

A Service of **Midwest Energy Cooperative**

April 2012

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES



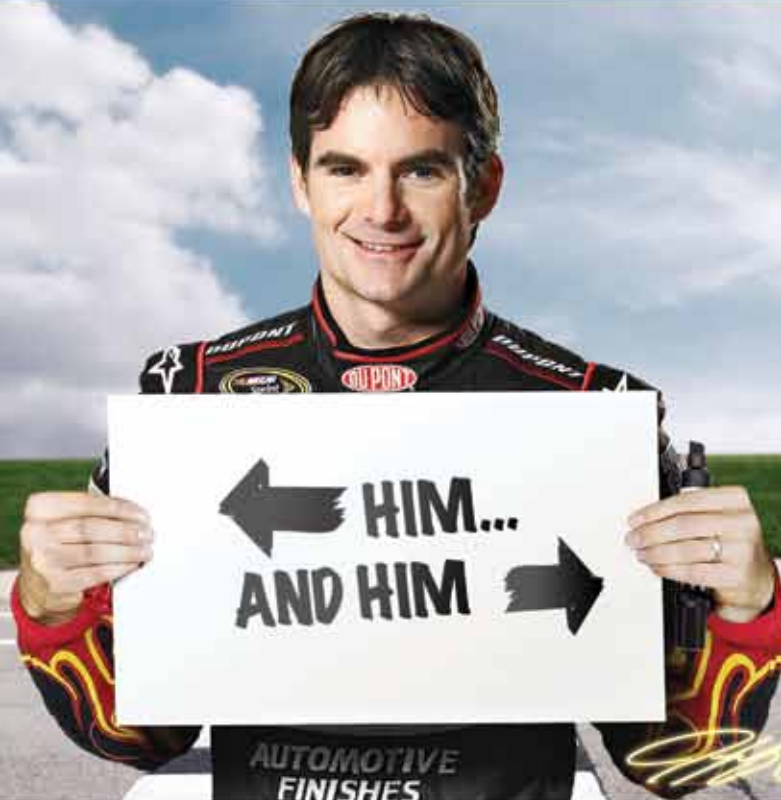
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A WATERFURNACE GEOTHERMAL UNIT IS LIKE TAKING TWO CARS OFF THE ROAD

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

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Editor
Gail Knudtson

Associate Editor
Doug Snitgen

Design Editor
Cindy Zuker

Publisher
Craig Borr

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Michigan COUNTRY LINES



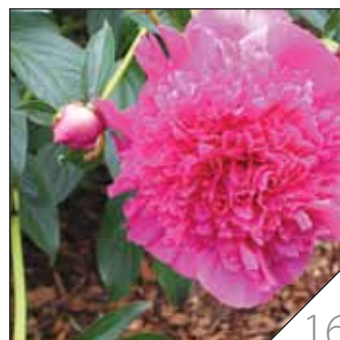
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*HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative
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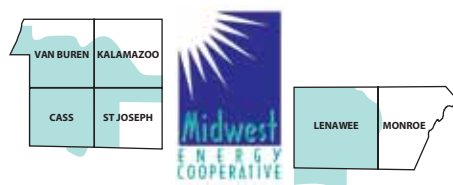
Photo - Shawn Malone/LakeSuperiorPhoto.com

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

Photo - John Russell/Great Lakes Images

Michigan's Electric
Cooperatives
countrylines.com





PRESIDENT & CEO

Robert Hance

CASSOPOLIS OFFICE

P.O. Box 127 (901 E. State Street)

Cassopolis, MI 49031-0127

M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Drive-up window: M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

TELEPHONE

269-445-1000 or 800-492-5989

Fax: 269-445-3792

PAW PAW OFFICE

59825 S. LaGrave

Paw Paw, MI 49079

M-F, 8 a.m.–1 p.m. and 1:30–4:30 p.m.

ADRIAN OFFICE

1610 E. Maumee St.

Adrian, MI 49221

M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

TELEPHONE

517-263-1808 or 800-492-5989

INTERNET TeamMidwest.com

E-MAIL info@teammidwest.com

EDITOR

Patty Nowlin

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Broadband Internet Is Today's Service Struggle

Let me be among the first to wish you happy anniversary!

You may not be aware, but April 15, 2012, marks the

75th anniversary of the incorporation of your electric co-op. There probably won't be flowers, cake, or pomp and circumstance. But maybe when you flip the kitchen light switch and push the brew button on your coffemaker, you can start the day with a little thought of thanks to the early pioneers whose efforts ultimately brought electricity to rural America.

