

A Service of **HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative**

April 2012

Michigan COUNTRY LINES



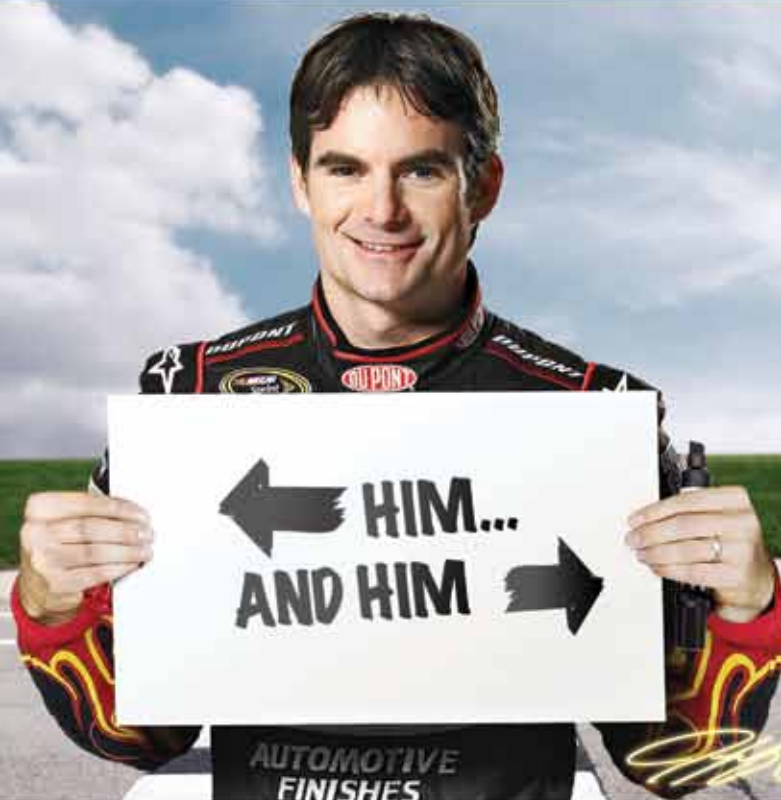
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Big Value, Low Cost

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

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

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

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AllTemp Comfort, Inc.
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Carsonville

Certified Temperature Innovations
(810) 300-7748

Charlotte

Applegate Home Comfort
(517) 541-8013

Cheboygan

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(231) 627-7533

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Orton Refrigeration & Htg
(989) 761-7691

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(231) 873-2665

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Change of Address: Please notify your electric cooperative. See page 4 for contact information.



Michigan COUNTRY LINES



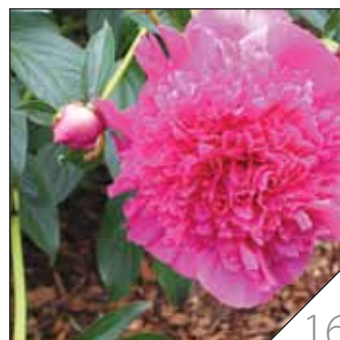
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*HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative
& Midwest Energy versions: Pictured Rocks
National Lakeshore, in the U.P.*

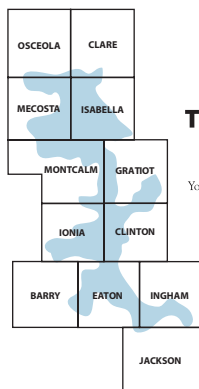
Photo - Shawn Malone/LakeSuperiorPhoto.com

*Cherryland Electric Cooperative & Great Lakes
Energy versions: The March storm.*

Photo - John Russell/Great Lakes Images

Michigan's Electric
Cooperatives
countrylines.com





Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Blanchard office:

3681 Costabella Avenue
Open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Portland office:

7973 E. Grand River Avenue
Portland, MI 48875
Open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Electric bill/account questions:

517-647-7556 or 1-800-562-8232

Pay by phone, anytime:

1-877-999-3395

Service questions/outages:

517-647-7554 or 1-800-848-9333
(24 hours for emergency calls)

Tri-County Propane:

1-877-574-2740

High Speed Internet

1-800-668-8413

homeworks.org

E-mail: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

Every Member Has A Role

In celebrating our 75th anniversary this year, it's been interesting to see how so many things have changed outwardly, yet remained essentially the same.

Our distribution system has been expanded, upgraded and rebuilt, yet Pole #1 still stands on Kinneville Road, a working piece of the system that brings you reliable electricity.

Our Portland office building is still in the same place as it has been since the 1940s—with some facelifts and modernization and repurposing.

The card on the next page is another great example. Kenneth Graham said his Uncle Carl kept that card posted next to the fuse box in the pump house as a reminder. The card includes meter reading and billing rules, and gives specific instructions on who to contact in case of a power outage, based on where the member lived. These days, we have one central number for you to call, but we still need you to call in and report your outage.

Truth is, we've always expected our member-owners to take an active role in their own electric utility.

We don't send you a list quite like this old one, to post next to your fuse box or meter, but through *Country Lines* and other communications we do ask you to take part in electing and guiding the cooperative's leadership. This is important because as a cooperative, we are operated by and for our member-owners—you.

Next month we'll ask you to attend your district's annual membership meeting for updates, and in Districts 3 and 6, to elect the neighbor who will represent you on your board of directors.

We have 75 years of good leadership, thanks to participation from members like you. It's a tradition that you can help continue.



Mark Kappler
General Manager



Join the conversation at
homeworks.org/blog

Our offices will be closed

Friday, May 4,

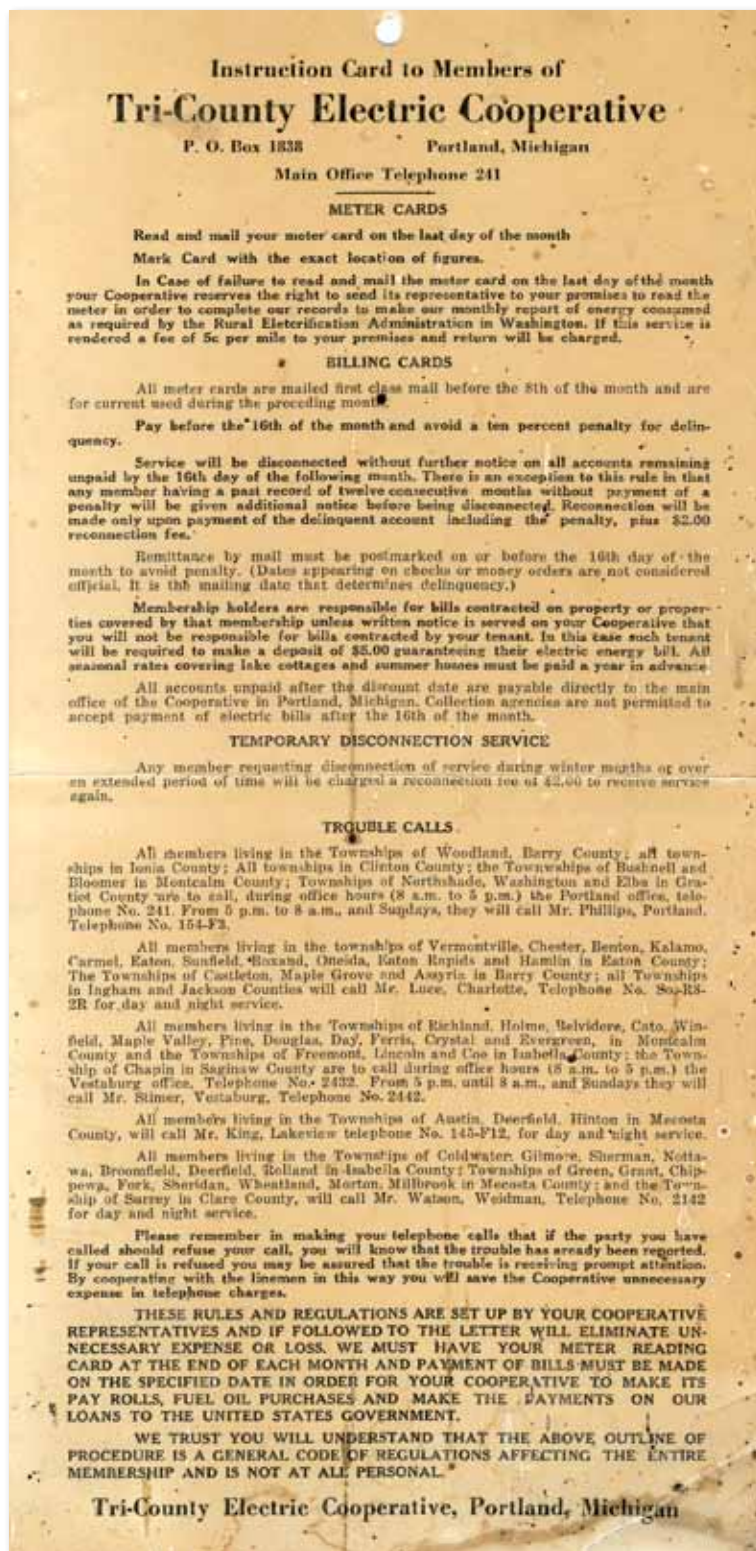
for all-employee training.

We will re-open at 8 a.m. Monday, May 7.

For emergencies, call 800-848-9333

To pay your bill by phone, call 877-999-3395

'Instruction Card' Reflects a Different Time



"While going through the belongings of my uncle Carl Geasler, I came across the enclosed card... I'm not sure how old it is, but as long as I can remember it has hung next to the fuse box in the pump house.

Carl often told about the Geasler family getting electricity to the farm, and the difference it made in their lives.

I also remember him telling about the reliability in the early years. He said that if there was a cloud in the sky you could be pretty sure the power was going to go out.

Things have changed considerably during my uncle's life and he said the best thing he saw in his life was electricity coming to their home. Carl passed away in 2007 at age 98 and was always thankful for his electric co-op."

— Kenneth Graham, Harrison



To read the entire instruction card, visit homeworks.org, where we've posted a copy in enlargeable, printable pdf format.



This photo from March, 1963, found in former general manager Vernor Smith's scrapbook, shows a line crew building service to an irrigation well; location unknown.

