliver the same or better performance as comparable models while using less energy and saving money.

"We're recognizing the top performers when it comes to energy efficiency," explains Katharine Kaplan, Energy Star program manager. She notes the initiative works closely with folks in a wide variety of areas, including industry experts, governments, nonprofit organizations and utilities. "We agree on a fair way to test products. Manufacturers test products using that procedure, submit the data to us, and we say, 'These are the top performers. This is how much energy you can use to be considered a leader by Energy Star.' Generally, that means you're in the top 25 percent."

For example, qualified refrigerators must be at least 15 percent more efficient than the minimum federal standard. Energy Star-rated TVs consume 3 watts or less when switched off, compared to a standard TV, which consumes almost 6 watts on average. By pushing for the manufacture of more efficient products, Energy Star estimates the rating system saved businesses, organizations, and consumers \$19 billion in 2008 alone.

Consumers are taking advantage of the program. A survey by the Consortium for Energy Efficiency—a group including members like the quasi-governmental Tennessee Valley Authority and Bonneville Power Administration, a federal power marketing

administration in the Northwest—discovered 76 percent of American households recognize the Energy Star brand. Of these consumers, 73 percent purchased an Energy Star-labeled product within the last year.

But not all products are rated by Energy Star. The program gauges the average energy efficiency of different appliance technologies and evaluates whether there's potential for increased efficiency—generally at least 25 percent higher than minimum standards. According to Energy Star, the most efficient electric resistance water heaters on the market have an Energy Factor of 0.95, about 5 percent more efficient than the minimum federal standard. Since there's little room for improvement, Energy Star does not have a category for the product.

"The technology doesn't qualify for the Energy Star program—not because it's not efficient, but because it's already as efficient as possible," says Steve Koep, a regional manager for RHEEM/Marathon Water Heaters. "When it comes to purchasing an electric water heater, consumers should consider durability and energy factor [EF], a mandatory evaluation done on all water heaters regardless of fuel source. EF takes into account fuel use, standby energy loss, and insulation under simulated actual conditions."

Last October *The New York Times* revealed some manufacturers of household appliances were testing products for Energy Star-certification internally instead of using independent laboratories. In response, Energy Star ramped up oversight of product ratings and by the end of the year had revoked the Energy Star label for some refrigerators while raising the bar for the efficiency expected from TVs.

Energy Star remains a driving force not just in the United States, but in other countries, such as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, and the European Union. Federal energy efficiency tax credits for appliances and home heating and air systems typically require qualifying products to be Energy Star-rated.

If you're in the market for an appliance and have questions about which product might be best for you, feel free to contact your electric cooperative. To learn more about the Energy Star program, visit energystar.gov.



An [Energy] Star is Born

Energy Star, a voluntary, international standard for rating energy-efficient consumer products, was created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 for home computers and monitors. Since then, the program has expanded to cover more than 60 categories and been adopted by Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, and the European Union. Devices carrying the Energy Star logo, such as computers and electronics, kitchen and household appliances, residential lighting, and homes, deliver the same or better performance and use 20 percent to 30 percent less energy on average than comparable models.

Since 1992, Americans have purchased more than 2 billion Energy Star-qualified products; the number of qualified homes tops 1 million. Here are some highlights:

2005-2010 Battery chargers, power adapters, commercial dishwashers, and ice machines included.

2002 Hotels rated and more than 100,000 new homes earn rating.

2001 Supermarkets, acute care hospitals, dehumidifiers, ventilation and ceiling fans, small commercial heating and cooling equipment, and commercial freezers, refrigerators, and washing machines rated.

2000 Water coolers and traffic signals rated; label extended to schools.

1999 Audio/DVD equipment, roof products, and compact fluorescent lightbulbs rated. Label extended to office buildings.

1998 TVs, VCRs, windows covered.

1997 Residential light fixtures, scanners, and washing machines rated.

1996 Exit signs, insulation, boilers, dishwashers, refrigerators, and room air conditioners rolled into the program.

1993-1995 Energy Star for homes launched. Copiers, fax machines, printers, heating and cooling products rated.

1992 Program begins with computers and monitors.

Source: Energy Star

Hooked



Producing locally-crafted works of art gives an economic boost to this isolated "Up North" area.
Linda Sirois

Vibrantly-colored wool rugs cover the walls and floors inside the Cross Village Rug Works. The rug designs are an array of familiar northwoods flora and fauna: trout, squirrels, blueberries and bears, as well as local landmarks and Native American themes.

The Rug Works, a member of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative, is an exciting newcomer to the tiny community of Cross Village, nestled about 20 miles north of Harbor Springs, at the end of the scenic "Tunnel of Trees" drive on M-119. It's housed in a unique log-and-stone building crafted by the builder of Legs Inn, a historic restaurant just across the street.

"It kind of takes your breath away when you first walk in the door," says Rug Works gallery manager, Ellen VanderZee. "It's amazing, really."

The shop offers an array of woolen products, including rug wool and knitting yarns, warm shawls, felted wool goods, and woven and pictorial rugs. The vividly-dyed yarns, detailed original designs, and weighty heft of these artworks demonstrate a high level of craftsmanship.

"They're really heirloom pieces," explains Cheryl Reed, one of the Rug

Photos - Andrea Serra, DiePhotography.net





Jasmine Petrie, wool dyer.

