

A SERVICE OF MIDWEST ENERGY COOPERATIVE

January 2011

MICHIGAN Country Lines



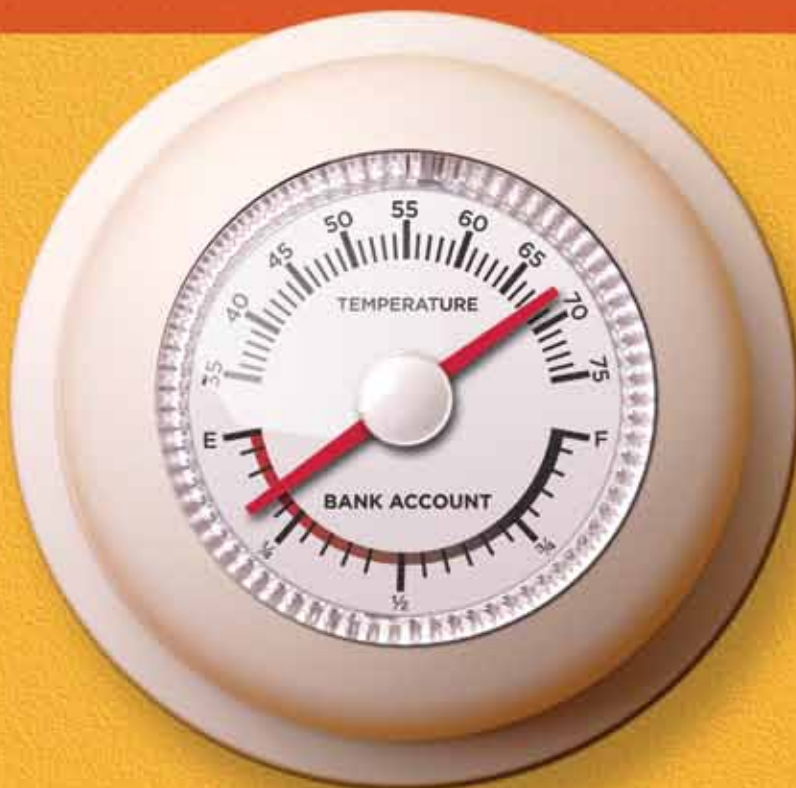
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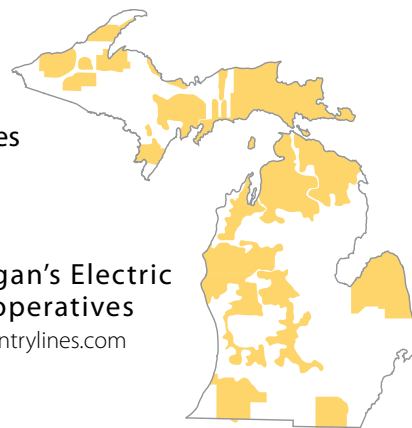
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Michigan's Electric
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countrylines.com

On the Cover

Rebecca Lessard works with Bella, a peregrine falcon at the Wings of Wonder raptor sanctuary.

Photo – Andree Magsig, drephotography.net



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Midwest Energy Cooperative

We Make a Difference In Our Community

It was part of the crowd on that cold November morning—a mere spectator to the action that was about to unfold. There were 20

or more people crammed into a small kitchen space in the Decatur home of Steve and Jaime Stone-McEnaney, all eager to see the looks on the family's faces as they realized what our Home Energy Makeover team had been up to that morning while they were conveniently away from the house.

The only thing missing was Ty Pennington and his now-famous mantra, "Move that bus!"

Your electric co-op took on an amazing project earlier this summer. The Midwest Home Energy Makeover was designed to implement measures to increase the overall energy efficiency of an existing home, and then share the experience, methods and results with other members to encourage more people to follow suit.

The project combined proven technology with tried-and-true methodology, and was very successful, as you will see from the story on page 28 of this issue. But the story is so much bigger and better than the measures implemented. Under the leadership of a team of Midwest employees, a community came together to support one of its own. And I would venture to say that every person involved, from the six family members who occupy the home to the many volunteers and partners who provided gifts of time, service and support, came away somehow changed for the better by the experience.

I've been involved in a lot of good stuff during my 36-year tenure in this business. The electric utility industry is a dynamic field, especially as it relates to technology, providing those of us on the inside with the opportunity to be

on the cutting edge of some really cool stuff. But at the end of the day and at the end of my career, I want to know

that *we* made a difference, and somehow encouraged others to do the same.

The Home Energy Makeover project was just one of many great service projects that we were involved with during 2010. Volunteerism and "giving back" has become a part of our corporate culture at Midwest, to the degree that our team gave more than 800 hours back to the community

through active service and outreach over the last year. Why do I share this? Because it's good stuff. Important stuff. In some cases, like our Home Energy Makeover, life-changing stuff.

Utilities carry an unfortunate reputation as being big, bureaucratic machines offering an overpriced commodity with minimal concern for customer service and satisfaction. Through our actions, we strive to create a different experience for our members, both in terms of your regular interactions as a customer, and in the way you think of us. We want to deliver reliable energy services with top-notch customer care. That's what we're about. And I believe what we provide adds great value to your life.

But we want to do more, and that's where our outreach efforts come in. We want to make a difference to the individuals and communities we serve—to make them better and stronger. In 2010, Midwest employees were hands and feet to people all over our service territory, supporting youth, seniors, people who are sick, and people in need. Service delivery at Midwest goes beyond poles and wires, and I hope you take pride in the fact that this cooperative—*your* cooperative—is making a difference.



Robert Hance
President/CEO

Midwest In The Community



The inaugural Midwest Energy Cooperative **Pajama Rama** for Homeless Education aimed to heighten awareness and raise donations for homeless students in all Lenawee County Schools.

Our goal to deliver this message to every community began early in 2010 and culminated with a one-day collection and celebratory event at Adrian Mall in October. Many businesses, organizations and individuals partnered to make this event a huge success by bringing in over \$13,000 in financial contributions and gift cards. Additionally, several thousand

dollars worth of goods were donated, including new socks, underwear, pajamas, back packs, sleeping bags and hygiene products.



Teaching Energy

Seventeen teachers representing 14 Michigan schools recently participated in a day-long energy education workshop hosted by Midwest Energy Cooperative. The workshop was presented by Todd Rogers, a certified energy manager and northeast regional director for the National Energy Education Development Project (NEED).

NEED is a Virginia-based organization that works with state and local partners to provide energy education to teachers and students nationwide. The program helps educators implement energy programs in their classrooms while developing student knowledge and leadership skills.

"This is a great, hands-on learning opportunity for teachers, and Midwest Energy is happy to help make it available," says Bob Hance, president/CEO. "What makes this program unique and particularly effective is that each student is provided with an energy efficiency kit to take home and install with their families. This gives them a real sense of ownership in the process and positions them to become a key link in educating about energy use and affecting change in their own homes."



Employee Appreciation Dinner

Twenty employees were recognized recently for a combined 310 years of service. Pictured (front, left to right): Steve Bella, 10 years; Scotty Borah, five years; Kathy Tucker, five years; Dixie Teague, 25 years; Patti Clymer, 20 years; Terry Rubenthaler, 15 years; Jim Haas, 10 years; Steve Hunsberger, 15 years; Stacy Campbell, 10 years; (back row): Nicole Barfell, five years; Pam Hemenway, five years; Ray Welburn, 40 years; Karen Smith, 15 years; Dirk Adam, 25 years. Not pictured: Jenna Kniss, five years; Andy Badner, 10 years; Chad Ritchie, 15 years; Mike Burrell, 15 years; Pam Myers, 25 years; Bob Beardslee, 35 years.

The event also celebrated employee volunteer efforts for 2010. Jennifer Gilliam was recognized as Volunteer of the Year for contributing 25.5 hours at eight events. In total, Midwest employees volunteered 882.5 hours of their time through 24 different community service opportunities.



Rob Wright, Edwardsburg Middle School, and Theresa Schwartz, Plainwell High School, learn how radiant energy converts to electrical energy in photovoltaic (solar) cells.

Lt. Gov. Calley Talks With Co-op Directors, Managers

Brian Calley (R-Portland), Michigan's new lieutenant governor, visited with the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association (MECA) board of directors in December to share insight on the plans of incoming Gov. Rick Snyder.

"Republicans have a lot to prove to people," Calley said, but added that he believes their politics match with Snyder's philosophy. Quoting from the Bible, Calley said that means "treat others the way you want to be treated."

"Bad tactics burn bridges and make the state's problems more acute," he explained, saying that we now have an opportunity with Snyder to build a team of the best people from both sides of the state and political aisles.

Calley particularly lauded Snyder's choice of former Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus as a senior advisor. Snyder's agenda will be aggressive and he's already given his team six-month timelines on some projects.

As to the state's "leaky ship" budget (a \$1.6 billion hole), Calley said Snyder has a 10-point

turnaround plan and will take measures that pay for results instead of just activities, while holding people accountable for the use of taxpayer dollars. Snyder wants to propose solutions that will fix the budget beyond the current year and will start by working early to change and simplify the Michigan Business Tax to a flat 6 percent of business profits.

Over 4,600 people took the state's retirement incentive, Calley said, saying it's a good chance to make changes, but 90 percent of those vacancies will not be filled.

Another plan is to make a government that provides good customer service to people, believing that the system now shies away from making decisions. Snyder, an Ann Arbor businessman, intends to "employ the same principles of business to government, but the difference will be there's no profit motive," Calley said.

On energy policy, Calley said utilities have been given a lot of input and Snyder will be "trying to get the MPSC and energy policy under control."



New MECA President and CEO Craig Borr is pictured (L-R) with Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, MECA lobbyist Sue Schlaybaugh, and Brian Burns, MECA board chairman and president/CEO of Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op.

Scholarships Offered

Each year, the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association awards two \$1,000 scholarships to qualifying applicants. Individuals are chosen based on their scholastic achievement and extracurricular involvement during their high school career.

The applicant's parent or guardian must be a member or employee of a Michigan electric co-op, and the applicant must be planning to attend a Michigan college or school full-time.

Selection will be based on grade point average, character, leadership, academic achievement, extracurricular and community activities, and essay response.

Applications are available

at countrylines.com; click on "Youth," email wolford@countrylines.com, or call 517-351-6322, ext. 205. Eligible applications must be post-marked by April 4, 2011.

MYSTERY PHOTO

Everyone who identifies the correct location of the photo below by **Feb. 10** will be entered in a drawing for a **\$50 coupon redeemable for electricity from your electric cooperative.**

Call in your entry to *Country Lines* at 517-351-6322, ext. 306, email jhansen@countrylines.com, or mail it to *Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, 48864. Include your name, address, phone number and co-op. The winner will be announced in the March 2011 issue.