The electrification of rural America is described by some as the single most dramatic event to shape this country's farming families and agricultural industry. It provided the groundwork for future generations of individuals, families, homes and businesses to enjoy the great benefits and value of what has become a basic necessity for life. So, the incorporation itself was more of an exclamation point marking the years of committed work undertaken by citizens who had a vision for a different life.

In that era, electric service was a luxury enjoyed only in cities, where there were enough people to make providing electricity economical. Those living in more rural areas—huge groups of citizens—were denied that access and the tremendous value it represented by virtue of geography and related economics. Across our country, groups of local citizens championed the cause of electric service, joining together in organized, grassroots efforts and investing significant time and resources to organize and charter electric cooperatives. It's under that model that we still provide your electric service today.

As I sit in front of my computer monitor, drinking hot tea in my climate-controlled office, I'm grateful.

Fast-forward to today, and we have a very similar story being played out across the rural space in our country. Today's issue is broadband internet, and I would suggest

it is a problem as pervasive and impacting today as electricity was 75 years ago.

Broadband internet is widely available across urban areas, and there are new platforms coming out all the time that provide even greater levels of speed and capacity. But the economics of extending this service to rural areas will take some effort and dollars, so basic availability continues to elude those who call that space home.

We have a significant communication gap in our country, and it's no longer just a matter of fun and convenience. Broadband internet is a key driver for economic growth and innovation, and yet providers have not found a way to deliver this necessity to huge numbers of citizens because of economics. A February news report indicated that one broadband giant has effectively finished with expansion of its "fiber-to-the-neighborhood" undertaking now that it has reached 30 million customer locations, and has admittedly run out of ideas on how to provide rural broadband to its landline customers in a way that is economically viable.

I think back to those farmers who had a vision for a better life. If they had depended on a successful financial model, much of America would still be in the dark today. We can no longer afford to allow economics and financial models to be the sole drivers behind broadband expansion; masses of people are being left behind. Like farmers in the early 20th century, we need to have a vision for something better, then pull up our collective bootstraps and make it happen.

We know that many within our service territory lack access to what has become a life necessity, and we continue to explore options and advocate for change at a local, statewide and national level. Midwest Energy may or may not end up as part of the solution, but we won't stop our efforts until a viable solution is in place.

Happy anniversary!



Robert Hance
President/CEO

Midwest in the Community

Giving back to our communities is one of the core values of Midwest Energy. We believe in doing what we can, individually and as a family of employees, to strengthen and support the communities in which we live, work and serve. Following are some of the ways we impacted our communities over the last few months.

1) Score One Midwest Propane mascot Gordy Gas interacted with a young fan prior to the March 1 Decatur Raider boys' basketball game. Midwest proudly supported Clinton and Decatur high schools with our presence at two February basketball games as part of our annual "Score One for the Home Team" events. By sponsoring the home games, we provided important and helpful support to our school partners while also demonstrating our community pride!



2) Seat Belt Safety Check The Adrian office bay was transformed into a community gathering spot on Jan. 26 as Team Midwest hosted a "Safe Kids Seat Belt Safety Check" event. Certified safety technicians from Safe Kids of Lenawee County worked with local families and caregivers to provide hands-on assistance and education in the proper use of child safety restraint systems, and also provided low-cost child safety seats.



3) Mind Trekkers Midwest Energy helped bring to life the mysteries of science, technology, engineering and math as a sponsor of the 2012 Mind Trekkers program, hosted on Feb. 23 at Southwestern Michigan College in Dowagiac. More than 200 area high school students participated in hands-on, interactive learning activities through this program developed by Michigan Technological University. Attendance was ultimately lower than expected due to the inclement weather and resulting school delays and closings.

Nicole Barfell, communications and community development specialist, was one of the Midwest team members on hand to assist with some of these learning experiences. She helped two students demonstrate the power of air pressure using a simple trash bag and a vacuum. By sucking the air out of the bag, the person inside the bag was essentially "vacuum sealed" and rendered unable to move due to the difference in air pressure inside and outside of the bag.



4) Blood Drive Alyson Gillam, a customer care representative, watched carefully as the technician prepared to insert a needle to draw blood. Team Midwest rolled up its collective sleeves on Feb. 16 to donate 21 pints of blood in a drive hosted for Michigan Blood.

Donating blood can make a lifesaving difference, as blood is a perishable resource that can be stored only for a short time. More than 4 million Americans would die each year without blood transfusions. This is an annual effort that we are proud to support!



