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June 2011

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Michigan

COUNTRY LINES



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8 Born To Race

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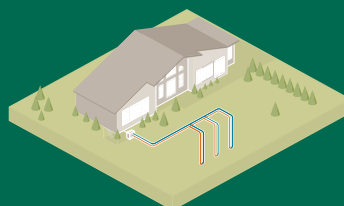
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Michigan COUNTRY LINES



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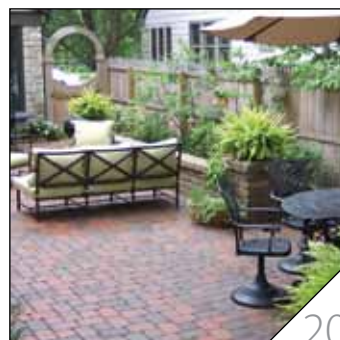


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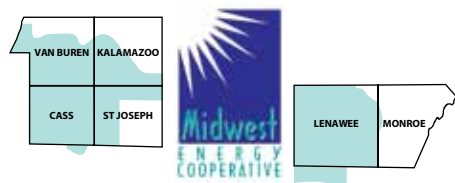
On the Cover

Larry and Jo Kelley own the Shelby Gem Factory, where they make jewelry and manufacture synthetic gemstones that are physically and chemically identical to real gemstones, right here in Michigan.

Photo - June Kuiper/junekuiperphotography.com

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Convenience at a Cost

I've admitted that I'm a bit of a blog junkie, and one recent entry that I read really resonated with me.

While in line at the store, a conversation was reportedly overheard between a cashier and her elderly customer. Seems the cashier suggested that plastic bags weren't good for the environment, to which the customer replied, "We didn't have the green thing back in my day."

I don't know if this was a real conversation, or just a good start to an interesting blog post, but there's much to be said for the sentiment behind the comment. It's not that we didn't have "the green thing" back in the day. We just didn't need to pour millions of dollars into marketing and advertising campaigns related to living in a more environmentally-friendly way because then we lived a much simpler life.

Those were the days when we drank water out of a faucet and didn't reach for plastic bottles. Milk was delivered in glass bottles, which were ultimately returned to the plant where they were washed and sterilized and refilled. We hand-washed our cloth baby diapers and hung them on a line to dry. We used push mowers to cut the grass. Simpler times.

It's the same story we tell over and over again related to electricity use. We didn't need to focus on energy efficiency campaigns and messaging "in the day" because we didn't have the vast array of appliances and electronics that now fill our homes and lives. Those were the days that families had one TV for the entire household. Kids spent their time playing outside—riding bikes, jumping rope, skipping rocks and climbing trees. We walked to the neighbor's house, sat together on the porch swing, drank iced tea and enjoyed face-to-face conversation. We washed dishes in the sink and put them in a rack to dry.

Today, most households have a TV in nearly every room, and at least one of those has a 60-inch, high-definition screen.

Kids and adults alike are constantly connected to computers, smart phones, gaming systems and other electronic devices.

We Skype, email, text and instant message—and often that messaging is directed to someone sitting in an adjoining room under the same roof!

I'm part of the generation that has lived and experienced this technological transformation that has changed the way we live and work. There are days that I would return in a heartbeat to

the simpler times that defined my own childhood; days that I would like to gift to my grandchildren so they could experience the joys of simplicity. Then there are days that I can't even imagine how life would be without the comforts and conveniences that we have as a result of today's technology.

We live in a different world today, and my goal is not to offer commentary on whether it's good or bad. Things were good "back in the day." Things are good today. We just need to remember that the comfort and convenience so readily available to us today comes at a cost—both financial and environmental. How we choose to expend those resources in order to add value to our own lives rests firmly in our control.



Robert Hance
President/CEO

★
Midwest Energy Cooperative
offices will be closed for the
Independence Day holiday
on Monday, July 4.

Payments may be made at the
drop box and will be posted on
the next open business day.

***Have a happy and safe
Independence Day!***
★

Midwest in the Community

A little bit of carpentry, a little bit of updating and spring cleaning, and a whole lot of lovin' for furry friends. Those were some of the tasks undertaken by a group of Team Midwest employees as they offered up a volunteer day at Pet Refuge in Mishawaka, IN, this spring.



Adam Johnson (L) and Carl Brewster work on decking at the facility.



Kathy Collins helps with a little spring cleaning and organizing.



Tracy Ivens (L) and Lisa Guyott enjoyed their time with some of the furry residents.



Learn more about this nonprofit animal shelter at petrefuge.com.

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Co-op Teens Get a 'Windy' Tour

Thirty-five students made the most of touring the Heritage Wind Farm near Cadillac on a wet, windy day during Michigan Electric Cooperative Teen Days. Steve Thoms of Heritage (above, center front) answered student questions as they all squeezed into a tower base to learn more about wind power and how the turbines operate.

In the co-op careers part of the three-day retreat, lineworkers from Cherryland Electric, Midwest Energy, and HomeWorks Tri-County Electric co-ops talked about their work and training, then helped students gear-up to try climbing a pole and gave bucket truck rides. Twelve chaperones from the co-ops also discussed their differing jobs and education, and a hotline demonstration and electrical safety tips were shared by safety professionals from Great Lakes Energy and HomeWorks Tri-County.

Other activities included watching a live TV 9&10 News newscast and a behind-the-scenes tour of the station, learning about energy efficiency and the co-op business model, and playing games and getting to know other teens from across the state.

Co-op Teen Days is held annually at the Kettunen 4-H Center in Tustin. Sixteen of the teens were chosen to attend the Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., in June. Learn more about these co-op sponsored youth programs at countrylines.com/youth.



Participating co-ops and the teens they sponsored this year were: *Cherryland Electric* – Brandon Acre, Jacob Russell, Lauren Sieloff, Grace Wiesner, Alyssa Zuiderveen; *Cloverland Electric* – Rachel Hoffman, Emily Markstrom, Julie Reed, Dorianne Shaffer, Paul Warner; *Great Lakes Energy* – Justin Dahl, Cade Dailey, Heidi Dill, Jennifer Herrema, Kaylee Kessler, Mackenzie Morison, P.J. Nemish, Matthew Richards, Heath Welch; *HomeWorks Tri-County* – Rebecca Kirby, Tyler Orlando, Alli Rayburn, Blake Warchuck; *Midwest Energy* – Ashley Fogarty, Christine Polmateer, Jessica Waldschmidt, Katelyn Waters; *PIE&G* – Krista Bursey, Allan Cramer, Lance Miller, Carlos Portillo, Danielle Rhode, Judy Romel; *Thumb Electric* – Chandler London; and *Wolverine Power Cooperative* – Nathanael Millen.

Refinancing Your Home

If you own your home and are paying on a mortgage, you may be able to save money by refinancing—particularly if you closed on your home many years ago. Only you can decide if refinancing is a smart move, but here are some things to consider:

- **Refinancing will cost you money.** You're either going to be charged closing costs to refinance, or you may be offered a "no-closing cost" deal. But don't be fooled. One way or another, you will pay for it, since no-cost transactions usually mean a higher interest rate (than if you paid closing costs out-of-pocket).

- **How long will you expect stay in your current home?** If you're thinking about moving in the next two years or so, the costs may not justify refinancing.

- **Think carefully before "cashing out."** It's popular now to take cash out of a home when refinancing, but your home is not an ATM. That money will have to be repaid sooner or later. And if home prices drop after you refinance, you could find yourself owing more on your mortgage than your house is worth.

- **Check with your current lender before you commit to any refinancing deal.** Chances are, you may be able to save yourself quite a bit of money on closing costs while taking advantage of a lower interest rate. "Calculate" your move carefully!

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to refinancing, but a refinancing calculator, such as one at Bankrate.com, can help you decide whether or not refinancing makes "cents."

Your home is one of your greatest assets—consider any related financing decisions carefully.

– NRECA Insurance & Financial Services Dept.



A New Fridge Can Save Energy

A refrigerator will operate for a very long time without problems, but that doesn't mean it's running at maximum efficiency.

If yours dates from the 1980s, replacing it could cut your electric bill by \$100 (from the 1970s, save \$200 per year), but only if you dispose of the old one. (Recycling allows the metal, plastic and glass to be re-used and keeps toxic chemicals out of landfills.)

Visit energystar.gov to estimate how much energy your current unit uses and how much money a new one may save.

More than a quarter of U.S. households own a second refrigerator, and that increases by 1 percent per year, notes a U.S. Department of Energy report. But these units are often older and less efficient models made before 1993 and use two to three times more energy. A second unit also increases air-conditioning costs since it produces heat. And because refrigerators are designed to operate in conditioned rooms, keeping one in an area exposed to temperature extremes, such as porches, garages and basements, forces it to draw more running power and adds \$420 to \$750 in energy costs over its lifetime.

When looking for a new unit, try a top-mounted freezer (uses 10-25 percent less energy), and buy only the size you really need. Keep it running efficiently by vacuuming the coils once or twice a year, and replace the door seal if it loosens or discolors.

– Brian Sloboda

Potholes, Roads, Gas Tax

[Mike Buda], are you seriously saying we should raise the gas tax (April *Ramblings*, "A Sure Sign of Spring")? I do work for the power companies and can hardly afford to drive to work as it is. Drive on a dirt road and lower the gas tax!

—Troy Nelson



the winter, or whose curbside box was damaged as was yours, would be to put the vertical post into a 5-gallon bucket filled with sand, then pour water into it. The frozen water adds rigidity as well as added weight. You or your neighbors may find this info helpful down the road, though of course, I hope you won't need it.

Do you realize the Postal Service actually makes an operational profit? (It is not a profit-seeking enterprise, so that word isn't used.) The reason for the huge bookkeeping loss is that federal law now requires the USPS to pre-fund its portion of future retiree health benefits. Other federal agencies do not face that mandate, nor does most of the private sector. (Pension benefits have long been pre-funded. In fact, they're probably over-funded, according to a recent audit, since no one hired in the past 25+ years receives the old Civil Service pension.)

Anyway, I enjoyed your article, and I'll leave you with one additional thought—the possibility of rural mail delivery around the turn of the 20th Century became the impetus for farmers to seek improvements in rural roads, which led to numerous benefits unrelated to the mail, such as improved ability to move crops to market, obtain mechanized equipment, attend fraternal organizations, and so on.

—John Hayes, Grand Rapids

U.S. Mail

Having just read your March *Country Lines* article about the mail, I'm offering my appreciation and a suggestion.