Cross Village Art Galleries

Cross Village Rug Works

Lakeshore Drive • 231-526-7849

crossvillagerugworks.com

Winter: M-T-TH-FRI-SAT, 11-4

Summer (Memorial Day): Daily, 11-7

Three Pines Studio and Gallery

5959 W. Levering • 231-526-9447

threepinesstudio.com

Summer (Memorial Day): Daily, 11-7

Cross Village Outpost

3 miles E. of Cross Village

Handcrafts, including Ottawa

quill boxes made from birchbark,

sweetgrass and porcupine quills.

Works' organizers. The pictorial rugs are created by area artisans using punch-needle tapestry with regionally harvested wool that is dyed and custom designed on-site.

Reed recites a list of yarn blends that includes the spun wool of rare sheep breeds, such as the blue-faced Leicester, Lincoln long-wool, and Cotswold (direct descendents of the flock brought over by Henry Ford to Greenfield Village in the 1920s). These heirloom sheep varieties are nurtured locally by some of the Rug Works' members in order to propagate and preserve the unique qualities of their wool. "We want the yarn we use to have a very high degree of strength and sheen," says Reed. "We want a luster, and jewel-toned colors." They mix in a medium grade, shorter-fibered wool from the sixth generation Matchett family sheep farm near Charlevoix, to also give the rugs "a resiliency; a 'spring' under your foot,"

Reed continues.

The Rug Works group is made up of committed people with a larger vision. In 2007, at Reed's kitchen table, she and MaryAnn VanLokeren became excited by the possibilities of establishing a cottage industry that would bring an economic boost to Cross Village. They incorporated as a nonprofit organization and rely partially on donations to meet their operating costs. Their goal is to become self-sufficient within the next two to three years. Reed points to the erratic employment options of this rural area after tourism quiets down each autumn. "We wanted to find something—a skill set—that would be a real craft that they could work in their homes," Reed says. To date, Rug Works has trained over 20 people in the rug-making craft.

Ties to the local community are a crucial component of "our bigger mission of education," says Reed. They've forged an

informal partnership with North Central Michigan College in Petoskey through art instructor Shanna Robinson, who developed classes in dyeing and weaving. Several Rug Works members have enrolled in Robinson's fiber courses in order to take those skills back to the workshop.

"People don't realize how much this place is affecting the people up here in the village," adds VanderZee. As an area native, she sees the ripple effect of Rug Works' activities. Besides the 25 people actively working, she points to several local farms, the people who process the wool, and the many satisfied customers among those who are benefiting. Using quality materials, new skills and integrity, these dedicated rural residents are helping themselves while producing truly regional works of art.

"When you see what an impact it [Rug Works] has on the people around you...it's inspiring, really," says VanderZee.

Top, left: Ellen VanderZee, Cross Village Rug Works' gallery director. **Bottom, L-R:** Sheep raised by Cheryl Reed, one of the Rug Works' organizers, include Polly, Grace, Aspen (part Wensleydale) and Priscilla (Leicester Longwool cross), who help provide wool for the shop. A careful combination of the wool and vivid dyes produce unique textures, weights and colors. The three-trout and dragonfly rugs are originals by the Rug Works' design team. A punch-needle tapestry rug made by Polly Hudson, gallery human resources director, depicts Holy Childhood Catholic Church in Harbor Springs before it was remodeled. Punch-needle classes and kids' workshops are offered to the public, and their designers can convert photos or other material into rug designs for custom orders. Several of the gallery's designs are also inspired by regional Native American beading patterns.



Photo - Linda Sirois



Vive la Différence

French for “Long live the difference” (between the sexes).

My youngest daughter’s claim to fame is her vocabulary. She said her own name at six months and now, at age two, she carries on actual conversations, like, with adjectives. Because my mother taught me to blush at compliments, whenever someone praises Marta’s speaking skills I say something like, “Oh, you know little girls! They love to talk.” My friend Ellen, who has two boys the same ages as my girls, grunts at this. “I don’t know,” she says. “She’s really saying quite a bit.”

Her boys, on the other hand, are dissecting mechanical trains and developing complex climbing systems to reach their cups or toys, and they understand the rules of every sporting event known to man.

Research shows that our little ones are following universal trends. As early as three hours of age, girls excel at imitation—a precursor to back-and-forth interaction. They’re more attuned to the sound of human voices than boys, and start using gestures like pointing or waving earlier. At 16 months, they produce as many as 100 words, while the average boy uses about 30.

Their brothers, on the other hand, express fear later than girls, and less often. One

study found that when their moms made a fearful face when they approached a toy, 12-month-old boys went for it anyway, while girls slowed their path.

Boys end up in the ER more for injuries, their gross motor skills take off during preschool years, and they prefer watching mechanical motion over human interaction. They’re also ahead of their female friends when it comes to figuring out the laws of motion (if they push a train through a tunnel, it will pop out the other side, for example).

While chromosomes are at work when our babies learn to play early-on, our children are sweet and naughty, smart and challenged entirely in their own ways, no matter their sex. What’s important for parents to remember is that when we model behavior—good or bad—it’s imitated.

Jodie Withey, mom to two girls and two boys in Harbor Springs, doesn’t mind letting nurture give nature a little kick in the pants. “I believe I’m a better woman because I know how to run a lawn mower, fix a leaky pipe, build a swing set, wire a light and check the oil in the car,” she said, “so I do try to teach my daughters things that may fall into the ‘male’ category. At the same time, I have my



© iStockphoto.com/Cherisa Roebuck

sons help with the dishes or the preparation of food, because I know what that means to me as a wife when my husband helps me out. I believe that we pass on our views to these impressionable lives during the early years.”

It’s a concept many parents take to heart. Respect, compassion, confidence and kindness aren’t found on a DNA code—they’re taught at home. And whether a child is a tomboy or all boy, made of sugar and spice or snips and snails, it’s all about *how* they follow their passions in life that helps them become well-rounded adults.

