In Your Best Interest, Page 9

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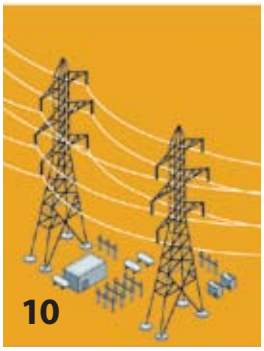

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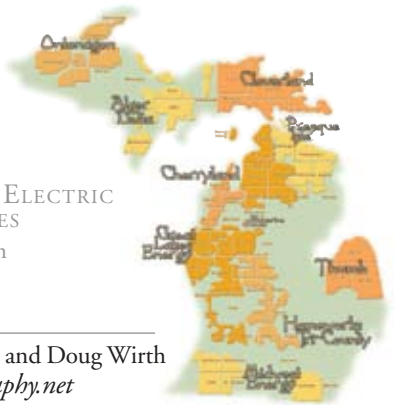

COVER*

A quilt block design that graces the Centennial Farm barn of Melanie (pictured) and Doug Wirth is part of the Osceola County Quilt Trail. *Photo – Andree Magsig, drephotography.net*

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Fun Times at the Zoo

Good days. Really, really good days.

There is something just magical that happens when you can engage with folks over food and fun. We had a chance to do that over two weekends in September with our Customer Appreciation Days at the Zoo. Between Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek and the Toledo Zoo, more than 3,000 co-op members and their families joined us for a day of family fun at a couple of this region's finest outdoor venues. Good days!

Robert Hance
President/CEO

Why do we do it? It's a question we get over and over again, both at the events and during the registration process. The answer really is quite simple: We do it because we care. There's no hidden agenda or sales motive, and it's not an objective in some lofty corporate strategic plan.

Events like this give us a chance to gather as a family and engage in a way that we don't get to in our usual course of business. They help break down the walls between customer and utility, allowing us to see one another as people and not just faceless names on the other end of the bill or telephone. When we engage on a personal level, we see and appreciate the fact that we are all people who struggle with paying bills, raising children, caring for aging parents, and dealing with tough economic times. It makes us all realize that we're together on this journey called 'life.'

It's amazing what kinds of conversations can occur on a Sunday afternoon in a pavilion over a hot dog. Granted, there was lots of talk of football and politics and the new TV season, but we also had a lot of great conversations about issues like power supply costs, renewable energy and climate change legislation. Again, casual conversations over a hot dog and some chips, but conversations that help us know what's on your mind as a customer of Midwest Energy.

We are very careful when planning and allocating resources—as a member-owned co-op this is a responsibility we take very seriously. Something else we take very seriously is the opportunity to talk in person with our members. As I see it, these events give us two great takeaways that are well worth the investment.

First, they allow us to connect and celebrate everything that's great about the people that make up the Midwest family. The entire service experience is different when we mutually recognize one another as people and not just customers and employees.

Events like this give us a chance to engage on a personal level… to appreciate the fact that we're all together on this journey called 'life.'

Second, you just can't put a price on the value of dialog. Keeping our fingers on the pulse of our customers is critical to helping us know what we need to do differently as a service provider. Something we hear from a customer over lunch may help shape future communications or change the way we deal with a particular issue. We value your input, and this venue gives us a chance to really tap into a resource that is not readily available to us in daily business.

Thanks to everyone who was able to join us this year. Good days, indeed. And thanks to those who submitted comments about the experience; these are always great to read and share with our employee family. One customer wrote, "This event is very much appreciated. Not many people can say their energy company truly appreciates their business. Thank you for the great gift in these difficult times."

You're welcome.

Where Does My Power Come From?

By Megan McKoy-Noe

Every month you pay your power bill to Midwest Energy Cooperative. But have you ever wondered where that electricity comes from?

Generally, it's not produced in your neighborhood—most electricity travels quite the distance from where it's generated, crossing heavy-duty transmission lines to reach local distribution systems and, finally, your home.

Along the way, the electricity changes hands a few times. But co-op members are lucky—in most cases, different types of consumer-owned electric co-ops are involved at each step to keep power flowing safely, reliably and affordably.

Different Co-ops, Same Goal

Your home or business receives electricity from Midwest Energy Cooperative, one of roughly 860 electric distribution co-ops in America. These local, member-owned, not-for-profit utilities build and maintain overhead and underground lines and equipment to deliver power. Typically, distribution co-ops do not generate electricity or directly negotiate with power providers. In most cases, that role lies with generation and transmission cooperatives (G&Ts).

G&T co-ops are wholesale power suppliers owned and governed by electric distribution co-ops. They produce electricity directly and/or buy it in bulk from other companies, then ship the power over high-voltage transmission lines (whether owned or leased) to local distribution co-ops.

The first G&Ts were created shortly after the birth of rural electrification in 1936 by groups of distribution co-ops and other publicly owned utilities. The idea was simple: by forming G&Ts, distribution systems could reduce costs by collectively negotiating power supply arrangements and achieve a better price without being held captive by other power generators. Our wholesale power supplier is Wabash Valley Power Association (WVPA), a G&T located in Indianapolis, serving 28 local distribution co-ops in five states. Overall, Wabash Valley Power is responsible for the electric needs of nearly 800,000 people at work and at home.

Today, there are 65 G&Ts in the United States. A few serve more than 100 distribution co-ops in several states while others operate in smaller areas. Seventy-eight percent of distribution co-ops receive at least some of their electricity from a G&T.

Generation

Right from the start, many G&Ts began building and operating generating stations. They currently generate about 5 percent of the nation's electricity and own all or part of 200 generating plants with a combined capacity of more than 51,000 megawatts. That's enough electricity to power about 10 cities the size of Las Vegas!

Overall, 45 percent of the power used by distribution co-ops nationally comes from power plants fully or partially owned by G&Ts. Coal-fired facilities account for more than half of the electricity produced by utilities nationally, followed by nuclear power and natural gas. Nineteen G&Ts feature green power generated from wind, solar, biomass and other renewable resources.

Wabash Valley Power has coal, natural gas, petroleum coke, nuclear and alternative energy fuels in its overall mix. While coal accounts for 66 percent of WVPA's generation, that number is dropping each year, particularly as more alternative fuels become available and affordable. Throughout the Midwest, where coal has long been abundant and inexpensive, most utilities have a much greater proportion of coal in their fuel mix. As an example, in Indiana, the average amount of coal for all utilities is 84 percent.

Given the uncertain future of an energy or climate change policy, Wabash Valley Power is proactively working to reduce its dependence on coal, and alternative fuels like biomass have proven to be a reliable and affordable option.

Transmission

Once generated, electricity can't be stored efficiently. Instead, G&Ts make sure that energy reaches local distribution co-op systems over high-voltage transmission lines. The more electricity packed onto a line (by increasing the voltage), the farther it will travel. Once power reaches its destination, distribution co-ops use transformers at substations to reduce the voltage before sending it over their lines to your home or business.

G&Ts own and maintain a national network of 66,584 miles of transmission line to deliver power to local distribution co-ops—enough to go around the world more than two-and-one-half times! The distribution co-ops own and maintain 2.6 million miles of line, 42 percent of the nation's total.

To learn more about where your power comes from, visit wvpa.com.

Source: NRECA G&T Profiles Data (May 2010), 2006 U.S. Energy Information Administration data

Megan McKoy-Noe writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric co-ops.

Survey Data Guides Future Power Supply

From October through November, you may be contacted to participate in one of two surveys of residential co-op members. These online and telephone surveys, commissioned through our power supply partners, are conducted primarily to help us understand electricity use changes and patterns in order to plan for future power supply needs.

The surveys will be conducted by two different independent research companies on behalf of Midwest Energy. Both have extensive experience in a wide variety of research methods as well as a strong history of satisfied customers. The majority of surveys will be conducted weekdays from 11 a.m. – 9 p.m., although a few may be conducted during weekend hours. The surveys will focus primarily on the appliances and items around your home that consume electricity.

If you are contacted and don't wish to participate, you will not be pressured to do so. The data gathered is used solely by the power supplier and cooperative for planning and informational purposes and is not shared with any other parties.

If you have any questions about the process, please call us at 1-800-492-5989.

Co-ops Encouraged to Emphasize Communication with Members

Directors, managers and employees need to tighten their bond with co-op members in order to help them ride out the current firestorm of uncertainty about electricity costs and other challenges, NRECA CEO Glenn English told about 900 participants at the Regions 1 and 4 meeting, Sept. 8-9.

Speaking at the Amway Grand Plaza in Grand Rapids, English said co-op officials must improve communications with members and demonstrate that they are doing everything in their power to hold down monthly bills. Otherwise, higher bills and other contentious issues could trigger a backlash of member anger toward elected directors and co-op staffers at a time when unity is sorely needed.

"If you build trust before the firestorm, it's just like putting money in the bank," English explained. "You'll need as much as you can, because when the firestorm hits, you'll spend it." Because they'll be the main target, he advised the co-op leaders to "use this time to reduce your co-op as a firestorm target."

This storm, he said, will last longer and affect 70 to 80 percent of the fuel co-ops use, so "we need 100 percent participation from you … and it's a good use of member dollars to communicate on this issue. The membership has to feel that each and every director, each and every manager, and each and every co-op employee is truly representing them and looking after their interests."

The government push to regulate coal, nuclear and natural gas generation sources means higher consumer bills, which are already showing up in some member mailboxes. Members will be angry at staff and directors for rate increases, and some co-ops have already lost managers, English said. "We need to retain experienced managers and directors to keep the trauma and cost down and make wise decisions." Co-ops can avoid these disasters by talking openly about issues to minimize the impact and by not ignoring problems.

Challenges facing co-ops will also look different in 2011, with new Congressional faces and maybe a different party, meaning that co-op leaders will have to get acquainted with new people and will gain and lose some friends, he said.

"The real issue is the electric bill and the intensity of members' concern about this—talk about it instead of ignoring it," English ended.

At the meeting, the following Michigan co-op directors also achieved recognition for completing advanced director education. Earning the Board Leadership Certificate were Melinda Lautner (Cherryland), Tamara Gady (Cloverland), Paul Byl and Susan Scott (Great Lakes Energy), and Carl Morton of HomeWorks. Ed Oplinger (HomeWorks) and Jon Zickert (Cherryland) earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate.

The Michigan Electric Cooperative Association hosted the event that drew 76 people from nine Michigan co-ops. Other states in Region 4 include Indiana, Ohio and West Virginia. Region 1 members include Delaware, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Vermont.

Energy Efficiency *quick tip*

In general, TV energy consumption goes up as the picture quality gets better and the screen gets bigger.

Wind Better

It seems the general tone of your article ["Wind and Basic Math," Sept. 2010] is negative. I'd like to counter a little.

Small, residential-sized (2- to 10-kilowatt as you suggest) wind systems, when properly sited, work very well and can easily produce 100 percent of a household's electric needs. The key is energy consciousness by the homeowners and efficiency. My wife and I have powered our all-electric home (except hot water) 100 percent-plus using a 2.5 kW wind turbine. We are not even in an ideal wind site—annual average wind speed at our hub height (126 feet) is 10.5 mph. The key is proper siting using best practices known by qualified site assessors and installers.

Sure, installing a quality wind system isn't cheap, but electric rates will likely only rise. And yes, regular maintenance is required that costs a small percentage of system cost, as well. But, saving money isn't the only reason to install a renewable energy system. Let's think about the long-term benefits of cleaner

Recycled Paper

Michigan Country Lines is now printed on recycled paper from FutureMark Paper, which taps the "urban forest" of waste paper thrown out in Chicago every day. Using recycled paper reduces the carbon emitted in paper production, the paper deposited in landfills, and water and air pollution. The energy to produce recycled paper is about one-half the amount required to make paper from pulp.

air and resulting reduced health issues, less destruction of landscape to mining fossil fuels, *not* having to transport fossil fuels to power plants. Distributed electric generation has many benefits, including not having to build more power plants. Isn't this actually good for the utilities?