I am retired from 35 years with the Postal Service, as a city carrier and in management support. Where I worked, our standard suggestion to customers establishing new delivery during

tor building their many glass manufacturing plants all over this old globe, and I've had many conversations with engineers about nuclear power. Each of the Guardian plants has enough standby power to run the plant in the event of a failure. A 500 ton-per-day plant runs 24/7 for 10-12 years. Guardian's Venezuela plant is full-time stand-alone with a turbine generator because fuel was so cheap there.

I now live in a community outside of Weidman, MI, that has 523 lots and about 250 homes and 175 full-time residents. I see no reason why we could not have our own nuclear power plant. Placed, constructed, secured and operated by trained personnel, of course. It could be sized for a maximum 400 homes and the excess electricity could go to the grid and help for the payments. There are many communities and towns around that could be set up in this manner, do you agree? Are there any surplus nuclear submarine reactors available? Just kidding.

To show you how radical I am, I think we should be driving nuclear-powered autos. If acci-

dents are the argument against that, the 25 gallons of gas in each of our cars is a potential bomb and we seem to have managed that quite well, so far. The main problem I see is our wonderful "MEDIA" and whoever is running it. They sure ran with the opportunity to mold public opinion over the problem in Japan didn't they?

I agree with you that solar and wind are nice ideas, but they will never produce enough reliable power to serve all the demands. Who wants to duck under a windmill blade every time you want to go fishing?

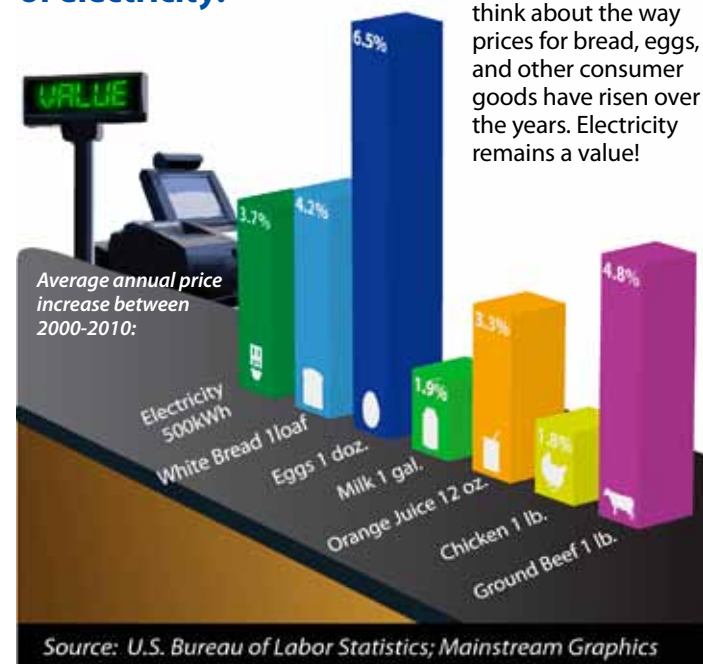
—Frederick Hartway, Weidman

More On Carrom Games

Enjoyed the "Game On" article in March about Carrom boards. One of the many games on the board involved shooting the wooden carroms into an inner ring area with a central hole. If my recall is correct, the inner ring was worth 15 points. Having learned to count by 15's as a child now comes in handy as an adult in figuring out how much a standard 15 percent tip would be.

—Cal Frappier, Cross Village

"Check out" the value of electricity!



Next time you're at the grocery store, think about the way prices for bread, eggs, and other consumer goods have risen over the years. Electricity remains a value!



Photo - Ray's Racing Photos, 1972



Photo - Doug Swift Photography

Born To Race

Wayne Clauss has been racing cars since 1970, but his love for the sport began long before that.

The Dowagiac resident and Midwest Energy lineman has frequented Hartford Motor Speedway since he was a kid, and was just 20 years old when he participated in his first race. He seems to have inherited his love of racing from his father.

"My dad and I never missed a race," Wayne says. "The most thrilling part was after the race was over, you'd get to go down and look at the cars."

Since that first time in 1970, Wayne has competed in countless races at Hartford Motor Speedway, Kalamazoo Speedway, I-96 Speedway, and several other tracks. He's also participated in a wide range of racing including late model, enduro (both 4- and 8-cylinder), stock car and modified. Many

local and regional businesses have sponsored his efforts over the years, including Lane Automotive, Allstar, Cass Automotive, and Midwest Propane.

After 41 years of driving, Wayne is well-known for his confidence and prowess behind the wheel. He doesn't know the exact number of races he's won, but he has the photographs, trophies and other memorabilia to prove it. In 2006, he was voted Rookie of the Year at Hartford Motor Speedway. In 2008, he earned "best in class" honors at every track he raced at that year and was subsequently named the "Street Stock Michigan State Champion." After winning that award, Wayne and his wife Kathy were invited to a banquet at which racing legend Tony Stewart was also present.

The racing season runs from May through September, and drivers participate in about

25 races during the season and in different car classes.

"Racing can be a full-time job in the summer," Wayne adds. "Seven days a week."

While Wayne was never seriously injured during a race, he's been in a number of wrecks. He once ran into the scoreboard at Hartford Motor Speedway hard enough to move it.

Wayne loves driving, but building cars is another passion. His favorite type of racing is late model, in which drivers customize their cars.

"Building the car is the most fun—that, and the competition."

Wayne and his friend Doug Lane of Lane Automotive have built and painted between 15 and 20 cars together over the years. Word of Wayne's exceptional cars has traveled all the way to NASCAR circles, and in 1989 Dale Earnhardt Sr. asked to rent one of them. Wayne eagerly took his ASA/Arco car to Rockford Speedway in Illinois and the celebrated driver drove it in a race. Other well-known drivers that have used Wayne's cars on the track include Ken Schrader, Kyle Petty and Rusty Wallace.

As Wayne prepares to retire this summer, both from his 34-year career at Midwest Energy and from actual racing, he's looking forward to spending more time on the sport that helped to shape his life. He doesn't plan to give up his passion, but doesn't expect to spend much time driving after this season. "I'm going to do more in the line of helping other people than actually racing myself," he says.

— Courtney Gause

Line Clearance Policy

In an effort to protect members from the dangers of electrical contact, Midwest Energy Cooperative has a policy related to line clearance.

The policy stipulates that members who build structures closer to power lines than what is allowed by the most current version of the National Electrical Safety Code will be required to either move the structure or pay to relocate the power line. Structures may include new homes, home additions, grain bins, signs and outbuildings.

"Every year we hear tragic and preventable stories of people who come into contact with power lines. Our objective is to eliminate that danger and keep our members safe," explains Mike Roush, vice president of operations.

If you have questions about the location of a planned structure with regards to overhead power lines, please call the cooperative's engineering department at 800-492-5989. We will happily work with you in planning the location of your structure so that it falls within all applicable guidelines and keeps you and your family safe.

Regulatory Cause-and-Effect

Stringent EPA regulations could cost consumers tens of billions of dollars.

For every cause, there is an effect. The wind blows; a limb falls.

Cause-and-effect relationships exist in the energy industry, as well. For example, electric bills will climb if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moves forward with imposing a series of potentially crippling regulations on power plants. Some of these new rules directly result from court orders.

According to a report from the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, which oversees the nation's bulk power grid, EPA mandates affecting cooling water intake structures, coal ash disposal, interstate transport of air pollutants, and hazardous air pollutants, including mercury, could force electric utilities to retire or retrofit between 33,000 megawatts (MW) to 70,000 MW of generating capacity by 2015—power that will need to be replaced in some way, and during a period of rising construction costs. Another hurdle, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, from power plants presents an even greater challenge.

Stringent regulations in each of these targeted areas could potentially impose tens of billions of dollars of extra compliance costs onto the backs of utilities—and



Photo - ©iStockphoto.com/Jeremy Mayes

therefore their members' electric bills. For example, in June 2010, the EPA proposed two possible approaches for managing coal ash and other coal combustion byproducts and residues produced when coal is burned to make electricity. One, nonhazardous regulation of CCBs, will ensure that coal ash is handled safely and protect not just the environment, but also jobs and consumers.

The EPA's other option—to regulate coal ash as hazardous, a determination the agency has rejected before (the last time in 2000)—would hit coal-fired power plant operators with staggering costs, send electric bills up, and eliminate

beneficial coal ash recycling (about one-third of the fly ash created in the U.S. is used as a Portland cement replacement). The Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), a nonprofit utility research group that includes electric co-ops as members, pegs the potential price tag from a hazardous CCB designation at between \$54.6 billion and \$76.8 billion over a 20-year period.

Electric co-ops have been actively urging the EPA through comments, testimony and litigation to consider the negative consequences of higher electric bills in promulgating new rules. In fact, over 10,500 comments from co-ops and their consumer-members were filed with the agency opposing regulating CCBs as hazardous.

Until the EPA's various power plant rules are finalized, the bottom line remains unknown—cause-and-effect uncertain. But no matter what comes down the pike, electric co-ops are committed to working hard to provide you with safe, reliable electric power at an affordable price.

Jewel of West Michigan

The Shelby Gem Factory produces beautiful, affordable gemstones and jewelry.



Larry Kelley demonstrates a ring vise—one of the major tools used at the Shelby Gem Factory to make jewelry. Larry and his wife Jo are members of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative.

cooking temperature,” Larry says. “It is rare to find a flawless natural ruby or sapphire.”

Factory employees “grow” the crystals in eight high-temperature furnaces. Electric coils surround an iridium cup that can withstand temperatures of 3,500 to 5,000 degrees. Ingredients are combined in the cup and melted. A rotating rod, called a “seed,” is inserted in the center of the cup to circulate the liquid and prevent hot spots. Then, the seed is raised at a painstakingly slow pace, cooling the liquid and forming a large crystal.

“It takes about three weeks to grow a diamond crystal, about a month to grow a ruby or emerald,” Larry explains.

Using a diamond saw, the factory’s highly skilled craftsmen can cut hundreds of rough gems from a single crystal. Each gem is then placed on the faceting machine where 57 facets, or sides, are cut and polished.

“When you facet a diamond, it has to be precise or it just doesn’t sparkle the way it should,” Larry says.

The jewelry makers mount the gems in 14 karat yellow or white gold settings. Larry purchases the rough gold castings from a company in Louisiana, and then does the final polishing of the pieces on-site.

Founded in 1970, the Shelby Gem Factory is truly a family affair. Larry’s wife Jo has been a full partner in the venture since 1979. Their son, John, has also grown up helping his dad make exquisite jewelry, and now works full-time for the company.