Common Myths About Boys and Girls

■ Boys bully more than girls

Girls actually bully as much as or more than boys. While physical assaults are more common among boys, girls bully using social aggression.

■ Boys are better at math, computers and science

In the U.S., girls perform as well as boys on standardized math tests. Girls are now taking calculus in high school at the same rate as boys, and the percentage of U.S. doctorates in the mathematical sciences awarded to women has climbed to 30 percent in the 21st century, up from 5 percent in the 1950s.

■ Girls have low self-esteem

Research says that fourth grade is the peak year for girls’ self-esteem, but in fifth grade

it plummets. Ten-year-old girls report feeling image-obsessed and depressed because they don’t look like the models and actresses they see in the media. Between 20 and 40 percent of 10-year-olds diet, and 73 percent of girls between the ages of eight and 10 dress and talk like teenagers to “fit in.”

■ Boys get in trouble more now than ever

Justice Department statistics show that the population of juvenile males in prison is only half of its historic high. The number of high school senior boys using illegal drugs has fallen by almost half compared with the 1980 rate, and the percentage of high school boys drinking heavily is now the lowest on record.

■ Girls are the only sensitive sex

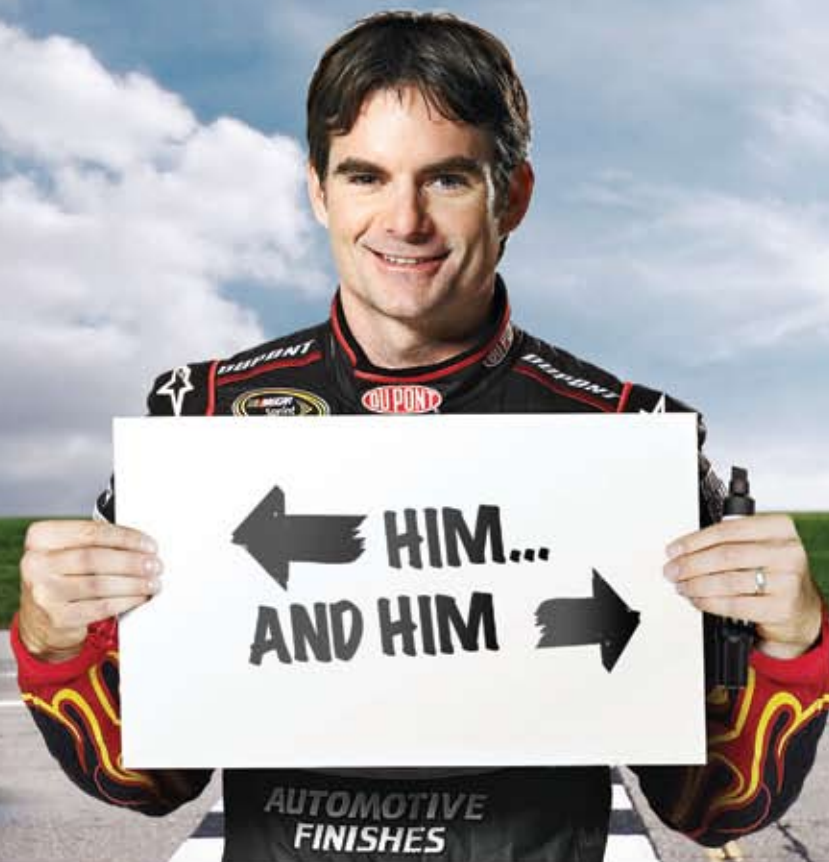
Not true, cry legions of parents. In fact, one researcher who studied babies during their first few months of life found that a higher proportion of girls could calm themselves when their

Speaking Out

While parents may notice innate inclinations in their children, kids aren’t always pleased to see them play out later in life as stereotypes.

A group of Swedish sixth-graders filed a complaint against Toys R Us over the company’s 2008 Christmas catalog, decrying the gender stereotyping in the product photos. The group’s teacher told the local paper that filing the complaint came after more than two years of the students’ work on gender roles. “When I see that only girls play with certain things, then, as a guy, I don’t want it,” said 13-year-old Hannes Psajd.

mother’s face displayed a ‘stony expression,’ but the boys could not. More boys would get easily distressed, they cried more, and were unable to calm themselves.



A WATERFURNACE GEOTHERMAL UNIT IS LIKE TAKING TWO CARS OFF THE ROAD

(Sorry, you can't pick *which* two...)

Jeff Gordon's office is a bit more extreme than most. It's hot. It's loud. You don't want to know what he spends on gas. So when Jeff gets home, he wants to be comfortable without spending a fortune on fuel. That's why when it was time to decide how to condition his house, Jeff chose a WaterFurnace geothermal heat pump. A WaterFurnace geothermal system uses the clean, renewable energy stored in your backyard to save up to 70% on heating, cooling and hot water. It's the environmental equivalent to planting an acre of trees or taking two cars off the road. It's good for the environment, it's great for your budget and thanks to a 30% federal tax credit, now is the best time to act. Visit waterfurnace.com for more information and to find a local dealer.

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Cheboygan
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DeWitt
S & J Htg & Clg
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Gaylord
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waterfurnace.com | (800) GEO-SAVE



FROSTING

The right frosting makes the cake! Find many more recipes at countrylines.com.

Vanilla Buttercream Fluff Frosting

2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
1 7-7.25 oz. jar marshmallow cream
1 c. powdered sugar
1 t. vanilla

In a medium bowl, beat butter with mixer on medium speed until creamy. Beat in marshmallow cream, blending well. Beat in powdered sugar and vanilla. Increase speed and beat 3-4 minutes until fluffy. Makes 3 cups frosting. Use immediately or chill for later use.