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

New Co-op Connections Partners!

In February, the Midwest Energy family of customers saved over \$2,970 on pharmacy costs using their Co-op Connections® cards. Since rolling the program out early last year, our members have saved almost \$40,000 with this great discount card program, offered as a free benefit.

By using your Co-op Connections Card, you 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. That will direct you to an informational page with a link to a national database of thousands of national, regional and local discounts—including the pharmacy program—that have been established by other member-owned electric cooperatives.

Midwest staff members continue to work with businesses across our service territory to develop local deals for our members' benefit. We will publish those in the magazine as they come on board, and will also promote new deals on our website. Check back often. If you know a business owner that might like to be part of this program, please call Nicole at 269-445-1112 or email pr@teammidwest.com.

The following businesses are local Co-op Connections partners from across our service territory.

■ **Adrian Locksmith & Cyclery** (*Adrian*) – 5% off any purchase

■ **Ambrosia Vae Baby Boutique** (*Three Rivers*) – 15% off at checkout

■ **Clipper Creations Pet Salon** (*Cassopolis*) – 10% off all grooming

■ **Cranky Hanks LLC** (*Dowagiac*) – 10% off all fishing tackle

■ **Discover Peters Travel** (*Cassopolis*) – Various discounts, including upgrades and on-board credits

■ **Eastlake Athletic Club** (*Elkhart*) – Free two-week trial



■ **Farm House Bakery & Restaurant** (*Vandalia*) – 10% off dining and retail

■ **Just Hair** (*Cassopolis*) – \$5 off any chemical treatment

■ **LaPlace for Latte** (*Edwardsburg*) – 10% off purchase

■ **Laurie Anne's** (*Dowagiac*) – 10% off any jewelry purchase

■ **Lipstick Jungle Spa** (*Niles*) – 10% off any spa service (not valid with other offers or promotions or on soirees)

■ **Menial Tasks LLC** (*Adrian*) – 10% discount on all offered services

■ **Porky's Party Place** (*Cassopolis*) – \$1 off a 14-inch combo pizza

■ **The Red Raven** (*Dowagiac*) – \$5 off a purchase of \$25 or more

■ **Satori Salon & Spa** (*Jones*) – Free upgrade for any service booked

■ **Shoemaker Heating & Plumbing** (*Palmyra*) – \$150 off the purchase of a Rinnai tankless water heater; \$250 off the purchase of a Bryant geothermal heating/cooling unit

■ **Sieler's Water Systems** (*Adrian*) – 5% discount

■ **Sizzling Grill House** (*Adrian*) – \$2 off any order over \$10

■ **SPA-TOE-PIA** (*Dowagiac*) – Free eyebrow waxing with any paid service

■ **Squeeze** (*Niles*) – 50 cents off any smoothie or food item

■ **Village Floral LLC** (*Cassopolis*) – 25% off any regular priced cash purchase

Board Members Re-elected

Ron Armstrong, district 3, Clarence "Topper" Barth, district 4, and Ken Swope, district 8, were recently re-elected to new three-year terms on your co-op's board of directors after running unopposed in the 2012 election.

Midwest Energy is governed by a nine-member board, and each director is elected to serve a three-year term. Directors are elected by and represent members living in his or her district. These are important roles, as your directors make critical decisions on behalf of you and the other member-owners of this cooperative.

Three seats on the Midwest Energy Cooperative Board of Directors will be up for election next year. Members interested in serving should contact the cooperative at 800-492-5989 for information about the process. All board members must reside in the district they represent.

In 2013, Districts 6, 7 and 9 will be up for election. District 6 is currently represented by Ben Russell of Constantine, and includes North Porter, South Porter, Constantine, Mottville, Florence and White Pigeon townships in Michigan and Washington, York and Van Buren townships in Indiana.

Colyne Sorsby of Cassopolis is the current director in District 7, which includes Jefferson, Calvin, Ontwa, and Mason Townships in Michigan and Harris, Osolo and Cleveland townships in Indiana.

District 9 is represented by Harry Gentz of Blissfield. District 9 includes Michigan townships Medina, Seneca, Fairfield, Ogden and Riga, and southern portions of Blissfield, Deerfield, Dover, Hudson, Madison and Palmyra townships. The district also includes Mill Creek, Gorham, Chesterfield, Royalton, Franklin, Dover, Pike, Clinton and German townships in Ohio.