“My son has an even better eye than I do for seeing the potential in a particular crystal,” Larry notes.

Located about 15 minutes inland from Silver Lake Sand Dunes and Pentwater, the factory/showroom does most of its business during the summer months. The showroom is an interesting mix of glass cases displaying the jewelry and science exhibits that detail how the gems are made.

“On a rainy day, we will be overrun,” Jo says, “and some people come not knowing

A self-taught gemologist, Larry Kelley has spent over 40 years refining his “secret family recipes” to produce dazzling diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires that look like natural gemstones. As a result, visitors to his Shelby Gem Factory can purchase stunning jewelry at a fraction of the cost.

“People often think that imitation stones are not as good as the real thing,” Larry says, “but in many respects, ours are better. Shelby emeralds are about 1.4 times harder than natural emeralds, so they will last longer.”

Imitation stones are chemically different than their natural counterparts. A natural diamond is made completely of carbon. The

composition of a Shelby diamond is one of many closely guarded family recipes, but because it does not contain carbon, it will not burn like a genuine diamond.

“All our white diamonds are flawless and D color like the most expensive genuine diamonds,” Larry reports. “No one will know the difference. In fact, many jewelers cannot tell.” The “D color” rating is the highest any diamond can receive on the color scale created by the Gemological Institute of America.

The factory also produces man-made rubies and sapphires which are chemically and physically identical to stones dug from the ground.

“Most of the gems we make are nearly flawless, because we control the ingredients and

Photos: June Kuiper/junekuiperphotography.com

Photo: Shelby Gem Factory



The Shelby Gem Factory makes a replica of Princess Diana's engagement ring recently worn by Princess Catherine. The original 18-carat sapphire ring cost \$65,000 in 1981.

what they will find. But, they keep coming back because we make beautiful jewelry that looks like the real thing for a fraction of the cost."

Jo attributes the factory's recent increase in sales to the faltering economy. A husband who might have spent \$3,000 on an anniversary gift a few years ago will come into the showroom and select a comparable piece of jewelry for \$300. Another Great Lakes Energy member, Linda Kotzian of Shelby, can testify.

"The first ring my husband bought me as a gift shortly after we were married came from Shelby Gem, since he couldn't afford a 'real' diamond back then," Linda recalls. "The setting was beautiful and it's still my favorite ring, although I did replace the synthetic diamond with a real one a few years ago." They also sell 'real' diamonds, she says, "but the synthetic stone was as beautiful as any diamond, and the ring brought me a lot of admiring comments over the years."

Their showroom has been a tourist draw in Shelby for years, Linda adds, since it highlights the unique process they use to produce the synthetic gems, and "I didn't realize until I glanced at their website that they make 'more varieties of synthetic and imitation gems than anyone else in the world.' And all in little ol' Shelby, MI!"

The crystal below, made by Larry Kelley, is a piece of the "Shelby Simulated Diamond" made at the Shelby Gem Factory. The crystals "grown" at the Factory come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Craftsmen cut the crystals into much smaller pieces to create individual gemstones. Visit shelbygemfactory.com or call 231-861-2165 for information.



A map in the showroom filled with colorful tacks represents the factory's worldwide clientele. The Kelleys' devotion to service has created a loyal customer base that includes three generations of some families.

"I have had many young couples come in and tell me that one of their grandfathers gave their grandmother a ring from here, their own parents got their wedding rings from here, and now they want a Shelby diamond, too," Jo notes.

Shelby Gem Factory builds many custom pieces for their clients, too. The high cost of insuring genuine gemstones has caused many jewelry owners to have inexpensive replicas made so the originals can remain in the family safe.

"On the other hand, I had a lady come in with only one earring and asked if we could make her another one. I told her, sure, we could match the earring perfectly, and asked her what happened to the other one," Jo laughs. "Turns out her parrot pulled it out of her ear and ate it."

The Kelleys love their work because jewelry purchases are generally made to celebrate special occasions, so most of their customers are very happy people. Of course, the final price tag may have something to do with those smiles, too.

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Managing Costs

Issues largely outside the direct control of your local co-op will impact electric bills in coming years.

After two years of declines, the price tag for building power plants and buying utility equipment is climbing once again. An improving world economy and hikes in costs for skilled labor, fuel and raw materials are driving expenses up. These higher prices likely will affect electric bills over the long-term.

“Electric co-ops have an obligation to keep the lights on and electric bills affordable at a time when costs for components needed to construct generation, upgrade existing power plants, expand transmission facilities, and modernize distribution systems are steadily rising,” acknowledges Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). “Combined with the costs of complying with new regulations, these are pressures that will affect electric bills in years to come—all of which are largely beyond the control of local co-ops.”

Keeping the Lights On

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation, the nation’s bulk power grid watchdog, estimates the U.S. will need to build 135,000 megawatts (MW) of new generation by 2017 to meet demand. Facilities already on the drawing board, though, will only deliver 77,000 MW. Electric co-ops—experiencing average annual load growth well above the levels of other electric utilities—estimate they will need to bring about 12,000 MW of new generation on-line over the next decade.

“However, this generation will be the most expensive in history, coming at a time when construction materials like steel, copper and concrete are shooting upward,” English remarks.

The past 20 years have witnessed nations in Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East transform themselves from backwater provinces into economic “tigers,” particularly in the areas of manufacturing, tourism, information technology and financial services. Flush with cash, these countries have embarked on unprecedented construction binges, erecting thousands of power plants, factories, residential high-rises and office towers.

Projects of this scope commandeer vast

amounts of basic resources—along with engineering and skilled labor expertise—and push up prices for items like oil, timber, steel, nickel and concrete.

After a brief downturn due to the global recession, worldwide commodity prices have rebounded—steel soared 42 percent between 2009 and 2010, while copper, used for wire and to ground electrical equipment, topped record highs of \$4.50 per pound earlier this year.

For new coal-fired and nuclear power plants, overall costs jumped 25 percent and 37 percent, respectively, compared to the year before, reports the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Capital costs for a pulverized coal plant now average over \$2,800 per kilowatt (kW), while a nuclear plant runs about \$5,300 per kW.

Wind generation capital costs increased, as well—about 21 percent, to \$2,400 per kW for land-based wind farms, and 50 percent, to \$5,975 per kW, for turbines placed offshore. Geothermal power plants also leaped 50 percent, to \$4,140 per kW.

On the other hand, costs for solar power dropped. The cost to build photovoltaic arrays, which convert sunlight directly to electricity, decreased 25 percent, to roughly \$4,755 per kW. But for both wind and solar, backup power from coal or natural gas must be built to be available when the wind isn’t blowing and the sun isn’t shining.

Natural gas-fired power plants, both peaking units (operate only when electric consumption crests) and baseload (full-time) facilities, currently boast the most stable costs. Total costs are generally much lower for combustion turbines and other natural gas generation equipment. This is true because they are manufactured in a factory and assembled on-site. Coal and nuclear plants, however, are built from the ground up—a more costly and time-intensive process.



Photo: Basin Electric

A project engineer and manager inspect the gate valve during air blows at a substation that is under construction. The air blows process removes debris from the new power plant’s piping before startup. The 385-net megawatt coal-based power plant will be complete this summer.

The bottom line? A portfolio of power plants that cost \$100 billion to erect in 2000 would cost about \$215 billion today.

Hometown Effects

For most local electric co-ops, the biggest expense involves buying power. Wholesale power purchases can account for as much as 75 percent of your co-op’s budget, which also impacts your electric rates.

Then there’s basic operations—everything from replacing poles and wire to maintaining rights-of-way and fueling line trucks. Costs for these activities continue to escalate. Between 1990 and 2010 in the north-central part of the nation, for example, prices for utility poles, towers and fixtures skyrocketed 98 percent while transformers spiked 154 percent.

Regulations on a Roll

Looming government regulations also pose a threat. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is considering four major rules that could become game-changers for electric utilities: cooling water intake, coal ash disposal, interstate transport of air pollutants, and using the best available technology to curb power plant emissions. In addition, the

LIVE WIRE: Help Electric Co-ops Battle Copper Crime

agency has begun regulating greenhouse gases from new and modified large stationary sources, including coal and natural gas power plants, under the federal Clean Air Act. The bulk of these EPA regulations are due to court-imposed decisions and deadlines.

"It's entirely possible tighter emissions standards and other rules will have a multi-billion dollar impact on the cost of doing business for electric co-ops," says Kirk Johnson, NRECA senior vice president of government relations.

Combating Rising Costs

In May, thousands of co-op leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., to call for more certainty on how electricity generation will be regulated.

"Co-ops need Congress' help to break out of the planning gridlock and set the rules for power generation today and in decades to come," stresses English. "Not knowing the rules is costing us valuable time and delaying critical decisions. Until the government provides more certainty, electric co-ops, along with the rest of the utility industry, are hamstrung in making informed decisions to provide generation and reliable power for our future."

Following orders and deadlines set by court orders, the EPA in recent years has begun issuing regulatory proposals that will affect power plants, however, what the final regulations will look like remains unclear.

"Rest assured, local electric co-ops are working together to keep your electric bills affordable," relates Craig Borr, CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. "We're controlling costs through innovation. No matter what government mandates come our way, we'll continue to put you, our members, first."

Michigan electric co-ops are "Looking Out for You."

Sources: Cooperative Research Network, NRECA Strategic Analysis, U.S. Energy Information Administration, Handy-Whitman Index of Public Construction Costs

Would you risk being hit by lightning for \$100? Seems a bit ludicrous, but desperate times cause folks to do foolish things.

Thefts of copper, bronze and aluminum to sell for scrap metal are on the rise at abandoned commercial buildings, empty homes, and—most dangerously—at power substations near neighborhoods. This theft from co-ops and other electric utilities causes power outages, additional maintenance and expenses, diminished service reliability, and in some cases, serious injury or death (to lineworkers, as well as the thieves).

In Michigan, a man was recently fined \$5,179 and faces a prison sentence of two to 15 years for copper theft from a Wolverine Power Cooperative substation. In Oklahoma, electric co-op members are facing a \$1 million repair bill because thieves wrecked a substation for just \$100 worth of copper. In New Mexico, a man was found dead beneath a power pole, electrocuted while trying to cut copper wiring from a live transformer. A Texas man died when he cut into a live power line while trying to steal copper. Similar accidents have been reported across the country.

"To a would-be thief, stealing copper may seem like a quick way to make a buck," says Joe McElroy, loss control specialist and safety consultant for the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. "But it's illegal, costly, and it's not worth a life. Working with any metal and electricity is a dangerous combination, even for trained employees using proper equipment."