Eileen Hughes, Dayton, OH

Lemon Meringue Frosting

3/4 c. sugar
2 large egg whites
3 T. water
1/2 t. cream of tartar
1/8 t. fine salt
1 T. finely grated lemon zest
1 t. pure vanilla extract

Bring a few inches of water to boil in a saucepan that can hold

an electric mixer bowl above the water. Whisk the sugar, egg whites, water, cream of tartar and salt in the bowl by hand. Set the bowl above the boiling water and beat with an electric hand mixer at medium-high speed until stiff peaks form, about 7 minutes. Remove from heat; beat in lemon zest and vanilla.

Jennifer Hansen, Mason

Quick & Easy Whipped Cream Frosting

8 oz. cream cheese, softened
8 oz. Cool Whip®, thawed
1/2 c. sugar
1/2 t. clear vanilla, coconut or almond extract

Beat cream cheese and vanilla in a deep bowl at low speed for 30 seconds, then at high for 2 minutes. Continue beating while slowly adding sugar. Beat

an additional 3 minutes, scraping the bottom and sides of the bowl, until mixture is smooth and no sugar residue remains. Using a spatula, gently fold in Cool Whip. Beat for 1-2 minutes on high, until mixture is smooth and creamy. Use as cake filling or frosting. Double recipe if you are filling and frosting a cake. Refrigerate any leftover for up to a week.

Karen Wormnest, Clarkston

German Chocolate Torte Frosting

8 oz. cream cheese, softened
2/3 c. packed brown sugar
1 t. vanilla extract
1 t. salt
2 c. whipping cream, whipped
2 T. crushed Heath® Bar

Line a 9x13-inch cake pan with heavy duty foil, leaving extra foil on each side for easy removal. Mix cake according to package directions. Pour batter into foil lined pan. Bake

according to package directions; cool and remove from pan. In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, sugar, vanilla and salt until fluffy. Fold in whipped cream. Cut cake in half, then cut each half into two horizontal layers, making four layers total. Place one layer on a serving platter. Spread with 1/4 of the frosting; repeat until all layers are frosted. Sprinkle crushed bar bits on top. Cover and refrigerate 8 hours or overnight.

Linda Geddes, Newaygo

Crème De Menthe Frosting

1-lb. box powdered sugar
3 heaping t. cocoa
8 oz. cream cheese, softened milk
1 c. whipping cream
3 t. green Crème De Menthe shaved chocolate

Combine sugar, cocoa and cream cheese in a large mixing bowl. Beat well until creamy, adding a few drops of milk if necessary to achieve spreading consistency. Spread on cooled cake. Beat whipping cream until stiff peaks form. Gently stir in Crème De Menthe. Spread over frosted cake. Top with shaved chocolate. Chill until ready to serve.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

Deluxe Chocolate Frosting

2 c. chocolate chips
1 1/2 c. butter, softened
3 c. confectioners' sugar
4 t. vanilla

Melt chocolate chips in a double boiler over boiling water or in a microwave. Stir until smooth; set aside. In a large mixing bowl, cream butter and confectioners' sugar, beating well. Add melted chocolate and vanilla; beat until light and fluffy. Frosts a two-layer cake.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

Fast Frosting

8 oz. Cool Whip®
3 oz. pkg. any flavor gelatin

Gently combine thawed whipped topping and gelatin until well mixed. Spread on cooled cake. Try assorted gelatin flavors with different cake flavors. Interesting and delicious.

Karen Gamelin, Munising

Quick Caramel Frosting

2/3 c. butter
1 c. brown sugar
1/2 c. milk
1-lb. box powdered sugar
1 t. vanilla

In a saucepan, melt butter. Add brown sugar and milk; heat to boiling, stirring constantly; boil for 5 minutes. Cool mixture for 10 minutes. Blend in powdered sugar, beating until smooth. Beat in vanilla and then frost cake.

Donna Schonveld, Schoolcraft

Cream Cheese and Orange Frosting

8 oz. cream cheese, softened
1 stick butter, softened
4 c. confectioners' sugar
1 1/2 T. orange juice
1 orange, zested
3 drops yellow food coloring
1 drop red food coloring

Cream cheese and butter together with an electric mixer until smooth. Beat in confectioners' sugar until smooth. Beat in orange juice, zest and food coloring. Frosts tops of two 9-inch cake layers.

Jenn Rekuz, Detroit

Cocoa Butter Frosting

1/2 c. butter or margarine, softened
1/2 c. cocoa powder
3 c. powdered sugar
3 t. vanilla
2-3 T. milk

Cream butter with cocoa. Add powdered sugar, vanilla and milk, one tablespoon at a time, beating until smooth.

Joyce Tamminga, Jenison

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Try Something New In Your Garden

Drum roll, please! The 2010 garden catalogs are in, and there are more new vegetable varieties to choose from than worms in a good batch of compost. Plant breeders have been busy tinkering to come up with tastier tomatoes, bigger melons and more prolific cucumbers.

For instance, check the Hales Best Cantaloupe, offered by Farmer Seed and Nursery out of Faribault, MN. They say it's "unsurpassed in flavor and size." Gardeners in central and lower Michigan should give this 83-day variety a try and let me know how it works out.

Then there are cucumbers that purportedly produce cukes all summer long. How can this be? They do this by being parthenocarpic (huh?). It simply means it doesn't need pollinating, which results in more fruit (at least I think that's the theory). After combing the catalogs, I found two varieties offered, both from Jung's Seeds and Plants: the Diamont Hybrid pickler and a gourmet mini cuke from Germany called "Inik."