The **Nov./Dec.** contest winner is **Vickie Severance of Hessel**, who correctly identified St. Anthony's Rock in St. Ignace.



Do you know where this is? ▶



Recycled Paper

Michigan Country Lines is 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 that required to make paper from pulp.

The Value of Electricity A dollar's worth can get you:



Sources: U.S. Department of Energy; National Rural Electric Cooperative Association



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Thanks & Giving

We have the opportunity to work the 4th Friday of the month at the East Side Soup Kitchen in Saginaw, and I am amazed at the ability of Pam Cole and her staff to find and provide food for approximately 250 to 400 people a day, five days a week. It's a humbling experience.

You've written a great article ("Thanks & Giving," Mike Buda, Nov-Dec); hope you are enjoying your retirement.

—Karl DeSimpelare, Unionville

Muncie Lakes Pathway

If only the Muncie Lakes Pathway was as majestic as you made it sound ("Our First Snow Trail," Don Ingle, Nov-Dec). The person who wrote the article has obviously not been there recently. No one would want to walk or ski there with the way it looks now. Logging trucks and men cutting the forest down is what you would see. The devastation and slaughter of our local forests for the Cadillac biomass plant has taken it all away from us.

For the public's safety, I advise to stay away from the Pathway. Who was it that sold out our forests here and on the other side of the Boardman River down Brown Bridge Road?

—Joan Costley

Contrary to the letter writer's opinion, I have observed the Muncie Lakes Pathway's current status. In response to her complaints, I offer these observations:

► *As part of the Pere Marquette State Forest, the area is managed for many purposes. One is to create small openings (savannas) of prairie-like habitat that support many animal and plant varieties, including rare or threatened species.*

► *Thinning of older, weaker or diseased oaks helps prevent the spread of oak wilt, a disease that continues to kill thousands of oak acres in Michigan's northern forests.*

► *Muncie Lakes Pathway itself is well-buffered; hikers or skiers will have no obstacles to their use and it remains much the same as before recent forestry efforts.*

► *The timber removed and sold puts money back into the state coffers to pay for many forestry and fire protection programs. The tops are chipped, removed and sold to biomass consumers to produce cleaner, green energy, again adding to needed state revenues and leaving the savanna areas as places to find greater biodiversity within the forest.*

The early stages of forest harvests may seem negative, but a return to view the same areas within a few years will show the dynamic ability of the managed forest to restore itself.

For now, the skier or hiker will find Muncie Lakes Pathway open for business as usual this winter.

—Don Ingle

Dan Bonner Lives On

My name is Dan Bonner—the LIVING Dan Bonner and 59-year-old son of the Dan Bonner about whom Mr. Ingle wrote in his article, "Our First Snow Trail" (Nov-Dec 2010).

Words are such feeble expressions about how touched me and my mother (his widow) and my siblings were upon reading this wonderful tribute to my

father!! Especially after all these years! Dad died in October 1979.

Most of our family still lives near Traverse City...and we enjoy hiking and skiing these trails that Dad left behind for ALL the people. I think often of the great legacy he left the people of Michigan with these beautiful wilderness areas and activities.

Mr. Ingle's tribute is a great gift to Dad's memory and our family. I could not let his tribute to Dan Bonner Sr. go unacknowledged by a grateful family.

—Dan Bonner Jr.

Recycled Paper

I enjoy receiving your magazine filled with many good ideas and tips for saving energy. I like the fact that you are continually looking for ways to insure that consumers receive the best and most efficient energy possible, and are making a concerted effort to listen to your customers.

I wrote a letter to the editor that never got published in your magazine. And, each time I receive your magazine I am made aware that you are eco-friendly by using recycled paper to print it on. I am as dedicated as the next person when it comes to saving the environment...however, I want to know why you have to go to Chicago to get the waste paper for this? It seems a large waste of expenses when Michigan is starving for jobs, new industries and economic development. If we do not have the capability in our own state for recycling paper products, might I suggest that you look into creating one? A joint effort with local towns, Chambers of Commerce, and a willing work force could reap benefits for years to come.

I would like to know your thoughts on this and your response to why we go out-state to buy paper for the magazine.

—Patricia Donegan, Stanwood

You raise good questions, however, if the kind of recycled paper needed for the magazine were produced in Michigan we'd probably buy it.

Unfortunately, paper manufacturing is an extremely competitive business on an international scale and we don't have the expertise or money to get involved in that arena. The recycled paper business is especially brutal, and we were lucky to find one as close as Chicago.

As to reader letters, we try to use as many as possible, but there isn't always space to print and still keep the content timely.

—Ed.

Idea for Keeping Warm & Saving Energy

I would like to have a message written for those people that will be suffering with cold homes this winter...I have found that wearing a small, lightweight ski cap to bed can keep me very much warmer and comfortable. I also very often wear a cap during the day. Unless you have tried this, you will not think it a great idea.

I think it would be a great idea to introduce to schools, too...the heat could be turned down another 5 degrees if the children wore hats and they would still be comfortable and at the same time saving on the school's heat bill.

Of course, at first, most of you are going to laugh and howl, but the schools know how to introduce these things. Maybe the principals, teachers and helpers could start the trend. A fancy, expensive ski hat is not needed...I got two at \$1 a cap. They were a smaller size, but you only need to cover the top of the head. And no, I don't think you will lose your hair—I have not.

My reason for writing this is, I am quite sensitive to the cold and think of the families that are not going to have much heat this year AND the children AND the schools' higher heat bills.

I realize there would have to be some or a lot of organization within the schools, but once this idea is introduced and people see the sense in it I am sure organizations would gladly give to this cause.

I find it one of the greatest comforts of my winter days.

—Carolyn Laarman

Tell us about your favorite Michigan-made products!

Share a few paragraphs with us about your favorite Michigan-made product and we may write about it. Be sure to share why you like it and if you have a unique story to go with it, please send that, too. Email by March 10 to czuker@countrylines.com or send to: Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Road, Okemos, MI 48864.



Teens, You could win a trip to Washington, D.C.

If you're a 10th or 11th grade high school student who will be 16 or 17 by June 2011, and your family receives electric service from Midwest Energy Cooperative, you are eligible to apply. You may be selected to attend **Co-op Teen Days** and then be considered to **win a free trip to Washington, D.C.**

Applications are available online at TeamMidwest.com, or contact Nicole Barfell at 800-492-5989, ext. 1112, or nicoleb@teammidwest.com.

Learn more about the programs at countrylines.com, and click on "Youth." Also check out **YouthTour.coop** to see videos and photos.

Michigan Electric Cooperative Teen Days

Tustin, MI
April 27-29

Rural Electric Youth Tour

Washington, D.C.
June 11-16



Your Touchstone Energy[®]
Cooperative 

A New Year Brings Big Changes at Country Lines

Change is inevitable.” I don’t know who first said that, so I looked to Google for the answer and received 25,900,000 possible results. No help there. Then I looked it up in a book of famous quotations. Nothing.

Either way, this often-used phrase now applies to me. After 15 years at *Country Lines* and the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association (MECA), this will be my last “Comment” as I am leaving in early January to take up a position with another energy company.

I have spent the last few weeks going through files and sharing information with others in the office and my successor to ensure that they have the history of the many legislative and regulatory “battles” we have fought on behalf of the electric cooperatives and you, their members.

Working Together Statewide

Working through MECA, the cooperatives have successfully:

- held down utility costs by reducing personal property taxes applicable to electric utility property;
- held down electric rates by insuring that the state’s recently adopted Michigan Business Tax did not unfairly impact your cooperative;
- reduced the impact of customer choice legislation so that the cost to your cooperative for implementing the program was minimal;
- fought the state tax commission’s efforts to increase the cooperatives’ property taxes, which saves our cooperatives almost \$1 million;
- saved our cooperatives more than \$1.8 million when we blocked a Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) plan to advertise and promote customer choice for residential customers when no real choice existed;
- worked to protect cooperatives from losing service area to other utilities, which would result in higher costs to cooperatives;
- worked to ensure that the state’s renewable energy and energy efficiency standards recognized that cooperatives are different than other utilities (nonprofit, customer-owned).

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



- passed legislation in 2008 that allows each cooperative to decide whether to continue regulation under the MPSC or become “member-regulated” by their locally elected board of directors.

On the Federal Level

In Congress, we weighed-in on issues including:

- greenhouse gas regulations;
- continuation of Rural Utilities Services lending programs; and
- promotion of rural economic development and progress.

Through This Magazine

Over the last 15 years we have also made substantial changes, all for the better, to *Michigan Country Lines* magazine so that our cooperatives can continue communicating with you for about the cost of a first-class stamp.

For Safety and Service

Our loss control and safety program employees have spent thousands of hours training your cooperative’s lineworkers, all with a commitment to keeping these crews safe and keeping the lights on.

I am proud of our accomplishments, and there are dozens of other examples where “working together” has led to better service, a safer working environment, and savings for your cooperative and ultimately, your wallet.

As for my successor, the MECA board of directors has selected Craig Borr (see below) to take over the helm at MECA. He is an excellent choice, with an extensive background in the electric utility industry. Craig has over 26 years of utility and, most importantly, cooperative utility experience to draw on and has worked side-by-side with me on many legislative and regulatory issues in Lansing and in Washington, D.C.

Although change is inevitable and I have no doubt MECA will change over the next 15 years, one commitment will not—the commitment to work for the cooperatives’ benefit, and through them for the benefit of their member-consumers—that’s you!

Take care.

Craig Borr is New Co-op Leader

Craig Borr will be the next president and CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association (MECA), which publishes *Michigan Country Lines* magazine.

“Craig’s strong leadership and in-depth knowledge of the industry, Michigan’s electric cooperatives, and the political front in Lansing and Washington, D.C., make him the ideal person to lead the association,” said Brian Burns, chairman of the MECA board of directors.

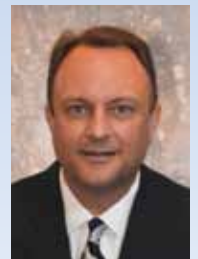
Borr, who starts this month, is currently the executive vice president of Wolverine Power Cooperative, in Cadillac. Wolverine is the state’s only generation and transmission cooperative and is owned by and supplies wholesale electric power to its six members, including four distribution co-ops (Cherryland, Great Lakes Energy,

HomeWorks Tri-county, and Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op).

In his 25-year career with Wolverine, Borr was actively involved in all aspects of the utility business, with a concentration on public policy and regulatory issues over the last several years.

Borr has a degree from Central Michigan University, and was chosen unanimously by the MECA board.

MECA is the statewide service organization for Michigan’s 11 electric co-ops, which provide electricity to the homes, farms and businesses of over 600,000 people in rural areas covering one-half of the state.



Who's your Legislator?