Yes, wind is not for everyone, and as you suggest, potential buyers should "get the facts" first and not allow themselves to be talked into wind by an unreputable salesperson. Let's face it, solar PV is better for those in urban areas. Either way, we need to change our mindset and dependence on fossil fuels. Wind is surely not the only answer, but it can play a key role in a more healthy, environmentally responsible, sustainable future. We should be encouraging energy consciousness and efficiency first. Only then will renewable energy sources, wind or otherwise, work well for more people.

Sam Simonetta, Deerton
Alger Delta Co-op member

Mustang Memories

I would like to thank all the people at *Country Lines* for the article written about our "Mustangs." A special "thank you" to Linda Kotzian for her special handling and follow-up to make this article as great as it is.

I have gotten over 20 telephone calls and emails from friends, neighbors and past fellow employees I worked with at Ford. Besides talking about the article, just about all remarked on the uplifting spirit this article gave to them in a "poor" economy!

Thank you again, Good job Linda Kotzian. Great magazine, *Michigan Country Lines;* keep it up.

Pat & Ellie Broderick

This article is so special to our family. To be able to have my father recognized in such a manner for what he has loved and enjoyed doing for so many years is awesome! It's been a Broderick family legacy (Mustangs) and reading it in *Country Lines* magazine…What can I say besides how proud I feel and how much I love my dad! Thank you for yet another great memory!

Jacqueline Broderick

More Blueberry Heroes

We have had a much warmer summer and in many areas rain has been ample, creating a good growing season for both cultivated and wild crops. Wild blueberry season is over in the U.P., and we have confirmed that the bears did not get all the berries. Recently, I saw my Wild Blueberry Hero, so I thought I should report in for 2010. [countrylines.com/2009/11/10/my-blueberry-hero]

Mr. K is 88 this year and he does not move as well and can not stand as long as he used to. Despite this, he was able to pick 251½ quarts—48 percent more than last year! Mr. K attributes his greater production to the weather and his new, smaller, light weight chair.

This year's production was used for blueberry pies for Mr. K's 101st Airborne Lunch Bunch and for a pancake breakfast at Mr. K's Finnish Club to honor Mr. Koskimaki's grandson, Matthew, who recently was killed by an IED in Afghanistan.

Charles Day, Lambertville

COMING UP: ▶ Favorite recipes: **SAUSAGE** by Dec. 10 and **BUDGET-FRIENDLY** by Jan. 10.
Mail to: Recipe Editor, Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, MI 48864, or email jhansen@countrylines.com

The Big Cheese Challenge

Move over Wisconsin, here comes Michigan cheese.

The 11 members of the new Michigan Cheese Makers Co-op hope to gain a foothold in the cheese market.

Co-op members will work together to market their products, leverage buying power, and help each other.

The Michigan State University Product Center for Agricultural and Natural Resources pulled the co-op together to "bring visibility to the fantastic cheeses made in the state by creameries using Michigan milk and artisanal techniques," says Matt Birbeck, supply chain specialist and counselor liaison for the Product Center.

Funded by a grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Cooperative Development, the new co-op will help its members market their artisanal cheeses to food stores in the state.

"A co-op like this is very important in a state like Michigan that is not known, like Wisconsin, for its cheese. The possibilities are endless," explains Jim Turner, state USDA director.

Forming a co-op is in line with the Product Center's goals, says director Chris Peterson. "Each of the members has a unique product," he says. "And that's a wonderful thing. However, having your own unique product maximizes the workload when it comes to marketing, and it's difficult for one producer to develop a portfolio of products. By marketing these together, members now have a portfolio of products which make them much more attractive to a grocery supplier."

In fact, Meijer representatives have announced that the company plans to join. "We're interested in becoming an associate member of the co-op because half of our 190 stores are in Michigan," states Meijer CEO Mark Murray. "These are spectacular small businesses [and] great products."

Photo – Leelanau Cheese Company

John [*above*] and Anne Hoyt, of Leelanau Cheese Company in Suttons Bay, see other benefits to their newly-formed co-op. "It's hard to do things yourself, there's more power as a team," Anne says. "We can share new ideas, new cheeses and recipes." They are also Cherryland Electric Co-op members.

For a new cheesemaker like Barbara Jenniks, of Cowslip Creamery in Grand Rapids, building camaraderie and a helpful spirit is key. "It's important to small cheesemakers like me, because we're all in this together," she says. "If we all make good products, there's room for all of us."

Four co-op members have been recognized for their cheeses, including Cowslip, Leelanau Cheese Company, Zimmerman's Creamery of Ann Arbor and Greenbush Farms of St. Johns.

"The fact that we have this many award-winning cheeses in Michigan is good because it tells the consumer that this is a good product," Peterson says. Although the co-op is small, he says it has a good spread across Michigan, and has the Lower Peninsula covered.

"They better watch out, we're on the way," Jenniks warns Wisconsin cheesemakers.

See GreatLakesGreatCheese.com for a list of cheesemakers and productcenter.msu.edu to find out about MSU's Product Center.

Service Charge Increase

Many of the conveniences we enjoy in daily life are accessible because of the availability of electricity. As consumers, we don't typically think about the infrastructure that needs to be in place to have power available at the flip of a switch. We just trust that the kilowatts will be there when we need them.

Behind the flow of kilowatts from your co-op is a high-tech and intricate system of transmission and distribution. It's steel, poles and wires. It's buildings and facilities and fleet. It's hardware and software. It's highly-trained and dedicated servicemen and women who are available 24/7 in the event that you flip the switch and nothing happens. It has nothing to do with the actual power that you ultimately consume, but everything to do with making that power available to you.

Like the cost of the actual power supply, our costs to transport the power to you has increased significantly. Given the upward pressure on power supply costs in recent years, we have opted to maintain your rates related to the distribution system. However, in order for us to continue providing a reliable electric system that gives you power at the flip of a switch, we must implement a modest rate adjustment.

Midwest Energy has applied to the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) for a $3 monthly increase to the service charge for residential rates, along with a very slight increase of .00057 cents/kilowatt-hour (kWh) to the distribution kilowatt charge. This would take the service charge to $15 monthly, and the distribution kWh charge to 3.124 cents/kWh. Both these lines on your bill are related to the infrastructure required to distribute electricity. For monthly use of 1,000 kWh, this equals an average increase of $3.57 monthly (3.1 percent). The proposed plan raises the service charge by $2 monthly for general service, irrigation and large power accounts.

"As a member-owned utility, there is no possible benefit to be achieved through gouging or overstating the need for revenue," says Bob Hance, Midwest Energy president/CEO. "We have worked hard for many, many years to keep expenses in check in order to avoid an increase in distribution-related charges. However, after careful and thorough analysis we know that without a slight adjustment, we are compromising our ability to continue providing the high level of service and reliability that our customers deserve and expect."

The rate case has been approved by the MPSC and the increases will be effective with your October bills.

Join the Conversation on Renewable Energy

Interest in residential renewable energy applications is growing as many people are asking questions and exploring options for installing renewable technologies, particularly solar and wind.

Midwest Energy Cooperative, in partnership with MSU Extension, invites you to learn more about this growing field and related considerations at a "Community Conversation on Renewable Energy," Thursday, Nov. 11, 2010, at the Dowagiac Performing Arts Center. The forum runs from 6-9 p.m. and the cost is $10 per person. Whether you're an environmentalist, a tinkerer or an investor, this seminar will provide valuable information and tools to consider before installing renewable energy technologies at your home or business.

This seminar will include a discussion of basic concepts about renewable energy, including solar and wind availability for this region, kilowatt output, weather factors, economics, required equipment, and size considerations. Participants will hear about other key considerations including zoning issues, inspections, insurance, up-front and ongoing costs, and available incentives. Speakers will also review lessons learned from various small-scale wind and solar demonstration projects, and address the basics of biomass.

Speakers include Richard Hiatt and Richard Peterson. Hiatt is the executive manager of the Rural Electricity Resource Council (RERC), a national association formed in 1957 to help electric utilities better serve their rural and agricultural customers. He joined RERC in 1985 after working in the member services department of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. Also a registered professional engineer, Hiatt enjoys helping electric power suppliers educate their consumers.

Peterson worked for over 30 years at New York State Electric and Gas, first as an agricultural engineer and later as the manager of agricultural market services. Upon retirement he formed the Northeast Agriculture Technology Corporation, based in Ithaca, NY, and continues working with that firm today, consulting with farmers and other rural consumers about electric energy and related technology.

Midwest Energy Co-op and MSU Extension staff will also be available to answer questions about related programs and services to help consumers understand and better manage their energy use.

To ensure space and availability of materials, please RSVP no later than Friday, Nov. 5. To reserve your space, complete and return the form on this page with related fees, or call MSU Extension at 269-445-4438.

Community Conversation on Renewable Energy

Sponsored by Midwest Energy Cooperative, in partnership with MSU Extension

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In Your Best Interest

Observing National Co-op Month in October gives us yet another reason to tell our members that you are part of something special. More than 40,000 cooperative businesses serve more than 120 million people nationwide. From agriculture cooperatives in the Midwest, housing cooperatives in New York City, credit unions, and telephone and electric cooperatives throughout the country, service to the membership is the mission of each and every one. Just like these other cooperative organizations, your electric cooperative was formed to deliver a service, in this case electric service, on a not-for-profit basis, with local ownership and direct accountability.

Every day, electric cooperatives demonstrate their service and the benefits of cooperative ownership. At the top of the list is providing reliable electric power at the lowest possible cost. Year-in and year-out, your cooperative meets or exceeds the service reliability standards established by the Michigan Public Service Commission. Service also means helping consumers manage their electric bills through Energy Optimization programs, being good stewards of the environment, and looking for workable solutions to address climate change.

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

Your cooperative has been in the energy efficiency business from day one. When cooperatives strung the first lines to serve rural America, they immediately started educating their new members on the wise and safe use of electricity. Many cooperatives also sold electric appliances in communities where no other options to buy existed. Today your cooperative is heavily involved in promoting energy efficiency (Energy Optimization) programs as required by Michigan law.

At a time of increasing national concern about the economy, especially rising energy costs, we also must communicate the cooperative difference to decision makers, whose actions affect our members and the communities in which they live and work. We have been to Washington, D.C., over the last year meeting with our members of Congress to discuss legislation affecting our ability to maintain reliable, affordable electric energy. We have discussed proposed legislation addressing climate change issues, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulation, a national renewable energy mandate, Clean Air Act regulation, the Rural Utility Service loan program, a national energy efficiency mandate, and a host of other proposals. Oftentimes, we find our mission is to simply educate our members of Congress on the impact of various proposals on your electric rates.

We are faced with an issue right now of having the EPA begin regulating the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs), such as carbon dioxide from power plants, under the Clean Air Act, due to Congress' failure to pass legislation addressing the issue. As it stands now, Congress still has time to consider a bill proposed by Sen. Rockefeller (D-WV) that would put a moratorium on the EPA's regulation of GHGs for two years, thereby giving Congress time to act. We support this proposal and will be telling our members of Congress to, as well. We believe this is good public policy.

The cooperative difference defines who we are and what we can achieve as we look out for our members' best interests.