Ron Armstrong
District 3



Clarence Barth
District 4



Ken Swope
District 8

Business Makes Changes To Save Energy and Money

EIn February, Midwest Energy Cooperative worked with its Cassopolis neighbor, Postle Extrusion, to complete the first Energy Optimization (EO) commercial and industrial project for 2012. And what a start it was!

Postle Extrusion, a manufacturer of aluminum construction components for the recreational vehicle and manufactured home industries, worked with Kalamazoo-based Midwest Energy Group to re-light their entire facility. The company spent about \$71,000 replacing or retrofitting 396 fixtures throughout the manufacturing and office space. Working through the EO program, they will receive a \$15,000 (maximum allowed/year) EO rebate resulting in an astounding 11.7 month payback.

Postle runs three work shifts, seven days

a week, and cranks out over 600 tons of aluminum monthly.

The changes will save them more than 435,768 kWh annually. Not only will they realize a great return on their investment, but the employees are enjoying, on average, a 35 percent increase in light at their working surface. The general manager is hopeful for greater production and better quality assurance and control from the improved lighting, and is confident his employees are now working in a safer environment. They have four more facilities outside of our service territories and proposals are in the works to install similar energy efficiency upgrades.

For more information about the Commercial and Industrial Program, or any of our other EO offerings, please call 877-296-4319 or visit Michigan-energy.org.



An electrician from Midwest Energy Group installs new lighting at Postle Extrusion through our Energy Optimization Commercial and Industrial Program.

Your Perspective PHOTO CONTEST

February Winner!

The votes are in and Carla Chase, a member from Paw Paw, is the February winner of our 2012 "Your Perspective Photo Contest." Her entry, taken in fall 2011 from a small farm southwest of Paw Paw, secured the most votes by Feb. 29 and won Carla a \$20 bill credit. There's still plenty of time to submit your entry. Visit us at Facebook.com/TeamMidwest for details and official rules.





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.

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

nothing 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 with so many cooks in the kitchen,

ing 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



Source – Samsung

Samsung’s refrigerator with WiFi capability.



Source – GE

Several GE dishwashers feature SmartDispense technology.

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.

Samsung isn’t alone. 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

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.

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 rat-

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

How to Buy an Energy-Efficient Appliance

You go shopping for a new refrigerator, and you're on a budget. The best buy is the one with the lowest sales price, right?

Not necessarily. If you buy the lowest-priced refrigerator, you may end up spending more than if you buy a more expensive one. The reason? The cost of owning a home appliance has three components: the initial purchase price, the cost of repairs and maintenance, and the cost to operate it.

To figure out how much you'll spend over the appliance's lifetime, you have to weigh all these factors. The appliance with the lowest initial price, or even the one with the best repair record, isn't necessarily the one that costs the least to operate. Here's an example of how an appliance's energy consumption can affect your wallet.

Suppose you're in the market for a new refrigerator-freezer. Different refrigerator models with the same capacity can vary dramatically in the amount of electricity they use. For one popular size and configuration, for example, the annual electricity consumption varies across models from a low of about 600 kilowatt-hours (kWh) to a high of more than 800 kWh, per year. Based on national average electricity prices, that means the annual cost to operate this refrigerator can range from about \$50 to \$70, depending on which model you buy.

A \$20 difference in annual operating costs may not sound like much, but remember that you will enjoy these savings year after year for the appliance lifetime, while you must pay any difference in purchase price only once. As a result, you may actually save money by buying the more expensive, more energy-efficient model.

You can learn about the energy use and



Source - Samsung

efficiency of an appliance (determined in independent laboratory tests) from the yellow-and-black EnergyGuide® label. The Federal Trade Commission's Appliance Labeling Rule requires appliance manufacturers to put these labels on refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers, TVs, water heaters, furnaces, boilers, central air conditioners, room air conditioners, heat pumps, and pool heaters.

When you shop in a dealer's showroom, you should find the labels hanging on the inside of an appliance or secured to the outside. The law requires that the labels specify:

- The capacity of the particular model;
- For refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers and water heaters, the model's estimated annual energy consumption.
- For air conditioners, heat pumps, furnaces, boilers and pool heaters, the energy efficiency rating.

■ The range of estimated annual energy consumption, or energy efficiency ratings, of comparable appliances.

Some appliances may also feature the Energy Star® logo, which means it is significantly more energy efficient than the average comparable model.