► **Find Your State Representative**
at house.mi.gov

The 35 representatives shown are members of a House of Representatives that swung to a Republican majority of 63-47 with the November election—a 20-seat swing. Most of them developed their political skills in local government, which has proved to be the natural stepping-stone in this era of term limits.

Whatever their background, most represent districts with large rural populations—areas where electric co-ops serve. Several of the

representatives are electric co-op members themselves; 25 were elected for the first time in November.

Legislation affecting cooperatives and their owners most likely originates in those committees covering utilities, energy, transportation, environment, land use, safety, or taxes. Find a list of committees and their chairmen, members and schedules at house.mi.gov and senate.mi.gov (see p. 12 for information on senators).

Ontonagon



110th District (R)
Matt Huuki
1st Term
517-373-0850

Thumb



83rd District (R)
Paul Muxlow
1st Term
517-373-0835



84th District (R)
Kurt Damrow
1st Term
517-373-0476

Presque Isle



105th District (R)
Greg MacMaster
1st Term
517-373-0829



106th District (R)
Peter Pettalia
1st Term
517-373-0833



107th District (R)
Frank Foster
1st Term
517-373-2629

Alger Delta



108th District (R)
Ed McBroom
1st Term
517-373-0156



109th District (D)
Steven Lindberg
3rd Term
517-373-0498



110th District (R)
Matt Huuki
1st Term
517-373-0850

Midwest



55th District (R)
Rick Olson
1st Term
517-373-1792



57th District (R)
Nancy Jenkins
1st Term
517-373-1706



59th District (R)
Matt Lori
2nd Term
517-373-0832



61st District (R)
Margaret O'Brien
1st Term
517-373-1774



63rd District (R)
Jase Bolger
2nd Term
517-373-1787



78th District (R)
Sharon Tyler
2nd Term
517-373-1796



80th District (R)
Aric Nesbitt
1st Term
517-373-0839

Cloverland



107th District (R)
Frank Foster
1st Term
517-373-2629



108th District (R)
Ed McBroom
1st Term
517-373-0156



109th District (D)
Steven Lindberg
3rd Term
517-373-0498

Cherryland



101st District (R)
Ray Franz
1st Term
517-373-0825



104th District (R)
Wayne Schmidt
2nd Term
517-373-1766

HomeWorks



65th District (R)
Mike Shirkey
1st Term
517-373-1775



67th District (D)
Barb Byrum
3rd Term
517-373-0587



70th District (R)
Rick Outman
1st Term
517-373-0834



71st District (R)
Deb Shaughnessy
1st Term
517-373-0853



87th District (R)
Mike Callton
1st Term
517-373-0842



93rd District (R)
Paul Opsommer
3rd Term
517-373-1778



97th District (R)
Joel Johnson
1st Term
517-373-8962



99th District (R)
Kevin Cotter
1st Term
517-373-1789



102nd District (R)
Phil Potvin
1st Term
517-373-1747

Great Lakes



70th District (R)
Rick Outman
1st Term
517-373-0834



73rd District (R)
Peter MacGregor
1st Term
517-373-0218



74th District (R)
David Agema
3rd Term
517-373-8900



87th District (R)
Mike Callton
1st Term
517-373-0842



88th District (R)
Bob Genetski II
2nd Term
517-373-0836



89th District (R)
Amanda Price
1st Term
517-373-0838



90th District (R)
James Haveman
2nd Term
517-373-0830



91st District (R)
Holly Hughes
1st Term
517-373-3436



100th District (R)
Jon Bumstead
1st Term
517-373-7317



101st District (R)
Ray Franz
1st Term
517-373-0825



102nd District (R)
Phil Potvin
1st Term
517-373-1747



104th District (R)
Wayne Schmidt
2nd Term
517-373-1766



105th District (R)
Greg MacMaster
1st Term
517-373-0829



107th District (R)
Frank Foster
1st Term
517-373-2629

Who's your Senator?

► Find Your State Senator
at senate.mi.gov

The 2010 election saw the Republicans take a 26-seat majority in the Michigan Senate. The new faces include 13 in co-op service areas. All are former representatives. Only one, Gretchen Whitmer, is a Democrat.

The senators on this page represent districts that overlap electric co-op service areas. Although electric co-op issues are but a small part of their overall responsibilities, they have generally been supportive of the co-op agenda, which rests on the premise that as self-governed, member-owned and not-for-profit utilities, co-ops and their members ought to be treated differently than for-profit utilities.

Thumb



31st District (R)
Mike Green
1st Term
517-373-1777

Alger Delta



38th District (R)
Tom Casperson
1st Term
517-373-7840

Ontonagon



38th District (R)
Tom Casperson
1st Term
517-373-7840

Cloverland



37th District (R)
Howard Walker
1st Term
517-373-2413



38th District (R)
Tom Casperson
1st Term
517-373-7840

Cherryland



35th District (R)
Darwin Booher
1st Term
517-373-1725



37th District (R)
Howard Walker
1st Term
517-373-2413

HomeWorks



22nd District (R)
Joe Hune
1st Term
517-373-2420



23rd District (D)
Gretchen Whitmer
2nd Term
517-373-1734

Presque Isle



36th District (R)
John Moolenaar
1st Term
517-373-7946



37th District (R)
Howard Walker
1st Term
517-373-2413

Great Lakes



24th District (R)
Rick Jones
1st Term
517-373-3447



28th District (R)
Mark Jansen
2nd Term
517-373-0797



30th District (R)
Arlan Meekhof
1st Term
517-373-6920



33rd District (R)
Judy Emmons
1st Term
517-373-3760



34th District (R)
Geoff Hansen
1st Term
517-373-1635



35th District (R)
Darwin Booher
1st Term
517-373-1725



36th District (R)
John Moolenaar
1st Term
517-373-7946



37th District (R)
Howard Walker
1st Term
517-373-2413



24th District (R)
Rick Jones
1st Term
517-373-3447



32nd District (R)
Roger Kahn
2nd Term
517-373-1760



33rd District (R)
Judy Emmons
1st Term
517-373-3760



35th District (R)
Darwin Booher
1st Term
517-373-1725

Midwest



16th District (R)
Bruce Caswell
1st Term
517-373-5932



20th District (R)
Tonya Schuitmaker
1st Term
517-373-0793



21st District (R)
John Proos
1st Term
517-373-6960

Who's Afraid of an Empty Nest?

Have you noticed? So few parenting moments unfold the way we picture them (aided by Hollywood and Madison Avenue, of course).

Those well-groomed magazine mommies snuggling with sleeping newborns? Forget about it.

Pre-teens chatting happily with their parents over a hot breakfast? Ha!

Cheerful children singing their way cross-country in a spotless mini-van? (Actually, group singing did erupt once in our not-so-spotless minivan. It was in 1998, and it still warms my heart. But I digress.)

I shouldn't wonder, then, that the "empty nest" has not matched its hype. With apologies to my children, whom I love very much, I am not experiencing what Wikipedia calls a "lonely, abandoned feeling."

This, I understand, is not a universal experience. Google "empty nest" and you'll find 713,000 sites offering explanations and advice. Clearly, many, many parents struggle when their children leave home for good.

As holiday visits wind down and we send our adult children out the door with extra-tight hugs and a sigh of relief, I'm reflecting on our comparatively smooth transition out of 24/7 family life. I can't match the advice by real experts—online and otherwise—but I can tell you what has worked for us.

Prolong your parenting as long as possible.

Stretch childbearing over more than a decade, and by the time your last baby trudges off to college, you'll have shared space with your progeny for nearly 30 years. That's a long time to be laundering socks and wondering where your hairbrush went. The relief of reclaimed liberty will soften the blow of being left behind.

If you lacked the foresight to plan ahead, don't despair. Delightful delays are still possible. Our favorite has been a serendipitous daughter who moved into our home two days after our youngest moved out, propelled there for her senior year by a confluence of



circumstances beyond her control. You might also encourage your children to befriend international students for whom travel home is not an affordable option.

Multiply your options.

If delay tactics aren't possible, encourage adult children to enhance the impact of their visits home. So far, we've acquired a new daughter and two terrific sons through marriage. This option has had the added benefit of adding—joy of joys!—three tiny offspring to the crowd that gathers for all major holidays and occasional weekends. Compounding this solution with the aforementioned "prolonged parenting" effectively emptied our nest of playthings and picture books for roughly 13 minutes—short enough to avoid any serious brush with the blues.

Which reminds me—hang on to as much stuff as you can. It's hard to feel a void when, even after the exodus of permanent residents, your nest remains not all that empty. This is much easier to accomplish than you might imagine. If your kids are like mine, they'll leave behind piles of detritus.

Only one phenomenon threatens this strategy. Each time a child departs—and I've confirmed this with other left-behind parents—you might experience an extraordinary urge to purge, sort, clean and restore a sense of order to your world. It's commonly held that a "nesting" impulse propels soon-to-be parents into a frenzy of preparation for the new arrival. However, this "reverse nesting" is not widely discussed.

And, why not? There's something deeply

satisfying about rediscovering the furniture and carpet that was buried for years under clothes, collections, shoes, shin guards, Oreo crumbs, spilled milk and (dozens and dozens of) folded notes...

Except... about three garbage bags and a half-bottle of disinfectant into the task, memories start to surface. You toss aside a high-school textbook (with a vow to return it to the taxpayers) and uncover a photo from that once-in-a-lifetime trip you chaperoned. You move a bookshelf and there he is—that little Lego® astronaut you haven't seen since second grade. All of a sudden, it hits you—it's not just stuff you're sorting. It's the remains of a life into which you've poured your heart and soul.

So, you move a little more carefully through the task. You discard the smelly, damaged goods, and display the loveliest pieces on newly polished shelves. You tuck away out-grown hobbies to share one day with your child's own child. You capture memorable moments into a photo collage. All in all, you distill 18 years of cluttered and untidy living into what you hope is a tribute to the journey you've shared.

At some point, you suspect you've reclaimed more than just a room in your house. Memory by memory, order arises out of the chaos that defines the process of parenting teenagers. You sweep away frustration, discard tired arguments, showcase what's lovely, and wrap a ribbon of meaning around decades of frenetic activity.

Keep at it long enough and you find, to your surprise, the nest feels not so much empty, as ready for a reunion with someone you've loved for a long, long time.

Linda Wacyk
is a regular *Country Lines* freelance writer, educator, grandmother and content empty-nester.



A woman with short grey hair, wearing a dark blue jacket, blue jeans, and tan boots, stands in a large wooden aviary. She is holding a large turkey vulture by its wings. The bird has dark feathers and a pinkish-red head. The aviary has a wooden floor and walls made of vertical wooden slats. The ceiling is made of wooden planks. The text "Wings of Wonder" is written in a large, stylized, brown font with a white outline, positioned in the lower right area of the image.