Our Energy, Our Future
A Dialogue With America
OurEnergy.coop

GRID Lines

Utilities prepare to repave America's electric highway. **Megan McKoy-Noe**

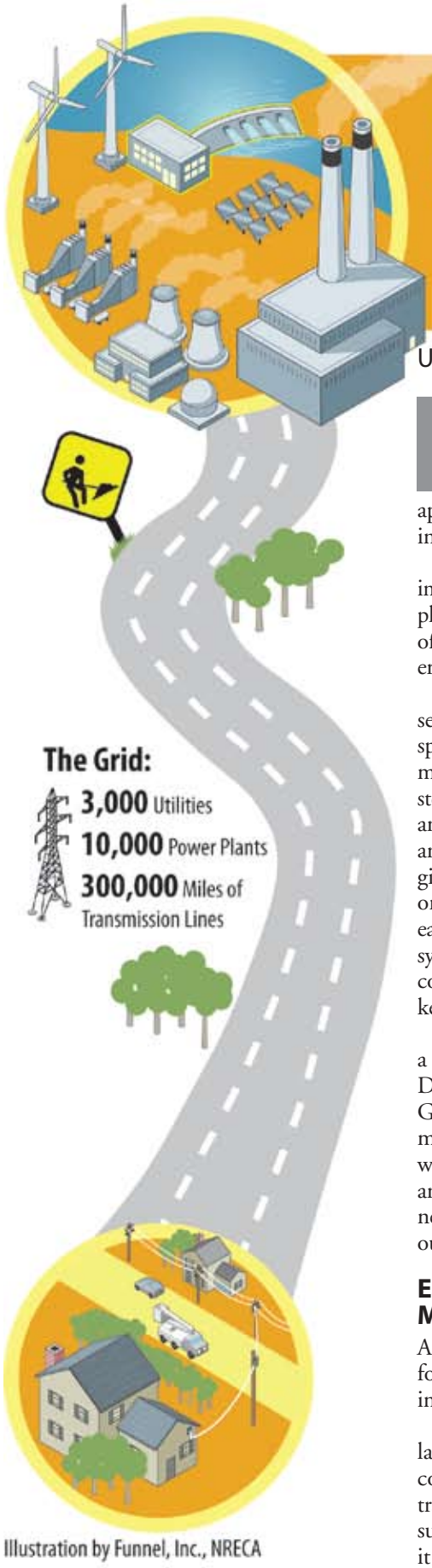


Illustration by Funnel, Inc., NRECA

Imagine a major highway with vehicles all going one way. It's rush hour—rows of impatient cars try to merge, pushing to reach a final destination. Exits for cities appear, and a steady stream of cars spreads into the countryside.

Electricity today travels across the nation in much the same way—moving from power plants along major transmission arteries until off-ramps deliver it to a local electric cooperative and, finally, your home.

There's a national push to improve this setup—repave the electric highway, so to speak—to allow for two-way traffic of information. This would be accomplished by two steps: upgrading the physical network of poles and wires to bolster reliability and security, and deploying digital "smart grid" technologies that allow utility staff and equipment on power lines and substations to talk to each other. The ultimate goal: allow electric systems to operate at top efficiency and help consumers make better energy choices to keep bills affordable.

"Modernizing America's electric system is a substantial undertaking," stated the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in its report, Grid 2030. "The nation's aging electromechanical electric grid cannot keep pace with innovations in the digital information and telecommunications network. America needs an electric superhighway to support our information superhighway."

Earth's Largest Interconnected Machine

A challenge lies before utilities: how to transform a largely mechanical power network into a digital smart grid.

North America's electric grid may be the largest interconnected machine on earth, consisting of power plants, high-voltage transmission lines, smaller transmission lines, substations, and distribution facilities. But it wasn't built with a master plan in mind. It was created as needed, one section at a time. As the nation's electric needs grew, so did the grid.

Today, the electric grid is split into three parts: the Western Interconnection, which reaches from the Pacific to the Rockies; the Eastern Interconnection, which continues to the Atlantic; and the Texas Interconnection, which covers most of the Lone Star State. Plans are under way in Clovis, NM, to connect all three segments, but today they remain fairly isolated.

The grid includes about 3,000 utilities and other entities operating 10,000 power plants, according to DOE. Over 1 million megawatts of energy courses over 300,000 miles of transmission lines nationally. Most of this vast network was designed at least 50 years ago—thus the need for a major upgrade.

Grid of the Future

What will tomorrow's grid look like? Paving a new, smarter grid calls for unprecedented cooperation and communication, since everyone has a different idea of what our future power network should be. Electric cooperatives believe there should be three main goals behind grid improvements: affordability, efficiency and reliability.

To keep electric bills affordable, a smarter grid will provide tools to help members manage their electric use, while automation devices and tools help reduce operational costs. And since electric co-ops are nonprofit, any money saved on daily operations will ultimately be returned to members.

Technology focused on boosting efficiency could shrink a community's carbon footprint by letting members reduce their electric use during demand peaks and lowering line losses. Finally, a smarter grid should be more secure and can help electric co-ops restore service following an outage much faster and safer than before. While it will still take the same amount of time to remove a tree that's fallen onto distribution lines, a utility would be able to pinpoint that location remotely rather than walking a line to find the problem.

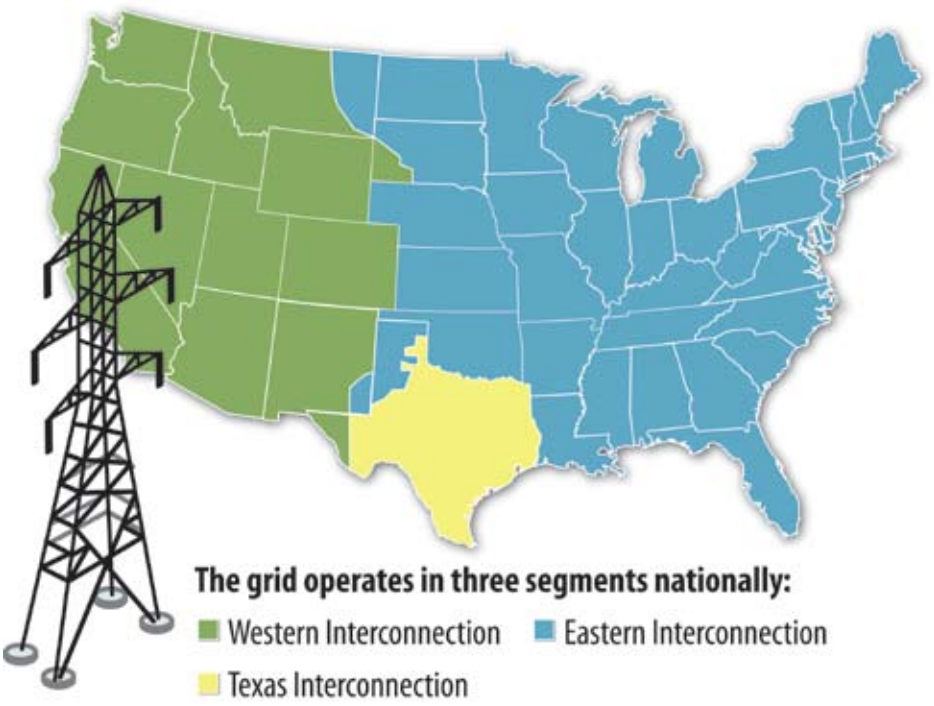
As with all construction projects, these

improvements will require study to make sure consumer benefits outweigh costs.

Electric cooperatives, as consumer-owned and governed utilities, take a sensible approach to technology investments. This means the co-op business model, combined with DOE research funds, makes cooperatives an excellent test bed for exploring the smart grid's value for their members and how these new technologies might be able to help keep bills affordable.

To learn more, visit smartgrid.gov. For updates on how electric co-ops are leading the way with smart grid innovations, visit ECT.Coop.

Megan McKoy-Noe, CCC writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.



Trail of Quilts

Driving Michigan's quilt trails offers beautiful scenery and small towns and events to browse. **Gail Knudtson**

Elsie Vredenburg is a professional quilt maker ("Designs by Elsie") and coordinator of the Osceola Quilt Trail. She's pictured with her great-granddaughter in front of the "Osceola Star" block she designed.

■ **OCT. 9 –** "Quilt Trail Color Tour" – 1-2:30 p.m.; Osceola League for Arts & Humanities; 231-734-9900 ■ **NOV. 1 thru DEC. 22 –** "Christmas Gift Shop" – 207 N. Main, Evart ■ **ANYTIME –** Find an Osceola Quilt Trail map at osceolaarts.com or call 231-825-2572

A graceful trail of quilt block designs can be found in the small-town fabric of Alcona, Grand Traverse and Osceola counties. Painted on barns and buildings, they are part of a National Quilt Trail project aimed at preserving the buildings, as well as the art, heritage and well-being of their communities.

Osceola's Quilt Trail was started by professional quilt maker Elsie Vredenburg, of Tustin, after she met the National Quilt Trail organizer, Donna Sue Groves, at a quilt show. Groves started the Trail in Ohio in 2001 by keeping a promise to her mother, a master quilter, to paint a quilt block on her barn.

Today, the National Trail meanders through 27 states, including Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky and North Carolina, which has the highest number of sites.

Oceana's Trail has nearly 31 blocks installed on 28 sites, and Elsie says more are planned for 2011. The "Osceola Star" that she designed and is mounted on her garage, was the county's first.

Most of the work gets done through volunteers and donations, Elsie explains, which in Osceola is a committee of seven people, with two that do most of the quilt block painting at the Osceola League of Arts &

Photos–Elsie Vredenburg

Opposite page: Great Lakes Energy Co-op members Doug and Melanie Wirth own this barn (also on cover) near Evart, and their 8x8-foot quilt block is based on a quilt made by Doug's mother, Esther. It's the largest on the Osceola Quilt Trail, and is called "54-40 or Fight!" It refers to the Oregon Territory's northern latitude during the border dispute between the U.S. and Canada, and was James Polks' 1844 presidential campaign slogan. Polk's plan was to wage war to win the entire Territory for the U.S.

The Great Lakes Energy volunteer People Fund granted money for 13 quilt blocks.

Above, left: This "Sunflower Wreath" block rests at Christie's Potting Shed and Florist in Marion. The building used to be a garage, and is now used for Christie's "Antiques and Old Stuff". Pictured (L-R) are Fred Prielipp, Carl Patterson and Christie Patterson Prielipp.
Above: Sometimes hanging the quilt blocks is a challenge. The former owner of the Steve and Melody Yarhouse farm near Evart was known for her wonderful flower gardens. Melody has kept the gardens blooming and chose this "Amaryllis" quilt block to symbolize that legacy.

Humanities (OLAH) studio. The OLAH group also helped Elsie grow her idea for a local quilt block trail.

Alcona County's Quilt Trail, Michigan's first, began as a possible way to bring tourism to that area and showcase its unique history. It has about 23 blocks, and more details are available by calling 989-724-7788, or visiting alconaquilttrail.com.

In Grand Traverse County, Google "Grand Traverse Quilt Trail" or visit the website barnsofoldmission.com to bring up several information choices.

"Each quilt block shows the personality of each homestead by the design they pick out—whether it's a quilt made by great-great grandma, or someone else—they're all different," says Trail participant Melanie Wirth (cover photo).

Like any community, locals in these counties are hoping the Quilt Trail will bring tourists to help their economies. For example, the OLAH group is sponsoring a "Quilt Trail Color Tour." They also hold a "Christmas Gift Shop," which is a community art sale and fundraiser that last year brought 660 shoppers and 35 artists (see box, page 12).

The nice thing is, you can travel the Quilt Trail any time of year.