For gardeners in the "mitt" and over the Big Mac, where the season is a little shorter and cooler, there are a few new varieties that catch the eye. Jung's Canesi hybrid winter squash claims to be the "earliest butternut squash to date." I've never had much luck growing the butternuts in my Zone 4 garden, but this 80-85 day variety may be worth a try. Some season-extending ideas may be necessary to get this to ripen here in the E.U.P., where we only get about 65 good growing days.

"What's old is new" is apparently the case among many purveyors of vegetable seeds. Heirloom seeds, which are generally those that originate prior to WWII, are popping up in the new catalogs like radishes on a warm spring day. Gardeners are apparently shopping with their palettes as they long for the tastier fare of yesteryear, something that has been sacrificed in some newer varieties that aim for size, color and ability to keep longer at the expense of taste.

Pine Tree Garden Seed owner Richard Meiner has added many heirloom varieties

to his new catalog in response to the demand from gardeners nationwide.

"It's in response to people being interested in the older varieties, especially taste," says Meiner. These heirlooms were passed down through the generations much like a hope chest, he adds, some which originated from companies that went out of business during the Depression. An example is Long Island Improved Brussels Sprouts, which date back to the 1890s, need about 85 days to mature, and cost just a little over \$1 for 100 seeds.

The popular Burpee seed company is offering an interesting new tomato variety called Tye Dye. Recommended by a fellow gardener, it is actually a hybrid that boasts "heirloom flavor" and should also be a conversation piece when it turns from green to a bi-color gold-and-red. The 7-ounce fruits are nonacidic. Allow 78 days from seeding to a ripe, colorful, tasty tomato.

Have you ever been a little frustrated when your beans start like gangbusters and then just quit? The result is more beans than you can eat fresh. Burpee's seems to have the answer with their new Bush Beans Beananza. This dwarf French bean will produce twice as long as your old bean fare if you keep them picked. Come on, give it a try!

I asked Susan Anderson, the Johnny's Selected Seeds product manager in Maine, to help us northern gardeners with some new varieties for short-season zones. You know, those areas in the state where you just seem to run out of summer, leaving green tomatoes hanging on the vine. One new offering they are jumping up-and-down about is Sultan, a high-yielding, 7- to 8-inch seedless cucumber that requires only 56 days to mature.

"Home gardeners will just love this one," Anderson says enthusiastically. She suggests waiting until the ground warms up to about 70 degrees before direct-seeding all cucumbers and other cucurbits.

Other new Johnny's varieties include Cherokee, a tomato that ripens green. Anderson says it's one of her favorites because of its "bold and acidic flavor." It needs 72 days to mature and like all tomatoes, needs to start



Burpee's Tye Dye Tomato

Photo: W. Atlee Burpee & Co.

indoors about eight weeks before setting-out. She also gushes over Red Pearl, a 58-day grape tomato that's a product of the company's own breeding program. The few seeds it produces can be re-sown for next year's crop.

One of my personal favorites is Stokes Seeds, an international company that caters to both commercial and home gardeners. I've grown their seed for years in a commercial greenhouse. Some of their notable new offerings include Hickock, a "longer lasting" dark green gourmet bean with good disease resistance, and Golden Beet, a novelty bright orange beet.

So, go ahead and try a few of these new veggie varieties—I promise you'll be more excited than a leaf-hopper on a potato plant! Happy Gardening.

Visit Neil's website at neilmoran.com.

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Throwing Money Up The Chimney

It's not your imagination. Though it may seem contradictory, an open masonry fireplace can actually cool your house and result in higher overall heating costs. The fireplace opening attracts heated indoor air and then releases it through the chimney. The resulting vacuum draws cold outdoor air into your house through windows, doors and gaps anywhere. You may feel comfortable by the fireplace, but your heat pump or furnace runs like crazy trying to keep the rest of the house warm.

Although I do not recommend using an open fireplace during cold weather, if you really do like the ambiance of a fire, close all the doors to that room, open a window and turn the furnace thermostat down. You will still lose some heated air up the chimney from the rest of the house, but hopefully most of the air is being drawn from the open window. The loss is not as severe during mild weather because outdoor air is not as cold.

Every efficient wood-burning fireplace or insert will have tight-sealing glass doors between the room and the chimney to block the loss of already heated room air. You may be able to operate some fireplace models with the glass doors open and just a screen covering the opening, but do not burn it this way very long. When burned properly, the efficiency of a good fireplace can be higher than an old furnace.

Burning firewood to heat your home—one of several forms of biomass heating—may qualify for a federal tax credit. Biomass sources include cord firewood, wood pellets, corn, switch grass, peanut shells, and even cherry pits, and can be burned in a variety of heating appliances. Fireplaces, wood stoves and pellet stoves are most common. I've even burned cherry pits in my wood pellet stove—they produce a lot of heat and burn cleanly.

The tax credit applies to any biomass heating appliance placed in service during 2009 and 2010. The credit is equivalent to 30

percent of the cost (including installation), up to a maximum of \$1,500. To qualify, the appliance must have an efficiency rating of 75 percent or greater. Check the specifications because not all fireplaces or stoves are this efficient—generally, they range from 70 to

hot, it loses density and naturally flows into the room through an upper vent. This pulls cooler air from the room in through a lower inlet to be heated.

If you want more heat output and better control of the flow of heated air, install a blower kit. Each manufacturer offers its own specially designed kit to mount on fireplaces. The better ones have thermostats and variable-speed controls for the best comfort. A blower kit can usually be added by the homeowner after installing the fireplace.