Wings of Wonder

Rebecca Lessard, of Wings of Wonder raptor sanctuary, holds Doolin, a turkey vulture that serves as an ambassador raptor by accompanying her to educational presentations. She says he entertains audiences and wows them with his curious personality (he liked the photographer's boot laces) and good looks.

Rebecca Lessard smiles when she is referred to as “the Mother Theresa of the raptor world.” But there are few who would disagree with the difference she is making with her nonprofit Wings of Wonder sanctuary as she rehabilitates 45 to 75 birds of prey each year.

“When I started 20 years ago, my intent was to rehabilitate three to four raptors each year...sort of my contribution to the planet,” says Lessard, who lives between Traverse City and Empire, just off M-72 in Leelanau County. Power to the Lessard property is supplied by Cherryland Electric Cooperative.

“But the universe had other intentions and that first year I admitted 12 injured raptors, which required additional flight enclosures to be built by my husband,” she explains. “Now, we not only rehabilitate raptors, we also present 150 educational programs each year, with live raptors, to schools, camps, libraries, clubs and community organizations, reaching 9,000 people.”

Lessard’s degree is in biology and she specialized in working with mammals. But 20 years ago a friend came to her with an injured red-tail hawk.

“I didn’t particularly want to work with it, but a veterinary friend offered to help,” she says. “As soon as I had that red-tailed hawk in my arms, I was hooked.”

She did an internship at the Minnesota Raptor Center, then applied for mandatory state and federal permits to rehab raptors.

“I convinced my husband Don to build me one flight pen where the birds could fly,” she says.

That was in 1990. Twenty years and 13 flight enclosures later she and her birds are flying high, even though a controversial legal struggle between Wings of Wonder and the Leelanau County Road Commission “may force us to close,” says Lessard.

This legal challenge—involving a road that runs right past the bird enclosures—has also put extreme financial pressure on the small nonprofit organization. Money that could have been used towards surgery for an injured bald eagle or a peregrine falcon has now been used to pay legal bills. Scholarship money that could have provided raptor programs to local schools is now gone because of the mounting legal bills. Wings of Wonder is only one of three dedicated raptor rehabilitation and education centers in Michigan.



Photos - Andree Magsig, deepphotography.net

Eoin (pronounced “Owen”) is a 21-month-old great horned owl. A leg injury incurred as a tiny chick resulted in a permanent disability that keeps her from being returned to the wild. Eoin gets to live her life at Wings of Wonder sanctuary, where fresh rodent is “served” daily. She will also work as an educational ambassador.

Lessard has an impressive resume when it comes to treating raptors. She holds rehabilitation and possession permits from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. She was cited with the 2007 Northern Michigan Environmentalist of the Year Award in Education and was also presented with the President’s Award by the Michigan Audubon Society.

But she never lets the awards take her focus off the birds, 10 of which Lessard calls “ambassador raptors.”

“They have permanent disabilities which prevent their release back into the wilds,” she says. “So they live here at Wings of Wonder and help us educate people. They are part of the many programs we put on during the year. They will finish out their lives here... working as ambassadors for their species as well as being foster parents for the orphaned baby raptors we admit annually.”

Wings of Wonder operates with a three-person board of directors. Lessard is subcontracted by the nonprofit to work four hours a day, seven days a week.

“I donate the other 13 hours a day,” she says with a smile. “That’s my contribution.”

Besides keeping the raptors healthy, keeping them fed is another challenge. She has a separate small building near the birds where packages of mice, crickets and quail—purchased downstate—are kept in freezers.

If the raptors require more medical attention than Lessard can administer by herself, there are nine veterinary clinics from Petoskey to Cadillac that provide services for Wings of Wonder.

Of course, caring for injured birds can be dangerous, and she has suffered her share

of injuries—the most serious when an injured eagle’s talon went through her glove and pierced her little finger.

But she tends to forget about the challenging days and focus on the moments she savors.

“On a nice day, I may stop all my chores and get an ambassador raptor out on a glove and we go for a hike in the woods,” she says. Well, really Lessard does the hiking while the raptor rides on her gloved hand. “It is an amazing experience to go for a hike with a raptor,” she adds. With keen eyesight that can see at least eight times better than a human, they observe much more. “Many times when I’m out with Pearl, my red-tailed hawk,” she continues, “I will notice her keenly

interested in the canopy of a tree. When I follow her gaze, I will spot what attracted her attention...a porcupine perhaps or a raccoon snoozing on a tree branch.” Without Pearl, Lessard says she would have walked right on by. “It’s just another of the many blessings I receive from working with raptors,” she says.

Besides providing homes to hawks, falcons, owls, turkey vultures and other birds of prey, there is an occasional eagle that is treated and released.

During a warm November day, Lessard watches an eagle being rehabilitated as it flies back and forth in the sanctuary’s 100-foot long flight pen, which measures 17.5-feet high and 16 feet wide.

“This eagle will be released next week out on Old Mission Peninsula,” she says. “We invite the public to all of our raptor releases. It is not unusual to have 1,000 people attend an eagle release.”

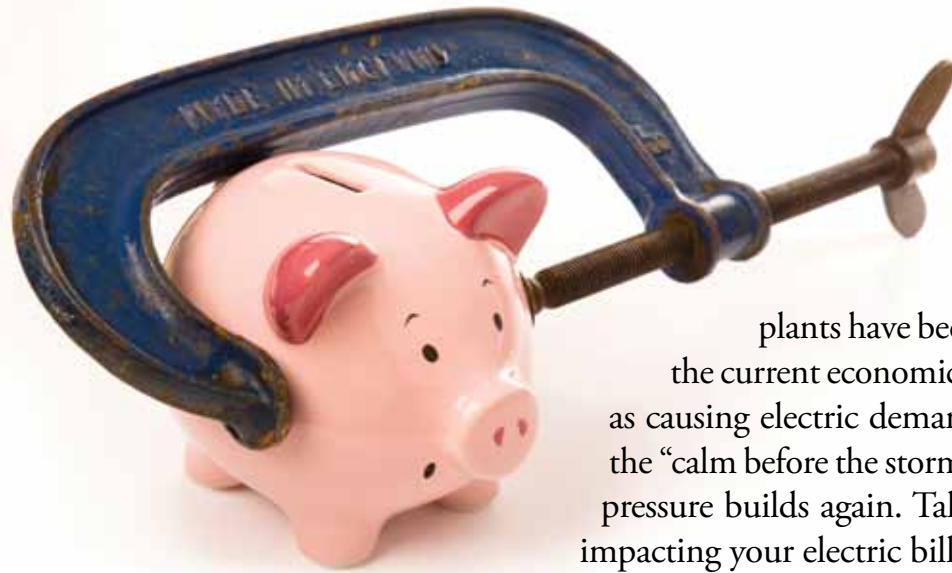
The Wings of Wonder sanctuary is not open to the public, per law, but tours are available by appointment only. And, between Lessard’s busy schedule of doing the tours and educational programs, the public gets plenty of chances to see the birds.

“These birds have an amazing will to survive,” Lessard says in awe. “I try to provide rest, good food, the right medications, a safe environment and plenty of time to recover. They do most of the work...I just try and not get in their way toward making a full recovery.”

Opportunities are also available to adopt a raptor and sponsor its care for a year by calling Lessard at 231-326-4663, sending an e-mail to wow@wingsof wonder.org or visit their website, wingsof wonder.org.

Prices Under Pressure

Co-ops work to keep electric bills affordable as energy challenges grow.

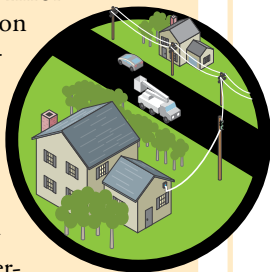


Electric co-ops are caught in a high-pressure situation. New government regulations, rising fuel and materials costs, escalating demand for electricity, and required investments in both adding generation as well as upgrading existing power plants have been climbing over the last decade. While the current economic downturn released some steam—such as causing electric demand to dip—this respite may just mark the “calm before the storm” when financial fortunes rebound and pressure builds again. Take a closer look at the pressure points impacting your electric bills:

1. Growing Electric Demand

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) predicts that by 2030 residential demand for electricity will increase between 16 percent and 36 percent above 2007 levels. Historically, co-op demand rises faster than the industry average—before the recession hit, co-op sales increased by 4.4 percent while industry sales only increased 2.6 percent between 2006 and 2007.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicts industry demand will rebound by 5 percent in 2010 and estimates that with strong economic growth, electricity prices will jump 19 percent by 2035. However, the forecaster fails to factor in the added costs of complying with new federal regulations aimed at curbing emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, from power plants.



2. Added Regulation

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will begin regulating greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, this month—an action made possible by a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Massachusetts v. EPA*) that gave the agency a green light to consider imposing such controls. In late 2009, EPA declared that six greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, “endanger the public health and welfare” of current and future generations.

Although carbon dioxide measures crowd headlines, the cumulative impact of new federal mandates for handling coal ash, water, and limiting hazardous air pollutants along with state (and perhaps federal) requirements for renewable energy generation could become a much more expensive hurdle.

During the past 20 years EPA has used the federal Clean Air Act to slash nationwide emissions of nitrogen oxides, which contribute to smog, by 54 percent, and cut acid rain-causing sulfur dioxide emissions by 42 percent. That’s an impressive reduction, considering electricity use rose 64 percent over the same period. However,

proven technology existed to achieve those results—something not currently available for removing carbon dioxide and other areas under scrutiny.

“The Clean Air Act as written was never designed to deal with carbon dioxide, and it could be awkward at best and probably a disaster, at worst,” warns Glenn English, CEO of the Arlington, VA-based National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

“We’re entering an era where regulatory activities are going to play a more significant role in the electric industry than what happens on the legislative front,” asserts Kirk Johnson, NRECA vice president of energy & environmental policy, noting that Congress has debated climate change policy for over a decade without reaching a clear consensus. “Environmental statutes that have been on the books since the 1970s, especially the Clean Air Act, are like a one-way ratchet: they only tighten.”

Tighter emissions standards could have a multi-billion dollar impact on the cost of doing business for electric co-ops, adding more pressure to electric bills.

3. Need for New Power Plants

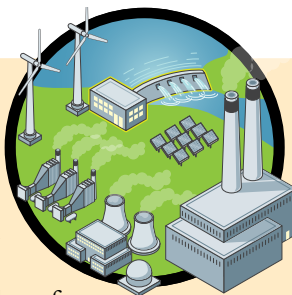
Even as new regulations are announced, utilities must be ready to make quick decisions on moving forward with power plants to meet growing electricity demand—especially since the number of operating plants may start to fall, not rise.