Barn Photos – Andree Magsig/drephotography.net

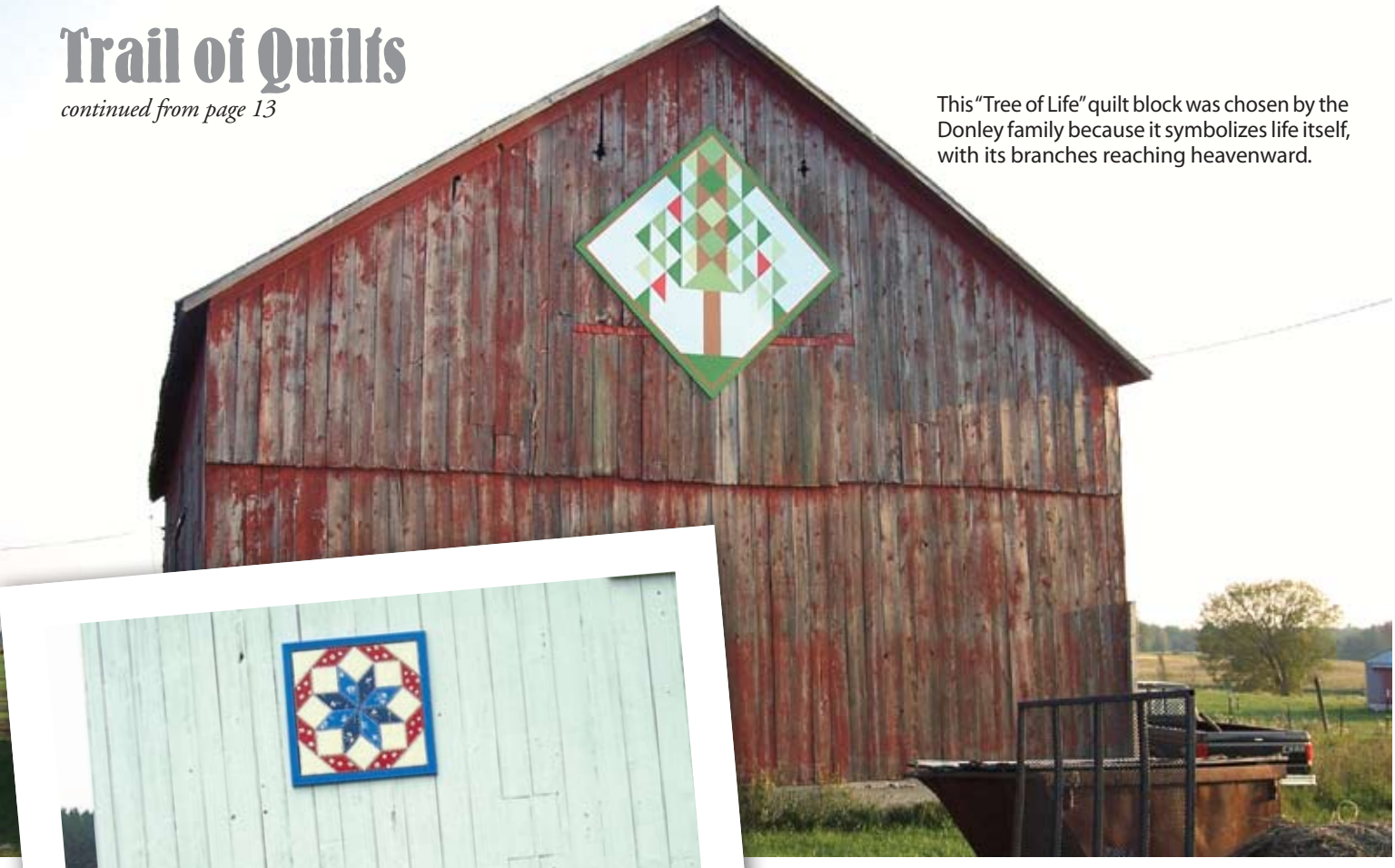
In August 2010, this variation of the "Dresden Plate" design came to rest on the hip-roof barn of Jim & Bonnie Neuman, of Marion. The barn was rebuilt with neighborly help after a fire in 1960. And, word has it that the Neumans, their children, grandchildren, great-grands, and international exchange "children" have all, in turn, found comfort under this family quilt that can always be found at the end of the couch.

more ▸

Trail of Quilts

continued from page 13

This "Tree of Life" quilt block was chosen by the Donley family because it symbolizes life itself, with its branches reaching heavenward.



Left: Founded in 1871, the seven-generation Hall farm is one of the earliest homesteads near Marion, MI. Homesteader Sarah McElroy Hall created the "Rolling Star" quilt which inspired this block. The family cherishes the quilt, which includes scraps from Sarah's hand-stitched dress, also pictured here.

Below, left: This "Old Glory" quilt block stands proudly on the Osceola Township Hall in Evart. The Osceola League of Arts & Humanities plans to put a quilt block on all 16 of the county's township halls.

Below: This "Star of the Orient" design is at the Centennial Farm of Jerry and Lynn Mitchell of Hersey. Lynn chose this design because it reminds her of the old windmill spinning in the breeze.

Photos – Elsie Vredenburg

Geothermal's Promise

Energy from deep in the earth has huge potential for electricity generation and heat. **Magen Howard**

Geothermal energy—created from Earth's natural heat—has been used by many cultures for thousands of years to cook and bathe. But modern technology has unlocked new ways to harness geothermal potential: producing electricity using hot water and steam locked below the surface; and heating and cooling buildings.

America leads the world in geothermal power production, with about 3,080 megawatts of capacity from more than 70 power plants, according to the Geothermal Energy Association, the national trade association for geothermal development companies. Western states boast the most geothermal energy, because it's easier to reach.

How it Works

Typical fossil fuel-burning and nuclear power plants heat water to boiling to create steam. The steam then turns a turbine, which generates electricity.

Geothermal power stations essentially cut out the middle man, piping naturally heated water (which is changed into steam) or naturally occurring steam into a plant to spin turbines. Three different types of geothermal generation exist; the choice depends on the state of the hydrothermal fluid (whether steam or water) and its temperature.

Dry steam: The first type of geothermal power plants built, these facilities use steam from a geothermal reservoir (pulled from wells) and route it directly through turbines to create electricity.

Flash steam: The most common, these plants pump water boasting temperatures greater than 360 degrees F under high pressure to generation equipment. The steam is separated from the water and used to make electricity; leftover water and condensed steam are channeled back into the reservoir.

Binary cycle: Uses moderate- to low-temperature groundwater or steam. In a binary cycle system, hot water is pumped from a well and passes through a heat exchanger, where it warms a secondary fluid boasting a lower boiling point than water. This causes the secondary fluid to flash to vapor, which in turn drives a turbine. The secondary fluid then condenses and returns to the loop system; the water gets pumped back into the well.

Other Uses

Geothermal energy offers an array of benefits beyond electricity generation. In some cases, hot water can be piped directly into systems to heat buildings, greenhouses and fish farms. Some cities run hot water under roads and sidewalks during winter to melt snow and ice.

Geothermal heat pumps rely on the energy of the ground—the top 10 feet of the earth remains a fairly constant 50 to 60 degrees F year-round—to move heat into and out of a building, providing winter heating and summer cooling. Also called ground-source heat pumps, these appliances come in two types: an open-loop system uses well water; a closed-loop model moves a water and antifreeze solution through underground pipes to disperse heat.

While geothermal heat pumps generally operate more efficiently than their air-source cousins, they are more expensive up-front. A federal tax credit equal to 30 percent of the cost for materials and installation, with no limit on total project expenses, applies to geothermal heat pumps through Dec. 31, 2016.

A full list of geothermal heat pump requirements, along with a product list, can be found at energystar.gov/tax credits. To see if other rebates are available in your state, check the "Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency" at dsireusa.org.

A geothermal heat pump might not always be the best option in every situation. Contact your co-op to determine whether a geothermal heat pump is the right choice for you. Go to earthcomfort.com to find a local Michigan contractor.

Magen Howard writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Scott Gates contributed to this article.

Source: Bureau of Land Management

Geothermal power stations go down to 6 miles deep to pipe naturally heated water (which is changed into steam), or naturally occurring steam, to a plant to spin turbines. **Inset:** One type of closed loop for a geothermal heating and cooling system.

Linda Wacyk

Schools are Finding It *Is* Easy To Be 'Green'

Kermit the Frog might sing a happier tune after visiting our kids' schools, where "being green" is a growing trend. Green Schools across the nation are making a commitment to providing healthy, comfortable and productive learning environments while saving energy, resources and money.

In Michigan alone, more than 500 schools in 65 counties are now part of a growing Michigan Green Schools network, dedicated to protecting the air, land, water and animals of our state. They also aim to leave their mark on the world through good ecological practices and teaching environmental stewardship to our kids.

What is a Green School? Green school leaders actively take steps to improve the health and energy-efficiency of buildings, ensure science-based environmental education in the classroom, implement healthy food choices into the cafeteria, promote alternative means of transportation, and more.

"Green schools seem to make decisions differently," said Tom Abramson, Green Schools Coordinator at Delta-Schoolcraft ISD. "They are more apt to think of long-term consequences of their everyday actions."

Abramson points to Rapid River schools as an example, where among other actions staff and students have evaluated the lunch program for ways that waste can be reduced. Another school found that through recycling they could reduce their waste disposal costs while recycling valuable resources.

Going green on a larger scale by committing to green design, construction and operations for new and existing buildings can bring even greater benefits. Abramson says green school leaders in the Delta-Schoolcraft area that continuously evaluate the schools' infrastructure (heating systems, doors, windows, lights, and more) to find ways to save energy.

Some schools raise the standard even higher. Whitmore Lake, a rural community north of Ann Arbor, made a bold move to construct a green, LEED®-certified high school by following rigorous practices endorsed by the U.S. Green Building Council. Leaders there say that extra effort improves health and efficiency and—an added benefit—attracts new families to the district.

Who gets involved? Everyone, from students to community groups, can pitch in to make schools environmentally safe and responsible.

Student "Green Club" members at Gladstone Area Public Schools, along the northern shores of Lake Michigan, have accomplished a number of environmentally friendly projects earning them recognition as Michigan Green Schools.

Back in Rapid River, students recycle and collect paper and bring it to the library. Office staff have replaced all CRT computer monitors with more energy efficient LCD monitors, and custodians are using environmentally-friendly cleaners.

"Families participate in our Girls Scouts' waste-free lunch, they recycle in their homes, our American Legion recycles paper, local church groups recycle boxes, and we even have a local metal artist that recycles all of our cans from the kitchen," said Rapid River fifth-grade teacher Beth Larson.

Some of the best green initiatives are those that involve teachers and classroom activities. Science classes find a natural connection, but other classes can put learning into environmental action as well.

Gladstone High School recently received a grant that will allow them to study and use solar energy. By partnering with Energy Works Michigan, the school will have access to lesson plans and professional development for English, math, and social studies teachers who are interested in integrating this content into their instructional planning.

What are the rewards? Schools that earn Michigan Green School designation receive tangible rewards like a signed certificate, a web banner, and a flag designating the school as an "Official Michigan Green School." Many counties hold ceremonies each spring to recognize participating schools.

Abramson says the intangible rewards are even greater.

"It is important for schools to do this so that they can model conservation and savings to the adults of the future," said Abramson. "Lessons learned at school may carry over to homes to expand the benefits of making wise decisions."

Best of all, studies show that schools that have adopted green practices improve student test scores, reduce sick days, and raise teacher and student retention. And as the commitment to "green" principles grows, so do the benefits, which can include impressive energy cost savings.