Letters

Praise and advice regarding the recent storm, more on apples and hospital costs, CFLs, and guidelines for tree-planting. It's all here in your reader letters.



Photo - John Russell, Great Lakes Images

"Thanks to all of the line crews who worked on getting power restored to customers." — George Granlund

Storms & Power Lines

In light of the recent snow we had here in Leelanau County, I would like to make a suggestion regarding the power lines. We could take a more proactive approach to the emergency that arises by burying the power lines. I heard this is very expensive, but if put in perspective of the cost of restoring power to business and homes, not to mention the loss of commerce, and personal inconvenience, I wonder just how much more expensive this process of burying the lines would be.

— Anneke Wegman-Plamondon,
Lake Leelanau

Editor's Note: It costs about three times as much to install underground cable. This equates to tens of thousands of dollars more per mile-of-line. Further, the life span of underground cable is shorter than overhead, and it is much more time-consuming and costly to locate and fix underground outages.

Each time they upgrade a section of line, electric co-ops evaluate the cost/benefit of underground lines and review outage history over a period of years. Because they are member-owned and nonprofit, co-ops constantly balance their

responsibility to keep the lights on with maintaining affordable rates.

Thanks To Storm Crews

Thanks to all of the line crews who worked on getting power restored to customers. We went 42 hours without power, but survived. [I have some] suggestions for *Country Lines* articles:

- An hour-by-hour narrative of how Cherryland handled the storm.
- A description of how to use a generator to power a furnace or other appliances in an emergency. Both good and bad practices.
- What to do in an emergency, such as preserving food, keeping warm safely, etc.

The storm can be a real learning experience. Again, thanks to the crews for the hard work.

— George Granlund

Editor's Note: There's a storm story on pages 12-13, and electrical safety stories are scheduled for all issues (always p. 25).

Safety information on using generators and around downed power lines appeared in March (also on countrylines.com), and the May issue will feature storm safety. Thanks for asking about these important topics.

An Apple A Day

Enjoyed reading the "An Apple a Day" story in the February issue of *Country Lines*.

We have one such Yellow Transparent apple tree on our farm in Garden (Upper Peninsula). Mike Buda suggests that, "If you have a tree, treasure it." The tree is about 100 years old and is starting to "deteriorate" with old age. About five years ago, my neighbor and I decided to keep the tree living as long as possible. Every fall, we give it some necessary maintenance. We currently have a cable wrapped around the trunk to keep it from splitting any further. Mike is correct about the deliciousness of the fruit from this tree. My mother made great pies and sauce with the apples from this tree over 60 years ago. The threshing crew and family loved her delicious homemade apple pies.

— Steve and Roseanne
Pscodna, Garden and Lansing

Who's Paying Hospital Costs?

Let me offer a possible answer to Mike Buda's January "Ramblings" column, where he wonders who is paying the costs for his hospital roommate, Roger. Most likely, everybody who pays health insurance premiums or out-of-pocket for medical services shares the expense of Roger's health care. This is one of the reasons why medical care and health insurance premiums cost so much. If Roger's on disability, then taxpayers pay.

Any society has to decide whether they treat their fellow citizens or let them die. While some in our country would choose the latter (as shown in

recent debates), most of us living in a civilized society choose to treat people in need of care. As it should be.

If you choose to drive, you are required to be insured. You can choose not to drive. You can't, no matter how healthy or careful you are, choose not to get sick or injured. That's why the Individual Mandate (requires that everyone be insured) part of the new health care law is crucial to making this law work.

Until now, the burden of paying healthcare costs for the "Rogers" among us was left to the insured (through higher rates), or to taxpayers when the "Rogers" go on disability. In 2014, when the Affordable Care Act kicks in, everyone will be covered, and everyone will pay into the system. The burden of caring for "Roger" will be shared by many rather than few, if we are going to continue our moral tradition of treating our neighbors instead of letting them die. Then Mr. Buda won't have to wonder, because Roger will be insured.

— Jeff Lange, Alanson

Geothermal Heating/Cooling Contractor?

I need help finding a contractor for my house in Rosscommon, MI.

— Kevin Forrest

Editor's Note: Visit the Michigan Geothermal Energy Association's website at earthcomfort.com for contractor and other information, or email info@earthcomfort.com.

Burned About CFLs

I want to tell you I resent being told what kind of lightbulbs to use (CFLs). It takes them much longer to come on, and I am used



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Use motion sensors on your lights to save on your electric bill. These sensors turn on lights automatically when someone enters a room and turns them off after a person leaves.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

to flipping the switch and having light. Not so with these new bulbs. For me, it will be more costly as they do not give enough light for me to see, and I'll have to use more of them. You claim it will save 25 percent energy, but on the other hand, if I have to use two instead of one, how is that saving energy? Where I use a 75-watt now I have to go to 100-watt in the new bulbs. That is not saving anything. They are also harder to dispose of. Maybe that is what they want them to do is use more. Everyone I talk to says the same thing. In fact, I know people buying up the regular lightbulbs by the case hoping to have enough to last their lifetime. I paid almost \$10 for a 3-way one and it doesn't fit any table lamp I have with the shade on, and I can't afford to buy new lamps. I took the shade off to make room for the bulb and used it, and it lacks a lot of being anywhere near as good as the old 3-way bulbs. Try doing hand work at night with those new bulbs, and you just can't see. Yes, I have had my eyes checked. My son and his family have had two of them start smoking between the base and the spiral. No, it did not burn out, but it is not safe and they will not use them. What's next? Have we no freedoms?

— Dorothy Hemenway, Decatur

Art Thayer Responds: (Energy Efficiency Programs Director, Michigan Electric Cooperative Association)

Thank you for your letter concerning frustration with CFLs. Although you are using a 100-watt CFL equivalent bulb to replace a 75-watt incandescent bulb, you are still saving energy because the 100-watt equivalent CFL only consumes 23 watts, reducing your energy consumption by over 50 watts every time you use the bulb. As with any appliance, there are vast differences in quality and performance between brands. Consumer Reports (consumer-reports.org) has tested and rated

several CFL brands and this is a good source for finding the best-performing bulb. If your electric co-op has an energy advisor they may also be able to point you in the right direction for proper bulb replacement and the best brand. Yet, even the best CFL brand may not be the best fit for your particular use. The federal government is rethinking the requirement to phase out incandescent bulbs and has pushed the effective date of the 100-watt phase out from January 2012 to October 2012. The new incandescent bulbs are more efficient than older incandescent bulbs. Slight smoking and discoloration (brown or black, over time) at the base of the CFL bulb is normal.

Nuclear Opinions

The water flowing through the Saint Clair and Detroit Rivers at each end of Lake Saint Clair has perhaps more energy than three or four nuclear power plants could produce if a reasonable plan to harvest this otherwise wasted energy could be formulated with perhaps the cooperation of Canada or mirror facilities on each side of the border.

— David Shepard

Don't Plant Near Power Lines

The weather is warming and gardeners are getting ready. Please consider an article on planting trees, shrubs, grasses, forbs and rain gardens under electric and power lines. Not only homeowners plant under lines ... I've seen landscapers do the same! In ten years, when the trees are just starting to look good, they'll have to be cut down.

Thank you.

— Beth Clemensen

Editor's Note: The Arbor Day Foundation site at arborday.org has information on "Choosing the Right Tree" that offers planting guidelines, suggests species for different landscape areas, and offers free trees for joining. We've also planned a safety-related story for May.

HomeWorks Youth Serves On National Council

Tyler Orlando, a junior at Chippewa Hills High School in Remus and a HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Co-op member, recently returned from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Annual Meeting in San Diego, as part of his year-long service on the NRECA Youth Leadership Council (YLC).



Tyler Orlando

Orlando represented Michigan on the YLC, a leadership group composed of 42 students nationwide. YLC members play an important role at the meeting by assisting at the Congressional Action Center, encouraging members to contact their U.S. senators and representatives on key co-op issues, including protecting consumers and keeping electric bills affordable. The group also kicked off the huge event, which showcased a procession of YLC members carrying their state's flag to open the first general session.

"It was really cool to be part of NRECA's Annual Meeting," Orlando said. "I learned so much about the energy industry and how public policy affects it. And I met people from all across the country. It was an amazing experience."

Orlando was elected by his peers to serve on the Youth Leadership Council during the Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. The Youth Tour meets in Washington, D.C., every June, where over 1,500 students representing electric co-ops from across the country meet their Congressional representatives, learn about national co-op issues and visit historic landmarks. YLC delegates also attend a summer Leadership Conference in Washington. A national YLC spokesperson is selected during this conference.

Visit YouthTour.coop to see photos and videos and learn more about these electric co-op-sponsored programs.

Why Does the Type of Power We Provide Matter?



Up to 75 percent of every dollar you pay your local electric cooperative goes directly for wholesale power costs. Bucket trucks, poles and wire, right-of-way trimming, payroll, and other operating expenses are covered by the rest.

Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

Auto-Pay Makes Paying Bills Easier

Pay your utility bills the easy way! HomeWorks' FREE electronic payment service allows you to authorize your bank to pay your monthly utility bill automatically from your checking or savings account.

Simply complete and return the application below, and we'll get things started.

If you prefer to make your own payments each month, visit homeworks.org and click

on "My Account" to use our eBill program.

In eBill, you'll have the choice of paying by electronic check or savings deduction, or using a credit or debit card. You may also choose to sign up for automatic bill payment using a credit/debit card through our eBill system.

Another new payment option is by phone—call 877-999-3395 to pay by credit or debit card, or from a bank account.

Did you know?

You can choose to stop receiving a paper bill each month, and download your statement as a pdf document from eBill at homeworks.org.

PDF files can be enlarged on your screen, and they're simple to file on your home computer. Save paper and postage—it's easy!

STEP 1: Choose which HomeWorks bill(s) you'd like to have paid automatically:

- ☐ All active HomeWorks accounts
- ☐ ELECTRIC account #:
- ☐ PROPANE account #:
- ☐ INTERNET account #:
- ☐ I no longer wish to receive a paper bill.

STEP 2: Provide your banking information:

Deduct my bill payments automatically from my bank account.