“Because of these new rules, we’re expecting a number of current power plants to go offline and retire,” predicts Johnson. “The cost to comply with the rules may simply be too much.”

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), which oversees the reliability of the bulk power system covering the United States and most of Canada, estimates that by 2017 peak demand for electricity will jump 135,000 MW—equivalent to the current amount of power used by the entire western half of the nation. Planned new generation resources will only provide another 77,000 MW, far short of the amount of energy Americans will need.

Co-ops are working hard to relieve some of this pressure and delay the need for new plants through energy efficiency programs. Most co-ops offer energy efficiency education, but many take this a step further; 77 percent provide residential energy audits while 49 percent offer financial incentives for members to make efficient choices. But these measures can only go so far.

“When the economy turns around, co-ops will resume growing faster than other electric utilities,” remarks English. “We’ve got to be ready for that development and have new power plants planned and largely ready to go. However, co-ops must first know how carbon dioxide and other rules could impact the price of power to make prudent decisions.”



4. Cost of Materials

Every year that investments in new power plants are delayed jacks up the final price tag. Worldwide, steel prices soared 42 percent between 2009 and 2010 while costs for other construction supplies like nickel and concrete jumped as well.

Materials costs for distribution co-ops are also climbing. Prices for copper, a critical raw material used for wire and to ground electrical equipment, reached a 27-month high at the end of 2010. Between 1990 and 2010 in the north-central part of the nation the price tag on

utility poles, towers and fixtures skyrocketed 98 percent while line transformers spiked 154 percent.

“Electric co-ops have an obligation to keep the lights on and electric bills affordable at a time when the costs for fuel and raw materials to build new generation are steadily rising,” acknowledges English. “Combined with costs of additional regulatory compliance, these are just some of the pressure points that will affect electric bills in years to come—all of which are largely beyond the control of local co-ops.”

Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, “2009 Annual Energy Outlook”; North American Electric Reliability Corporation, “2010 Special Reliability Scenario Assessment”; Cooperative Research Network, “Handy-Whitman Index of Public Construction Costs”; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Steel Market Update”

Megan McKoy-Noe
writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



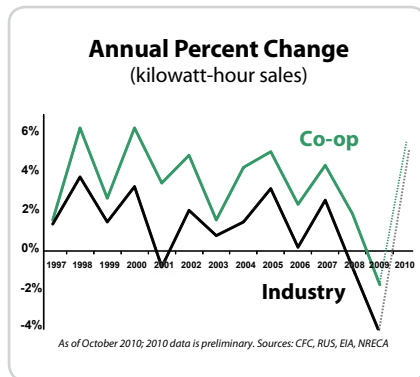
Power Use Largely Mirrors Overall Economy

For a quarter-century America’s electricity consumption climbed steadily, making it fairly easy to forecast and plan for power needs 10, 20, or even 30 years down the road. That changed in December 2007 with the first signs of a recession.

As the nation’s economy slowed, electricity sales dropped 0.8 percent in 2008 and another 4.2 percent in 2009—the greatest single decline in six decades. Commercial and industrial use was hit the hardest. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), net power generation nationwide in 2009 sank below 2004 levels. Electric co-ops primarily serve residential members so the downward trend wasn’t as severe, but it was still apparent.

“With the economic recession affecting electricity demand, forecasts of future demand have resulted in greater uncertainty for both short- and long-term planning horizons,” states a 2010 report from the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, an organization charged with overseeing reliability of the United States’ electric grid.

Further illustrating uncertainty, EIA released two different forecasts for the next 25 years hinging on the nation’s economic growth—predictions that don’t take into account the cost of impending federal regulations to curb carbon dioxide emissions from power plants.





sausage

recipes

Enjoy these recipes sent in by readers with smoked, bulk, Polish, Italian and kielbasa sausage. Find hundreds more recipes at countrylines.com.

Sausage Potato Soup

1 lb. link sausage, Italian works well
6 med. potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 lg. onion, chopped
1 c. chopped carrots
3 ribs celery, chopped
3 c. water
1 c. milk
1 can cream of chicken soup, undiluted
8 oz. cream cheese

Brown link sausage; cut into bite-sized pieces and set aside. In a saucepan, combine potatoes, onion, carrots, celery and water; bring to a boil and cook until tender, about 30 minutes. Add sausage and any brown bits from the pan, milk, soup, and cream cheese. Heat and stir well until cheese dissolves. If desired, thicken soup with a roux of butter and flour.

Mari Beswick, Baldwin

Kapusta

1/2 lb. bacon
1 lb. ground beef, optional
2 8-oz. pkgs. fresh mushrooms or 8 oz. can mushrooms
2 med. onions, diced
1 15-oz. can diced or crushed tomatoes
1/2 c. beef stock
salt and pepper to taste
1 lg. can sauerkraut, drained and rinsed once
5 lb. head cabbage, shredded
2-3 sticks kielbasa, cut in chunks

Cut bacon into 1/2-inch pieces; fry crisp. Do not drain. In another pan, brown ground beef; drain liquid and add to bacon. Stir in mushrooms, onions, tomatoes, salt, pepper and beef stock; simmer for 15 minutes. In a large roaster pan, combine sauerkraut and cabbage. Add sauce with meat; mix well. Cover and bake at 350° for 1 hour. Reduce heat to 300° and bake 2 hours longer; stirring occasionally. Add kielbasa during the last hour of baking.

Marilyn Eaton, Lake

Sausage Soup

12 oz. Polish sausage, fully cooked
16 oz. can stewed tomatoes
1 1/2 c. water
10 pkg. frozen cut okra or cut green beans, optional
1 t. dried thyme leaves
1/4 t. garlic powder

2 t. hot sauce
1 c. cooked rice or minute rice

Cut sausage in half lengthwise; then cut into 1/2-inch pieces. Place all ingredients in a large saucepan. Cook over medium heat until heated through, about 15-20 minutes. Serves 4.

Linda Larner, Central Lake

Sausage Stuffing Balls

1 lb. ground sausage, any flavor
1 6-oz. pkg. stuffing mix, any flavor
3/4 c. cranberry sauce
1 egg
1 c. water
2 T. melted butter

Cook sausage in a large skillet until cooked through, stirring often; drain. Transfer meat to a large bowl; cool slightly. Stir in dry stuffing mix. Add cranberry sauce, egg and water; mix well. Shape into 16 balls; place on a baking sheet. Brush evenly with butter. Bake at 325° for 20 minutes until brown.

Mary Waterbury, Fenton

Buttermilk Biscuit Sausage Pinwheels

1/4 c. shortening
2 c. flour
1 t. salt
1 T. baking powder
1 c. buttermilk
1 lb. bulk pork sausage

Combine flour, salt and baking powder; cut in shortening. Add buttermilk; mix. On a lightly floured surface, knead

dough for a few seconds. Roll out into a 9x13-inch rectangle. Spread uncooked sausage over dough. Roll up, jelly-roll style, starting from the short side. Cover and chill in refrigerator 1 hour. Cut roll into 1/2-inch slices. Place slices on a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake at 425° for 20 minutes or until lightly browned. Serve with maple syrup, if desired.

Annie Miller, Manistee

Spicy Beans & Sausage

1 lb. smoked sausage, halved lengthwise and cut in 1/2-inch pieces
1 16-oz. can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
1 15 1/2-oz. can great northern beans, rinsed and drained
1 15-oz. can black beans, rinsed and drained
1 1/2 c. frozen corn
1 1/2 c. salsa

1 lg. green pepper, chopped
1 lg. onion, chopped
1/2-1 c. water
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 t. ground cumin

In a 5-quart slow cooker, combine all ingredients. Add enough water to fill cooker halfway. Cover and cook on low 5-6 hours or until meat is tender. Stir before serving.

*Doreen Lawrence,
St. Clair Shores*

Summer Sausage

4 lbs. ground beef
1 c. water
3/4 t. onion powder
3/4 t. garlic powder
1 1/2 t. mustard seed
1 1/2 t. ground peppercorns
1 1/2 T. liquid smoke
5 T. Morton's Tender Quick® salt
1 t. hickory salt

Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl. Divide into four equal parts. Shape each quarter into a roll shape. Wrap each in tin foil, shiny side out. Refrigerate 24 hours. Leave wrapped securely in foil; place in boiling water and boil for 1 hour. Cool, rewrap and refrigerate or freeze for later use.

Ester Crawford, Niles

Mediterranean Pasta Sausage

1 lb. Italian sausage links, casings removed
1 26-oz. can Hunt's® Roasted Garlic and Onion Spaghetti sauce.
1 2.25-oz. can sliced black olives; drained
1 16-oz. pkg. frozen cut leaf spinach
4 c. uncooked penne pasta
3 c. shredded mozzarella cheese divided

Cook pasta according to package directions; drain and keep warm. Cook sausage in a large non-stick pan over medium-high heat for 5-7 minutes until crumbled and no longer pink; drain. Stir in sauce, olives and spinach; heat through. In a large bowl, combine meat sauce with hot pasta; toss until well coated. Coat a 9x13-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Pour in half of the pasta mixture; top with half the cheese; repeat steps. Cover with foil and bake at 350° for 20-30 minute until cheese is melted.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

Cheesy Sausage Peppers

2 16-oz. jars whole pickled jalapeño peppers or 18 fresh
16 oz. shredded cheddar cheese, divided
1 lb. pork sausage
1 1/2 c. biscuit baking mix
3 eggs lightly beaten
2 envelopes pork flavored seasoned coating mix

Cut each jalapeño in half lengthwise; remove seeds and stems. Stuff each half with about 1 tablespoon cheese. In a bowl, combine the uncooked sausage, biscuit mix and remaining cheese; mix well. Shape about 2 tablespoonfuls around each jalapeño half. Dip into eggs; roll in coating mix. Place on a baking sheet coated with nonstick cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 35-40 minutes or until golden brown.

Arlene Yoder, Scottville

Deep Dish Pizza

Crust:

1 pkg. yeast, (2 1/4 t.)
2/3 c. warm water
2 c. flour, divided
1/4 c. oil
1 t. oregano
1 t. basil
1 t. marjoram
1/2 t. garlic powder
1/2 t. onion powder

Toppings:

4 c. mozzarella cheese, divided
diced onion
thinly sliced mushrooms
1 lb. ground sausage
1/2 t. oregano
1/2 t. basil
1/2 t. marjoram
1 28-oz. can diced tomatoes, well drained

Dissolve yeast in warm water. Add 1 cup flour, oil, oregano, basil, marjoram, garlic powder and onion powder; mix well. Add remaining flour; knead for 6 minutes. Place dough in a greased bowl; let rise 1 hour. Transfer dough to a greased 9 x 13-inch pan; spread crust across pan and up the sides. Sprinkle crust with 1 cup mozzarella cheese. In a fry pan, sauté sausage, onion, mushrooms, oregano, basil and marjoram; drain. Stir in tomatoes; pour over cheese. Sprinkle 2 more cups cheese over sauce. Bake at 400° for 20 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining cheese; bake 10-15 minutes longer. Let sit 5-10 minutes before cutting.