How much savings? Experts say a green school typically uses 33 percent less energy and 32 percent less water—enough savings to hire two additional full-time teachers.

Marysville Public Schools, a suburban district northeast of Detroit, is putting those claims to the test. The district opened a new high school in 2009 that is almost 100,000 square feet larger then the old school. Yet they expect only a slight increase in energy bills because of sustainable building practices they adopted.

"If we're saving at least one teacher's job a year through our energy savings, we've made some great decisions along the way," former Marysville Superintendent John Silveri told The School Administrator.

Ultimately greening America's schools presents an extraordinary cost-effective opportunity to improve the health and educational settings for all students.

"Going green helps our schools learn to do more with less," said Larson. "It helps the kids understand what can be done to make our school and the world a better place, and that we need to practice what we preach."

michigangreenschools.us

energyworksmichigan.org

usgbc.org/k12toolkit

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Stir-fry

Stir-frying is a quick sauté over high heat. While you can stir-fry in any type of skillet, the sloping sides of a wok allow you to move ingredients away from the hot bottom while cooking. Peanut or canola oil are good choices for stir-frying. They both have a high smoke-point—the point where oil breaks down and begins to smoke. Find more recipes sent in by readers at **countrylines.com**.

Beef and Vegetable Stir-Fry

1 lb. beef top round steak
1 ½ c. broccoli, cut in 1-inch pieces
3 med. carrots
1 t. salt
1 t. cornstarch
1/2 t. sugar
2 T. soy sauce
2 T. dry cooking sherry
2 T. cooking oil
1 med. onion, cut in thin wedges
1 c. frozen peas, thawed
1/2 c. water chestnuts, drained, sliced thin
1/2 c. bamboo shoots, halved lengthwise
hot cooked rice

Partially freeze beef; slice very thinly across the grain into bite-sized strips. Cook broccoli and carrots in boiling salt water for 2 minutes, covered; drain. Combine cornstarch, salt and sugar. Blend in soy sauce and cooking sherry; set aside. Preheat wok over high heat; add cooking oil. Stir-fry broccoli, carrots and onion in hot oil for 2 minutes or until crisp-tender; remove from wok. Add more oil, if necessary. Add half of the beef to wok; stir-fry 2-3 minutes until browned; remove beef. Stir-fry remaining beef 2-3 minutes. Return all meat to wok. Add peas, water chestnuts and bamboo shoots. Stir soy mixture; add to wok. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly. Return broccoli, carrots and onion to wok. Cover and cook 1 minute more. Serve with rice.

Kathryn Ross, Bad Axe

Virginia Yee's Dry Fried Sichuan String Beans

1/4 c. chicken broth
1 T. sugar *(Pictured, above left)*
1 t. salt
2 T. vegetable oil
1 lb. string beans
2 T. minced fresh ginger
1/4 c. ground pork
1 T. balsamic vinegar
1 t. sesame oil
1 T. chopped scallions

In a bowl, combine chicken broth, sugar and salt. In a large wok, stir-fry string beans in vegetable oil until beans look wrinkled with brown spots; remove beans to another dish. Add ginger and pork to wok and stir-fry until pork is no longer pink. Add broth mixture to wok; bring to a boil. Add cooked beans, tossing to combine and cook 2 minutes until most of the liquid evaporates. Add vinegar, sesame oil and scallions; toss to combine, remove from heat and serve at room temperature.

Jennifer Van Wingen, Lake Ann

Chicken Cherryaki Stir-Fry

1 ½ c. fresh cherries, pitted *(Pictured above)*
(may substitute frozen or canned)
2-3 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
2 T. teriyaki sauce
2 T. dry sherry
1 T. lemon juice
3 ¼-inch-thick slices fresh ginger
1 T. cornstarch

Send in your recipes! If published, you'll receive a free kitchen gadget. Send in: your **ALL-TIME FAVORITE previously published Country Lines recipe by Oct. 10** *(no gadgets this category)*, **SAUSAGE recipes by Dec. 10,** and **BUDGET-FRIENDLY recipes by Jan. 10**. Mail to: *Country Lines* Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email jhansen@countrylines.com.

3 T. vegetable oil
6 green onions, sliced diagonally in 1-inch pieces
2-3 sm. carrots, thinly sliced
2 c. snow peas
4 oz. sliced water chestnuts, drained
2 oz. Chinese rice stick noodles, cooked, or 2 c. hot cooked rice
1/4 c. slivered almonds

Thaw cherries if frozen; drain reserving juice and set aside. Cut chicken into bite-sized cubes. Combine teriyaki sauce, sherry, lemon juice and ginger in a small bowl; stir in chicken. Cover and marinate in refrigerator, one hour; stirring once or twice. Drain chicken, reserving marinade. Discard ginger. Blend reserved cherry juice into cornstarch; stir in marinade; set aside. Heat oil in wok or large skillet, over high heat. Add sliced green onion, carrots and snow peas; stir-fry 2-3 minutes until tender but still crisp. Remove vegetables from wok. Adding more oil if needed, add chicken and stir fry 3-4 minutes. Push chicken away from center of wok; add cornstarch mixture. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly. Stir in chicken, cherries, vegetables and water chestnuts; heat through. Serve over noodles or rice and garnish with slivered almonds. Serves 4.

Pam Assenmacher, White Lake

Stir-Fry Shrimp and Vegetables

1 lb. med. raw shrimp with shell on
1 t. cornstarch
1/2 t. salt
1/2 t. roasted sesame oil
1/8 t. white pepper
7 lg. bok choy stalks
6 oz. fresh pea pods
4 oz. fresh mushrooms
2 green onions with tops
2 T. oyster sauce
1 T. cornstarch
1 T. cold water
2 T. olive oil

1 t. finely chopped ginger root, optional
1 t. finely chopped garlic
1 T. olive oil
1/2 t. salt
1/2 c. chicken broth

Peel shrimp; pat dry and toss with 1 teaspoon cornstarch, salt, sesame oil and white pepper. Cover and refrigerate for 20 minutes. Remove leaves from bok choy and cut in 2-inch pieces. Cut stalks into diagonal 1/4-inch pieces. Remove strings from pea pods and place in boiling water; cover and cook 1 minute. Drain and rinse in cold water; drain and set aside. Cut mushrooms into 1/2-inch slices. Cut onions into 2-inch pieces; shred lengthwise into fine shreds. Cover with ice water for 10 minutes or until pieces curl; drain. Combine oyster sauce, 1 tablespoon cornstarch and water in a small bowl; set aside. Heat wok until very hot. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil; tilt wok to coat sides. Add shrimp, ginger and garlic. Stir-fry until shrimp are pink; remove and set aside. Heat wok until hot; add 1 tablespoon olive oil. Add bok choy stalks, mushrooms and salt; stir-fry 1 minute. Add bok choy leaves and broth; heat to boiling. Stir in cornstarch mixture and cook until thickened. Add shrimp and pea pods; cook and stir for 1 minute or until the shrimp is hot. Garnish with green onions.

Joyce Runberg, Beaver Island

Stir-Fried Beef and Peppers

5 T. cooking oil, divided
1 lg. green pepper, sliced
1 lg. red pepper, sliced
1 onion, sliced
3/4 lb. beef flank steak
3 T. soy sauce
3 T. cold water
2 t. cornstarch
1/8 t. hot pepper sauce
1 t. ginger
hot cooked rice

Slice beef across the grain into very thin strips; set aside. Heat a large skillet or Dutch oven over high heat for 3 minutes. Add 3 tablespoons oil, green and red peppers, and onion. Cook, stirring constantly until vegetables are coated with oil. Stir-fry 5 minutes or until vegetables are tender-crisp; remove from pan and set aside. Add remaining 2 tablespoons oil to skillet and heat. Add meat and stir-fry 3 minutes or until lightly browned. Combine soy sauce, 3 tablespoons water, cornstarch, ginger and hot pepper sauce. Pour over meat; cook until sauce thickens and boils. Return vegetables to skillet; stir to coat. Serve over hot rice. Serves 6.

Mrs. John Clairmont, Bark River

Ginger Chicken

1 lb. chicken breasts, cut in 2-inch cubes
1/2 c. whole kernel corn
1/2 c. chopped broccoli
1/2 c. frozen carrots
1 c. sugar snap peas
5 T. butter
3 T. ginger teriyaki sauce
4 c. cooked white rice

In a large skillet, melt 3 tablespoons butter over medium heat. Add chicken; cook thoroughly. When chicken is cooked, add all vegetables and remaining 2 tablespoons butter; mix well, cover and cook 5-8 minutes until vegetables are crisp-tender. Add ginger teriyaki sauce; stir well. Reduce heat to low and cook for an additional 3-5 minutes. Serve on top of rice.

Danielle Cochran, Grayling

Stir-Fry Venison

2 T. vegetable oil
1 lb. venison cut cross-grain in 1/2 x 2-inch strips
3 med. potatoes, thinly sliced
1 med. onion, thinly sliced
thinly sliced green, yellow and red pepper
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1 lb. mushrooms, thinly sliced
1/3 c. soy sauce
2 T. brown sugar
1 T. corn starch
1 T. water
cooked noodles or rice

Heat oil in a large skillet or wok over high heat. Cook and stir venison and garlic about 2 minutes or until browned. Add potatoes, onion, pepper and mushrooms; cook, stirring frequently until tender. Whisk together soy sauce and brown sugar in a small bowl. Add to skillet. Stir together cornstarch and water until smooth; add to skillet. Cook until heated through and sauce thickens. Serve over noodles or rice.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

Indonesian Style Beef & Pasta

1 ¼ lb. boneless beef steak, sirloin or top round
5 T. Teriyaki sauce, divided
2 T. creamy peanut butter
1 T. water
1/8 -1/4 t. crushed red pepper
1/8 -1/4 t. ground ginger
6 oz. dry vermicelli or thin spaghetti
2 T. vegetable oil
1/2 c. seeded and chopped cucumber

Cut steak into 1/8-inch thick strips and place in a shallow baking dish. Add 2 tablespoons teriyaki sauce; toss to coat evenly and set aside. In a bowl, combine remaining 3 tablespoons teriyaki sauce, peanut butter, water, red pepper and ginger; set aside. Cook vermicelli according to package directions; drain and rinse. In a medium bowl, toss vermicelli with peanut butter mixture to coat well. In a large non-stick skillet or wok, over medium-high heat, heat oil until hot. Add beef, half at a time; stir-fry 1-2 minutes until no longer pink. Add cooked beef to pasta; toss lightly to combine. To serve, sprinkle with chopped cucumber. Serves 4.

Duane Alvord, Port Sanilac

Neil Moran

Raising Chickens Is Easy

It seems like a perfect match for the gardener or small farmer.


Mitchell Miller, of Stalwart

More and more people seem to be looking for ways to "grow it fresh" in their backyard. This includes the growing of vegetables, of course, but also the raising of livestock. One animal that seems like a perfect match for the gardener or small farmer is chickens. Chickens will provide you and your family with hormone-free meat and eggs in addition to manure for the garden.

Chickens seem to be the rave right now. There are as many new websites on the subject as there are different breeds of the bird. Even city folks are getting into the act as they approach municipal boards to approve ordinances for raising a few hens in the city limits.

This spring, at the pleading of my grandson, I hesitantly gave the okay to purchase some of those fuzzy chicks sold at the feed store. Buying a variety of types is the best way to get started. We bought10 laying hens, a rooster, and one meat chicken (they all looked the same to me as chicks!).

Raising chickens is really pretty easy. Their main requirements are space, food and protection from predators, including fox, skunks and the occasional neighborhood dog. They also need a protected area, such as a chicken coop, where they can be sheltered from the elements.