It's hard to understand why folks would put their life on the line for a few dollars, but many law enforcement officials believe that methamphetamine users are responsible for much of the problem.

The price of scrap copper fluctuates, but has increased 542 percent since 2001. Your electric co-op uses copper to ground equipment, protecting it from power surges and lightning by giving electricity a safe path to the ground. A lot of copper wire is also used in substations, where high-voltage electricity arriving from distant power plants is stepped-down before it travels to your neighborhood. Then, another transformer near your home—either mounted on a utility pole or in a (usually green) box on the ground—lowers the voltage again so you can use the power at home. Copper is an essential component every step of the way.

Lineworkers are highly trained professionals who understand the dangers of working with electricity and take proper safety precautions. To protect the public, utilities surround their substations with secure fencing and warning signs, but some thieves will not be deterred.

Please help your electric co-op keep equipment safe, prevent outages, and save lives by helping to prevent these thefts. Consider installing motion-sensor lights outside your home or business to deter thieves, storing tools and wire cutters in a secure spot while you're away, and if you work in construction, do not leave any wires or plumbing unattended or leave loose wire at the job site, especially overnight.

If you notice anything unusual, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, or a hanging wire, call your local electric co-op immediately. If you see anyone other than utility personnel or contractors around substations or other electric facilities, call the police.



Photo - GMEC



The arrow shows where the copper wiring was cut off. The photo at right is an example of extreme copper theft in Michigan. Thieves used a chain saw to topple a transformer power bank pole and other tools to get the copper coils inside the transformer. A large quantity of oil from the transformer spilled on the ground, which is also a disregard for environmental safety.

Hanging Baskets Add Beauty and Color

Every year people spend good money buying hanging baskets to add a little color to a patio or other living space. But by mid-summer there are complaints that plants, once so pretty, are now looking like a wig on a scarecrow.

There is a way to keep hanging baskets looking good all summer, but first you have to choose the right varieties.

Petunias

Popular for the last few decades, petunias hold their beautiful blooms all summer long. However, they're not exactly maintenance-free. They require regular deadheading and constant watering. Wouldn't you rather be at the beach or lounging in a chair than sweating over a hanging basket as you pluck every last spent bloom?

So, let's cool it on the petunias. Maintaining three to four baskets of petunias instead of a dozen will save you a lot of deadheading time. Placing them in a protected area in partial shade or dappled sunlight will further reduce maintenance time. Another thing folks may not know about petunias is you can cut them right back to the rim of the container about midsummer. Then, place them in full sun, water and feed well, and they'll come back better than ever.

Mix it up

There are other plants that make great-looking hanging baskets. A favorite are the tuberous and fibrous begonias. I always thought

these did best in the shade. Not so. They also can stand full sun most of the day (10-12 hours) and require very little deadheading. What's more, they'll flower right up until the threat of a fall frost.

Geraniums

Geraniums are another good choice. They require much less deadheading. When deadheading is necessary, there are fewer blooms to maintain. Geraniums also don't mind a little (note the "little") neglect during the summer, especially in the watering department. They flower better when they're a little on the dry side. And don't forget, there is a beautiful trailing type of geranium that comes in white, pink and deep red.

Top Tips

Here are some more tips for maintaining beautiful hanging baskets while (hopefully) getting more R & R this summer:

1. Water regularly. Hanging baskets will require almost daily watering in hot weather. Rain doesn't count as a watering unless there is a flood warning!

2. Water well with a large watering can, or better yet, one of those water wands. Water should be streaming out the bottom of the container when you're done watering.

3. Feed regularly. Plants in a hanging basket require lots of fertilizer. However, for the sake



This dipladenia (or mandevilla) is also good for hanging baskets because it's very tolerant of direct sun, beautiful, and easy to maintain.

of sparing the lakes and streams of harmful fertilizer run-off, I suggest you use an organic or slow-release fertilizer, along with occasional feeding with a water soluble fertilizer, to keep them fed all summer.

4. To keep plants from drying and looking ragged, hang the baskets in a spot near your home that is protected from strong winds.

"It really depends on the variety in the hanging basket, but keeping them well watered and fertilized is key to having successful hanging baskets all summer," says Danielle Ernest, public relations and brand development coordinator for Proven Winners. "If they get a bit leggy, go ahead and give them a haircut."



Hanging Basket Choices

Calibrachoa

This petunia-like plant, also known as "million bells," comes in many colors. Ones to look for are Superbells® "Blackberry Punch Calibrachoa," and "Coralberry Punch Calibrachoa," both from Proven Winners. Calibrachoa requires a little less maintenance than petunias, but is nearly as showy. Hang this one in a protected, partial shade area to keep it looking good all summer.

Scaevola

This is another common variety for hanging baskets. It's leafy, with medium-sized flowers that come in white and deep lavender.

Bacopa

With its petite white flowers, bacopa is a nice complement to baskets of large flowering begonias in a backyard living area. "Bridal Showers," a variety that is loaded with little white flowers, is a common variety. Bacopa demands a little break from the sun or it too will fizzle out before the season ends.

Petunia

Okay, for you petunia devotees, there are some irresistible varieties out there, including Proven Winners' "Pretty Much Picasso®," a "supertunia" with violet purple flowers edged in lime green.

Vines and Foliage

Don't forget the vine plants. These no-fuss plants are sometimes mixed in with flowering plants in a hanging basket. Look for trailing plants like vinca vine, licorice vine, English ivy and Boston ivy.

Memories and History of Vernors Ginger Ale

It's a true Michigan product with the same great taste that it had in the beginning.

I lived in the northwest section of Detroit from 1936 to 1953. My family was middle-class, but we did not have any extra money for luxuries and pop was not an item on my mom's shopping list. A pound of hamburger went a long way in a variety of dishes. If we ever did have soda, it was Vernors. (My father did not believe that caffeinated pop was good for you, and he also thought we might become addicted.)

A very special treat was a boston cooler (not named after Boston). My mom would put vanilla ice cream in the ginger ale. Once in a great while I would be surprised to find Vernors in my glass of milk. Another way my mom used it was on special days, like Thanksgiving, when it would be mixed with grape juice for a special zing.

My brother, Gar (of Petoskey/Pickerel Lake and St. Petersburg, FL), remembers the large Vernors bottle plant and headquarters on Woodward Avenue just one block from the Detroit River.

My sister, Cathy (of Lewiston, NY, and summers at Pickerel Lake), remembers the taps they had to pour the ginger ale and a circular bench in the middle of the floor.

I remember the excitement of going there and my father saying we could drink as much of it as we liked. It cost 5 cents a glass right from the tap.

I still love it today. It's good for settling the stomach and to drink along with play-

ing cards or on a hot summer day. My husband and I occasionally have a boston cooler for dessert. My mom always served her evening guests a boston cooler. It was her trademark.

Today, Vernors is part of the Dr. Pepper Snapple Group. I called to see where it was made and they said at various plants, but some is still made in Detroit. Eighty percent of the sales for Vernors is in Michigan, but Ohio and Illinois also sell quite a lot of it. My husband and I have had trouble buying it in Florida, but you *can* find it there. It is in Florida because of the Michigan retired folks who go there in the winter. It was not mass distributed until 1980.

James Vernor opened a drug store on Woodward, where it was first sold at his soda fountain. In 1896, he closed the drug store and went into the ginger ale business. It passed thru several owners but was sold in 1966, and Vernors shares the title of America's oldest surviving soft drink with Hires Root Beer.

The legend about Vernors is that James Vernor had been trying to come up with a drink that was like one he had tasted from Dublin, Ireland. He said "it was deliciously



©drpeppersnapplegroup.com



Marjory Burden Priest

different," and that is still the motto for it today. James was a pharmacist clerk at Higby and Sterns Drug Store in Detroit when he was called off to fight in the Civil War in 1862. He stored a secret mixture of 19 ingredients including ginger and vanilla in an oak cast. Four years later he returned to discover that the aging process had deliciously transformed his mixture into the distinctly robust taste of Vernors that we drink today. His son said later that he came up with it after the war. Nevertheless, today's Vernors is still aged in oak barrels the way James Vernor did it years ago. It's a true Michigan product with the same great taste that it had in the beginning.

The bottle today shows the little gnome mascot used in 1900. It says, "A Michigan original from 1866." It also says in a circle that it is "Barrel Aged 3 Years • Bold Taste." So, let's give Vernors a thumbs-up for being a Michigan favorite for 145 years!

Thanks to Marjory Priest for submitting her favorite Michigan-made product.

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Tell us about *your* favorite Michigan-made product and we may write about it. Please share why you like it, and if you have a unique story to go with it, please include that and send to czuker@countrylines.com or mail to *Michigan Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. We are especially looking for products that people may not have heard much about. Photos are encouraged, but they must be attached as a jpg to an email or sent as a print (photos printed on computer paper are not acceptable).

Strong Dads Make Strong Families

There is a ruckus in the playroom. I look in; my daughters, ages 5 and 3, are pink marshmallow puffs of dress-up—feather boas, high heels and tutus out to there. My husband has pulled down a large plastic toy bin from the closet. The three of them are gathered around, sinking their hands deep into the bin and coming up with awful-looking creatures adorned with molded plastic muscles and alien faces.

My husband whispers theatrically, “Long ago, in the land of Eternia...”

When Trevor first began telling the girls stories about He-Man and the Masters of the Universe (a cartoon he watched as a child), I was horrified. The epic battles between good and evil, the archenemy Skeletor and the darkness of it all contrasted too much with the Madeline books I’d been pushing. But when Trevor revealed that he’d kept all of his corresponding toys, I knew He-Man’s days were over in our house. My girls would recoil at those creepy things.

Alas, they love the toys. And while some of them do have a bit of magic to their design, I know that’s not the reason. When the toys come out, Trevor and the girls run through the house together, weaving enchanted tales of heroism and hiding under the dining room table creating “command central.” It is unlike anything else they do in their sparkle-filled lives. It’s invariably special.

And as it turns out, research says it’s doing them some good. One study found that children who were securely attached to their fathers were better problem solvers than children who were not attached to their dads. In a study of preschoolers, children whose fathers were responsible for at least 40 percent of childcare tasks had higher cognitive development scores and a greater sense of mastery of their environments than children whose fathers were less involved.

On the flip side, children who live absent their biological fathers are, on average, at least two to three times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to have educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of abuse and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with both parents. And in the U.S., one out of every three kids lives apart from their biological father.