Financial Institution:

To ensure the correct account number is used for this electronic payment and to obtain the ABA/routing number, please contact your financial institution for assistance.

ABA/routing #:

Account Number:

☐ Checking ☐ Savings

IMPORTANT: Please include a voided check with this completed form - automatic checking deduction cannot be processed without it.

STEP 3: Complete account information and authorizing signature:

Name:

Address:

City:

State: ZIP:

Daytime Phone:

Email:

This authorization will remain in effect until I give written notice of termination to HomeWorks Tri-County.

I understand that I should continue to pay my bill normally until the "Direct Payment" designation appears on my bill, and that **it is my responsibility to keep my banking information on file with HomeWorks up to date.** I further understand that HomeWorks will pass through any banking fees incurred due to my information being incorrect or outdated.

I authorize HomeWorks to deduct my payment from the bank listed for my bill each month. I understand that I control my payments and if at any time I decide to discontinue this service I will notify HomeWorks. I understand that all information provided will remain confidential.

This application cannot be processed without your authorizing signature:

Signature

Date

PROCESSING OPTIONS:

- Visit www.homeworks.org and use your eBill account to sign up
- Call us at 1-800-562-8232 with your banking information

- Mail this completed form to us at:
HomeWorks Member Services
7973 E Grand River Ave.
Portland, MI 48875

Touchstone Energy Classroom Grant Supports Portland Reading Program



From left, Portland High School resource room teachers Kevin Robydek and Louise Foltz accept a check for \$2,500 from HomeWorks Tri-County customer service representative Luanne Goodman, as principal Chris Rockey looks on. The grant will help the school buy and implement software to help struggling readers.

Spare Change Helps Area Families With Food, Housing

By rounding up your energy bill to the next dollar, you made it possible for the Tri-County Electric People Fund to make 13 grants, totaling \$18,185.64, in February.

The grants included:

- \$200 to Sheridan Assembly of God, to purchase food pantry items;
- \$3,850 to Briggs Public Library, St. Johns, for an early literacy station;
- \$2,000 to Red Cross-Central Michigan Chapter, Mt. Pleasant, for their emergency food program;
- \$1,500 as a challenge grant to the Lyons-

Muir Historical Society, toward restoring and conserving a rare Civil War flag;

- \$1,196.73 to Sunny Crest Youth Home, a working ranch near Sunfield for at-risk boys aged 10-17, for gardening program expenses;
- \$233.33 to an Ingham County family to assist with housing expenses;
- \$420.00 to a Montcalm County family to assist with Lifeline expenses;
- \$6,132.78 in total to four Mecosta County families to help with housing expenses; and
- \$2,653.10 in total to two Mecosta County families to help with dental expenses.

How To Apply For a Grant

Write to 7973 E. Grand River Ave., Portland, MI 48875. We'll send you an application form, grant guidelines, and other helpful information. You'll also find information and application forms on our website at homeworks.org.

Note: Applications must be received by May 8 to be considered at the May 16 board meeting.

How You Can Help

Tri-County customers can opt in or out of the voluntary Operation Round Up program at any time. Just enclose a note with your bill payment, or call us at 800-562-8232.



Ryan Smith Reaches Journeyman Level

Ryan Smith has completed four years of apprentice lineworker training, including class work and 7,000 hours of on-the-job education.

Ryan is HomeWorks' latest apprentice lineman to complete his training and "top out."

He joined the HomeWorks team at Portland in April 2003, working as a DIRECTV® installer and supervisor before moving to the automated metering project.



Nick Rusnell Earns Key Account Certification

Nick Rusnell has earned the Certified Key Account Executive designation from NRECA, our national organization. He is the second CKAE we have on staff, as Missy Robson went through the program several years ago.

The training program helps key account executives like Nick and Missy provide top quality customer service to our largest members, like Morbark, the Carson City Prison, and the ethanol plant at Woodbury, and to the dairy and other large farms we serve.

Nick joined the cooperative in January 2004 as a DIRECTV installer and field technician, and has served as the co-op's energy advisor since September 2008.



BATTLING THE STORM

By Nick Edson

The scene was a mess, and it blanketed most of northern lower Michigan and part of the eastern U.P. with 18-24 inches of wet, heavy snow.

Huge trees were knocked over, pulling down power lines and poles with them.

Two feet of snow blocked roads and driveways.

Over 104,752 homes and businesses were left out in the cold in the service areas of Cherryland, Great Lakes Energy (GLE), Presque Isle Electric & Gas (PIE&G), Cloverland, and Alger Delta cooperatives. The first three were the hardest-hit, but the count doesn't even include consumers affected in areas served by other utilities.

"We had our work cut out for us," said Cherryland line superintendent, Jim Carpenter, of the 20,000 outages in their area. "I've worked here 34 years and I've never seen the kind of destruction that we were facing."

Engineering manager Frank Siepker agrees.

"It wasn't just the amount of damage that was done," Siepker notes. "It was the fact that we had guys walking in waist-deep snow for miles at a time just to get back to where the line was down. We had many places where we couldn't send our line crews until our tree-trimming crews went in and cleared trees away from the road."

The storm hit late on Friday, March 2, and took more than a week of grueling work in fast-changing weather conditions to get everyone's power restored.

Not only were the co-op line crews working 16 hours at a stretch, but outside line, tree-trimming and equipment contracting crews came from all over Michigan and part of Indiana to help. Mutual aid teams, coordinated by safety professionals Joe McElroy and Dan King of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association (MECA), came from seven other

A crew works to reconnect power lines with the help of a bucket truck. The deep snow and ice produced by this record storm slowed restoration progress, and many outage areas weren't accessible by vehicles, causing some lineworkers to crawl through snow drifts on their hands and knees to reach downed wires.

electric co-ops and nine cities.

About 50 additional crews were called in to assist with Great Lakes Energy restoration efforts alone. By the storm's end, Cherryland had 150 people working in addition to regular staff—the largest workforce ever deployed on their system, and Presque Isle required about 30 additional workers.

"It was a huge undertaking," explains Siepker. "But the bottom line was that we had members sitting in the cold. We couldn't let up until the last one had power."

As the crews struggled to work in harsh conditions, member service representatives were answering phones and updating the media, web pages, and Facebook and Twitter sites with the latest news about power restoration.

"Most of our members understood the monumental task we faced," said Cherryland General Manager Tony Anderson. "But a few became frustrated and voiced that to our employees. That comes along with the job. I'm very proud of the job our employees did handling this massive outage."

At Great Lakes Energy, the state's largest co-op, outages spread over 18 counties and affected over 60,000 of 125,000 members.

"Getting to outage locations took more time with this storm," says Great Lakes CEO Steven Boeckman. "Big line trucks got stuck in the snow. Snowshoes, special tracked vehicles and snowmobiles were needed to get to many trouble spots, and even those sank into the snow."

Rain followed the storm, causing snow to



Photo and opposite page – John Russell, Great Lakes Images

The scene pictured here was unfortunately common as trees and limbs tore down lines in the storm's path.

Below: Lineworkers prepare to replace a pole that snapped in half under the pressure of heavy, wet snow.

freeze on some downed wires, and it had to be knocked-off before hoisting them back up into place. Over 50 broken poles were replaced, sometimes using tracked vehicles to haul them in. "Most of this hard, time-consuming work had to be repeated over and over again at each location with downed wires," Boeckman says.

Presque Isle had over one-half of their members—about 18,290 locations—out in their seven-county service area.

Towards the storm's edge, Cloverland and Alger Delta handled their own outages without outside help. "Our line crews began responding to outages early Saturday morning and hit it hard all weekend and continued into Monday morning," says Wendy Malaska, Cloverland marketing/communications director. About 10,000 services across their five-county area were affected, and Alger Delta had 40-50 outages.

"I cannot remember one this bad since the windstorm of '98, and cannot describe how bad it is on the line personnel...extremely challenging!" explains Joe McElroy, MECA's safety/loss control director. Deep snow also means bucket trucks are replaced by lineworkers climbing the slippery poles.

Each co-op has unique stories about how this record storm affected both their members and employees.

Some Cherryland members needed help and came right to the co-op's Grawn office to get it when they needed water for their horses. They came twice a day, meeting Member Service Manager Kevin Cragg outside as he filled up their big buckets with water. Other times, thoughtful members brought baked goods for employees to eat as they manned the office at all hours of the day and night.

It's not uncommon for co-op employees to

help arrange hotel rooms and meals for field crews, but one co-op even had employees who helped with lineworker laundry and another found a school bus to shuttle crews to and from the hotel after their equipment was stolen in the parking lot.

"It takes everyone to help out by doing things they don't normally do to get the job done," explains Scott Szymoniak, PIE&G's operations/engineering manager. This may mean an accounting employee takes outage calls and member services and management employees run materials and guide outside crews to outage sites.

And sometimes, it means co-op members help, too. Some PIE&G members drove lineworkers on their personal snowmobiles or tracked quads to reach outage sites. "Our members were glad to do anything to help," Szymoniak says.

At Great Lakes Energy, co-op members used snowblowers and tractors to clear roadways and to-the-pole paths for the crews, says operations director Dave Matz. A local restaurant provided meals and refused payment.

On the seventh day after the storm, Cherryland still had 150 lineworkers fixing outages that affected about 400 members; Great Lakes Energy still had 290 members without power; and PIE&G about 25.

The storm's magnitude will incur huge costs for the co-ops that bore the worst damage. For example, Cherryland estimates a final cost in the \$1 million range, Great Lakes \$1.5 million, and PIE&G in the \$500,000 range.

"There were no winners in this thing," says Siepker. "Only survivors. We did the best we could to get power restored. Our members did the best they could to stay warm. Many members told us they would never take electricity for granted again."



Photo – Great Lakes Energy



Photo - Shawn Malone/LakeSuperiorPhoto.com

America's National Parks:

Elliot Creek Falls along the North Country Scenic Trail in the U.P.

Big Value for a Low Price

When it comes to vacations, America's national parks are a perennial favorite. From roaring geysers and sandy seascapes to frontier forts and presidents' homes, these unique treasures boast magnificent landscapes and cultural enrichment.