*Mary Ellen Wynes,
Mt. Pleasant*

Jambalaya

1 T. olive oil
16 oz. kielbasa, cut in 1/4-inch rounds
1 28-oz. can whole tomatoes
1/2 c. water
1 8-oz. box jambalaya flavored rice mix
1 lb. shrimp, peeled and deveined
1/4 t. hot pepper sauce, optional

Heat oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add kielbasa; cook until browned. Add tomatoes in their liquid and water. Crush tomatoes with the back of a spoon. Bring mixture to a boil; add rice mix, reduce heat; cover and cook for time specified on rice package. Add shrimp; stir, cover and cook about 5 minutes, until shrimp are pink. Stir in pepper sauce if desired and serve.

Mary LaFleur, Bellaire

Stuffed Portabella Mushrooms

1 lb. Italian sausage
1 lb. ground turkey
2 T. Worcestershire sauce
1/4 c. semi-dry white wine
3 t. minced garlic
1/4 c. Italian bread crumbs
2 med. eggs
1/2 c. grated Asiago or Parmesan cheese
4 lg. portabella mushrooms

Cook sausage and turkey in a large skillet until brown; drain. Mix remaining ingredients, except mushrooms with the meat mixture. Divide mixture into 4 portions. Remove stems from mushrooms and fill each mushroom with mixture. Place mushrooms, stuffing side up, on a baking sheet. Bake at 350° for 20 minutes. Serve mushrooms whole, as an entrée or slice into wedges for appetizers.

Eva Braganini, Mattawan

▶ **Send in your recipes!** If published, you'll receive a kitchen gadget. Send in: **BUDGET FRIENDLY recipes by Jan. 10**, **CHEESE recipes by Feb. 10** and **MARSHMALLOW recipes by March 10**. Mail to: Country Lines Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email jhansen@countrylines.com.

Remembering an Outdoor Friend

Time, it's said, is a great healer. It's also a great thief that robs us in many ways as our age increases; but the worst theft of all is that of losing old friends.

This writer lost an old friend this November—one I'd shared trout streams and grouse coverts with for decades. Art Underwood of St. Ignace left family and friends after a long bout with illness—and leaves a big void in the lives of many of us who shared the outdoors with him.

Of all the members of our long-time trout fishing club with whom I shared decades of opening days by the Au Sable River, Art Underwood and I had the longest span of friendship—one that began as undergrads at Michigan State in the '50s. By another coincidence, we shared birthdays only a week apart in February.

We also shared a love of fly-fishing and bird hunting, along with good friends who also grieve his passing.

After college we worked in scattered places; Art went to UPI wire service employment in Chicago and Michigan, eventually as chief of the UPI Lansing Bureau, while I headed west and freelanced magazine articles to publications in California, Chicago and Colorado while playing trumpet in jazz bands to help pay the bills.

On returning to Michigan, it was mutual friend Whitey Sawyer, then sports editor of the *Muskegon Chronicle*, who brought us back together for 37 following years in our Grayling fishing camp. It was a funny moment at that first reunion when, after a long time span and a change in bulk and beards, we suddenly recognized each other across a camp dinner table.

Art was a natural story teller and would usually have a small circle of other campmates gathered around as he spoke on almost any subject that came up. He was well-read and knew a lot about most things, and in our circles he was the unofficial 'guru.'

Art was also a member of the Camp Socrates Grouse Hunt Club held at my cabin near Baldwin and members of that club have also expressed their sadness at the loss of our hunting companion.

In my scrapbook there is a page from the MSU newspaper. In the top left ('above



Trout camp - An ailing Art Underwood (seated, center) at one of his last visits to his longtime trout camp is surrounded by fishing buddies of up to 40 years of shared openers. Art passed over Thanksgiving in his home at St. Ignace after several years of increasing illness. He leaves family and a great number of outdoor companions behind.

the fold,' I often kidded him) is a picture of myself at a piano going over the score for the annual Red Cedar Water Carnival for which I was musical director; and in a small brief below was the announcement of Art's selection to be the next year's editor. It was one of the few times I was one-up on Art.

Since reconnecting those many years ago, Art and I shared some great rambles together. Once when I was visiting him, he decided to give me the grand tour of some of his favorite backwoods niches.

We visited a small trout stream on the Pine River that was hidden within dog-hair spruce and cedar thickets and was his favorite place to fish the runs of pink salmon. It was also part of a federal hatchery where Lake Superior lake trout are reared for replanting in Lake Michigan where the original lakereels were wiped out by overfishing and lamprey. It was also the best place to buy a pastie or smoked whitefish.

Wes Maurer, publisher of the *St. Ignace News*, enticed Art to come out of retirement to work for him as a reporter from 1998 to

2003, and Art had lost none of his skill as a wordsmith.

Earlier, the St. Ignace City Council named May 24 as "Art Underwood Day" in recognition of his many services to the community and local causes, including chairing the St. Ignace Planning Commission for eight years and helping to develop the county's 9-1-1 emergency service.

Art's long days of illness, weekly hospital visits, and absence from the streams and coverts he loved are now over. As will his many friends, this writer will sorely miss that big "Huggy Bear" and our circle of outdoor companions are poorer for his passing. Art's gone on to fish loftier streams.

Don Ingle
is an avid outdoorsman
and award-winning
outdoors writer that
submits regularly for
Country Lines.



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Rolling Shutters Improve Windows' Efficiency and Safety

Having windows in your home that are still in good condition but are not the most energy efficient is common. If good-quality windows were installed within the past decade, they should last a very long time with little maintenance. This is particularly true for windows with vinyl or thermally broken aluminum frames. Windows with pultruded fiberglass should practically last a lifetime.

Although rolling window shutters offer many advantages in addition to energy efficiency, there are other lower-cost options to also consider.

Installing magnetically-attached acrylic interior storm windows is one relatively low-cost option to improve efficiency.

Some of the new low-emissive permanent window films save energy year-round. They are nearly clear, and you can install them yourself. Both of these options also block much of the sun's fading ultraviolet (UV) rays. Installing insulating window shades or curtains is also effective.

Adding rolling shutters on the exterior of your windows improves efficiency and also offers security and storm protection. These shutters are commonly used in coastal hurricane zones.

The actual energy savings from installing rolling shutters depends on the type of window glass you have and, to a lesser extent, the types of slat in the shutter. If your house has double-pane windows, adding the shutters will about double the insulation value of the windows. With single-pane windows, the efficiency increase will be even greater.

You can get an additional energy savings during summer because the rolling shutters also block direct heat from the sun's rays through the windows. The shutters can be lowered to any position to allow in only as much light (and heat) as you desire. When



Photo: Rollac Rolling Shutters

completely lowered over the window, they block nearly all of the light.

Rolling shutters are extremely strong and secure because they operate similarly to a rolltop desk. Narrow slats roll up into a box housing above the window. The ends of each slat slide in vertical tracks on each side of the window, making them very secure and relatively airtight when fully closed. The slat itself provides insulation, as does the dead air space created between the shutter and the window glass. In cold climates, this also reduces indoor window condensation problems.

If you want security and privacy but also light and ventilation, slightly raise the rolling shutter. The bottom of the shutter will not rise but the slats will separate, slightly exposing the interlocking flanges between them. Many of the shutters are designed with narrow slots in the flanges, which allow some light and fresh air to filter in.

Roll-formed metal, plastic or extruded aluminum are used to make the slats. All are suitable for most areas. The extruded aluminum

slats are the strongest and most expensive, and are often used on shutters for large windows. The roll-formed metal slats can be filled with foam insulation for higher efficiency and rigidity. Check your local building codes for required materials and strength.

An important feature to consider is how the rolling shutter is opened and closed—usually with a pull strap, a crank handle or an electric motor. Keep in mind, if your shutters are inconvenient to use, you will not close them as often as you should.

For most small- to average-sized windows, a pull strap is easy to use and inexpensive. Large shutters or ones made from heavy gauge aluminum may be easier to operate with a hand crank. Electric motor operators are most convenient, but also more expensive.

If the pull strap or crank is indoors, there will have to be a hole in the wall connecting it to the outdoor housing. This will allow a slight amount of air leakage. An electric motor operator will eliminate the need for a hole.

The following companies offer rolling window shutters: AC Shutters, 800-745-5261, acshutters.com; Roll-A-Way, 800-683-9505, roll-a-way.com; Rollac Shutters, 888-276-5522, rollac.com; and Wheatbelt, 800-264-5171, rollupshutter.com.

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

James Dulley
is a nationally recognized
mechanical engineer
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"Vinegar Can Do What?"



(By Frank K. Wood)

If you want to discover inexpensive alternatives to hundreds of costly products, you need *The Kitchen Table Book: 1,427 Kitchen Cures and Pantry Potions for Just About Every Health and Household Problem*, an informative new book just released to the public by FC&A Medical Publishing® in Peachtree City, Georgia.

Your refrigerator alone could be holding more healers than the drug companies' billion-dollar labs! You won't believe what you can do with baking soda, bananas, and so much more!

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Energy-Saving Boxes: Too Good to Be True?

Most of us think we're too smart to fall for a scam. Yet, every year, thousands of folks are separated from their hard-earned dollars by putting their faith and trust in another person's sales pitch.

There's no shortage of hucksters pretending to help consumers save energy. These types of scams generally center on misstatements of science or confusion over an electric utility's energy efficiency programs.



The most popular scam right now involves a device that promises to save energy without requiring you to make any changes in behavior, turn anything off, or adjust the thermostat. People who sell these "little boxes" often claim outrageous energy savings—sometimes as much as 30 percent or more—couched around legitimate utility terms like power conditioning, capacitors and power factor.

The marketing spiel usually goes something like this: "The model being sold will control alternating current power factor and reduce electric bills. It will condition your power and make appliances last longer. It uses no power and has no moving parts. It will make motors in your home run better."

Accompanying materials often caution, "Your utility doesn't want you to know about this device." That last part is true—but only because these boxes are a rip-off.

What's the reality? While electric co-ops use various components to correct power factor for commercial and industrial consumers, power factor correction is not a concern with homes.

Engineers at the University of Texas-Austin concluded that one of the units could produce no more than a 0.06 percent reduction in electric use in an average house.

The Electric Power Research Institute, a

Palo Alto, CA-based nonprofit research group made up of electric utilities, including electric cooperatives, recently tested one of the most popular residential power factor correction products and found that it generated average power savings of just 0.23 percent—far from the 30 percent claimed by its manufacturer. At that rate, it would take a typical homeowner more than 70 years to recoup his or her investment.