It’s costing everyone a pretty penny, too. The federal government spent at least \$99.8 billion on programs like child sup-



port enforcement and anti-poverty efforts to father-absent homes in 2006.

But we are not without hope on the father front. Groups like the National Fatherhood Initiative are working to encourage men to get going on the daddy business by educating fathers who don’t feel confident with their kids, by equipping families and communities with resources for their fathers, and by raising a collective high-five for the dads who are out there playing catch with junior.

It’s true that I don’t love when my daughters tell our priest about how Evil-Lyn and Stinkor were defeated by Snout Spout just before we headed out to Mass. And packing a tin He-Man lunchbox crafted 30 years ago (certainly without the safety standards we enjoy today) is not what I had envisioned five years back, when our ultrasound picture painted a pink future. Yet they’re two of the reasons I list when I tell Trevor why I think he’s a great dad.

Without dads, our kids are only getting half of the story. And even when they’re zany, when they rile the kids up before bed or when their basketballs end up in the flower garden, they’re doing just what nature intended—helping kids (and their brains!) grow.

Lisa Doublestein is a regular Country Lines freelance writer, educator and mom.

BEING A GREAT DAD ISN'T TOUGH

Here are some easy ways to share your interests with your child—it’ll be fun for both of you!

PLAY SPORTS: Both boys and girls love to learn about and play like the teams you cheer for.

GO FOR A HIKE: Tell your kids why you enjoy being outside. Point to bugs, trees and plants as you go. Ask your kids what they like about the outdoors.

LISTEN TO MUSIC: As long as the language and content is appropriate, sing along and dance to the tunes you like with your child.

PLAY GAMES: Children ages 3 and up can learn simple card games like Uno, War and Go Fish, and board games like checkers and Candy Land. These pave the way for more complex games you can play as they get older.

LEARN: Ask your kids to tell you about what they like. Let them “teach” you about what they’re into these days. Praise them for their efforts and skills.



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Casseroles & Pot Pies



A staple at potlucks and gatherings, casseroles come in as much variety as the people who serve them. Thanks to all who sent in casserole and pot pie recipes! Find hundreds more recipes at countrylines.com.

Puff Pastry Chicken Pie

- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry
- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 med. onion, chopped
- 1/2 c. frozen peas
- 1/2 c. frozen corn
- 1/2 c. frozen carrots
- 3 c. chicken broth
- 2 T. flour
- 4 T. butter
- 1 t. salt
- 1/2 t. pepper

Grease a 12-inch round deep-dish pie pan. Cut chicken into 1-inch pieces. In a large saucepan over medium heat, melt butter; add chicken and cook for 5-8 minutes. Add onion and cook until slightly translucent. Add flour and stir constantly for 2-3 minutes. Add chicken broth; continue to stir and cook until broth thickens, about 5-7 minutes. Meanwhile, remove puff pastry from freezer to thaw. Add salt, pepper, corn, carrots and peas; cook an additional 5 minutes. Remove from heat and pour into prepared pan. Place pastry sheet on top of pan; cut three slits in pastry. Sprinkle pastry with salt and pepper. Bake at 425° for 25 minutes or until top is golden brown. Remove from oven and let set for 5 minutes before serving.

Danielle Cochran, Grayling

Enchilada Pot Pie

- 2 10-oz. cans green enchilada sauce, divided
- 2 c. shredded Muenster cheese, divided
- 1 large chicken breast, fully cooked and shredded

- 1 12-oz. can refried beans
- 1 small onion, finely minced, divided
- 1 4-oz. can green chilies
- 4 fajita-size flour tortillas

In a medium bowl, mix together cooked chicken, 1/4 cup enchilada sauce, 1/3 of the minced onion, and 1/2 cup of the shredded cheese; set aside. Pour about 1/4 cup of enchilada sauce in the bottom of a deep dish pie plate or spring form pan. Place one tortilla over sauce in pan bottom. Spread beans over tortilla; sprinkle with 1/4 cup cheese and 1/3 of the minced onion. Top with second tortilla; cover tortilla with chicken mixture. Top with third tortilla; pour remaining enchilada sauce over and top with remaining minced onion. Cover with foil and bake at 400° for 20 minutes. Remove from oven; turn oven to broil. Remove foil cover from pan; sprinkle with remaining Muenster cheese and place under broiler. Broil until bubbly and slightly brown.

Mary Gorshe, Suttons Bay

Cottage Green Noodle Casserole

- 1/4 lb. green noodles
- 2 c. cottage cheese
- 1 c. sour cream
- 1 onion, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 t. steak sauce
- 2 t. seasoned salt
- 1/8 t. pepper
- 1/2 c. soft bread crumbs
- 1/2 c. shredded cheddar cheese

Cook noodles in boiling salted water until tender; drain. Combine with cottage cheese,

sour cream, onion, garlic, steak sauce, seasoned salt and pepper. Pour into a shallow 1½-quart baking dish. Combine bread crumbs and cheddar cheese; sprinkle over casserole. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Serves 4.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

Turkey or Chicken Almandine Casserole

- 3 c. chopped, cooked turkey or chicken
- 1 can cream of chicken soup, do not dilute
- 1 8-oz. can sliced water chestnuts, drained
- 1 4-oz. can mushrooms, drained
- 2/3 c. mayonnaise
- 1/2 c. chopped celery
- 1/2 c. chopped onion
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 1 8-oz. can refrigerated crescent rolls
- 2/3 c. shredded Swiss cheese
- 1/2 c. slivered almonds
- 2-4 T. melted butter

In a large saucepan, combine turkey, soup, water chestnuts, mushrooms, mayonnaise, celery, onion and sour cream; heat over medium heat until bubbly. Pour into a 9 x 13-inch casserole dish. Separate rolls into two rectangles. Place over hot mixture. Combine cheese, almonds and butter in a bowl; sprinkle over crescent top. Bake at 375° for 20-25 minutes until brown. Yield 6-8 servings.

Judi Fanning, Kalkaska

Chicken and Potato Casserole

- 8 chicken breasts, fried and cut in chunks
- 8-10 c. shredded potatoes
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 c. Miracle Whip®
- 4 oz. Velveeta® Cheese
- 2 T. chopped onion
- 1½ c. crushed corn flakes or cracker crumbs
- 1/2 c. melted butter

Spread potatoes in a greased 9x13-inch pan; top with chicken. In a saucepan, heat sour cream, soup, Miracle Whip, cheese and onion; pour over chicken. Combine crumbs and butter; sprinkle over casserole. Bake, uncovered at 350° for 45 minutes.

Lavina Coblenz, Fredericksburg, IN

► **Send in your recipes!** If published, you'll receive a kitchen gadget. Send in: **FRESH HERB recipes by July 15, PUDDING & CUSTARD recipes by Aug. 15** and **LAMB & VEAL by Sept. 15**. Mail to: Country Lines Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email recipes@countrylines.com.

Corned Beef & Cabbage Puff Pastry Pot Pies

14 ozs. cabbage, cut into 1/2 x 4-inch strips
3 T. unsalted butter
3 T. flour
1 c. milk
1 c. grated Gruyere cheese, about 4 oz.
1 T. plus 1 1/2 t. coarse-grained mustard
1/4 t. freshly grated nutmeg
1/4 t. dried dill weed
cayenne pepper
8 oz. very thinly sliced cooked corned beef,
cut into 1/2 x 4-inch strips

2 17-oz. pkgs. puff pastry, thawed
1 egg beaten with 1 t. cold water

Cook cabbage in a large pot of salted boiling water until tender, 5-8 minutes; drain. Squeeze dry in a towel. Melt butter in a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and stir 3 minutes. Whisk in milk, cook until mixture is smooth and very thick, whisking constantly, 4-5 minutes. Gradually mix in Gruyere. Add mustard, nutmeg, dill and cayenne pepper. Stir in corned beef and cabbage; cool.

Divide filling among six 1-cup ramekins. Roll one piece of pastry out on a lightly floured surface to 1/8-inch thickness. Cut out rounds 2 1/4-inches larger in diameter than ramekins, using a bowl as a guide; reserve scraps. Brush one side of each round with egg and water glaze. Arrange glazed side down on top of ramekin, pressing firmly against

sides of ramekin and pushing up slightly at rim; do not press down on rim. Seal pastry to sides with tines of fork. Repeat procedure with remaining pastry. Brush tops and sides of pastries with glaze. Score tops in grid pattern, do not cut through pastry. Roll out scraps to 1/8-inch thick. Cut out 2-inch design of your choosing. Brush with glaze. Arrange on baking sheet, glaze side up. Place pies on baking sheet. Refrigerate designs and ramekins at least 30 minutes. (These can be prepared up to 6 hours ahead).

Position baking rack in center of oven. Bake at 400° for 20-25 minutes until pastry is golden brown and filling is hot. Transfer pies to plates; arrange one design on top of each pie and one on each plate. Serves 6.

Faye Starr, Bloomfield Hills



Sweet Hot Turkey Salad Casserole

2 cans crescent rolls or sheet dough
2 c. cooked, chunked turkey
12 ozs. whipped cream cheese
1 c. crushed pineapple, well-drained
1 c. shredded Swiss cheese
1 c. dried cranberries, cherries or currants
1 c. fresh, diced apples
1 c. crushed pecans or cashews
3/4 c. diced red onion
black pepper to taste

Spray a 9 x 13-inch baking dish with non-stick spray. Place one roll of crescent rolls or sheet dough in bottom of pan; set aside. In a large bowl, gently fold all other ingredients together, except second crescent roll or sheet dough, until mixed well. Place mixture in baking dish; spread evenly. Top with remaining crescent roll or sheet dough. Bake at 350° for 35-45 minutes. Serve immediately.

Robin Musselman, Charlotte

Chinese Beef Casserole

2 lbs. ground beef
1 c. chopped onion
1 c. chopped celery
1/4 c. soy sauce
2 cans cream of mushroom soup
1 14-oz. can bean sprouts, undrained
1/2 t. pepper
1 c. uncooked long grain rice
1 8-oz. can sliced water chestnuts, drained
2 c. frozen peas, thawed
1 5-oz. can chow mein noodles

Brown meat, onion and celery; drain. Stir in soup, bean sprouts, soy sauce and pepper; bring to a boil. Pour into a greased 3-quart baking dish. Stir in uncooked rice and water chestnuts. Cover and bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Uncover; stir in peas and sprinkle with chow mein noodles. Bake 15-20 minutes longer until heated through. Yields 8 servings.