For the greatest efficiency and least amount of drafts indoors, install an outdoor combustion air kit with the fireplace. Make this decision before you install the fireplace because a duct has to be attached to bring in the outdoor air. It is often run under the floor to the front of the firebox.

Airtight fireplace inserts are often the most efficient design and provide the longest burn-time and maximum heat output from a load of firewood. They are not as stylish as a fireplace, but provide much better control over the heat output and combustion air used. For air quality considerations, select an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certified model. Pellet and catalytic cord firewood models typically produce the least particulate matter.

Despite great improvements in efficiency, keep in mind that some stoves and fireplace options use electricity and may not operate properly during an outage. The cost for efficient models can also be high, which makes qualifying for the federal tax credit that much more important.

The following companies offer efficient wood-burning fireplaces: Desa International, 866-672-6040, desaint.com; Fuego Flame, 800-445-1867, fuegooflame.com; Jotul, 207-797-5912, jotul.com; Kozy Heat/Hussong, 800-253-4904, kozyheat.com; and Lennox Hearth Products, 800-953-6669, lennox-hearthproducts.com.

Have a question for Jim? Send inquiries to: James Dulley, Michigan Country Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit dulley.com.

Ready to get cozy by the fire? Not too fast—first learn to keep your energy dollars from floating up the chimney.



The decorative airtight doors on this heat circulating fireplace improve efficiency and reduce room air loss up the chimney.

90 percent efficiency. Get a manufacturer's statement certifying that the unit meets the efficiency requirements. For details, check energystar.gov/taxcredits.

When buying or upgrading a fireplace you're faced with several options. Initially you must decide between a zero-clearance or masonry fireplace. If your old fireplace is large, you may be able to fit a new unit inside. If you plan to install a fireplace somewhere else, a zero-clearance model is easiest. It often uses a double-walled design with insulation so it can be safely placed against wood wall studs.

A heating-circulating fireplace provides the best efficiency and most heated air output. Many of these operate without a fan and rely on the natural flow of room air around a super-hot firebox. As the air gets

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2009 Employee Appreciation Dinner

Fifteen employees were recognized at the recent Employee Appreciation Dinner for a combined 205 years of service. Pictured (front row, L-R): Denise Smith, 15 years; Patty Nowlin, 10 years; Diane Beardslee, 30 years; Donn O'Shinski, five years; Mike Roush, 35 years; (back row): Tom Baumeister, 10 years; Jeremiah Hunsberger, 10 years; Jim Clymer, 20 years; Greg Karmol, 10 years; Michelle Ferguson, five years; Ron Mueller, 25 years; and Mike Miller, five years. Not pictured: Prentice Carpenter, five years; Todd Hartsell, 10 years; and Shellie Raymond, 10 years. *Read more about Mike Roush and his 35 years at Midwest Energy Cooperative on page 5 of this issue.*

Mark Your Calendars! ✓

Learn About Heating and Cooling Options

In March, Midwest Energy Cooperative will present community forums to help members learn more about options for heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC). Local contractors will discuss the various types of HVAC systems available, including how different systems work, applications and economics.

All forums are 6-8 p.m. and reservations are requested. Mark your calendars now and watch for more details in the February *Midwest Minute* bill insert or the March magazine.

Tuesday, March 16

Cass County Council on Aging, Cassopolis

Tuesday, March 23

Van Buren County ISD Conference Center, Lawrence

Wednesday, March 24

LISD Tech Center, Adrian

Midwest in the Community

✧ As we reported in the January magazine, the Midwest Family shipped over 600 pounds of donations in December—food, hygiene items and games—to a platoon of soldiers serving in the Iraq War. But the co-op family also spread cheer locally during the holiday season.



▲ Lynn Steinman, meter reader, unloads bags of pet food that were donated for the Cass County Animal Control. An avid animal lover, Steinman spearheads an annual effort at Midwest to collect donations of food, blankets, cash and other supplies to benefit the local organization.

Linemen Jim Haas (left) and Marty Smego decorate a bucket truck with Christmas lights and a banner for the annual Dowagiac Candlelight Christmas parade. ▶




◀ Billing representative Casey Hilligoss shows a young student at Sister Lakes Elementary some of the choices available at the Santa's Workshop event. Students were invited to shop for gifts for family members at a shop set up by the school parent-teacher organization. A variety of items were available for purchase, including coffee mugs, key chains, pet products and jewelry. Midwest staff were on hand to help students shop for and wrap their gifts.

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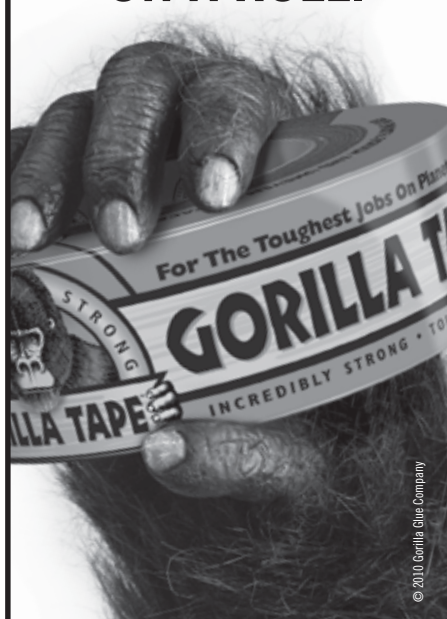
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Free Safety Programs

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We all tend to take electricity for granted until it's not there. Then we realize how dependent we are on the flow of current for our everyday existence. However, electricity should not be treated lightly. It is critical that both adults and children are aware of its potential dangers and how to act accordingly.