Lately, they've been getting even better. Visitors are reaping the benefits of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which funded improvements to national park facilities and roads. Ninety-nine percent of these projects are finished, says Jeff Olson, spokesman for the National Park Service (NPS) in Washington, D.C. For example, the scenic Skyline Drive in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park sports dozens of new overlooks with jaw-dropping views and new interpretative signs.

Something for Everyone

National parks, nearly 400 now, offer something for everyone at a relatively low price. Enjoy hiking, biking, swimming, fishing and rafting, shop for locally made crafts at gift

shops, tour museums, explore cliff dwellings, take guided full-moon walks, and learn about science and biology from ranger talks.

The beauty and slower pace of a park vacation also draws people together. Parents are reminded that food cooked over a campfire tastes better. Kids remember how to make their own fun. Those in their '20s finally bond, adult to adult, with their parents. Even the most sullen teenager may crack a smile by the end of a day or two.

"For generations now, people have introduced members of their family to national parks," Olson says. "Parents and grandparents are now introducing their children to parks. These are places where you learn about American heritage and culture."

And, those who enjoy technology won't be disappointed, either. Visitors to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., can use the NPS' free app. The app displays the user's location, highlights historical and cultural points and offers tour suggestions, and gives directions to over 70 sites. Inside other national parks (rural or urban), visitors can deepen their

experiences by using smart phones and other mobile devices at visitors' centers and exhibits. Park websites sport live webcams, podcasts and links to lively social media, as well.

Michigan National Parks

Traveling closer to home, Michigan has its own wonders waiting for discovery within Isle Royale National Park, Keweenaw National Historic Park, Sleeping Bear Dunes, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, or the North Country Scenic Trail. Together, these national parks hosted 1,912,324 visitors in 2011.

A visit to **Isle Royale**, the country's only island national park, truly means "getting away from it all." At 45 miles long and 9 miles wide (third largest in the U.S.), hikers especially love its remote location and total automobile ban. It's also common to hear distant wolf calls or see a wandering moose or other wildlife in its wonderful, rugged scenery.

Over 160 miles of foot trails, 36 campgrounds, and one hotel are described as ample for those who make the effort to visit "one of the most pristine wilderness areas on earth." Note that the visiting season here is short (mid-April through October), and the Park Service's M.V. Ranger III ferry connects

Isle Royale with Houghton from early June to mid-September.

Established in 1992, **Keweenaw National Historic Park** celebrates life and history on the Keweenaw Peninsula, especially relating to 7,000 years of copper mining. The peninsula houses the oldest, largest lava flow, which created the largest known deposits of accessible pure (97 percent) native copper on Earth. Early miners could break the red metal from the rock to make jewelry and tools, and into coins and electric wire by later generations.

The entire picture of copper mining here, according to Wikipedia, is best-represented by the Village of Calumet (social, ethnic, commercial themes); former Calumet and Hecla Mining Company properties (corporate paternalism and power); and former Quincy Mining Company properties (extraction/processing themes). There's lots more for visitors to experience, from the Quincy Mine Hoist Museum in Hancock to a tour of the Delaware Mine near Copper Harbor, and many other museums, heritage centers, and Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park is nearby, too.

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore stretches 42 miles along Lake Superior, and offers 15 miles of giant red, orange and gold-colored sandstone cliffs.

The home of America's first national lakeshore, the rock formations shape natural



Learning about birds of prey from a national park ranger.

Photo - John F. Mitchell

archways, sea caves and waterfalls that are framed by sand dunes. You can see the Rocks close by paddling a kayak through their tunnels, or backpack among the peaks and bases. Most visitors, however, get close on boat tours that depart daily from Munising, or you can hire a plane in Grand Marais or drive to the Miner's Castle overlook.

Other notable sites are many waterfalls,

including Munising Falls, interpretive centers, and nearby forests, lakes and opportunities for four-season activities.

Running through Pictured Rocks is the longest finished segment (581 miles) of the **North Country Scenic Trail**, which also winds through Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park and other parts of the U.P. before crossing the Straits of Mackinac into the Lower Peninsula.

Crossing seven northern states, this is the longest of eleven National Scenic Trails. Designed to provide peaceful recreational opportunities in some of our country's outstanding landscapes, it will stretch 3,200 miles from North Dakota to Vermont when it's done. Over 2,100 miles are already certified.

The North Country Scenic Trail is accessible mostly on foot, by hiking, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, although bicycles and horses are allowed in some designated areas.

Most Michiganders know that a visit to **Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore** has to include "climbing the dunes," but while you're around, try the seven-mile-long Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive. This route takes you through several hundred feet of changes in elevation, vegetation, climate and great views of Lake Michigan. From the top of Sleeping Bear, you can see the Manitou Islands, a favorite place for campers and scuba divers.

Michigan also has 1,776 National Register of Historic Places listings, one National Heritage Area, 12 National Natural Landmarks,

Continued ►

Admission to Most National Parks Is Free!

Most of America's national parks don't have an entry fee.* For parks that do, admission is from \$3 to \$25 (good for an entire carload of people for a week). There are also bargain annual passes, good at over 2,000 federal recreation sites, including a seniors' pass for \$10. In Michigan, you can now buy a pass when you renew your driver's license.

The National Park Service has fee-free days in 2012 at over 100 national parks that usually charge entry fees. The dates are:

- **April 21-29** – National Park Week
- **June 9** – Get Outdoors Day
- **Sept. 29** – National Public Lands Day
- **Nov. 10-12** – Veterans Day weekend.

Search nps.gov/findapark/feefreeparksbystate.htm by park name or state to see which states are offering fee-free days, call 202-208-3818, or connect on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Also, visit the Public Broadcasting Service's website for enriching park stories at pbs.org/nationalparks.htm.

Many park-related hotels, restaurants, shops and tour operators offer specials on fee-free days (see National Park Hospitality Association at parkpartners.org/Special-Offers-for-2011.html and National Parks Promotions Council at nationalparksonline.org/special-offers/).

To find other free attractions (zoos, museums, concerts and festivals) check free-attractions.com or a city's visitor center, chamber of commerce or state tourism websites for ideas in the area you're traveling. Washington, D.C., and New York City boast an array of free activities at washington.org and nycgo.com.

*Fee waiver includes entrance fees, commercial tour fees, and transportation entrance fees. Other fees such as camping, tours, concessions and third party fees are not included, unless stated otherwise.

National Parks, from page 13

and 34 National Historic Landmarks, according to the tourism website at michigan.org.

Lodging = More Than Camping

For lodging, people sometimes picture a grand historic lodge or a tent campground. While these are great options, there are typically other choices through concessioners in the park or in nearby towns. One reason that Great Smoky Mountains Park is continually ranked as most popular U.S. national park is accessibility. It's close to Gatlinburg, TN, and Cherokee and Bryson City, NC, which cater to visitors with a wide variety of affordable accommodations, restaurants, shops, museums, and other attractions.

Popular Acadia National Park in Maine has no "roof" lodging, but the nearby historic village of Bar Harbor offers house vacation rentals, cottages, motels and bed-and-breakfast inns that suit all budgets.

Planning Ahead Is Key

Consider your travel priorities—do you want to drive your car, or fly to the closest airport and rent one? Cook or eat out? Sleep under the stars in the back country or on a real bed? Do you prefer to be near cities or to venture out?

People are surprised that some parks are close to major metropolitan areas. Cuyahoga Valley National Park, blessed with a winding river and fascinating canal history, is only 30 minutes from Cleveland. It also hosts scenic train rides and evening concerts. Stanford House, a bed-and-breakfast inn in the park,

has a self-service kitchen and wireless internet. The renovated farmhouse's room rates, which include a continental breakfast with cereal and fresh fruit, start around \$50 for a small room with a bunk bed and shared bath.

If staying in a quaint cabin is for you, primitive ones can be rented in Shenandoah. The large capacity cabins (roughly \$30-\$45 nightly) have no running water or electricity, but are equipped with mattresses, cookware, and either a wood fireplace or woodstove. In most cases, you carry your items in from between a few tenths of a mile to several miles in. Returning guests rave about the mountain views and the cabins, booked through Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, an authorized concessioner.

Another get-away-from-everything place is Big Bend National Park in Texas. It has

spectacular canyon and mountain scenery, with lots of plants and animals and more types of birds than any other national park in the United States.

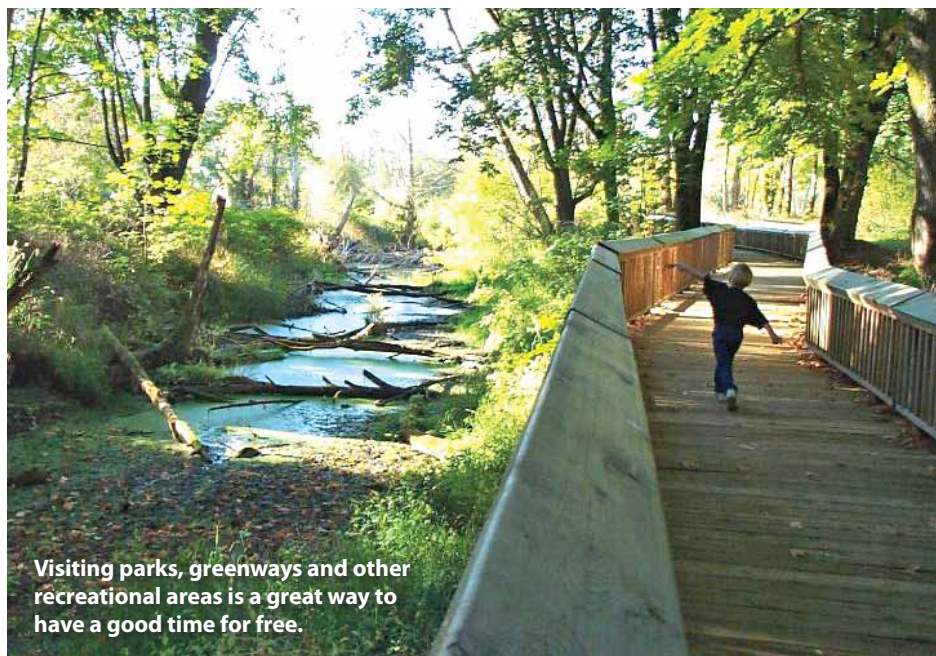
It pays to do your homework. Biscayne National Park boasts urban proximity, colorful coral reefs, and first-rate scuba diving and snorkeling. It's within sight of downtown Miami, but that doesn't mean its logistics are easy. More than 95 percent of this marine park is covered by water, so transportation is by boat here.