Linda Slais, Lewiston

Herb-Baked Fish & Rice Casserole

1 1/4 c. hot chicken broth
1/2 c. uncooked white rice
1/4 t. Italian seasoning
1/4 t. garlic powder
1 10-oz. pkg. frozen chopped broccoli, thawed and drained
1 2.8-oz. can French's® French Fried Onions
1 T. grated Parmesan cheese
1 lb. unbreaded fish fillets, thawed if frozen
paprika to taste
1/2 c. shredded cheddar cheese

In an 8 x 12-inch microwaveable casserole dish, combine broth, rice, Italian seasoning

and garlic powder. Cook, covered on high for 5 minutes, stopping to stir halfway through cooking time. Stir in broccoli pieces, 1/2 can French fried onions and Parmesan cheese. Arrange fish fillets diagonally in a single layer on top of rice mixture and sprinkle lightly with paprika. Cook, covered on 50 percent power for 18-20 minutes or until fish flakes easily with fork and rice is done. Rotate dish halfway through cooking time if your microwave does not have a turntable. Top fish with cheddar cheese and sprinkle with remaining half of onions. Cook uncovered on high for 1 minute or until cheese melts. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

Patricia Coyle, Watervliet

Italian Casserole

1 lb. spaghetti noodles
1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
1 large onion, diced
1 can tomato soup
1 can cheddar cheese soup
1 t. dried oregano
1 t. onion salt
1 t. garlic salt
grated cheese of choice

Brown ground beef and onion; drain. Add soups; stir until well-mixed. Stir in spices and simmer while preparing spaghetti according to package directions. Drain spaghetti; combine with sauce and pour into a 4-quart casserole dish. Top with grated cheese of choice. Bake covered, at 350° for one hour.

Joan Clairmont, Bark River

Meat Pie Roma

1 lb. ground beef
1/2 c. chopped green pepper
1/2 c. chopped onion
3/4 c. water
1 6-oz. can tomato paste
1 t. salt
1/2 t. oregano
1/4 t. garlic powder
1 can refrigerated biscuits
1/3 c. grated Parmesan cheese, divided
6 oz. sliced mozzarella cheese

Brown meat; drain. Add green pepper, onion, tomato paste, water and seasonings; simmer 10 minutes. Line a greased 9-inch pie plate with biscuits; sprinkle with 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese. Fill with 1/2 of the meat mixture; top with 2 slices of cheese. Top with remaining meat mixture and Parmesan cheese. Bake at 400° for 15-20 minutes. Cut remaining cheese into strips; place on top of meat pie and return to oven. Bake until cheese melts. Makes 6-8 servings.

Cathy Nichols, Portland



Photo: Hamilton Parker Company



Photo: GreenScapes Landscape Architecture

How to Pave a Patio

Are you tired of tracking mud and dirt from the yard into the house? Do you want an outdoor space for entertaining or just getting out of the house when it's nice outside?

If you answered yes, then a patio may be right for you, and there are many choices for do-it-yourself installation on virtually any budget. Selection of materials is a good starting point to help determine how much money you'll need to spend.

To choose the right kind of paver for your space, your first decision is—clay or concrete? “Select the color and style that you want to achieve, and that will give you the benchmark to decide which manufacturer is most likely the right fit,” explains Adam Lewin, president of Hamilton Parker Company, a building supply company with stores in Delaware and Columbus, OH.

Clay pavers are popular because they have a deep color that doesn't fade over time. Manufacturers like Belden Brick (distributors in Bay City and Grand Rapids, MI), Pine Hall Brick (seven MI distributors) and Whitacre-Greer offer products that are perfect for home use. Concrete pavers, like those produced by Reading Rock, offer an especially wide choice of sizes, shapes and colors.

Lewin recommends that you narrow down your choices by considering the kind of look you want. For example, do you want a blend of colors or a solid appearance; a style that's classic old-world, rustic or clean lines; beveled edges or a dry, pressed look?

A low-cost option is to create your own patio by using reclaimed concrete. Re-using old or broken concrete pieces that are readily available from construction or demolition sites also helps the environment by reducing the amount of debris that goes into landfills. Install them as you would any other pavers, but understand that they may be quite heavy and of varying thickness. For added interest,

choose different sizes and shapes.

Regardless of the pavers, most do-it-yourselfers choose a sand-based patio base over a mortar-joined one because sand is more forgiving (and less expensive) and allows for much easier removal when necessary.

The next step is to create a frame. Metal border material or treated lumber is widely used. Lay-out the selected area with stakes and string. Using a flat-bladed shovel and maddox, dig out the area to about 4 to 6 inches deep (depending on the depth of border material and pavers). It's also a good idea to use a soil compactor (from equipment rental stores).

If odd sections of reclaimed concrete are used, then mark where more soil needs to be removed with white spray paint or lime and adjust the depth as necessary to fit the sections. Cut landscape fabric to fit the area and apply so that weeds and roots won't grow up through the gravel or sand.

Carefully install the frame, making sure that the angles are true. If using pavers of uniform depth, place enough gravel or, preferably, class 2 base material, to provide a minimum depth of roughly 1 inch over the area. Class 2 base material is generated by

LEFT: Paved walkways help reduce muddy traffic in your home.

RIGHT: It's important to consider drainage issues when planning your patio.

ripping up old roadbeds and used as a base for new roads. Level the gravel using a piece of scrap lumber.

Pour sand on the gravel. A general rule of thumb is to subtract the depth of the pavers from the depth of the borders, but it's good to have a minimum of 1 to 2 inches. Level the sand carefully with a screed made from scrap lumber, or a 2x6.

Place the pavers together according to the desired pattern using string tied from one edge of the frame to the other to ensure straight placement. Fill gaps between the pavers with sand by using a kitchen broom. Mist the area with a garden hose nozzle and repeat this process twice, then again about a week later or if pavers become wobbly.

If using reclaimed concrete, dig a bed about 3 inches deep and about an inch bigger in diameter than each paver. Place the landscape fabric, add sand over the weed barrier and even out with a rake. Set the broken concrete in place and fill the gaps with sand and mist to help settle the sand. Step on each piece and rock it from side to side. If wobbly or uneven, fill in with more sand until each piece is stable.

There are other patio options for the do-it-yourselfer. While not really a patio, a “floating deck,” or a wooden deck built close to ground level is a project explained on numerous websites.

Environmentally friendly products such as PolyPavement™, a liquid soil solidifier, are sold in 5-gallon buckets and may be applied by one of two methods. Diluted PolyPavement (polypavement.com) can be either mixed or compacted into the soil or sprayed on compacted soil and allowed to dry. The resulting surface is suitable for traffic, is the same color as the soil, and twice as strong as asphalt. The downside is that not every kind of soil is suitable.

Patio Drainage

When planning your patio, make sure it slopes away from any structures and has adequate drainage. The patio can be built with a channel around the sides that will drain water and can be covered with metal grills that look like part of the patio. The channel can also be connected to your property's main surface drainage port, likely a storm sewer, by buying drainage pipes.

Visit doityourself.com/stry/how-to-plan-patio-drainage-to-avoid-drainage-problems for more details.

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Get Comfortable: Ways to Even Your Room Temperatures

Nearly every house has some problems keeping all the rooms evenly warm or cool.

The heating, cooling and ventilation system (HVAC) is one of the last design features considered when a house is built. In addition to keeping the house perfectly comfortable year-round, other considerations such as total installation costs and monthly utility bills are factors that must be evaluated.

There are many reasons why various rooms do not stay warm or cool enough even though they have similar-sized ducts. A common reason is the number and orientation of windows. South-facing windows can transmit much heat into a room, causing it to overheat in summer. North-facing windows, especially old, leaky ones, can make a room chilly in winter. Both of these problems can be lessened by installing new windows or insulating shades, but there will still be some variations.

The walls of the ducts, especially on sheet metal ducts, may be losing or gaining heat as the air makes its way from the furnace or central air conditioner to the rooms. To make this even worse, heating ducts are often located under windows. This positions them on cold or hot outside walls and takes space from the wall insulation thickness.

A simple method to check this is to hold a thermometer in the register outlet air flow in each room. If there is a significant difference in the temperature, wrap insulation around as much of the duct as you can reach. Where the duct runs vertically through a wall, there is not much you can do other than open the wall and install insulated ducts.

Another reason for uneven temperatures is that not enough heated or cooled air is getting to those problem rooms. As a rough evaluation, hold your hand over room outlet registers to compare the air flow rates. If a room is far from the indoor blower, the duct creates more air flow resistance. This is exacerbated by the fact that longer ducts

lose more heat through their walls, and have more joints that can leak heated or cooled air before it gets to the intended room.

Check the damper plates in the ducts near the furnace to be sure the ones leading to the problem rooms are not partially closed and blocking air flow. Try partially closing the dampers leading to the other rooms. You may have to close them quite a bit to notice the effect, but doing so may force more heated or cooled air to the rooms that need it. The settings of the duct dampers to each room will likely have to be changed from summer to winter because the heat gain/loss varies with the changing seasons.

Hang a thread from a stick and hold it near all the joints in the ducts to locate air leaks. Seal these leaks with tape or duct joint sealing compound. Don't just use cheap gray duct tape, as it often comes loose in a year or two. Use either aluminum foil duct tape or black Gorilla® duct tape. Gorilla tape is easier to apply and holds up for many years.

Also, don't forget to make sure the room register baffles are fully opened. Installing a deflector over the register can help direct heated or cooled air out into the room. This is particularly true when air-conditioning because cool air tends to hang near the floor and not circulate throughout the room. Move furniture so it is not blocking the air flow.



Photo: ©iStockphoto.com/Slobodan Vasic

Installing a duct booster fan can help get more air flow to problem rooms. These fans are designed to fit into the ducts (round or rectangular) near the furnace blower, and some can sense when the blower starts and they turn on automatically. Others have their own thermostat or can be connected to the main blower controls.

Register booster fans, which



This adjustable duct thermostat is easy to install and it controls when the booster fan comes on.

mount over the outlet register in a room, can also help. These are easier to install than a duct booster fan, provide more room temperature control, and plug into a standard wall electric outlet. It has its own thermostat so it comes on only when the main blower is running, and the small fan motor uses only about 30 watts.

The following companies offer booster fans: Aero-Flo Industries, 219-393-3555, aero-flo.com; Field Controls, 252-522-3031, fieldcontrols.com; and Suncourt Manufacturing, 800-999-3267, suncourt.com; and register deflectors: American Metal Products, 800-423-4270, americanmetalproducts.com; and Deflecto Corporation, 800-428-4328, deflecto.com.