In short, these devices are nothing more than ordinary capacitors used to store energy or differentiate between high- and low-frequency signals. Since capacitors are already at work in your co-op's infrastructure and in many of your home's electronics and appliances, there is very little savings to be gained.

Companies selling the "little boxes" change names quickly and often, and move from town to town looking for new victims. There are several questions you should ask a sales representative when reading an ad for the next magical cure-all:

Does the product violate the laws of science?

For example, does it claim to be capable of "changing of the molecular structure ... to release never-before tapped power." If true, the invention would quickly be sold in every store across the nation, not marketed through fliers or a poorly designed website.

Was the product tested by an independent group?

If the performance of the product was not tested and certified by a lab or entity not connected to the company selling it, be very skeptical.

Is it too good to be true?

If so, it probably is. A video getting play on the internet shows a consumer reporter for a TV station testing one of these little boxes. By looking at electric bills before and after installation, he concludes the device is a good buy. However, an excessively hot or unusually cool day can cause one month's electric bill to run significantly higher or lower than the previous month. Wise consumers always ask to see electric use for the same month from the previous year(s), not previous month, and factor in weather anomalies for any savings claims.

What Is Power Factor?

Power factor is the ratio between the electricity we use (real power) and the amount of electricity a utility provides (apparent power), expressed as a number between 0 and 1. The average home in Michigan has a power factor of 0.95, or 95 percent. This means even if an electrical system isn't performing at its best (1, or 100 percent), utilities deliver extra power to make sure consumers get what they pay for. When power factors come in below 1, special equipment like capacitors are used to keep an electrical system in balance.

Real World Example:

Let's say you ordered a drink at a restaurant, and when it arrived the glass was overflowing. You only ordered a 12 oz. drink, but the waiter poured a bit extra to make sure the cup was full. You're not charged for anything that spills over the rim, just like you're not charged for the extra power that your co-op delivers to make sure you're getting what you pay for.



Brian Sloboda
is a program manager
specializing in energy
efficiency for the
Cooperative Research
Network



College Scholarships



High school seniors whose parents or guardians currently receive monthly electric service from Midwest Energy Cooperative, and whose primary residence is in Midwest's service area, may apply for one of the four

\$500 college scholarships to be presented in spring 2011.

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

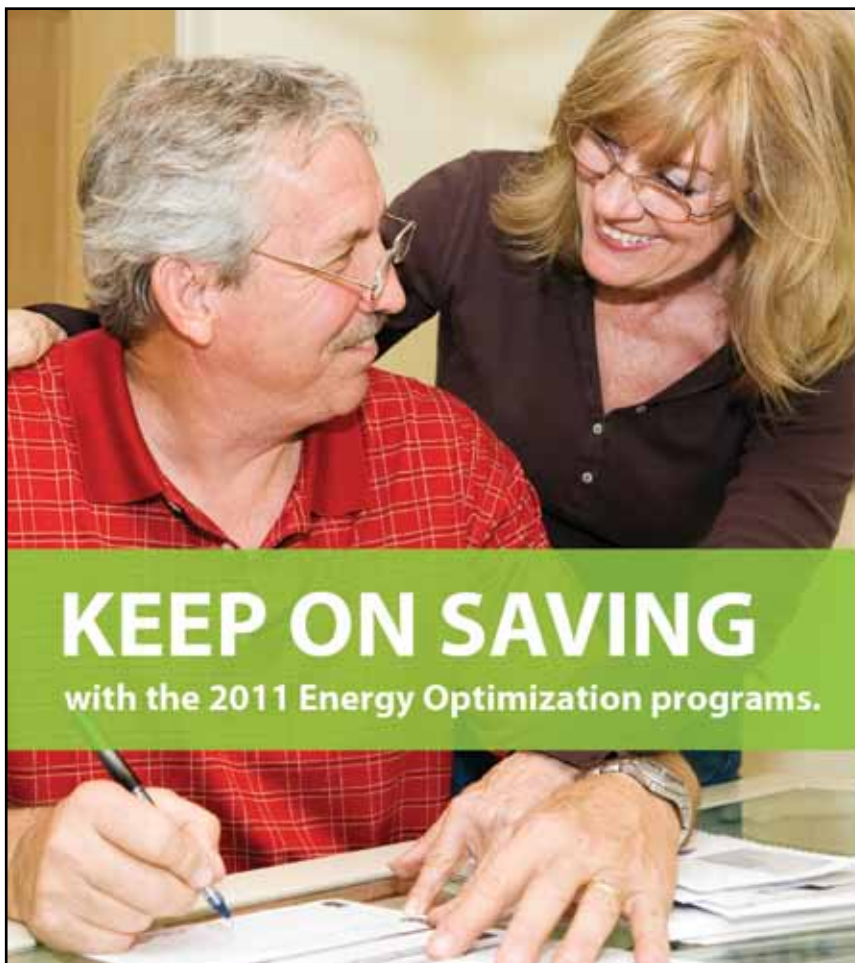
Scholarship applications must be post-marked by *Friday, March 18, 2011*, and winners will be notified in late April. Interested students may contact Nicole Barfell at 800-492-5989, ext. 1112, or email nicoleb@teammidwest.com. The application can also be downloaded at TeamMidwest.com.

Midwest Energy Cooperative Case No. U-15818 2009 Renewable Energy Plan Annual Report Summary

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) requires all Michigan electric utilities to get approximately 2 percent of their power supply from renewable sources by 2012 and increasing to 10 percent by 2015.

Under this requirement, Midwest Energy Cooperative submits an annual report to the MPSC regarding its Renewable Energy Plan. Although the cooperative uses renewable energy in its fuel mix, the annual report states that the co-op did not bank any renewable energy credits in 2009. This is because Midwest Energy will acquire its renewable energy credits through Wabash Valley Power Association, the co-op's current power supplier, under an all-requirements contract. Wabash Valley's power supply portfolio for 2009 had approximately 3 percent renewable energy.

A full copy of the cooperative's Renewable Energy Plan annual report that was filed with the MPSC is available on the cooperative's website at teammidwest.com or by request at any of the cooperative's offices.



Last year our Energy Optimization programs helped participating members save over 30 million kilowatt hours of electricity across the state of Michigan. That adds up to big energy bill savings—with even more chances for you to save this year! Watch for information about the 2011 Energy Optimization programs at michigan-energy.org or by calling 877-296-4319.





Winterizing Your Vehicle Can Save Cold Cash

Winterizing your vehicle should be a top priority, according to the Car Care Council, saving you from the inconvenience of being out in the cold with the unexpected expense of emergency repairs.

“The thought of a breakdown, an engine not starting or otherwise being stranded is stressful as it is, but those things happening in freezing winter weather are extra stressful and costly,” said Rich White, executive director, Car Care Council. “An investment of an hour or two to have your vehicle checked is all it takes to have peace of mind and help avoid the cost and hassle of a breakdown during harsh weather.”

The Car Care Council recommends the following steps for winterizing your vehicle:

- ◆ Clean, flush and put new antifreeze in the cooling system. As a general rule of thumb, this should be done every two years.

- ◆ Make sure heaters, defrosters and wipers work properly. Consider winter wiper blades and use cold weather washer fluid. As a general rule, wiper blades should be replaced every six months.

- ◆ Have the battery and charging system checked for optimum performance. Cold weather is hard on batteries.

- ◆ Check the tire tread depth and tire pressure. If snow and ice are a problem in your area, consider special tires designed to grip slick roads. During winter, tire

pressure should be checked weekly.

- ◆ Be diligent about changing the oil and filter at recommended intervals. Dirty oil can spell trouble in winter. Consider changing to a “winter weight” oil if you live in a cold climate. Have your technician check the fuel, air and transmission filters at the same time.

- ◆ If you’re due for a tune-up, have it done soon. Winter magnifies existing problems such as pings, hard starts, sluggish performance or rough idling.

- ◆ Have the brakes checked. The braking system is the vehicle’s most important safety item.

- ◆ Have the exhaust system checked for carbon monoxide leaks, which can be especially dangerous during cold weather driving when windows are closed.

- ◆ Check to see that exterior and interior lights work and that headlights are properly aimed.

Motorists should also keep the gas tank at least half-full at all times to decrease the chances of moisture forming in the gas lines and possibly freezing. Drivers should check the tire pressure of the spare in the trunk and stock an emergency kit with an ice scraper and snowbrush, jumper cables, flashlight, flares, blanket, extra clothes, candles/matches, bottled water, dry food snacks and needed medication.

Since fuel economy is also directly related to vehicle maintenance and driving behavior, consider these additional facts:

- Keep your car properly tuned to improve gas mileage by an average of 4 percent.

- Keep tires properly inflated to improve gas mileage by 3 percent.

- Replace dirty or clogged air filters on older vehicles to improve gas mileage by as much as 14 percent.

- Replace dirty spark plugs, which can reduce mileage by two miles per gallon.

- Change oil regularly and gain another mile per gallon.

- Observe the speed limit. Gas mileage decreases rapidly above 60 mph.

- Avoid excessive idling. Idling gets zero miles per gallon. Warming up the vehicle for one or two minutes is sufficient.

- Avoid quick starts and stops.

Aggressive driving can lower gas mileage by 33 percent on the highway and 5 percent in the city.

- Consolidate trips. Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much gas as one longer multi-purpose trip.

- Don’t haul unneeded items in the trunk. An extra 100 pounds in the trunk reduces fuel economy by 1 to 2 percent.

For a free copy of the council’s “Car Care Guide” or for more information, visit carcare.org.

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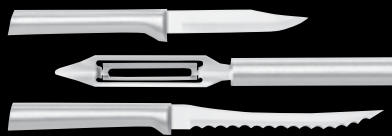
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Nonstop Surprises For Decatur Family

Thanksgiving Day came early for the Stone-McEnaney family as the Home Energy Makeover team from Midwest Energy converged upon their home to deliver a morning of big surprises.

The Home Energy Makeover was designed to increase the overall energy efficiency of an existing home, giving a deserving family an opportunity to enjoy increased home comfort in a more energy efficient environment. More than 60 applications were received from all over Midwest's service territory. A team of Midwest employees reviewed all nominations and made site visits, ultimately selecting the Steve and Jaime Stone-McEnaney family as the winner.

On Tuesday, Nov. 23, after several months of ongoing work in the home, which included the installation of a brand new 3-ton, two-stage Water Furnace® geothermal unit, the family was taken to breakfast under the guise of an informational meeting with a representative from Wabash Valley Power Association (WVPA), the co-op's power supplier. When they returned, they were greeted by a bevy of local reporters and co-op staff, all eagerly awaiting the surprised look on their faces as they discovered what was behind the morning's covert operation.