Finally, stay open to lesser-known parks. A newer park, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison in Colorado, receives a fraction of the Grand Canyon's numbers. However, its canyon's combination of narrowness and vertical drop are unmatched by any other in North America.



Grotto Falls in the Great Smoky Mountains

Source - Great Smoky Mountains National Park



Visiting parks, greenways and other recreational areas is a great way to have a good time for free.

Source - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Finding Other Travel Deals

Popular websites such as tripadvisor.com, smartertravel.com or travelzoo.com offer advice from fellow travelers about places to eat, play and stay, plus a wide variety of planning tools, including searches for flights, hotels, restaurants and vacation rentals.

There are also many free or inexpensive cell phones apps that help travelers save money, too. Check user reviews before downloading, and some travel websites (tripadvisor.com) and companies offer free mobile apps.

Social media is great for getting current travel advice. From photos to tweets on great-and-not-so-great deals, insiders dish about lodging, food and attractions. One of the oldest is virtualtourist.com.

Other handy sites for travel deals include affordabletours.com, restaurants.com, hotels.com, and ecruises.com.

Making Better Food

Today, most people only see glass milk bottles in antique stores, or maybe on a dining table holding fresh flowers. But in midwest Michigan, where Hilhof Dairy is based in Hersey, you'll find them in many independently-owned grocery and health food stores.

"It's a healthier way to store milk," says William Straathof Jr., who runs the farm with his wife Connie, and their family. "Plastic leaches formaldehyde. And when not recycled, it fills up our landfills."

Milk products produced by the 48-cow certified organic farm include whole, 2 percent, skim and cream—all packaged in glass bottles that customers can return to the store for a \$2 deposit. They are later picked up and taken back to the farm, where they are sterilized and used again.

"We pasteurize our milk for 30 minutes at 145 degrees, and then it goes directly into the glass bottles with a cream line," he explains. "When cream is left in its natural state (not homogenized), it's 100 percent digestible, and contains more nutrients."

"No homogenization also means a shorter shelf-life, so our products come to customers fresher," William continues. "The milk isn't being trucked long distances or stored in silos."

And, the use of glass bottles is just one example of how the Straathofs practice sustainable agriculture. In addition to milk products, the family also raises and sells organic, grass-fed pork and beef.

"We sell our pork in the summer months—ham, pork chops, sausage and more—and we're sold out in two months," William adds proudly. Their beef products—from New York Strip to ground beef and everything in between—are available year-round.

The Straathof's get all this work done with the help of their children, Karston, Ana and Bianca, and their families. The farm has been in the family for over 50 years, since William Sr. named it "Hilhof Farm" by combining his last name with Hillenaar, his wife Nellie's last name. William Jr. took over the business in the late '70s after his father passed away.

A typical week includes milking the cows, running the farm's retail store, delivering



Photos courtesy-Hilhof Dairy

Operating Hilhof Dairy takes a whole family, including (front row, L-R) Connie and William Straathof Jr., Dave and Ana (Straathof) DePew with their children (Ana holding Landyn and back row, Maddie and Kendal), with Bianca Straathof, Nate Kidder and Karston Straathof on the far right. The DePew's are members of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative.

products to customers, and keeping detailed records for organic certification.

Ana DePew, the Straathof's daughter, and her husband David, a lineworker for Great Lakes Energy Cooperative, started raising certified organic chickens and eggs at their own farm last year. They sell most of their eggs at the Hilhof Dairy store and, if available, to three other grocers. "We can't raise enough chickens for the demand of organic eggs out there!" Ana exclaims.

"One of the biggest challenges in organic farming is that we cannot use man-made chemicals or fertilizers on our land, and if an animal gets sick, we can't use antibiotics," Ana adds. They have had to find more natural ways to keep their land and animals healthy, and they do so by talking to other organic farmers and doing a lot of research.

While achieving organic certification takes time, the pay-off is substantial even for small operations like Hilhof Dairy. They stopped

using man-made chemicals and fertilizers in 1996, and the farm was certified in 2004.

The Dairy's organic products are available at their farm store, and at over 46 stores including the Cadillac, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and Brighton areas. (You can also visit online at HilhofDairy.com.)

"And, we now offer chocolate milk made with Dutch cocoa," William adds. Using half the sugar and more cocoa than commercial companies gives it a superior chocolate flavor, he adds.

"More stores want our milk, but we don't want to get too big," William says. "We want to stick to the basics—making better food for people."

Jodi Bollaert is a native Michigander and consummate advocate of Michigan-made. Visit her Facebook page at [facebook.com/FavoriteMichiganProducts](https://www.facebook.com/FavoriteMichiganProducts) for regular posts about the wonderful things made in the mitten.

Tell us about your favorite, or a unique, Michigan-made product. Email czuker@meca.coop or send to: **Country Lines**, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Be sure to share why you like it, or a unique story to go with it.





Photo - Nichols Arboretum

Preserving the Peony

Peony lovers everywhere will go gaga over the Peony Garden at Nichols Arboretum in Ann Arbor.

Each year a magical fairyland comes alive in shades of white, pink and red peony blossoms, floating over their expansive rectangular beds. Celebrating its 90th anniversary, the Peony Garden at Nichols Arboretum displays over 800 peonies, including 270 varieties from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

W.E. Upjohn, a doctor and founder of the Upjohn Pharmaceutical Co. in Kalamazoo, gifted the Peony Garden to Nichols Arboretum in 1922. “He was a major peony connoisseur, with a peony garden covering several acres,” comments David Michener, the Arboretum’s curator.

Upjohn donated hundreds of his own peony cuttings as a legacy to the public through the University of Michigan, his alma mater, which oversees the Arboretum.

“A landscape architect by the name of

Aubrey Tealdi was the Arboretum’s director at the time,” recalls current director, Bob Grese. “There’s a good chance that Tealdi may have done work for the Upjohns, and that was how the connection was made.” And, “Tealdi designed just the right site with perfect drainage, facing north, which protects the shallow-planted tubers from winter thaws and gives them full sun during the bloom season,” adds Michener. “Some people may find the rectangular beds boring (design-wise), but they were actually quite innovative at a time when the baroque Victorian curvy-edged beds were the rage.”

Around 2005, Grese, who was long-interested in historic gardens, was looking for the best way to steward the Arboretum’s Peony Garden into the future. With help from a friend at the American Peony Society, he put together a Peony Advisory Council comprised

of international experts and enthusiasts. One of those members, Scott Kunst (of Old House Gardens in Ann Arbor), recommended that the Peony Garden follow the English model of historic preservation by insuring that plants are backed up and do not disappear—thus, the “Peony Project” was born.

Besides providing a spectacular site to view peonies, the Peony Project is establishing resources for peony lovers and historic garden curators alike, with five primary goals:

Verification & Identification

There are still some plants of questionable identity in the Garden. “We use sources like the American Peony Society, old gardening magazines and antique nursery catalogs to help us identify questionable plants,” says Carmen Leskoviansky, collections and natural areas specialist at Nichols Arboretum.

Restoration

“We have the original map from 1927 showing the layout,” states Leskoviansky. “While many plants are original, some were replaced with modern varieties and other plants are no longer in the trade. So, working with the advisory board, we decide which plants to use in the restoration.”

Expansion

“Last fall we added 14 tree peonies from American and European varieties, and we’re hoping to add a large collection of tree peonies from China,” comments Leskoviansky.

Backup

“We’ve already started to back up the peony collection offsite by partnering with the Girl Scouts of Michigan, who took divisions and placed them at Girl Scout Camps throughout the state,” says Grese. And, Michener is working with the North American Plant Collections Consortium to establish the Peony Garden as “the” reference collection by providing peony cuttings to gardens throughout the continent.

Education

The Peony Finder website allows gardeners to browse past and present varieties. “This new site is under construction and won’t be released until July, but gardeners who would like to help test the website can email Michener at mbgna.curator@umich.edu.

The Peony Garden’s 90th anniversary celebration runs June 2 to June 10. To learn more, visit lsa.umich.edu/mbg.



The “Do Tell” peony is a Japanese variety with soft, shell-pink pedals and a deep pink center.



This distinctive “Lois Kelsey” peony is called a “semi-double” variety.

Camping With Kids

My oldest daughter and I have always seen eye-to-eye on one very important issue: no camping. While my husband and youngest girl revel in the idea of nights spent under the stars, Berit and I put the kibosh on camping every summer.

But then, last summer, my husband signed us up for an entire long weekend of camping without running it past me first. Before I could feign illness or enlist my pint-sized partner in refusal, we were tucked into a forest of tall trees using bottled water to brush our teeth. And I'll be darned if it wasn't that oldest kid who was first to leap barefoot into the dirt, to wonder at animal tracks and calls, to fall asleep filthy after tracking shooting stars. I couldn't help it: I loved watching my family camp.

You'll notice I didn't say that I loved camping, too. Doesn't matter. Have you ever seen what camping does to kids? When their toys are left at home they pick up sticks—sticks!—and do stuff with them. They build dirt mountains and jump on top. They eat almost anything without complaining.

And it turns out camping isn't just good, dirty fun. The U.S. military has found that kids who spend lots of time outdoors have more complex sensory abilities. An 18-month study of 800 military personnel found that the best bomb spotters were rural people—those who'd grown up in the woods hunting—as well as those from tough urban



Photo - © iStockphoto.com

neighborhoods, where it's equally important to be alert. They tend to take in the entire environment, versus focusing on one piece of information at a time.

So, maybe you don't aspire to send your kid bomb sniffing, but there's more. Research suggests that too much time indoors is linked to nearsightedness, while outdoor play that uses all the senses and a good dose of spatial awareness leads to an increased ability to learn. Another great benefit? These kids know how to sense and avoid danger. And the toasted marshmallow on top: folks who spend a lot of time outdoors as kids tend to more fully engage in life.