The Energy Star program also provides a number of rebate opportunities when you purchase qualifying products and appliances, including ceiling fans, compact fluorescent lightbulb fixtures, light-emitting diode (LED) fixtures, smart power strips, room air conditioners, dehumidifiers, clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers, refrigerators and low-flow aerator kits. Before buying a new appliance, check out available rebates through Midwest Energy Cooperative's Energy Optimization Program (see details below).

— Sources: Federal Trade Commission;
U.S. Dept. of Energy

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 Midwest Energy Cooperative's Energy Optimization Program. These programs and incentives are applicable in Michigan service locations only, and other restrictions may apply.

these folks are paying significantly more just to have cold drinks handy."

The Cooperative Research Network 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 con-

sumers compare brands and shop effectively (see above for buying tips).

"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 compare how updating appliances and making other changes can impact your electric bill.

Harvest Wind Farm's Annual Output Increases Again

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."

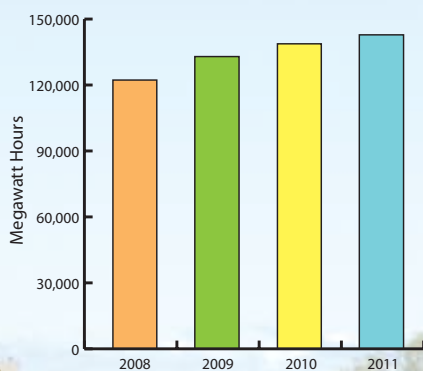
Minimum wind speeds of eight miles per hour are needed to generate electricity at the Harvest Wind Farm. Prior to moving forward with a project like Harvest, a developer will spend months collecting weather data at a proposed site to be sure weather conditions are ideal. Meteorological towers standing 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.

Electricity Generated Annually by the Harvest Wind Farm



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

Prepare for Storms *Before* They Come

Before Mother Nature brings spring storms in full force, take time to think about what you need in the event of an extended power outage.

Following are suggested items to keep on-hand and easily accessible, although everyone should consider the unique needs of their own family in order to create an emergency kit that provides for individual circumstances.

▶ Water: at least one gallon per person, per day, for drinking and sanitation. If you have pets, have extra available.

▶ Food: at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food that can be eaten without being cooked. Don't forget a hand-operated can opener.

▶ Flashlights and fresh batteries.

▶ A corded telephone. Cordless phones will not work when your power is out.

▶ A battery-powered radio and/or TV. Midwest Energy works with regional news media to provide regular updates about major power outages.

▶ Battery-powered or wind-up clock.

▶ First-aid kit and hand sanitizer. Be sure to fill prescriptions and have any needed medical supplies on hand.

▶ Extra blankets.

▶ Candles and matches.

▶ Moist wipes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation.

▶ Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities.

Be Safe and Smart

Stay away from downed power lines, and warn others to do the same. Report downed power lines to the electric company.

▲ Turn off all appliances, including your furnace, air conditioner, water heater and water pump. These actions will avoid a circuit overload when power is restored to all appliances at once. Leave on one lamp to know when power is restored.

▲ Candles may be used as temporary sources of light, but never leave burning candles unattended.

▲ Keep freezer and refrigerator doors closed. Food will stay frozen for 36 to 48 hours in a fully loaded freezer if you keep the door closed. A half-full freezer will generally keep food frozen for 24 hours. If it looks like the power outage will be prolonged, prepare a cooler with ice for your freezer items.

▲ If it's hot outside, close drapes and blinds on the sunny side of your house, drink plenty of fluids, take your pets to a cool basement location, and go to an air

conditioned community facility, such as a mall or library. Do not hesitate to contact a physician if you have any health-related questions or concerns.

Power outages are an unfortunate reality, but one for which you can be prepared with a little planning. As always, if you do lose power please notify us at 1-800-492-5989. You can easily report your outage on our automated attendant by pressing "1" when the up-front message begins, and then following the instructions. Use of the automated attendant allows our dispatchers to focus their attention on working with the line crews to manage the outage and restore service as quickly as possible.

Powering Up: Understanding The Outage Restoration Process

It's frustrating to see lights coming on around you while you remain in the dark. Unfortunately, power cannot typically be restored to everyone at the same time. When a major storm causes widespread damage, longer outages may result. Co-op line crews work long, hard hours to safely restore service to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's our approach to outage restoration:

Distribution Substation: Each substation serves hundreds or thousands of members. When a major outage occurs, substations are checked first to see if the problem lies there or from transmission lines feeding that substation. Midwest depends on transmission providers to repair and/or restore transmission lines.