Midwest Energy Cooperative offers electrical safety programs for schools, churches, civic groups, emergency response teams, and other groups. The programs are free and can be conducted right in your own facility and adapted to the length of your class or program period.

We have two interactive programs that carry a strong message about respecting electricity. The "Hot Line

Demonstration" is a trailer with real poles and power lines that carry 7,200 volts of electricity. The program shows how different elements are affected by electrical contact, and can be adapted for nearly any audience.

We also offer "Hazard Hamlet," a portable model suited for schools, which highlights electrical safety in everyday situations.

For details about our safety programs or to schedule a presentation, please contact the public relations office at 800-492-5989, or e-mail pr@teammidwest.com.



Nicole Barfell points out one of many electrical safety features on the interactive "Hazard Hamlet" safety program.



The Hot Line Demo is a large interactive trailer that lineworkers use to show how different elements, such as rope and wood, are affected by electrical contact.

Protect Children and Pets From Electrical Hazards

Accidents around the home result in millions of injuries to the most vulnerable members of your family—young children and pets—each year. For example, approximately 2,400 children receive emergency room treatment annually for injuries caused by inserting objects into electrical receptacles, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

With a few precautions, these and other injuries can be avoided:

- Install tamper resistant outlets that protect against small children inserting foreign objects into them. Simple plastic caps typically used can be easily removed by some children.
- Keep electrical cords tied up or out of sight.
- Unplug all appliances when they are not being used, such as hair dryers or coffee makers.
- Keep appliances out of childrens' bathrooms.
- Teach children not to touch appliances when they have wet hands and to keep appliances away from water.
- Teach children other basic safety tips such as staying away from outlets and not touching electrical cords.

Some of the same tips apply to pets:

- ▼ Keep electrical cords away from cats and puppies who love to chew on them.
- ▼ Make sure nightlights and appliances are fully plugged in. Partially exposed prongs can be a temptation to curious critters.
- ▼ Keep halogen lamps away from pet play areas. If knocked over, they could start a fire.



- ▼ Keep appliances in bathrooms away from water. Playful pets can knock radios or curling irons into water, creating a dangerous situation.
- ▼ Discourage cats and dogs from curling up for naps behind electrical equipment, such as computers.

— Chris Grammes
Source: SafeElectricity.org

Ways To Pay

Midwest Energy offers a number of convenient ways for you to view and pay your monthly bill.

E-bill and Online Payment

With Midwest Energy Cooperative's E-bill feature, you can make a secure, one-time payment with a credit card or checking account, review a current or previous bill, see payment and billing history, and even view charts showing monthly and/or average costs and usage data—all with a few simple keystrokes from the comfort of your own computer.

Visit TeamMidwest.com to access the E-bill site, and click on the "Pay Bill" icon on the home page. First-time users will have to sign up for online account access by providing your account number, the last name on the account, and a valid email address. Once you have registered, you will create your own password and be able to log-on in the future with your email address and password.

Automatic Bill Payment

If you are looking to simplify bill paying, we offer "Easy Ways to Pay." Through this program, you can sign up to have your bill automatically deducted from a designated bank account or charged to your credit card every month. It's an easy and secure way to take care of your monthly bill. You continue to receive a bill indicating your payment amount and the date on which it will be paid. You can sign up for this option online through the E-bill site (noted above), or by calling Midwest Energy.

District Service Centers

Midwest Energy offers three district service centers where customers can make payments or speak with a customer care representative. There is also an office in White Cloud for our propane customers in that region. All offices are equipped to take both electric and propane payments. If you are unable to stop during business hours, drop boxes are available at each office. Payments left after-hours are posted during the next business day.

Office Locations and Hours:

- **Adrian District Service Center**
1610 E. Maumee Street
Adrian, MI 49221
Hours: Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- **Cassopolis District Service Center**
Corporate Headquarters
901 E. State Street
P.O. Box 127
Cassopolis, MI 49031
Hours: Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- **Paw Paw District Service Center**
59825 S. LaGrave
Paw Paw, MI 49079
Hours: Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. and 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
- **White Cloud District Service Center**
3181 S. Evergreen Drive
White Cloud, MI 49349
Hours vary. Please call ahead.
1-800-492-5989

Phone

You can make a one-time payment by credit card or check by calling our Customer Care Center at 800-492-5989, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You may pay with Visa, MasterCard or Discover.

Kiosk

A payment kiosk is available 24/7 in the foyer of our Cassopolis District Service Center. The kiosk uses a modified version of our E-Bill program, and allows you to make a payment with a credit/debit card or e-check (no cash). You can also view your bill and payment history on the easy-to-use machine.

Additional payment kiosks will be placed around our service territory—watch for more information.

Mail

Send payments by mail to the following address:

Midwest Energy Cooperative
P.O. Box 127
Cassopolis, MI 49031

When you pay your bill by mail, send a check or money order. *Do not send cash* through the mail. To help us credit your payment correctly, please include the bill stub and write the account number on your check. Allow at least five days before the due date for the payment to reach our offices.

Whole-House Load Management Is a Win-Win

Topper Barth was happy to be a test subject for the new Interruptible Whole-House Load Management program, and is even happier now to recommend the program to others.

Participating members pay a lower energy rate, but ultimately all members benefit.

"It's a win-win for everyone," the Three Rivers farmer and chairman of the cooperative's board of directors said.

"I'm saving money on my monthly electric bill and I know I'm helping the cooperative to reduce its overall load during periods of high usage."