Camping is a tough pill to swallow for a lot of people these days, who are pressed for time or live in an area rich with museums and playgrounds. Considering camping, with its lists of items needing to be packed, assemblage of various sleeping quarters, and

resulting pile of dirty laundry (and we're talking real, scrub-inducing dirt here), makes a lot of parents want to head for the nearest Chuck E. Cheese.

But consider this: In 30 years, when you're gathered with your children and grandchildren sharing memories, what will you say? Will you reminisce over Junior's high skee-ball score? Or will you laugh about the time Dad flipped the canoe? And more importantly, how will these memories have shaped who your children have become?

Mitten-State Camping

With more than 1,000 campgrounds statewide, Michigan has a lake, river, beach or forest for your family.

Not ready to hit the trail on your own? The DNR is hosting over 200 camping events, called "Rec 101," in 2012. They'll provide gear and expert instruction on everything from archery to windsurfing, all for free.

Be sure to get a "Recreation Passport" (instead of the old "state park sticker") for \$10 when you renew your license. It gives you discounts at over 800 Michigan businesses, and is good all year.

Michigan State Parks see about 22 million campers in the parks annually. Get out there with them this year. To learn more, visit michigan.org and click on "Camping & Recreation," or call 800-784-7328.



Keep It Simple: Tips For A Great Camping Trip

- **Be safe.** Learn about the wildlife where you're going, and be prepared to deal with it. Have your kids wear a whistle and teach them to blow it if you get separated.
- **Make them help.** It's not always easy, but involving kids in set-up and camp chores will teach important, brain-boosting skills and give them a healthy dose of confidence.
- **Show, don't tell.** Point out landmarks to give kids a sense of direction and place. Gather around footprints and talk about the animal that made them. Figure out why a particular place has its name (Sleeping Bear Dunes, for example).
- **Be outdoors.** Don't bring along video games. Find things to do outside, like paddle ball, cairn-building, fairy house crafting, and shell collecting.
- **Other resources.** Check your local library or bookstore for "Best Tent Camping in Michigan," by Matt Forester, 2011.

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





Mediterranean Inspired
Chicken Wraps

Mediterranean Dishes

The colorful, flavor-filled dishes known as “Mediterranean cuisine” originate from countries that border the Mediterranean sea—Morocco, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Italy, France and Spain. This region not only produces a variety of tasty meals, they are good for your health! Those on Mediterranean diets are less likely to have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or become obese. It’s hard to ignore the benefits of eating this marvelous food.

Photography by: 831 Creative

Mediterranean Inspired Chicken Wraps with Cucumber Dill Sauce

Cucumber dill sauce:

*1½ c. plain low fat yogurt
2 t. fresh lemon juice
1/2 c. cucumber, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
pinch of salt and pepper
2 T. fresh dill, chopped*

Chicken:

*3 T. olive oil
2 T. fresh dill, chopped
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1 t. Italian seasoning
2 T. fresh lemon juice
1 t. kosher salt
1/2 t. black pepper
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
tortillas, pita bread, or flat bread
tomato slices
thinly sliced onion*

In small bowl, combine all sauce ingredients. Cover and refrigerate. In a large storage

Crushed Lentil Soup

*1 med. sweet onion, finely chopped
2 T. olive oil
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 c. vegetable broth
3 c. water
17.6-oz. pkg. Steamed Lentils from Trader Joe's or 3 c. cooked lentils
1 pinch saffron
1 t. coriander
1 t. cumin
1 t. pepper
1 t. salt
1 t. pepper
1/4 c. lemon juice*

In a large pot on medium heat, sauté onion with oil and garlic 3 to 5 minutes, or until

onion is translucent. Add broth, water, lentils, and all spices (do not add lemon juice). Reduce heat and bring to simmer. Cover and cook 10 minutes. Puree in blender or with hand blender until smooth. Let sit at least 30 minutes before serving for best flavor.

Christin Russman



Crushed Lentil Soup

bag, add oil, dill, garlic, Italian seasoning, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Seal bag and smush around until combined. Add chicken, reseal bag, and shake chicken inside to coat. Put bag in refrigerator for at least 2 hours. When ready, grill chicken for 8 to 10 minutes per side on med-high heat or until no longer pink. Thinly slice chicken on cutting board. To serve, put several pieces of sliced chicken on bread. Add tomato slices and onion. Top with a few tablespoons of dill cucumber sauce.

*Kirsten Kubert, Cherryland
comfortablydomestic.com*

Spinach Cups

2 eggs
1 clove garlic, minced
1 8-oz. package crumbled feta cheese, garlic/herb flavor
1 small onion, minced
2 10-oz. boxes frozen, chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
4 packaged pre-baked mini phyllo dough shells
1 c. shredded mozzarella cheese

Mix first four ingredients in large bowl. Mix in spinach. Place phyllo shells on a baking sheet; fill each with spinach mixture. Sprinkle small amount of cheese on top. Bake at 400° for 8 min.

Connie Foltz, McMillan

Cucumber, Tomato and Feta

6 c. coarsely chopped cucumbers (2 lbs.)
2 lg. tomatoes (1 lb.), coarsely chopped
1 bunch scallions, chopped
1 c. pitted olives, halved
1 7-oz. package feta, crumbled, divided
1/2 c. coarsely chopped fresh mint
6 T. extra virgin olive oil
1/4 c. fresh lemon juice
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Combine cucumbers, tomatoes, scallions, olives, half the feta, and mint in a large bowl. Whisk oil and lemon juice in a small bowl; season with salt and pepper. Pour over salad; toss and coat. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Sprinkle remaining half of feta over and serve.

Lisa Bechaz, Petoskey

Moroccan Style Potato Pancakes

1 lb. yellow-fleshed potatoes
1 carrot, finely diced
2 T. canola oil
2 c. finely chopped onion
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
1 c. frozen peas
3 large eggs, beaten

1/2 t. turmeric
3/4 t. salt
1/8 t. ground pepper
4 scallions, white and green, chopped
1/2 c. chopped cilantro leaves
Peel and cut potatoes into even-size chunks. Place in saucepan; cover and boil until tender. Drain and mash. Meanwhile, sauté carrot and onion in olive oil until tender. Turn off heat and mix in garlic and frozen peas. Cover and let sit while potatoes are cooking. Mix together potatoes, vegetables, eggs, spices, scallions and cilantro. Form into patties. Gently sauté in canola oil in frying pan until golden brown, turning once.

Margie Guyot, Ellsworth

Lamb Sliders

2 lbs. ground lamb
1 large yellow onion, grated
2 garlic cloves
1/2 c. chopped parsley
1/2 t. cumin
1 t. allspice
1 t. ground coriander
salt and pepper to taste
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 red onion, thinly sliced
2 tomatoes, sliced
1 pkg. of 12 whole wheat dinner rolls
Combine meat, onion, garlic, parsley, and spices. Add egg; mix until thoroughly combined. Form 12 balls of meat mixture and flatten into patties slightly larger than dinner rolls. Grill or pan fry patties until medium-well. Cut dinner rolls in half; butter and toast on grill or broiler until lightly brown. Garnish

with red onion, tomato and tzatziki sauce.

Tzatziki Sauce

3 T. olive oil
1 t. white vinegar
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 t. salt
1 c. Greek yogurt
1 c. sour cream
2 cucumbers peeled, seeded, finely minced
1 t. dill
Combine oil, vinegar, garlic and salt in bowl. Mix well. With a whisk, blend yogurt and sour cream; add the oil mixture and mix well. Add cucumber and dill. Chill for 4 hours.

Jeff Cullen, Bellaire

Penne Puttanesca

4 t. chopped garlic
2 t. red pepper flakes
2 T. butter
1/4 c. olive oil
1/4 c. grated Asiago cheese
1 tomato, chopped
1/4 c. sun dried tomatoes, crushed (opt.)
12 black olives, pitted and chopped
1/2 c. Chardonnay
2 T. capers
6 anchovy fillets, finely chopped
1 lb. pasta, cooked (penne or mostaccioli)
Sauté the chopped garlic and pepper flakes in butter and olive oil over medium heat for 2 minutes. Add all other ingredients, stirring constantly. Simmer for 5 minutes. Spoon over freshly cooked pasta. Add additional cheese if desired. Don't forget the anchovies, they are the key ingredient! Serves 4.

Eva Braganini, Mattawan



Spinach Cups

SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE! Contributors whose recipes we print in 2012 will be entered in a drawing. We'll draw one winner in December and pay their January 2013 electric bill (up to \$200) as a prize.

Thanks to all who sent in recipes! Upcoming: Please send in **RECIPES FOR KIDS** by April 10, **FRESH FROM THE GARDEN** recipes by May 10, and **MULTI-MEAL** recipes by June 10. Mail to: Country Lines Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email recipes@countrylines.com.

Co-op Connections Card Now Offers Healthy Savings

The card that offers discounts at hundreds of local and national merchants, and saved HomeWorks Tri-County members thousands of dollars on prescriptions, now provides Healthy Savings on lab and imaging services, chiropractic, dental, vision and hearing care.

This brand-new benefit is part of an already successful Co-op Connections card program. You can print out temporary new cards at healthysavings.coop; sturdier paper cards will be distributed in the May issue of *Michigan Country Lines*.

To locate providers that participate in the Healthy Savings program, call 800-800-7616 with your card handy or visit healthysavings.coop.

Be sure to get your new Co-op Connections cards in the May issue of Country Lines!

More Local Businesses Offer Card Discounts

We've added over a dozen local businesses to our list of participants offering discounts on products and services to you, our member-owners. Simply show your Co-op Connections card at the business to receive the discount.

For a list of all local and national businesses currently offering discounts on everything from fitness to furniture repair to hair care, visit CoopConnections.coop. Your card can be used when you travel, too, as many co-ops across the country participate in the program.