What they found was a kitchen full of brand new Energy Star® appliances, each decked out with a bright red bow to celebrate the momentous occasion.

"It was just an awesome feeling," Jaime said upon walking into the kitchen. "Words can't really explain it."

The new appliances included a refrigerator, dishwasher, microwave, stove, clothes washer and dryer. But the surprises didn't stop there.

The Midwest team also presented the family with a food basket for their Thanksgiving celebration, complete with a turkey and ham. It was an emotional morning for the family, although the biggest emotional punch came with the presentation of a \$450 rebate check, offered through a geothermal incentive program offered by WVPA. The rebate was credited to the family's December electric bill. Last winter, as a result of having to heat with space heaters after the demise of their fuel oil furnace, Jaime and Steve had monthly electric bills that exceeded \$500, creating another layer of financial difficulty for the struggling family.

"Midwest Energy is more than a locally-owned utility, and I think this project demonstrates that," said Bob Hance, president and CEO. "We want to provide tools and resources to our members to help them become more educated energy users."

"Using the Energy Optimization program, we have been able to reach out to a family in need—a family that has demonstrated through their own example that they want to lift themselves out of difficult circumstances. And I think what they are going to discover as a result of this effort is

a lifestyle that they can sustain."

Bob and the Midwest team hopes that other members will recognize that this family's efficiency upgrades and energy use changes can make similar differences in their own energy use.

Home Audits

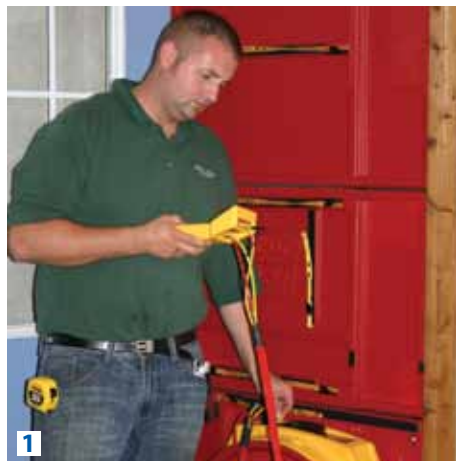
Before beginning any work, the team had to determine the status of the house in terms of energy efficiency. On Aug. 17, Brad Bartholomew and his team from **Bartholomew Heating & Cooling and Energy Saving Services** conducted a thorough energy audit to determine where we could make the biggest impact with energy efficiency measures for our family. A second audit on Nov. 16 showed a 30 percent reduction in air leakage, based on the measures implemented. With additional measures yet to come, Brad anticipates a final reduction of 50 percent.

"It will be equivalent to a new house under the highest Energy Star standards," he said.

The Timeline in Photos

1. Rodney Whitcomb from Energy Saving Services takes a reading after installing a blower door during the initial audit. The blower door lowers the internal air pressure, allowing auditors to measure the infiltration of outside air pressure through unsealed cracks and openings.

2. Rodney and Brad review temperature readings on the infrared scanner. By mea-





asuring temperature differences on walls and floors in adjoining areas, an auditor can determine areas of cold air infiltration. It also reveals areas of inadequate or nonexistent insulation.

3. Brad uses a smoke stick to visualize air infiltration in the basement windows as part of the post audit.

4. A work team rolled up its sleeves on Oct. 15 to prepare the house for the new HVAC unit. This included jumping in a crawl space to remove insulation, hauling out the old, broken fuel oil furnace, and tearing out all existing duct work. Midwest Propane Operations Manager Billy Meggs cuts apart existing ductwork.

5. Lori Ruff, Midwest communications specialist, moves a piece of insulated foam board into place. A work team gathered on Nov. 5 to attach the foam board to the basement walls, which will help seal air leaks.

6. Students in the HVAC program at Kalamazoo Valley Community College helped design and install the ductwork for the new geothermal system on Nov. 9.

7. Nov. 23 was reveal day. Members of the Stone-McEnaney family, including (L-R) Jaime, Jim, Tommy, Annette and Stevie, were surprised not only with a kitchen full of new appliances, but a \$450 rebate offered through the geothermal incentive program from Wabash Valley Power.



Energy efficiency measures included:

■ **Installation of a highly efficient, 3-ton, 2-stage (with electric resistance back-up) Water Furnace geothermal unit** with a closed-loop, horizontal installation. The unit was provided at cost by **Water Furnace**, and all labor and installation was donated by **Water Furnace of Michiana**. Another efficiency gain from the installation of the geothermal unit is that it supplies preheated water to the water heater.

■ **Design and installation of all new ductwork.** The existing ductwork was not sufficient to support the airflow needs of the new geothermal unit, so a team of Midwest Energy volunteers came in and removed all existing ductwork (as well as the non-working fuel oil furnace) to make way for the new ductwork. Gehry Gross, an instructor with the HVAC program at **Kalamazoo Valley Community College**, made this an educational and community service project for his students, designing and installing ductwork and registers that support the system's air movement.

■ **Electrical upgrade.** **Bender Electric** donated labor and supplies to upgrade the home from 100 to 200-amp service to support the new geothermal unit.

■ **Crawlspace sealed off and insulated.** The basement space had not been properly insulated, making it a source of significant air leakage. A team of Midwest volunteers installed a foil-backed insulation board on all basement walls to seal leaks. **Air Tight Michigan** donated labor and materials to seal the

entire crawl space, basement and other strategic wall cavities in the main level of the home with a two-part closed cell foam sealant.

■ **Chimney removed.** **Scott Wade Construction** and **Quality Masonry** donated labor and supplies to remove the existing chimney, which was a major air-sealing measure, and provided a cold air return cavity for the new HVAC system.

■ **Other sealing measures** were implemented by a team of Midwest Energy volunteers with supplies donated by **Home Depot** in Three Rivers. This included caulking and installing foam gaskets on all electrical receptacles and light switches.

■ **New appliances.** To further increase energy efficiency, we upgraded existing appliances to Energy Star® models, including a refrigerator, dishwasher and clothes washer. The refrigerator and clothes washer are both rated as Tier 3 appliances, the most energy efficient as rated by the Consortium of Energy Efficiency.

■ **Other efficiency measures:** • Replaced all existing incandescents with efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs. • Installed a programmable thermostat. • Installed R4 insulated pipe wrap on all water lines.

■ **Energy Aware.** To assist the family in monitoring their energy use and adapting their consumption behaviors, we will install a real-time energy monitor, donated by **Markur Communications**. The monitor is hardwired into the home and provides instant feedback about electricity consumption and related costs through a wireless in-home display.

Learn more about the Midwest Home Energy Makeover at **TeamMidwest.com**



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The Music in Our Lives

Last month I was on the verge of participating in a study of brain function and memory at Michigan State University. They were looking for healthy men and women over 65 who had attended college and who would be willing to submit to brain scans, DNA tests, and memory evaluations to help researchers determine if there were markers that could provide early warning signs for memory and brain ailments.

It seemed like a good thing to do. Besides, you never know when that kind of research just might benefit yourself or someone you know. Unfortunately, at the last minute, just before I was getting ready for an MRI scan, the technician asked if I had ever had metal fragments in my eyes, because they could react with the scan and cause severe eye damage. Well, I had—both long ago and more recently. And while those fragments are probably gone, the extra test to determine if they are was too expensive for the research project to bear. So my career as a lab rat was cut short.

That same week I went to Menard's to buy a few sheets of wallboard so I could repair a wall damaged by a water leak. On the way home, and for days after, I couldn't get the bad Muzak version of "I'll Be Home for Christmas" that played on the store speakers out of my head.

So, my memory still works, but in very mysterious ways. I have a great sense of direction, which is good because I can't remember street names. I remember faces, but it may take an hour for me to remember the name of the person attached to the face. It makes things a little awkward. (I really wish I could have had that brain scan.)

Music is one way to keep the brain functioning at a higher level. I don't just mean classical music, which has been proven to work. I mean any music—even the music you may think is outside your generational comfort zone.

A few months ago my wife, Barbara, sent her Aunt Jeanette in Columbus, OH,

several CDs of 1940s big-band music by the likes of Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller, plus a hits compilation by Frank Sinatra.

She couldn't have gotten her a better gift for her birthday. Jeanette said she couldn't stop dancing around her apartment, singing along and playing the music loud enough for her neighbors to hear. College girls in the apartment complex showed up at her door to find out about this music they liked but couldn't place. They shared wine while they listened. Generations were bridged in the few swinging minutes of "In the Mood."

This was the music of Jeanette's teens and twenties, when all of us are marked for life with the musical imprint of our generation. Recently, I was watching an otherwise forgettable movie that took place in the late '50s that included a decent rendition of "Blue Suede Shoes." I was immediately taken back to my grandmother's apartment, where we watched black-and-white TV and were first exposed to the sheer animal power of Elvis Presley and early rock-and-roll. It still moves me.

But then most of the music of the '50s, '60s and '70s moves me, rock more than country. I am copying records from those years to a digital format so we can include them in our iTunes library, including, among others: The Band; Blood, Sweat & Tears; Roberta Flack; Dave Brubeck and Miles Davis (from my jazz years). Then there are the personal oddball favorites, like "Frog City" by Southern Comfort, a rare southern rock album by a British band, and "Motel Shot" by Delaney & Bonnie and Friends, with 'friends' including Eric Clapton, George Harrison and Duane Allman. They'll join never-tired-of favorites like The Beatles, Cowboy Junkies, Emmylou Harris, Norah Jones (alone

and with The Little Willies), Eric Clapton, Bruce Springsteen, Dwight Yoakam, Simon & Garfunkel and Bob Dylan.

But I don't think it's healthy to dwell on music from our past exclusively. Exciting and interesting music is being made today, an eclectic blend of rock, country, blues and, yes, rap, that's as fresh as early rock.

Give a listen to CAKE, Jack White, Monsters of Folk, Wilco, Green Day, Duffy, Band of Horses, Ben Harper, KT Tunstall, The Swell Season, and The Donkeys. (I thank our boys for tuning us in to new music.)

Older artists crossing the generational gap are Tony Bennett and Johnny

Cash. Over the past year, I've heard Cash's songs played in places where young people gather more than ever. Bennett draws bigger crowds of young fans now than he ever did.

That's nice, because his version of "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" is *our* song, if you know what I mean. When Barbara and I were in New York City a decade ago, we saw Tony strolling in Central Park. Barbara wanted to meet him, but I held her back, suggesting that if he couldn't go for a walk without being bothered in Central Park, essentially his front yard, where could he go? So we let him be, which she doesn't let me forget and probably never will. She's got a great memory.

Thanks for joining us.



Mike Buda, editor emeritus of Country Lines, can't play a note on any instrument, though he faked a bugle for a couple of years. Email Mike at mbuda@countrylines.com or comment on his columns at countrylines.com/column/ramblings/

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