The program is available to all residential

co-op members who have a whole-house generator with a transfer switch. A remote device, installed by the cooperative at no additional charge, allows the co-op to transfer the member's residential load from the electric grid to their back-up generator during times of peak system demand or system emergencies. Like the water heater load management program, this program allows the cooperative to reduce peak load. Because energy supply charges from the cooperative's power supplier are based on monthly peak demand, all co-op members ultimately benefit when we can reduce peak-time electric use.

In exchange for the ability to control the load, the member pays a lower energy kilowatt-hour (kWh) charge: \$.03376/kWh

compared to \$.0508/kWh, for all their use on that account. Load control is limited to week-days and occurs mostly between 3-8 p.m., when the demand for electricity peaks.

"I've been on the program for four months and the control process has been seamless," Barth said. "I haven't had any blinks and haven't had to reset clocks. It's a great program that benefits our members and the cooperative."

Besides the one-time cost for the generator and transfer switch, interested members should also take into account the cost of fuel to operate the generator when considering this program.

For more details about the whole-house control rate, call Midwest Energy at 800-492-5989.

We Hear You

Your letters to Jim Hough and your responses to our survey spur us to excel.

When Jim Hough first signed on to write the “Right at Home” column on this page in 1984, *Michigan Country Lines* wasn’t yet a magazine. It was, more accurately, a tabloid—black ink on newsprint—which meant your hands would get mighty black from handling it. And, boy, did we get complaints. Eventually, we changed to the format you’re holding now. It’s easier to handle, carries color much better, and doesn’t make your hands look like you’ve been playing with coal. That’s the kind of positive change that comes from listening to you.

Country Lines actually started 30 years ago this coming November. At the time, it was the youngest of 30-some publications across the country started by state electric co-op associations to help electric co-ops stay in touch with members. Some of those magazines were in business 40 years before Michigan co-ops saw the light. The goal of the magazines is to help members keep up with what’s going on in the utility they own, which is actually one of the golden rules of the cooperative form of business.

We know that if we were to fill these pages with only information about transformers, substations, rates and generator safety, we wouldn’t have many readers. And so we make room for other things that may interest you more, like gardening, recipes and the great outdoors. And Jim Hough’s column on this back page.

The sad thing, of course, is that Jim has packed away his large-print typewriter, upon which he created the warm-hearted stories about his friends in his beloved U.P. He delivered the columns to us on letter-sized sheets of newsprint strung together with tape into 6-foot long scrolls. He writes that way because he is legally blind and the large type allows him to read his own copy. Still, it often looked like we were getting an over-sized roll of toilet paper. And considering the columns he wrote about Engadine’s outhouse races and the toilet seat nailed to a tree announcing that his Paradise cabin was open for

visitors, toilet paper would have been appropriate.

But Jim’s columns weren’t fluff. We wanted him to write stories that would draw you into the magazine, to help create a community of electric co-op readers across the state and beyond.

As proof, there are the many letters he’s received from well-wishing readers who just wanted to let Jim know how much they loved his column.

“We have enjoyed your articles in every issue,” wrote one reader.

“You don’t know me, but after reading your columns for a long time, I felt I had to let you know how much I enjoyed your writings,” wrote another.

“If it was not for your articles I probably wouldn’t even open the magazine,” wrote still another, frankly. (Do you know that studies show about half of the population starts reading magazines from the back?)

That so many of you would take time to write a letter to Jim Hough wishing him well after his farewell column in the January issue is testament to your connection to the magazine. We thank you, and we promise that we will work hard to keep your trust.

For those of you who fear they will miss Jim’s special connection with the U.P., I want you to know that I and my teacher wife, Barbara, were high school sweethearts in Ironwood, and have a special fondness for pasties, Saykly’s chocolates, trout streams, Marquette and Lake Superior. The title of this new column reflects the approach I hope to take in writing about the people and places along co-op lines, but it is also a tip of the hat to our now long-gone St. Ambrose High School, whose sports teams went by the name of “Ramblers.” You can take a kid out of the U.P., but you can’t take the Yooper out of the kid.

Our latest survey shows that our community of readers is as strong as ever, but also that we have work to do to keep your trust and build a stronger relationship with younger co-op

members.

The survey was conducted online in November, with a follow-up random sample mail survey in December. It reveals that over 90 percent of co-op members read the magazine regularly and that 63 percent of you clip items from the magazine. We’re pleased that attention is being paid, because your co-op counts on the magazine to keep you informed and get you involved.

A surprising majority of readers who participated in the survey expressed a desire to see *Country Lines* printed on recycled paper. We are planning to do that in April, after we use up our current paper stock.

Finally, I’ve got to get something off my chest.

We get calls almost daily from readers who want to talk about something in ‘*Country Lines*’. We do appreciate the calls. But, the name of this magazine is *Michigan Country Lines*. Notice the ‘r’ between the ‘t’ and the ‘y’ in *Country*. That ‘r’ is not silent and it’s always been there, but for some people it seems invisible. It’s been bugging the staff here for decades, and I promised I’d mention it. So there it is. Honestly, I don’t care what you call it (*Country Lanes* is another favorite) as long as you don’t stop reading—and calling.

Thanks for joining us.



Mike Buda is the founding editor of Country Lines and continues to work on the magazine, as well as other activities of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. He lives in Mason with Barbara. Their boys, Dan and Jon, have flown the coop.

Email Mike at mbuda@countrylines.com

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In 2009, the Midwest Employee Family made a difference in the lives of individuals and organizations across our service territory through more than 700 hours of volunteer service time. We're making a difference — one classroom, one community park, and one soup kitchen at a time.