Here are a few examples of local businesses offering discounts:

- **Blanchard Lanes** – 58 Jackson Rd., Blanchard, 989-561-2525, facebook.com/Blanchardlanes – \$1 bowling and 2 pizzas for \$20.
- **DeWitt Lumber Co.** – 725 Spring Street, Blanchard, 989-561-2100, dewittlumber.com – 5% discount on your purchase.
- **Woodshop Services** – 3937 Costabella Avenue, Blanchard, 989-561-2286, woodshopservices.webs.com – 10% discount on restoration work.
- **The Bare Foot & Nail Spa** – 10026 Buchanan Road, Canadian Lakes, 231-972-0012, thebarefootnailspa.com – 10% discount.
- **Big Rapids Antique Shoppe**, 105 S. Michigan Avenue, Big Rapids, 231-796-7300, bigrapidsantiques.com – 50% off yellow tag items in our marketplace; 10% discount on regular-priced items.
- **Gilbert's Carpet Plus** – 14150 Northland Drive, Big Rapids, 231-796-2700, and their new location at 10704 Northland Dr. NE, Rockford, gilbertscarpetsplus.com – 5% discount on sundries.

This is not insurance nor is it intended to replace insurance. This discount card program contains a 30-day cancellation period. This plan provides discounts at certain health care providers for medical services. This plan does not make payments directly to the providers of medical services. The plan member is obligated to pay for all healthcare services but will receive a discount from those health care providers who have contracted with the discount plan organization. For a full list of disclosures, visit healthysavings.coop. Discount Medical Plan Organization: New Benefits, Ltd., Attn: Compliance Dept., P.O. Box 671309, Dallas, TX 75367-1309.

Introducing **NEW** Healthy Savings Discounts!



Print your new card today at healthysavings.coop or watch for it next month in this magazine.

With the new Healthy Savings package, you receive no-cost access to the following discounted health benefits:



Prescriptions

By using your Co-op Connections® Card, you will receive a 10% to 85% discount on prescription drugs at over 60,000 national and regional pharmacy chain stores including CVS, Walgreens, Walmart, Target and many more.



Dental Care

Save 20% to 40% on most dental services including orthodontics, periodontics and endodontics.



Vision

Get 20% to 60% savings on eyewear.



Hearing Aids

Discount of 35% off hearing aid prices at 2,000+ Newport Audiology Center locations.



Lab Work and Imaging

Savings of 10% to 60% off usual charges for MRI, CT and other lab procedures.



Chiropractic

Take advantage of 30% to 50% savings on diagnostic services and treatments.

Spring Cleaning Tips That Save Energy, Money

You may have bought a new refrigerator or freezer recently, taking advantage of higher energy efficiency, or just needing more space.

And, if you're like most people, you've thought about moving that old unit to the garage for extra storage space.

Spring cleaning time is a good time to reconsider. The older your fridge or freezer, the more energy it will use—sometimes up to three to four times more than a new model—particularly if it's kept in a non-conditioned space like a garage usually is.

Instead, get rid of that energy-wasting second freezer or refrigerator at no cost through our Energy Optimization program. We'll pick it up for free, recycle it safely, and give you a \$30 reward!

More than 250 members have already taken this energy-saving step. Join them by

visiting homeworks.org for more information, or calling 877-296-4319 to schedule a pick-up.

More Spring Energy-Saving Tips

► Dirt and dust generally reduce energy efficiency. Start the cleaning with your heating and air-conditioning systems.

► Check window units over to make sure they don't have dust, debris or leaves stuck to the outside, or dust blocking the inside vents.

► If you have central air, clean or replace your furnace air filter. Check your system's blower by setting the control to "fan." If you hear squeaks or squeals or rattles, then the motor bearings may need oil—turn this job over to a professional.

► Another thing to check is the condensation tubing. If the tubing is blocked by dust, water can back up and run down into

your living space. Outside, inspect the heat exchanger for any leaves, mud or debris around it. Clearing these away will help air flow, and the unit will cool more efficiently.

► Do you have ceiling fans? It's a good time to clean the fan blades and the rest of the fan housing. Otherwise, the fan will blow dust all over the room. Once the weather is warmer, switch their direction so air is circulated downward into the center of the room.

► Light bulbs need cleaning, too, so remember to dust or wipe them. Clean bulbs provide more light for the money.

► If your home has a sliding glass door, make sure to keep its track clean. A dirty track can ruin the door's seal and create gaps where conditioned air can escape.

Nick Rusnell is Home Works Tri-County Electric Cooperative's Energy Advisor




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Whether you care about living green or saving green, an electric heat pump system provides the comfort and economy you're looking for. Geothermal is a simple technology that uses the earth's renewable energy to provide high-efficiency heating and cooling. In winter, the system draws heat from the ground and transfers it to your home. In summer, it extracts heat from your home and transfers it to the ground.

HOME WORKS Tri-County Electric Cooperative

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BLANCHARD
THUR APRIL 26

DOORS OPEN 6:00PM

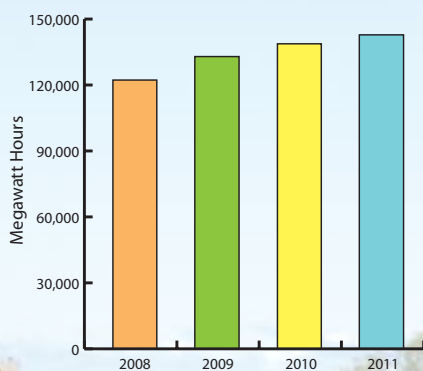
PROGRAM STARTS 6:30PM

Learn how you can save on your heating and cooling bills by using a super-efficient geothermal heat pump system with our low dual fuel electric rate. There will be a brief presentation followed by an "Ask the Experts" breakout session with contractors and factory representatives.

Events will be held in the community rooms at Portland and Blanchard; watch for the direction signs. A light supper will be available.

Harvest Wind Farm's Annual Output Increases Again

Electricity Generated Annually by the Harvest Wind Farm



Favorable weather conditions in 2011 led to record output for the Harvest Wind Farm. The project's 32 turbines generated 142,819 megawatt hours (MWh) of electricity during the year, surpassing 2010's mark of 138,737 MWh.

Wolverine Power Cooperative is purchasing the total output of the Harvest Wind Farm under a long-term contract and supplying the electricity to its members.

"Harvest began commercial operation in December 2007 and is Michigan's first commercial-scale wind farm," says Dan DeCoeur, Wolverine's vice president of power supply. "This past year marked its fourth complete year of production."

Minimum wind speeds of eight miles per hour are needed to generate electricity at the Harvest Wind Farm. Prior to moving forward with a project like Harvest, a developer will spend months collecting weather data at a proposed site to be sure weather conditions are ideal. Meteorological towers standing about 200 feet in the air are used to evaluate potential sites. They monitor wind speed, wind direction and temperature.

The turbines at the Harvest Wind Farm measure 393 feet in height. Turbine towers, consisting of four sections each, rise 262 feet high, and the blades tack on another 131 feet. Each turbine at the wind farm required 100 acres of property leased from landowners. The spacing of the turbines across 3,200 acres ensures each turbine has the footprint needed for maximum output.

"When all turbines are operating at top speed, the wind farm has a total capacity of 52.8 megawatts of electricity, enough to serve about 15,000 homes," DeCoeur explains. "We are pleased to be affiliated with this project and proud to be a leader in renewable energy in the state."

Harvest is owned and operated by Exelon Wind. It is located in Michigan's Thumb area, between Elkton and Pigeon, and represents an investment of \$94 million.

State Requires Renewable Energy

Electric providers in Michigan are required to meet a renewable energy standard under Public Act 295 of 2008. Compliance begins in 2012 and builds to 10 percent of total retail sales by the end of 2015, where it remains for 2016 and each year thereafter.

With its long-term commitment to purchase the entire output of the Harvest Wind Farm, in addition to power supply from a small hydro project, Wolverine Power Cooperative and its members meet the requirements of Public Act 295 for the next several years.



Source: TimberTech

This composite deck railing has built-in low voltage lights under the post caps and in the balusters.

The maximum 12-volt output wattage will be listed on the transformer, and instructions for the fixtures should list their individual wattages. A prepackaged low-voltage lighting kit will include the proper size transformer for the number and types of lights.

When purchasing a low-voltage system, be sure to select a transformer with a built-in timer so there is no chance of accidentally leaving the lights on all night and wasting electricity. Photo-eye controlled transformers are the most convenient and provide the most sequencing options. One of the more convenient and efficient is “on” at dusk, “off” in a set number of hours (6, 8, 10). For security, an “on” at dusk, “off” at dawn is a good option, but uses more electricity.

Many homeowners prefer a variety of path, deck and floodlights to meet their landscape lighting needs. For much of the general lighting where the fixture is not noticeable, inexpensive plastic fixtures are fine. For more exposed areas, decorative metal fixtures with stained and etched glass are attractive. Another attractive option is natural wood fixtures.

To edge a path, snap-together lighted plastic simulated bricks are effective. The electrical connectors are built into the bricks so wiring will only need to run to the first brick along the edge. To light a deck, several decking material manufacturers offer built-in post and baluster lights with hidden wiring.

Safety

For those that do a fair amount of landscaping and gardening, safety is another advantage to choosing low-voltage lighting. There is very little risk of electrocution when digging with metal garden tools because the wires on the ground carry only 12 volts of electricity. You will not be shocked if you accidentally nick one.

If you have a question for Jim, please email jdulley@countrylines.com, or mail to James Dulley, Michigan Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Be sure to let us know which electric co-op you receive service from.

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



DIY Outdoor Lighting

Q: *I'd like to add outdoor lighting by my deck and landscaping, but need something that's safe, efficient and easy to install. Is low-voltage lighting a good option? What are the best types?*

A: Low-voltage lighting is an excellent outdoor option for deck spaces and landscaping. It is safe, efficient, and relatively easy to install for the experienced do-it-yourselfer.

Efficiency

The energy efficiency of low-voltage lighting is fairly similar to standard line-voltage (120 volts) outdoor lighting. If you are interested in brightly lighting a large area, line-voltage lighting fixtures, such as low-pressure sodium,

are your most efficient choice.

The newest and most energy efficient low-voltage landscape lighting uses super-efficient LEDs (light emitting diodes) instead of standard incandescent bulbs. This type of technology is becoming more common, even for standard indoor lamps.

The LEDs are considerably more expensive than other alternatives, but use less than one-fifth as much electricity as equivalent incandescent bulbs and last as much as 10 times longer. The light from LEDs is more directional than from incandescent bulbs, so multiple LEDs are often used inside one fixture for broader lighting patterns and brightness.