Chicks are sold in the spring and can be purchased from local feed stores or mail-order catalogs. The main thing with chicks is to keep them warm. They need temps at 90-100 degrees for the first week you bring them home, and then drop the temperature 5 degrees each week until you get them in a coop. A heat lamp will be needed to keep them warm, but be careful not to create a fire hazard. One way to reduce the risk of fire is to hang the cord (which is clamped onto the side of a plastic box) above the container so that if the lamp comes loose, it won't fall into the sawdust bedding material. Also, be careful to keep children away from the lamp's heat, which can be pretty intense.

Chicks require a specially formulated feed and a constant supply of water. Feed chickens a starter feed until they are old enough to start laying eggs, which is about five months, according to Kristen Taylor, of Pickford Feed Service, in Pickford. At this time you should start feeding them a laying mash, which consists of about 17 percent protein, plus oyster shells, grit and vitamins, Taylor says.

Chicks also need room to grow. Last spring, after about four weeks of having a dozen chicks in our bathroom, we moved them to a corner of my heated greenhouse. I surrounded the fledgling chickens with makeshift walls that could be moved out wider as they grew, and eventually I got them into their own coop.

Chickens need about 2 to 3 square feet per bird inside the hen house and 3 to 4 feet per bird outside. Chicken wire appears

Source for unusual chickens:

mcmurrayhatchery.com

For more information on raising chickens:

backyardchickens.com

to be the best fencing to keep the chickens in and predators out.

Chickens are a productive lot for the small-scale farmer. A healthy hen averages 255 eggs a year, and a good meat chicken can be ready to butcher in less than three months. They require minimal space and can even be free-ranged around the barnyard, providing they are safe from nearby dogs. However, they can be a problem if they enter the garden, which many gardeners can attest to. Keep them out of the garden at least until the end of the season, when they can go in and feast on the bugs. While eating bugs, they'll also be fertilizing your garden!

Meat chickens should be raised separate from laying hens since they require a different feeding regimen, Taylor says. These beefy birds, which are obviously bred to grow fast, need a regimen of 12 hours of feed, followed by 12 hours without feed. The reason for this, she says, is so the birds don't gorge themselves and also to develop strong bones and body structure. In just eight to 10 weeks they'll be ready to butcher.

Winter can be problematic for chickens, though it doesn't have to be. Make sure they are sheltered from drafts and have a constant supply of water. Keep the coop dry by providing some type of bedding material, preferably pine shavings. Predators become even more of a problem in the winter as they search for limited food reserves. Plug any holes in your coop and check often to make sure no new ones are being made by burrowing animals. Also, make sure your chicken feed is kept in a tightly sealed container. Hens need about 14 hours of light to keep egg production going; artificial light, perhaps on a timer, will need to be provided.

It's been awhile since I've raised chickens, and I must admit to missing their barnyard strutting and scratching. As long as I can keep them out of my vegetable garden and flower beds, and they don't chase my grandson, we'll keep on raising them!

Bathroom Lighting

Remodeling a bathroom? Make smart lighting decisions to get the most energy savings from your efforts.

People don't often think about lighting and energy efficiency when it comes to bathroom remodeling, but it's as important as installing the proper vanity or plumbing fixtures. Today's modern master bathrooms and dressing areas are often as large as some second bedrooms and are more than just a place to shower, shave, etc.

If the lighting in both of your bathrooms is like most older bathrooms, it consists of an overhead light, perhaps built into a vent fan if there is no window. If there is a window in the bathroom, very few builders went to the expense of installing a vent fan. Today, vent fans are almost always installed to address indoor air quality concerns in modern, more airtight houses. While remodeling, definitely install a vent fan.

The lighting for your children's bathroom will be simpler, so tackle it first. A basic overhead light should be adequate until they get old enough to shave or wear makeup. There's likely already an incandescent overhead light-only or fan/light fixture. In either case, replace it with a new Energy Star® qualified fan with a compact fluorescent lightbulb (CFL). It will use 75 percent less electricity for lighting than a comparable incandescent bulb and the fan will be much quieter than the old builder-quality vent fan.

Since children often forget to turn lights or vent fans off when they leave the bathroom, select a vent fan with a motion or humidity sensor to automatically shut it off at the right time. This can save a significant amount of electricity. If you have only a light fixture, use a motion-sensing switch, such as the Lutron MeadowLark™ model. This allows you to program the length of time the light stays on after no motion is detected, along with several other energy-saving functions.

Planning efficient and effective lighting for your master bathroom and dressing area is a bit more complicated. Use a basic lighting design technique called layering to provide proper lighting for various activities. This is the same design technique professionals use for every other room of a house.

The three basic lighting layers are task, ambient, and accent or decorative. Bathrooms are task oriented (showering, shaving, applying makeup, general grooming), so adequate task lighting is most important.

Ideally, place lighting on both sides of the mirror and also on top for three-direction lighting. This eliminates shadows that can be problematic when shaving or applying makeup. If the mirror is not too wide, wall-mounted vertical fluorescent tube lighting on each side of the mirror is best and efficient.

Several companies offer efficient decorative T2 or T5 fluorescent fixtures. Some can be attached to wide mirrors, and decorative sconces with CFLs are effective around narrow mirrors. Daylight-type CFLs provide the best color rendition for makeup. Halogen bulbs may also be used, as they offer a longer life, are somewhat more efficient than standard incandescent bulbs, and provide a whiter light.

A recessed light with a built-in vent fan provides task lighting in the shower and exhausts humidity. The fan has an automatic humidity sensor switch.

Photo – Broan

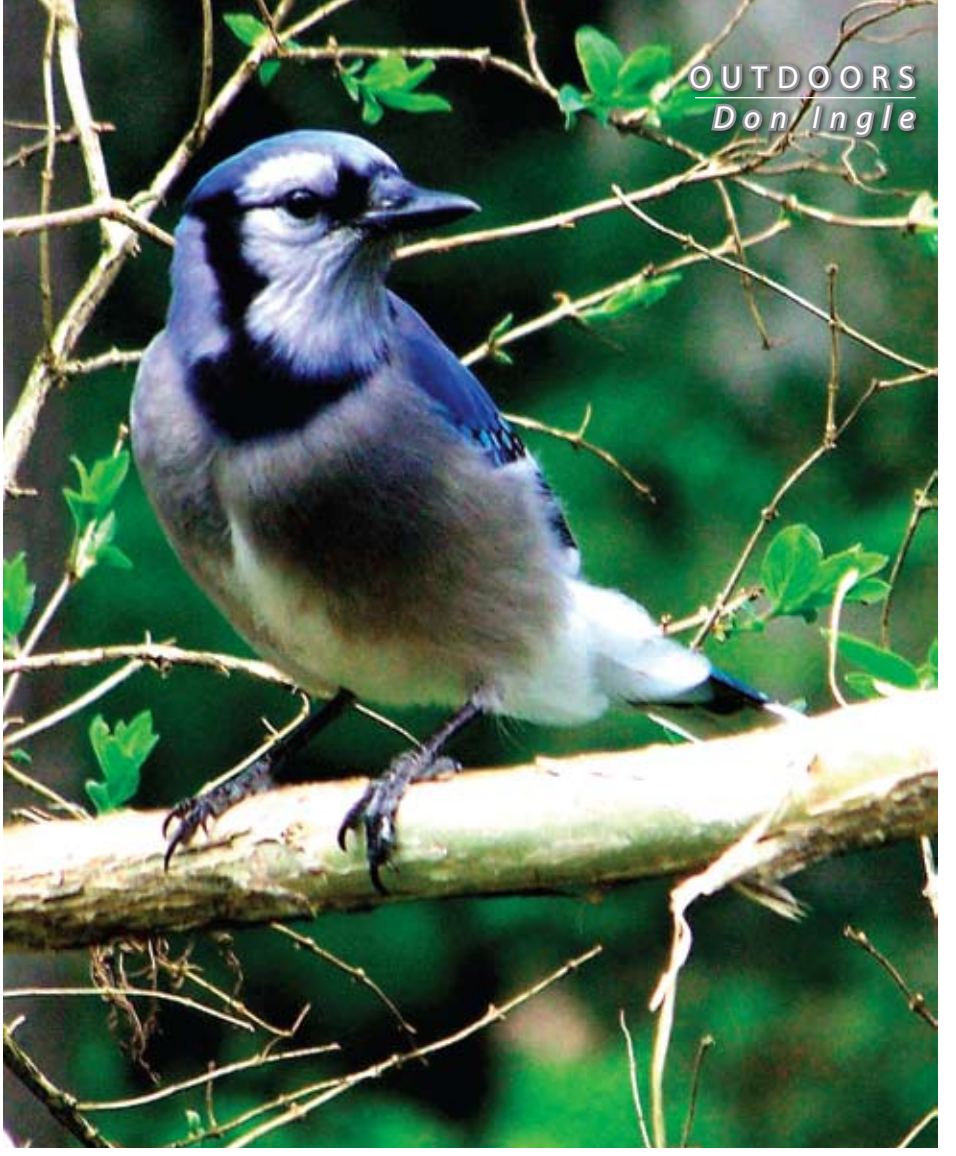
For over-the-mirror task lighting, Kichler® offers a new decorative rail design (this design also works well for accent lighting). It is similar to track lighting with three or four directional fixtures, but they are mounted on a rail that hangs down a few inches from the ceiling. It mounts to the ceiling over a standard ceiling electrical box. Several of the rail fixtures use super-efficient, long-lasting white light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs.

For the bath/shower area, recessed overhead task lighting works well. If you are remodeling on your own, consider installing low-voltage fixtures for safety and easy installation. Broan-NuTone® offers recessed light fixtures with built-in exhaust fans. These are efficient because excess moisture is drawn from the shower stall before it ever enters the room.

For ambient and accent lighting, lower-wattage incandescent fixtures—either overhead or sconces—are effective. These can be controlled by dimmer switches to save energy. The new Lutron Eco-Minder™ dimmer is a good choice. As the lights dim, an LED on the faceplate changes from red to green to remind you to dim the lights to save energy. On some models, the switch also functions as an efficient night light. It is wise to install separate dimmer switches for the various layers of light. Another daytime ambient light option is an ODL® tubular skylight with a solar-powered remote dimmer.

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

Blue Jays



Avian bullies at backyard feeders.

They're blue, boisterous and bold bullies.

As if that isn't enough, they are nest-robbers, thieves and loud-mouthed mischief-makers. (And also fun to watch when they turn up at your feeders to begin their avian pranks.)

Blue jays, with the Latin tongue-twister name of *Cyanocitta cristatta*, are members of a larger family of birds called *Corvidae*. Cousins of the blue jay include crows, ravens, gray jays and magpies, but it's the blue jay that's the most familiar at bird feeders. Jays are very territorial. They are greedy, pushy and pugnacious towards other birds, often pushing or scaring off smaller or less bellicose birds in their eagerness to claim the larger share of seeds.

Did I mention they can also be loud, with a portfolio of shrill cries, metallic clicks and sounds effects? Good mimics, they sometimes imitate the calls of other birds, including hawks. To anyone listening, the variety of blue jay jabber seems endless.

In our part of the world, the blue jay is common. Other parts of the country have related, but differently marked and colored jays. Western states have Pinyon and Steller's jays. While their dress uniforms differ from our blue jay, their attitude and manners are much the same—that is, pushy, greedy and sometimes obnoxious with bullying ways.

Our common blue jay is a fairly large passerine (perching) bird. Physically, it is described as 9 to 12 inches long; bright blue on top and white-to-gray on its throat, chest and belly. It's markings are a gray-blue crest on its head and black-and-white bars on the wings and tail. The bill, legs and feet are black, and it sports a black "necklace" on its lower throat.