Main Distribution Lines: If the problem cannot be isolated at a distribution substation, distribution lines are checked. These lines carry power to large groups of members, such as towns or housing developments.

Tap Lines: If outages persist, crews inspect the final supply lines, called tap lines, that deliver power to transformers.

Individual Homes: If your home still remains without power, the service line between a transformer and your residence is inspected and repaired.

Outage Reporting at Your Fingertips

■ The telephone system at your co-op is equipped with an automatic outage reporting system, an easy and efficient way to report your outage. Dial **800-492-5989** and when you hear the recorded greeting, just press "1" to access the outage reporting system, then press "1" to report your outage.

You will be prompted to key in your telephone number, which will be linked with your service address. If that is correct, simply press "1" and you will be informed as to the time your outage was reported. *NOTE:* If we do not have an up-to-date telephone number on your account, you will not be able to use this system. Please call our office at 800-492-5989 to update account information.

Current Outage Information

■ In a major outage, you can access recorded information about current outages. Again, press "1" to access the outage reporting system and press "2" to hear current outage information. This is only updated in major outage situations. Please do not call us if your earlier reported outage is not on the recording right away.

You can also see a map and listing of outages by zip code by clicking on the "Outage Central" link at TeamMidwest.com. While you can't drill down to an individual account level, you can see how widespread a particular outage is.



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JOHN DEERE



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Common Ground Alliance



U.S. Department of Transportation



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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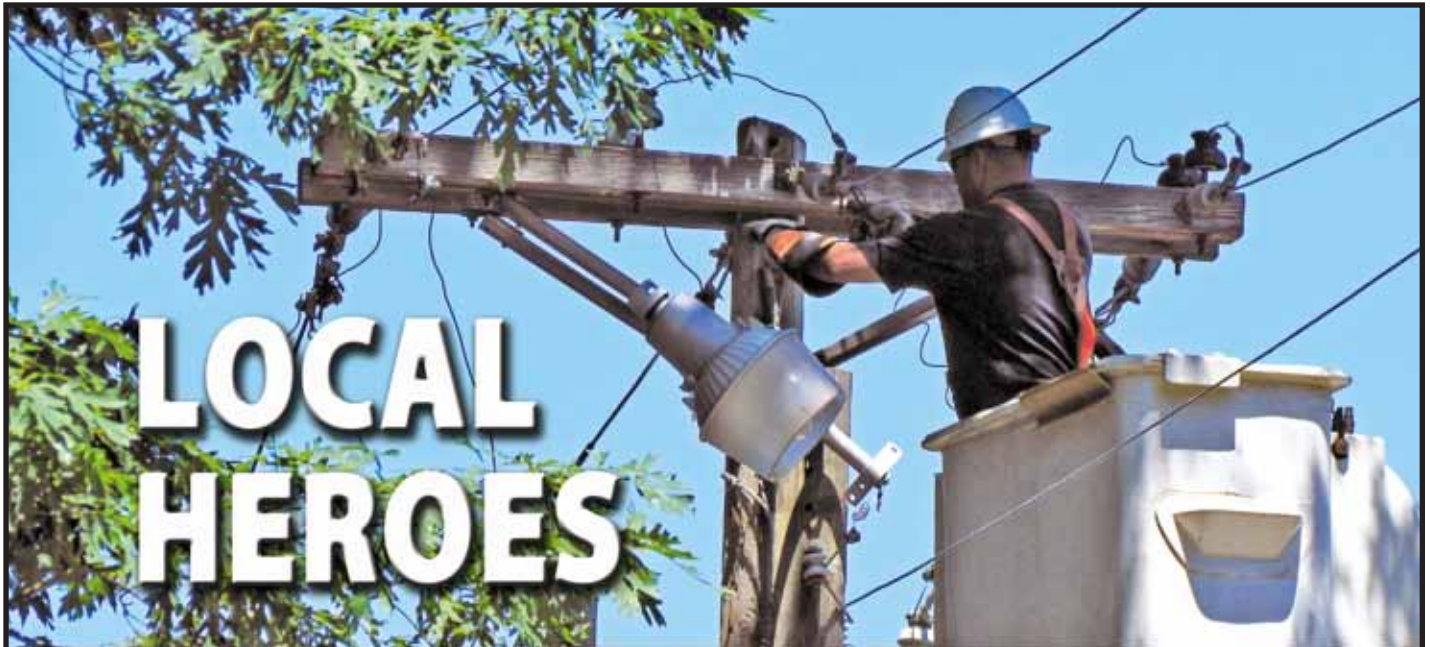
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