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

James Dulley is a nationally recognized mechanical engineer writing about home energy issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.





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Co-op members saved over \$3,000 in April on pharmacy costs using their new Co-op Connections® cards. By using your card, you will be able to receive 10 to 60 percent discounts on prescription drugs at over 60,000 national and regional pharmacy chain stores—including CVS, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, Target, and many more.

The program is simple and free to use. Log-on to TeamMidwest.com and click on the Co-op Connections card image to be directed to an informational page with a link to a database of thousands of national, regional and local discounts—including the pharmacy program.

Midwest staff continues to work with businesses across our service territory to develop local deals for your benefit. We will publish these in *Country Lines* as they join, as well as promote them on our website. Check back often.

If you are a business owner and would like to be part of this program, please contact us at pr@teammidwest.com for details.

This month we're proud to welcome the following to our Co-op Connections Family. Just show your card when you visit any of these businesses and the stated offer will be honored.



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611 North Main Street, Adrian, MI
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Energy-saving kits are now available at a discount.

With a quick trip to your local co-op district service center, you can secure great kilowatt-hour savings with minimal out-of-pocket investment through the Energy Optimization store.

■ **Smart Power Strip:** \$5 after instant rebate (limit 2)

Did you know that your electronics and appliances continue using power even when the devices are off? The Smart Power Strip is designed to stop this phantom power loss by automatically turning devices off when not in use. It's a great resource for your home entertainment systems or office.

For example, just plug the TV into the control outlet, and the DVD player, game system, and/or home theater in the switched outlets. When the TV is turned off, the devices in the switched outlets then power down.

Or, plug your computer into the control outlet, and the monitor, printer, and/or scanner in the switched outlets. When the computer goes to sleep, or is turned off, the devices in the switched outlets then power down. There are two constant "hot" outlets for your cable system, satellite receiver, DVR, fax, or cable modem.

This power strip also provides up to 6,000 volts of surge protection. It can handle a maximum spike current of 60,000 amperes. If the surge protection does fail, the manufacturer offers up to \$30,000 in connected

equipment warranty protection.

■ **Electric Water Heater Kit:** \$4 after instant rebate (limit 1)

The average home uses 30 gallons of water per day for showering with standard showerheads. Switching to a high efficiency showerhead could save over 2,300 gallons per year, as well as all the energy needed to heat that water. The kit includes one high-efficiency shower head.

Faucet aerators are easy to install, and can reduce your home water consumption and lower water heating energy costs by as much as 50 percent. The kit includes two faucet aerators.

Insulating your water heater pipes can reduce the heat loss that occurs as water runs through and sits in pipes. Using pipe wrap can result in a reduction in water heater temperature settings of between 2 and 4 degrees Fahrenheit, saving you energy. It is recommended that you install 4 feet of pipe wrap on the outgoing hot water pipe, and 2 feet of pipe wrap on the incoming cold water pipe. The kit includes 5 feet of 3/4-inch pipe wrap.

■ **Three Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs:** \$2 after instant rebate (limit 12 bulbs per account)

A quick and easy way to start saving energy is to replace your current incandescent lightbulbs with compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFL). CFLs use 75 percent less energy and



last much longer than incandescents.

Each of these items can be purchased individually, or you can package them for even greater savings! The Value Pack includes three CFLs, one Smart Power Strip, and an Electric Water Heater Kit for just \$9 after the instant rebate (retail value \$62.40), or you can purchase the Max Pack which includes 12 CFLs, two Smart Power Strips, and an Electric Water Heater Kit for only \$18 (retail value: \$123.85).

The EO Store is available through August. All EO rebates and programs are available to Michigan residents who receive electric service from Midwest Energy Cooperative. Offers are subject to change and availability. Other restrictions may apply.

New Website Includes 'Live Chat'

If you're out surfing the worldwide web, stop by the new TeamMidwest.com website and see our great new look, features and functions.

While much of the content is the same, the fresh new look and ease of navigation makes it much better to use. You'll still find many of the same great features, like details on our programs and services, energy resources and usage information, easy access

to the E-bill site to view your account information and pay your bill, and real-time outage information in our "Outage Central" link.

Our social media

platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Flickr) are now just a click away from the homepage. These are a great way to learn the latest news and information about your cooperative and share your own thoughts. You can view our latest Facebook and Twitter posts right from the homepage, and even sign up to follow us for major outage updates from the "Lights Out" alert on the scrolling banner.

A community calendar has been added. Just click on the "Upcoming Events" link on the home page to see a calendar that shows Midwest-sponsored events and activities, as well as community activities as submitted by

organizations in and around our service territory. Submitting an event is easy, and once approved, the event will be included for all to see.

"Live Chat" is a new, real-time support tool, also available from the home page. It connects you directly to a member of our Customer Care team and provides instant messaging capabilities so that you can get your questions answered. Live Chat will generally be available from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. If the feature isn't available, it will show as off-line, but will give the user an option to submit their contact information for follow up.

Surf on over and take a look. We think you'll like what you see!



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FOR SALE, DRAG LINE – 248-249-0355. mkish40809@aol.com

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GRAYLING ADULT FOSTER CARE – Home for sale. Six private rooms. 231-649-6842.

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49 ORGANIC ACRES – 3 miles west of Traverse City, MI. M-72 frontage, two roads, house, farm buildings, appraised 2005, \$730,000, asking \$500,000. 517-663-5013.

FOR SALE, KALKASKA, MI – 100 seating, active restaurant with 2-bedroom home on approximately 5 acres, near many trails and lakes, \$279,000. Contact swampplady59@yahoo.com

LAKE COUNTY HUNTING ACREAGE – 80-400 acre parcels available. Cranberry Lake 80 acres, \$145,000. Sauble River 80 acres, \$139,000. North West Realty, 231-745-4646. NorthWestRealty.biz

NEW LOG HOME, DRUMMOND ISLAND – 100 feet Lake Huron, 36x26x10 pole building, concrete floor, boat ramp, \$285,000. 231-258-5645.

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FURNISHED, 3-BEDROOM – 2-bath, air conditioning, double-wide over looks Little Traverse Bay, \$47,900. 231-487-0071.

163.8 ACRES, ISABELLA COUNTY – Beautiful piece of hunting property. Small older trailer, small barn, electric, pond, mixture of cedar swamp, wooded rolling high ground and 20 tillable acres, \$320,000. 616-209-2230.

MUSKEGON RIVER, RIVER FOREST – Lot 17, near Hersey. 240 feet frontage, gorgeous sunset view down the river, older but functional mobile. Peaceful retreat, asking \$42,900. 269-731-2822.

HISTORIC HOME AND ESTATE SALE – July 8-10, 2011. Perrett family mansion for sale and antiques ranging from 1880s to present. 404 W. Mansion St., Marshall, MI 49068. This Victorian-era federal-style marvel was built in 1855 with a grand view of the Brooks Memorial Fountain. Being part of the Marshall historic landmark district, it boasts 10-foot ceilings, 4 bedrooms, 2½ baths, 2 fireplaces, a summer porch and all original doors, woodwork and hardware. Asking price \$225,000. For private tour or questions, please call Marie, 989-217-0934.

TWO-BEDROOM HOME – On 2 lots in Atlanta, \$23,000. Land contract possible, 989-785-4110.

VACATIONS

3-BEDROOM BREVORT LAKEFRONT – Vacation home, 20 minutes north of Bridge. Linda.L.farquhar@gmail.com, 316-721-3420, lakefrontvacationrental.com

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Source: Alliance to Save Energy



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How to Stay Safe

Want to maintain a safe and more energy efficient house? Following are how-to tips to keep your appliances, outlets and alarms working all year long!

Clean Cold Coils

Refrigerators are one of the highest energy-consuming products in your home. In fact, if your current refrigerator was made before 1993, it uses twice the amount of energy used by new models. To maximize your energy dollars, vacuum the coils every three months to eliminate dirt buildup that reduces efficiency and creates fire hazards. To clean condenser coils:

- ▶ Unplug the refrigerator.
- ▶ Pull out unscrew the vent plate that protects the coils.
- ▶ Clean the coils with a vacuum hose, using a brush to wipe off dust you can see.

Clean Air = Safe Air

Air conditioners need to be cleaned at the beginning of every season to keep them running safely and efficiently. To clean your air conditioner:

- ▼ Shut off power to the unit and remove the filter cover.
- ▼ Use a vacuum extension brush on either the coils or the visible air fins.
- ▼ Pull out the filter and clean or replace according to the instructions in the manual.
- ▼ Outside, clear leaves and debris away from the condensing unit. Hose off dirt.

Outlet Serves as Fail-safe

Ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) are designed to protect people from electrical shock and electrocution. A GFCI constantly monitors electricity flowing in a circuit. If it senses any loss of current, it quickly switches off power to that circuit.

GFCIs can be installed at the main service panel or in place of ordinary outlets. Typically, they are installed in areas where water and electricity mix in close proximity, such as a bathroom, garage, kitchen or basement. GFCIs can be damaged or wear out due to voltage surges from lightning, utility switching, or normal use.

Just because an outlet works does not mean that the GFCI is functioning; they should be tested monthly to ensure they are in working condition. Whether you have a receptacle-type or circuit breaker-type GFCI, pushing the TEST button should turn off the power of the circuit. Portable GFCIs should be tested before every use. After testing, simply press the RESET button.

Smoke Alarms

On average, eight people die in a home fire each day in the United States, for a total of nearly 3,000 fatalities every year. Roughly two-thirds of these deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms. Smoke alarms save lives by providing early warning of fire. Newer smoke alarm recommendations and technologies provide greater levels of protection than ever before.

Smoke alarms should be installed in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home. They should be tested monthly by pushing the TEST button or using other procedures recommended by the manufacturer. Smoke alarm batteries should be changed at least once a year. If an alarm “chirps” or “beeps” to indicate low batteries, change them right away. Replace all smoke alarms at least every 10 years.

Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters

Arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs) replace standard circuit breakers in your home’s electrical service panel. AFCIs provide a higher level of electrical fire protection, detecting hazardous arcing conditions traditional breakers were not designed to recognize, and shutting down the electricity before a fire can start.

However, AFCIs can stop working without showing signs of failure. Test AFCIs after installation and once a month to make sure they are working properly. To test, push the TEST button. The breaker handle should go to the middle or off position. To reset, move the breaker handle to the OFF position and then to the ON position.