The blue jay is omnivorous—that is, eating fruit, acorns, seeds, nuts, insects, mice and frogs. Sometimes a blue jay will raid a nest for eggs and young birds, though its nest-robber reputation is bigger than it should be since studies show that such food is a very minor part of its diet.

Many trees and plants around the state are the result of blue jays burying food for later consumption, making them "accidental foresters." Like squirrels, they often bury food to eat later and some seeds and nuts are never recovered. The result is that some of the buried mast grows into plants or trees.

When mating time arrives each year, the mated female blue jay will lay four to six eggs in a nest made of sticks and twigs, and lined with grass. Nests are made in trees and shrubs, in secretive sites that are often very difficult to find.

The female incubates the eggs with some male help. The eggs incubate for about 17 days, and once hatched, both parents will feed the chicks.

To call blue jays "bullies" is accurate. Groups of blue jays will often attack intruders and predators. This writer can attest to their aggressiveness in protecting a nest site. Before we remodeled the façade of our home there was a wide ledge running across the front. A female jay chose that as her nest site, and after the chicks arrived we had to duck when leaving the house—the female would buzz us, even getting a jab or two delivered to show her displeasure.

Blue jays are also one of the more intelligent birds. They will wait and watch for a camper to put food down on a picnic table. As the person walks away, they will dive down and grab it. Along with crows, jays will also watch someone planting seed crops and dig up and eat the seeds when the gardener walks away. Forever opportunists, they are cunning in their thieving ways.

While jays do migrate, enough stick around to keep winter feeder antics lively as those "bullies in blue" swoop in again.

CO-OPS FIRST DELIVERED AFFORDABLE POWER TO RURAL AMERICANS 75 YEARS AGO. WHY STOP NOW?

October is Cooperative Month. And even though electric co-ops have been around for awhile, we're still finding new ways for you to save money. Visit michigan-energy.org to find out how little changes can add up.

MICHIGAN-ENERGY.ORG

Midwest In The Community

Midwest Energy, in cooperation with the Lewis Cass Intermediate School District and other community partners, put backpacks into the hands of 1,200 school-aged kids at the 2010 School Supply Spectacular event in August.

Volunteers stocked backpacks with age-appropriate school supplies and distributed them to local students who could not afford to purchase required supplies. Students from preschool through 12th grade were eligible. The day also featured free haircuts, dental screenings, Tri-County Head Start enrollment and bus safety, Angel Food Ministries, and Dowagiac and Cass District Library card enrollments.

A young man eagerly checks out the supplies in his new backpack.

Patty Wenger, a hair stylist from Dowagiac, provides a trim for a young man. Patty was one of a group of local stylists to volunteer their time for the School Supply Spectacular event.

Midwest Energy Offers Free Electric Safety Programs

One of our responsibilities as an electric utility is to teach people about the hazards of electricity, and it's a responsibility that we take very seriously.

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 taken for granted, and should not be treated lightly. It is critical that adults and children alike are aware of the potential dangers of electricity and know how to act accordingly.

Rich Drews, a Midwest Energy field technician, provides safety training using the Hot Line Demonstration trailer.

Midwest Energy offers electrical safety programs for schools, churches, civic groups, emergency response teams and other groups and organizations. 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 features a trailer equipped with 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 concerns in everyday situations.

For more information about our safety programs, or to schedule a presentation, please contact Nicole Barfell at 269-445-1112, or by email at nicoleb@teammidwest.com.

MISCELLANEOUS

BECOME AN ORDAINED MINISTER – Correspondence study. Founded in 1988. Free information. Ministers for Christ Outreach, 7549 West Cactus Rd. #104-207, Peoria, AZ 85381. ordination.org

FREE BOOKS/DVDs – Soon the "Mark of the Beast" will be enforced as church and state unite. Let the bible reveal. The Bible Says, POB 99, Lenoir City, TN 37771. 888-211-1715 thebiblesaystruth@yahoo.com

FARM WINDMILL – 30 feet high with direct stroke. 231-652-6363.

??WORK CLOTHES, GOOD, CLEAN – Rental type, 6 pants and 6 shirts, $44.95; lined work jackets, $10.95; denim jeans, $6. Call 800-233-1853. 100% satisfaction guaranteed. usedworkclothing.com

OUTDOORS

GARY'S STUMP GRINDING – Cheaper by the dozen. 800-870-3871 or 231-587-9296.

OUTDOOR WOOD BOILER – Kits and welded, from $1,295. 231-288-0066.

SAWMILL FOR SALE – $4,995, new portable band saw, saws 36-inch x 16-foot log. 231-288-0066.

NEW AND USED WOOD BOILERS – 888-825-0808. comfortableheating.com

REAL ESTATE

ATLANTA, ELK CAPITAL OF MICHIGAN – 3-bedroom home, 4-car garage and workshop attached. Approximately 275 x 125 foot lot, $21,000. Call 989-785-4110.

ATLANTA, ELK CAPITAL OF MICHIGAN – 3-bedroom, sunroom and balcony–top floor. 2-bedroom, 1 ½ bath, walk-in guest quarters, 20 x 40 foot pole barn, 300-foot stream frontage, bridge crossing, inland lake within 30 feet with fishing dock, boat included. Call 989-785-4110.

49 ORGANIC ACRES – 3 miles west of Traverse City, MI. M-72 frontage, 2-roads, house, farm buildings, appraised 2005, $730,000, asking $600,000. 517-663-5013.

10 ACRES, HOUGHTON COUNTY – Well, septic, fixer-upper, trailer optional. $30,000 or best offer, 906-523-4716.

200 FEET WATER FRONTAGE – Morley Pond fishing, Morley, MI. 313-386-0924.

ALCONA COUNTY 90 ACRES – Joins state land. Will sell all or 2 forties and 1 ten. Great deer and partridge hunting. 2 small hunting cabins, willing to lease. Please call 517-423-8316 or 517-263-5409, ask for Pete.

VACATIONS

KIAWAH ISLAND CONDO – Near Charleston, 170 yards to beach, 2 bikes, miles of bike paths, beautiful area. Winter rate $550/week $975/month. Call 989-725-7794 or email fredherring57@yahoo.com

WANTED

BUYING OLD WOODEN DUCK – Goose, fish, decoys. 248-877-0210.

BUYING GUN RELOADING EQUIPMENT – Bullets, ammo, gun parts, back stock and more. 517-623-0416.

Reach over 250,000+ households!

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Each initial, group of figures, phone number, abbreviation, email address and website address counts as one word. Hyphenated and slashed words count as two or more words. Ads are subject to editor's approval and editing. For member rate, attach your mailing label. To pay by credit card, include card number, exp. date, address related to the card and signature with ad. M/C or VISA only, please indicate which. Send your printed or typed ad and check made payable to MECA (advance payment required) by 15th of month prior to publication to: *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864, or email jhansen@countrylines.com. Call 517-351-6322, ext. 201, for more information. ***No classifieds accepted by telephone.***

Also, place order online at **countrylines.com**, and ads will be posted **FOR NO EXTRA CHARGE**

(Until the next issue of the magazine is published.)

Electrical Safety During Storms

Early fall can bring stormy weather. As a result, take precautions with your home's electrical system.

Keep in mind that storm debris can easily ignite if it comes into contact with downed power lines, especially when electrical wires are severed. Also, standing water and even appliances can become electrically charged.

Use these tips to keep safe after storms:

General Electrical Safety

▲ Never touch a downed power line. Call your electric co-op to report it immediately. Avoid contact with overhead lines during cleanup and other activities. Assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged.

▲ Be sure all electric and gas services are turned off before entering buildings for the first time.

▲ If water rises above the electrical outlets in your home, contact a licensed electrician before turning on your main circuit breaker. Outlets and wiring that contact with water could present a fire and shock hazard.

▲ Allow all electrical appliances and equipment, once submerged, to dry thoroughly. Have them checked by a qualified repair person before turning them on.

▲ Replace damaged extension and appliance cords, loose prongs or plugs.

Generator Safety

Portable electric generators are often put into use for temporary power. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions for installation and operation.

Use generators or other fuel-powered machines outside the home. Carbon monoxide fumes are odorless and can quickly poison you indoors.

Take special care not to overload the generator. Use appropriately-sized extension cords to carry the electric load. Make sure the cords have a grounded, three-pronged plug and are in good condition, and never run cords under rugs or carpets.

Never connect generators to another power source, such as power lines. The reverse flow of electricity can electrocute an unsuspecting utility worker.

Sources: U.S. Fire Administration, usfa.fema.gov; Consumer Product Safety Commission, cpsc.gov.

It Pays To Help Your Co-op Save Energy

Buying a new appliance can be an overwhelming task. Which brand is best? What features do I need? What will this do to my energy bills?

When it comes to your next water heater purchase, Midwest Energy Cooperative wants to take the confusion out of your hands.

We are pleased to offer a program that will put a high efficiency water heater in your home with only $100 out of your pocket. Comparable units are $400 or more at most retail stores.

The State Select® High Efficiency Residential Electric Water Heater offers a .93 efficiency rating. With 2.5-inch thick CFC-free foam insulation, heat trap nipples and other features, this unit meets stringent Energy Star® recommendations for efficiency. The product features a six-year limited tank warranty and a six-year warranty on parts. The elements carry a lifetime warranty.

Participate and pay only $100 for an energy efficient water heater.

Co-op members who are homeowners and use a minimum of 400 kilowatt hours a month can now purchase this high efficiency water heater for only $100 out of pocket when they participate in our load management program. Load management allows us to remotely control the electricity to your water heater. As a utility, we have periods of peak use during which customers are using a lot of power at the same time. Because energy supply charges from our power suppliers are based on monthly peak demand, all co-op members ultimately benefit when we can reduce peak use. We then pass those savings back to those participating in the load management program through a credit on their electric bill.

With this program, your water heater load management credit will be applied to the cost of your water heater for 66 months. After that time, you will receive the full monthly credit under the terms of the load management program. The monthly credit is $4 for a 50-gallon unit and $8 for an 80-gallon unit. Essentially, you pay only $100 for a brand new high-efficiency water heater, and begin pocketing a load management credit after 66 short months.

Water heater control does not exceed five hours a day, and occurs mostly between the hours of 3 p.m. and 8 p.m., when demand on the system is at its peak. The hot water stored within your insulated tank will remain hot for a long time.

Water heater units are available for pick-up between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. in the Cassopolis office, 3–4 p.m. in Paw Paw, and 3–3:30 p.m. in Adrian. For more information about this program or to see if you qualify, please call the co-op at 800-492-5989, or visit one of our offices.

...or pay only $50 combined with a $50 HVAC rebate!

The water heater load management offer, combined with the HVAC Program offered through Midwest Energy Cooperative's Energy Optimization Program could put a new water heater in your home for only $50!

The HVAC Program is designed to encourage residential members to install energy-efficient heating, cooling and water heating equipment. Co-op members are eligible for a $50 rebate in the form of a bill credit when they replace an existing electric water heater with a high efficiency (.93 or greater) electric water heater. Members must live in a single family dwelling in Michigan.

To claim the rebate, members must complete an incentive claim form and submit it with all required documentation. The form submitted must be for equipment purchased on or after Nov. 29, 2009. Claim forms are available on our website at TeamMidwest.com or by calling the office at 800-492-5989. Rebate incentives are subject to change and availability.