Each low-voltage LED fixture may use as little as 1 watt of electricity compared to about 11 watts from a typical snap-in wedge-base low-voltage bulb. Some of the brighter fixtures, such as bollards, use a 2-watt LED, and floodlights use three LEDs. The light quality from LEDs is very white and pleasing.

Installation

The most difficult part of installing a low-voltage lighting system is making sure the total wattage of all fixtures on a line does not exceed the rated output of the transformer.

NEXT STEPS:

Ready to tackle your own DIY outdoor lighting project? Here are some companies that manufacture low-voltage lights:

Argee Corp.:

(800) 449-3030 • argeecorp.com

Idaho Wood:

(800) 635-1100 • idahowood.com

Kichler Lighting:

(866) 558-5706 • kichlerlighting.com

Malibu:

(888) 295-7348 • malibulights.com

Nightscaping:

(800) 544-4840 • nightscaping.com

Troy Landscape Lighting:

(800) 677-6811 • troylandscapelighting.com

Appliance Innovations

Rebates and standards transform kitchens and laundry rooms, but are consumers really saving energy?

Does your refrigerator have Wi-Fi or a door with a view? Some new dishwashers self-dispense detergent and clean based on the number of dishes. And, you might be surprised to hear some ovens double as refrigerators. Leave dinner in the oven in the morning, then send a text message for the oven to switch from cooling to cooking mode.

“When it comes to appliances in the kitchen, things are getting smarter,” claims Kevin Dexter, senior vice president of home appliance sales & marketing, Samsung Electronics America. “We’re listening closely to consumers and adding improvements that busy moms want.”

During the 2012 International Consumer Electronics Show, Samsung unveiled several appliance twists, including an LCD refrigerator featuring Wi-Fi with a grocery app and a Flex Duo Oven using a Smart Divider to cut wasted cooking space.

Other manufacturers are also looking for twists to make appliances smarter and keep consumers happy.

“At GE Appliances, we’re rapidly expanding our Energy Star® offerings because it’s what consumers demand and it’s the right thing to do,” explains Rod Barry, director of efficiency and environmental relations. He claims a kitchen equipped with GE’s eco-magination appliances reduces electricity use by 20 percent compared to standard models.

But not all innovations make energy sense. Appliances use 13 percent of a home’s energy—a hefty chunk.

Setting the Standard

Manufacturers are constantly enhancing appliances to comply with consumer requests and meet changing federal efficiency standards. These standards, first enacted in 1987, drive efficiency innovations and are credited with saving over \$300 billion in electric bills over the past 25 years, notes the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy.

Current standards set the bar for furnaces, air conditioners, water heaters, refrigerators and freezers, washers, dryers, motors, lamps, and other products.



Samsung’s refrigerator with WiFi capability.

Most manufacturers also strive to meet a higher bar of excellence—the Energy Star certification. Launched by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992, this is a voluntary, international standard for rating energy-efficient consumer products. Appliances carrying the Energy Star® logo not only meet federal standards, they exceed it by using 10 to 50 percent less energy and water than standard models.

Rebate Revolution

After an influx of appliance rebate funds—almost \$300 million—from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, many consumers bought efficient appliances in 2010 and 2011. Although rebates were also offered for HVAC systems and water heaters, kitchen and laundry workhorses were the clear favorites, garnering 88 percent of all redeemed rebates. About 586,000 consumers added refrigerators, 551,000 added clothes washers, and 297,600 dishwashers.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) estimates this influx of efficient appliances will

save \$48 million in energy costs annually. But these savings are only realized when consumers follow the adage, “Out with the old, in with the new.” Unfortunately, a national electric co-op survey shows that isn’t always the case.

“A lot of folks buy these great new Energy Star refrigerators, then put the old ‘energy hog’ model in the basement as a soda fridge for the kids,” says Brian Sloboda, a program manager for the Cooperative Research Network (CRN). The Network monitors, evaluates and applies technologies to help electric co-ops control costs, increase productivity, and enhance service to their members. “As a result, a lot of potential savings are lost. Sure, it’s convenient to have the extra space, but these folks are paying significantly more just to have cold drinks handy.”

CRN partnered with E-Source, a Colorado-based efficiency group, to conduct a national appliance survey. The study found 19 percent of American households plug in two refrigerators, and 40 percent run a stand-alone freezer, adding expensive cold storage to electric bills.

Older models drain energy dollars. A refrigerator from the 1970s costs \$200 more to operate every year than a current model; a 1980s fridge isn’t much better, wasting \$100 in energy dollars annually.

Some co-ops offer rebates for recycling old refrigerators too, which helps consumers achieve expected savings.

Research & Compare for Savings

Consumers should look beyond fancy bells and whistles and research appliances to guarantee energy savings, notes the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The agency enforces mandatory EnergyGuide labels to help consumers compare brands and shop effectively.

“Most of the differences are on the inside—in the motors, compressors, pumps, valves, gaskets and seals, or in electronic sensors that make appliances ‘smarter,’” warns the FTC. “Even if two models look the same from the outside, less-obvious inside features can mean a big difference in monthly utility bills.”

Visit TogetherWeSave.com to see how updating appliances and making other changes can impact your electric bill.

Appliance Aid Federal tax credits for appliances expired at the end of 2011, but some Michigan utilities provide rebates and appliance loan programs. Check michigan-energy.org or call 877-296-4319 for available rebates and programs through HomeWorks Tri-County’s Energy Optimization Program. These programs are applicable in Michigan service locations only, and other restrictions may apply.



Energy Savings = Smarter Business.

An efficient business is a successful business. Energy Optimization programs are now available for businesses. Manage your energy use and reduce your overhead. Gain the tools, resources and rebates to improve your building's energy efficiency. Get started today at michigan-energy.org.

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Energy Optimization



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

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Building Your Quality of Life

Pity the Reader...

I'm hooked on a book by Stephen King. It's "11/22/63", his latest and maybe the first of his I've read. I say 'maybe' because I don't remember reading any others. But that says more about my memory than it does about the quality of King's books.

This is one of the better-written novels I've read in some time. At 849 pages, though, it's long enough to scare me away. I've been burned more than a few times by books much longer than they needed to be. I suspect that some publishers are afraid to edit their most popular writers

would be better as magazine articles.

They should take the hint in this quote often misattributed (including by me) to Mark Twain:

"I have made this letter longer than usual, only because I have not had time to make it shorter." (17th-century French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal, 1623-62, written in a letter to a friend.)

Sure, it takes time to write a better, shorter book.

Among the authors I've found to be blessedly tight writers are Lee Child (the Jack Reacher novels), John Irving, P. D.

"I'm not getting any younger. Passing the time with bad writing is not in my best interest."

for fear of offending them. So, you end up with 1,000-page Tom Clancy novels that are so dense with detail they're almost impossible to get through. And they seem lazy, as if Clancy doesn't really care about the reader or the quality of his work. It's not like he always wrote this way. He wouldn't have gotten published if he did. But now he's a factory writer and quantity seems more important than quality.

Clancy's not alone. Many popular authors and their publishers have given up on quality writing in favor of formulaic copycats that promise a quick profit for their investment. I'm sure the publishers are happy, but if you're like me, you feel like you're being taken advantage of.

I'm not getting any younger. Passing the time with bad writing is not in my best interest. Wouldn't it be nice if authors and publishers respected that and took a little of their time to make their books a little slimmer for all of us? Think of the time we'd all save.

Fiction isn't the only area that needs a sharp knife. I can't count the number of business and non-fiction books I quit reading halfway through because the authors kept repeating themselves. Some of them

James, the late Tony Hillerman, Margaret Atwood, Richard Ford, and Elmore Leonard. The gold standard is still Ernest Hemingway.

King's book could be shorter, too, but since there are two overlapping stories, I'll cut him some slack on this one.

King's writing style is deceiving in its simplicity, yet powerfully evocative in its description and dialogue. In case you don't know, the novel deals with a 40-something teacher from 2011 who finds himself transported in time to 1958 to try preventing the assassination of President Kennedy. It's a bit preposterous, but if you're willing to make the jump with King it turns into a satisfying trip to a different time and place. King evokes an era that is gone, but not forgotten, and when you're finally immersed in the music, language and styles of the late '50s and early '60s, it's hard to pull yourself out.

For pure escapism, "11/22/63" is hard to beat. It's not the Great American Novel, but it is a darn good story. (Hey, he even mentions the Upper Peninsula.)

I'm reading the book on a Kindle, a device that only could have been imagined in 1958. I suppose, to be true to the novel,

I should be reading it in an actual book. (If it's not in book form, can we still call it a book?) But there are a lot of good reasons to use an e-reader: They're light and easy to hold in any position, travel well, hold a ton of books, remember your place and, with adjustable type, make reading easier for many of us.

The downside is their impact on bookstores. Amazon.com was already pushing bookstores to the edge with online book sales, but with the popularity of the Kindle and other e-readers, actual bookstores are toppling over. That's too bad, because there's something warm and fuzzy about bookstores. They are key attractions in our best towns and cities. Among our favorite bookstores are Bestsellers Books & Coffee in Mason, five Schuler Books & Music (and their wonderful Chapbook Cafes) in the Lansing and Grand Rapids areas, Horizon Books in Traverse City, Petoskey and Cadillac, and McLean & Eakin Booksellers in Petoskey. They are spaces to savor, or, as the slogan for Snowbound Books in Marquette goes: 'The place for people allergic to life without books.'

There are close to 100 independent bookstores around Michigan. It's a tough business, but they're making it by providing personal services you can't get online—and by selling online themselves. They host authors and reading clubs, promote local talent, provide a gathering place—often with a cup of Joe and gourmet food, give kids a place to explore books, and help you find out-of-print books.

When Barnes & Noble closed their East Lansing bookstore a few months ago, a local student lamented on TV that she was soooooo sorry to see it go because she loved to browse through the books. It was a great place to spend time, she said. What she didn't spend was money.

We may use e-readers, but bookstores still draw us in, because we still like to buy actual books and have them around—as long as they're not two-pound monstrosities.

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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Actual speeds may vary. Requires a clear view of the southern sky. Exede is a service mark of ViaSat, Inc.