Sources: Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, Electrical Safety Foundation International

How to Clean Up a Broken Compact Fluorescent Lightbulb (CFL)



A CFL’s glass tubing contains about 4 milligrams of mercury. While this isn’t much (classic thermometers contained 500 milligrams) consumers should still take precautions if a CFL breaks.

- 1** Ventilate the room, then wait 5 to 10 minutes. 
- 2** Scoop up powder and glass fragments using stiff paper or cardboard. Seal in a plastic bag. 
- 3** Use duct tape to pick up any fragments or powder.
- 4** Immediately place all materials used to clean up and the plastic bag in an outdoor trash container. Remember to wash your hands. 
- 5** Not all recycling centers accept broken CFLs. Check with your local and/or state waste authority for disposal requirements, or visit Earth911.com.

To learn more visit epa.gov/cflcleanup.

Source: Electrical Safety Foundation, Environmental Protection Agency

STATE OF MICHIGAN

BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

NOTICE OF HEARING FOR THE CUSTOMERS OF MIDWEST ENERGY COOPERATIVE CASE NO. U-16037-R

- Midwest Energy Cooperative proposes to reconcile its 2010 power supply cost recovery costs and revenues, and apply a number of overall-revenue-neutral changes, including a \$3 increase in the monthly residential charge, if the Michigan Public Service Commission approves its request.
- The information below describes how a person may participate in this case.
- You may call or write Midwest Energy Cooperative, 901 East State Street, P.O. Box 127, Cassopolis, Michigan 49031, (800) 492-5989 for a free copy of its application. Any person may review the application at the offices of Midwest Energy Cooperative.
- The first public hearing in this matter will be held:

DATE/TIME: July 28, 2011, at 9:00 a.m. This hearing will be a prehearing conference to set future hearing dates and decides other procedural matters.

BEFORE: Administrative Law Judge Dennis W. Mack

LOCATION: Michigan Public Service Commission, 6545 Mercantile Way, Suite 7, Lansing, Michigan

PARTICIPATION: Any interested person may attend and participate. The hearing site is accessible, including handicapped parking. Persons needing any accommodation to participate should contact the Commission's Executive Secretary at (517) 241-6160 in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance.

The Michigan Public Service Commission (Commission) will hold a public hearing to consider the April 28, 2011, application of Midwest Energy Cooperative (Midwest) to reconcile its 2010 power supply cost recovery (PSCR) costs and revenues. Midwest represents that its 2010 net overrecovery is \$1,750,106, including prior years' balances. Midwest is also seeking a number of overall-revenue-neutral changes, including a \$3 increase in the monthly residential charge.

All documents filed in this case shall be submitted electronically through the Commission's E-Dockets website at: michigan.gov/mpscedockets. Requirements and instructions for filing can be found in the User Manual on the E-Dockets help page. Documents may also be submitted, in Word or PDF format, as an attachment to an email sent to: mpscedockets@michigan.gov. If you require assistance prior to e-filing, contact Commission staff at (517) 241-6180 or by email at: mpscedockets@michigan.gov.

Any person wishing to intervene and become a party to the case shall electronically file a petition to intervene with this Commission by July 21, 2011. (Interested persons may elect to file using the traditional paper format.) The proof of service shall indicate service upon Midwest's attorney, Shaun M. Johnson, at Dykema Gossett PLLC, Capitol View, 201 Townsend Street, Suite 900, Lansing, Michigan 48933.

Any person wishing to make a statement of position without becoming a party to the case, may participate by filing an appearance. To file an appearance, the individual must attend the hearing and advise the presiding administrative law judge of his or her wish to make a statement of position. All information submitted to the Commission in this matter will become public information: available on the Michigan Public Service Commission's website, and subject to disclosure.

Requests for adjournment must be made pursuant to the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure R 460.17315 and R 460.17335. Requests for further information on adjournment should be directed to (517) 241-6060.

A copy of Midwest's request may be reviewed on the Commission's website at: michigan.gov/mpscedockets, and at the offices of Midwest Energy Cooperative, 901 E. State Street, Cassopolis, MI. For more information on how to participate in a case, you may contact the Commission at the above address or by telephone at (517) 241-6180.

Jurisdiction is pursuant to 1909 PA 106, as amended, MCL 460.551 et seq.; 1919 PA 419, as amended, MCL 460.54 et seq.; 1939 PA 3, as amended, MCL 460.1 et seq.; 1982 PA 304, as amended, MCL 460.6h et seq.; 1969 PA 306, as amended, MCL 24.201 et seq.; and the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, as amended, 1999 AC, R 460.17101 et seq.

May 25, 2011

Lifetime Guarantee

We've been doing some remodeling. I think it's a rite of passage that you fix up the place when you retire. Either that or move. But we like our native Michigan, and we haven't agreed on a place in the state we'd rather call home, so here we are.

I've been putting drawer pulls on our new bathroom vanity and I noticed that they come with a lifetime guarantee. I don't know how these simple metal bands can go wrong, but I suppose offering a lifetime guarantee for something that can't go bad is pretty cheap. There's no downside for the company.

We've got a fancy coffee maker that's developed a tic after only three months: It turns on and off a half-dozen times before it finishes brewing a pot. When I emailed the manufacturer's customer support service, they suggested we first clean it according to their instructions (we already had) and then let them know if there are further problems. With the limited warranty, shipping wouldn't be free. Really? We made the effort to buy their product, but they can't make the effort to make sure we get something that works?

It would be nice if everything came with a lifetime guarantee, including us. However long our 'lifetime' is, we can experience any number of malfunctions, some fixable, some not, and they can appear at any age. What we can't do is send ourselves back to the manufacturer for a replacement.

What we can do is take better care of ourselves to give ourselves a chance for the best possible lifetime. It's kind of like our house: keep up with maintenance and give it an occasional makeover.

Science suggests we can do two things for the best chance at a high quality of life: stay active in mind and body, and eat well.

My family is good at eating. Our in-laws

laugh about the Buda family's seemingly constant focus on food—what we're going to have for the next dinner, what Sunday breakfast will look like, what we ate the last time we met. I guess food is our bond. We don't overeat, or go overboard on junk food, but we also don't abstain from so-called unhealthy food. My mother loves Kentucky Fried Chicken. My dad

cheddar cheese broth that I would liken to inside-out pierogis, the traditional Polish-filled dumplings. Since I can't find a reference to a soup like this online, I'm guessing it's the happy result of pierogi preparation gone bad. You see the potato theme here? By the way, we discovered that you can't get regular white potatoes in Minnesota, only reds and russets (think Idaho for baking). It seems the potato chip makers have cornered the market on good old Michigan white potatoes.

My favorite meal is breakfast. I've learned how to make great pancakes that are good for you, but taste so good they could double as dessert. This recipe is adopted from *The Joy of Cooking* (1997), with additions and substitutions to make them healthier. It makes about two dozen 4-inch pancakes. We freeze them, separating them with waxed paper, then thaw them at a low microwave setting before briefly crisping them up in the toaster.

If you want to give the fathers in your family a healthier meal on Fathers' Day, serve

them these pancakes for breakfast—bacon really goes well with them—or for dessert with strawberries and whipped cream.

I can't guarantee they'll fix what ails them, but I guarantee they'll like them.

Multi-grain Flapjacks

Lightly butter, oil or spray griddle and place over medium heat; heat electric griddle to 350 F.

Whisk together in a large bowl:

1 c. *white whole-wheat flour* (a lighter flour with all the benefits of regular dark whole wheat should be available in most groceries)

1/2 c. *white all-purpose flour*

1/3 c. *cornmeal*

1/3 c. *old-fashioned or quick-cooking rolled oats*

1/2 c. *total of any combination of wheat germ, flaxseed meal, oat bran, or any other fad grain of the day*

1/2 c. *chopped walnuts*

2 T. *brown sugar*

2 t. *baking powder*

1 t. *salt*

1/2 t. *baking soda*

1/2 t. *ground cinnamon*

pinch of *ground nutmeg*

Whisk together in another bowl:

2 c. *fat-free or low-fat milk*

5 T. *unsalted butter, butter blend or substitute, melted*



1/4 c. *honey*

3 *large eggs*

Pour the wet ingredients over the dry ingredients and gently whisk them together, until just combined. (For blueberry pancakes, add fresh or thawed berries to batter now.)

Spoon 1/4 cup batter onto the griddle, spreading out into rounds. Cook until the tops are dotted with bubbles, then flip and cook the underside until lightly browned. Serve immediately or keep warm in a 200 F oven.

Serve with maple syrup, favorite yogurt, fruit, or a combination of these.

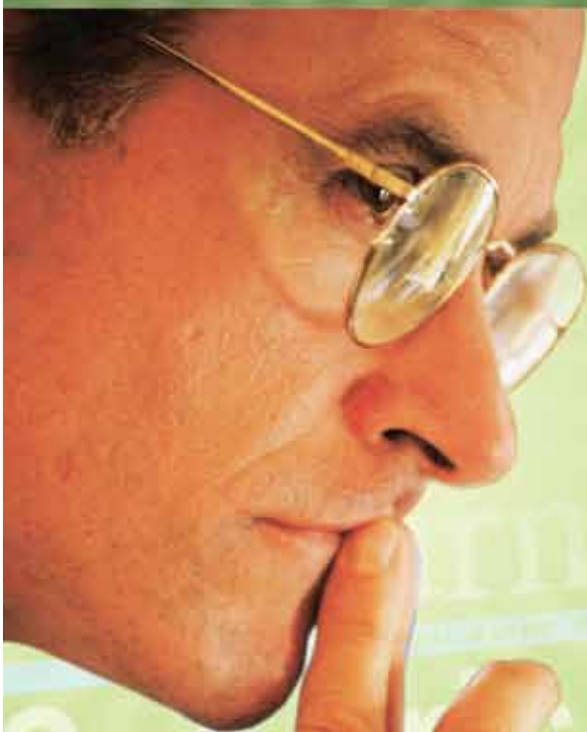
continues to enjoy braunschweiger. I think McDonalds' Sausage McMuffin with Egg is one of the culinary wonders of the world.

When Barbara and I visited my parents in Minnesota in April, we made them a few of their favorite meals. One is fondly called "Potatoes, Tomatoes and Meat," which consists of potatoes, tomatoes and meat. Another is Polish-style potato pancakes, with potatoes, egg and flour fried to a crispy edge and a soft center. You really can't walk after eating them. My brother Tom and his wife, Jackie, recently made them a soup with potato dumplings in a

Mike Buda is editor emeritus of *Country Lines*.

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





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