Energy Optimization

Claim Energy Tax Credits Soon

If you plan to take advantage of energy efficiency tax credits available under the federal stimulus bill, you'll need to do it soon. Qualifying projects include replacing windows, doors or roofs with materials that reduce your home's heat loss or gain; adding insulation; replacing certain air conditioners; and installing air-source heat pumps, hot-water boilers and biomass stoves.

"We want to make sure our members know about these tax credits and can take advantage of them before they expire on Dec. 31, 2010," says Bob Hance, Midwest Energy president/CEO. "This is an incredible opportunity for folks to invest in residential energy efficiency and see energy bill savings right away."

You can recover 30 percent (up to $1,500) of costs related to buying/installing heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and biomass stoves. Installation costs are not covered for windows, doors, roofing and insulation.

Energy Star® offers details on what qualifies for the credit at energystar.gov/taxcredits. Tax credits reduce, dollar for dollar, any taxes you owe.

"These are tough times, and we know it's important for our members to keep their monthly electric bills as low as possible," Hance adds.

The government also offers a renewable energy tax credit that expires Dec. 31, 2016. This covers 30 percent of materials and installation costs for solar panels, solar water heaters and geothermal heat pumps, for both new and existing homes. But check with Midwest Energy first for advice on what system makes sense for your home.

Keep your receipts and Manufacturer's Certification Statement (signed statement from the manufacturer certifying the product or component qualifies for the tax credit) for your records, then claim the credit on your 2010 taxes using IRS Form 5695.

Some electric co-ops and state government offices offer additional subsidies or rebates. A variety are available through Michigan's Energy Optimization Program (michigan-energy.org). For a list of state and local energy efficiency assistance, visit the "Database for State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency," at dsireusa.org. *– Magen Howard*

Survey Winners!

Ten Midwest Energy members saw a little bonus on their electric bills after winning a $100 energy credit for completing the 2010 customer usage survey. The winners were randomly drawn from nearly 3,000 surveys submitted by the Aug. 20 deadline.

Winners were Don Bazant, Three Rivers; Arthur Earl, Lawton; Michael Guinn, Clayton; Jeffrey Hippensteel, Dowagiac; Richard Huffman, Edwardsburg; James Magyar, Bristol; Esther Mead, Decatur; Gary and Kathy Moore, Hartford; Norman Peters, Adrian; and Lloyd Shafer, White Pigeon.

The survey gives us valuable information about your overall energy use, which allows us to better help you when you have questions about your use or need more information or resources. As always, we encourage you to call us any time your usage or personal contact information changes.

Thanks to everyone who took time to complete the survey!

Viva La Branche!

The new GM releases its new electric Chevrolet Volt this fall. If it catches on like many predict and hope, it will be a boost to our state's economy and a welcome move forward in the quest for a cleaner environment.

Will the Volt become the latest darling of our car culture? Will it generate the passion that followed the Corvette, Mustang, Camaro, or even the Prius? Will *you* buy one?

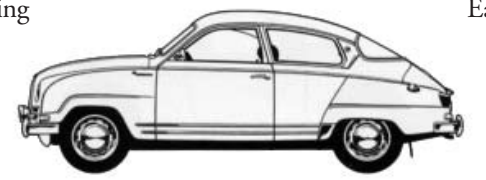
At a cost of $41,000 and up, less a $7,500 federal tax credit, the Volt won't be the 'people's car.' The prospect of being able to drive 40 miles on battery power alone is enticing, but if your daily drive requires you to travel longer distances, when the gas motor will have to kick in to recharge the batteries, you might not see the value.

The Volt is a cool-looking car. It has nice lines, enough space for average families, and all the latest gadgets.

But I'm sure it doesn't have backseat rear armrests that can each hold a six-pack like my parent's first car—a 1950 two-door Studebaker. (Don't ask.) Nor will it have the cavernous interior room of my first car, a 1948 Plymouth four-door sedan. When I bought it from my future father-in-law for $100, it was already 15 years old and needed an engine overhaul. You'd think Larry would have sold me a more road worthy car since I was dating his daughter. A friend showed me how to take the engine apart and put it back together. I've found working on cars, especially old ones, to be a relaxing and satisfying pastime ever since.

The Volt certainly won't match my favorite car, a banged-up, baby blue 1963 Saab 96 we bought in 1973 to replace a wrecked Volvo 122S. The Volvo was my first new car, solid, dependable and a great road car. The Saab, well, it probably was solid when it was new, too. After all, it was made by the company that made Sweden's military jets. With a two-stroke, three-cylinder engine, it certainly was unique. Pouring a can of oil in the gas tank with every fill-up was a sure way to cause a lot of weird looks from other motorists. With it's streamlined body and a gizmo that let you freewheel down hills, the car was a miser on gas. Getting 42 miles to the gallon during the mid-70s oil crisis was great. Plus, I was back in school, and later couldn't get a job during a recession much like this one. We depended on Barbara's new teaching job for food.

My job was to keep that car on the road. We lived in married housing on the Michigan State campus. The car didn't like to start on cold mornings, so I would have to push the car from the open driver's side door down a slight incline, jump in and pop the clutch to start it. The car was warmed up for Barbara when she was ready to leave—what a treat. Of course, sometimes she got there first, tried to start the car, and then ran up to the apartment yelling for me to get the blasted thing running.



Can a Chevy Volt be as lovable as a 1963 Saab 96?

I still wonder how we got through that first teaching year.

On a trip back from Ironwood in the summer of '73, on the M-69 'shortcut' between Crystal Falls and Escanaba, the Saab blew its head gasket. That's pretty much like a heart attack. The coolant that keeps the engine operating at the appropriate temperature leaks into the cylinders, and since water and anti-freeze don't help the combustion process, the engine dies.

There we were, on a quiet road in the middle of empty countryside, stranded. My sister's boyfriend was riding with us back to East Lansing, so, while Barbara drove, he helped me push the relatively light car a mile down the road to La Branche, which largely consisted of the La Branche Tavern.

We went into the bar to see about using their phone to call a wrecker, although finding anyone able to actually fix that Saab seemed remote. Then the boyfriend said, "sorry," but he needed to get back today, and he left to hitchhike a ride.

So, Barbara and I sat at the bar and explained our predicament to the owner. A few seats away was a thin, long-haired, bearded guy in a plaid shirt and jeans, a Viet Nam veteran. He heard our sad story and said he might be able to help.

He was a motorcycle mechanic and had tools in his truck. Maybe he could seal the head gasket tight enough for us to get back to East Lansing. Better yet, I said, this is basically a motorcycle engine, and I have a head gasket in the trunk. (Apparently, blown head gaskets were a common problem in these cars and the previous owner kept a spare!)

In the middle of a hot Sunday afternoon in August, the motorcycle mechanic vet got his tools out and helped this Air Force vet remove the head, clean off the old gasket, put in the spare, torque the bolts, and refill the radiator. We were done in two hours. The engine spit and sputtered for a few moments and then took off with its regular popcorn popper sound.

After grabbing a sandwich in the bar and buying our savior a beer and a meal—he wouldn't take anything else—we were on our way. I learned only a few years ago, when I mentioned this event at an annual meeting of Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association, that our hero's name is Jack Fisk. I've always hoped to see him again and buy him another beer, although the La Branche Tavern is gone.

Now GM has dumped Saab, which it bought a few years ago, to concentrate on its core business, which now includes the Volt. I'm sure it will be dependable, but it could never be as lovable as that quirky Saab.

Mike Buda, editor emeritus of Country Lines, has a 1951 Chevy pickup that needs a lot of attention.

Email Mike at mbuda@countrylines.com or comment on his columns at countrylines.com/column/ramblings/

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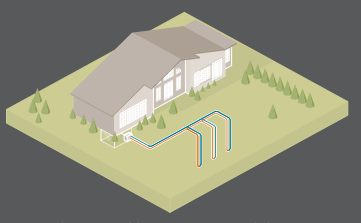

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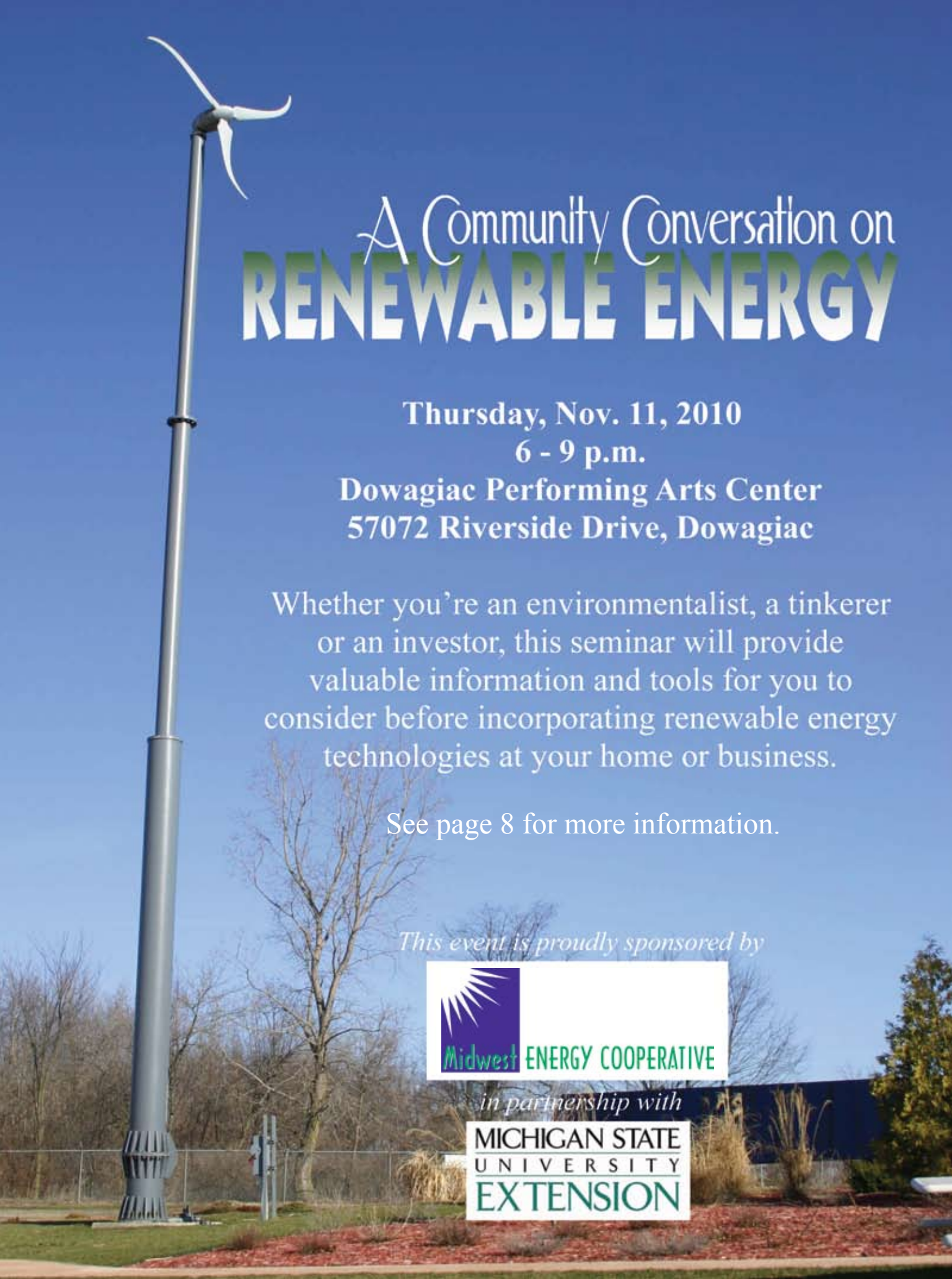
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