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May 2012

Michigan COUNTRY LINES

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**Home
Improvement**
EDITION

4 Line Clearance Is
Also About Safety

8 Our Website Now
Offers 'Live Chat'

9 Preferred Energy
Auditors List



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Michigan COUNTRY LINES



Photo - 7777?

10



Photo - 831 Creative

18



26

DEPARTMENTS

6 Readers' Pages
Letters, mystery photo, co-op principles, Youth Leadership Summit

18 Home Cooking
Crêpes
Christin Russman & Our readers

22 Wolverine Power*
WCEV air permit affirmed
Nancy Tanner

COLUMNS

14 Gardening
Install your own irrigation
Neil Moran

16 Family
Raising an only child
Linda Wacyk

17 Outdoors
Jerry Regan is 'der flymeister'
Don Ingle

23 House & Home
Central air upkeep
James Dulley

26 Ramblings
Never trust a fire
Mike Buda

FEATURES

10 Home Improvement
To finish or not to finish?
John Bruce

13 Storms
Electrical safety during and after storms
Frequently asked questions

15 Michigan-made
Luminature Design
Kathy Usitalo

YOUR CO-OP

Pages specific to your electric cooperative: 1, 4-5, 8-9, 20-21, 24-25, 28

*Not in all editions

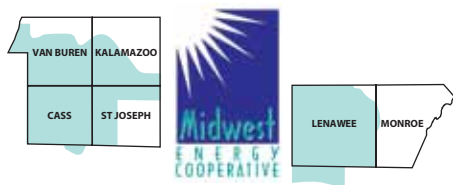
On the Cover

Lori McCarthy, owner of Luminature Design with her husband Paul, is pictured with some of their unique, handcrafted decor items.

Photo - David Olds



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Cooperatives
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Robert Hance

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Line Clearance

...More Than Reliability, It's About Safety

As I age, I tend to purge more and more information from my brain. I choose to believe it's a simple matter of available space; just like a computer, there's only so much storage in the mind's deep recesses, and we reach a certain point of saturation and need to start cleaning out the files. Those around me seem to think it's more a matter of advancing age and memory. Wish I could recall their names so I could correct them on that.

No matter my age or status of available space, I have a childhood memory of this amazing tree that is permanently etched in my mind's archives. The giant maple was a prominent and permanent fixture in the backyard of my boyhood home in west-central Michigan. The sturdy branches stretched across the sky, as if reaching for Heaven, and provided a haven where this curious young boy spent many of his childhood hours. I can still feel the rough bark as I remember my adventures in that tree, climbing and exploring, learning about nature, and pondering life's great mysteries. It was a great tree.

I still think often about that tree, especially in the context of my work in the electric utility industry. Like all the trees lining the back yards of the homes in my childhood, a primary power line cut right through ours. In the mind of a seven-year old boy, it just added an element of mystery and danger. Despite my mom's warnings, I approached that line on more than one climb and even reached out and touched it a couple of times. The resulting zing didn't harm me, but certainly warned me of a danger that lurked.

The little girl down the street wasn't as lucky. We spent many hours climbing and exploring the depths of our respective trees together, and on one of her solo climbs in her own backyard, she reached out for the same power line that I had experimented with several times. My friend died as a result of injuries from that contact, and I never viewed my tree haven the same.

I have already written at length and talked

with you, as co-op members, about trees and power lines. Midwest Energy has an aggressive right-of-way clearing program in place, designed to reclaim what nature has taken over in our ongoing efforts to provide you with the most reliable electric service possible. Trees are one of the top causes of outages, and our line clearance efforts are an intentional and strategic approach to reliability.

But it's more than just reliability. It's safety. As I drive across our service territory, I see many beautiful tree-lined streets and tree-filled backyards. And I see kids on bikes and skateboards. And I see power lines. And I know that every family living in one of those homes, and Midwest Energy as the utility serving that home, is vulnerable to that deadly combination of elements.

As we proceed through our 2012 line clearance initiative, we are coming into many areas that have not been touched in terms of tree work for two decades or more. From an aerial view, the canopy of trees completely covers any sign of power lines. But the lines are there—harboring a life-threatening danger for an unsuspecting child or adult who accidentally comes in contact.

We know our members love their trees, and we do, too. But trees and power lines are simply not a good combination. Loss of electricity is frustrating; loss of life is devastating. Reliability and safety are both primary considerations in our line clearance program and will guide our efforts as we continue to work the aggressive plan that has been in place for nearly 10 years.

We make numerous attempts to contact members prior to starting line clearance work in their area, including two phone contacts and one mailer. We are more than happy to discuss alternatives if you want to preserve your trees, but you must initiate the conversation and be willing to shoulder the financial responsibility. You deserve reliable electric service, and we won't compromise safety. We hope you share that passion and help us by actively participating in the process when we come your way.



Robert Hance
President/CEO

Midwest in the Community

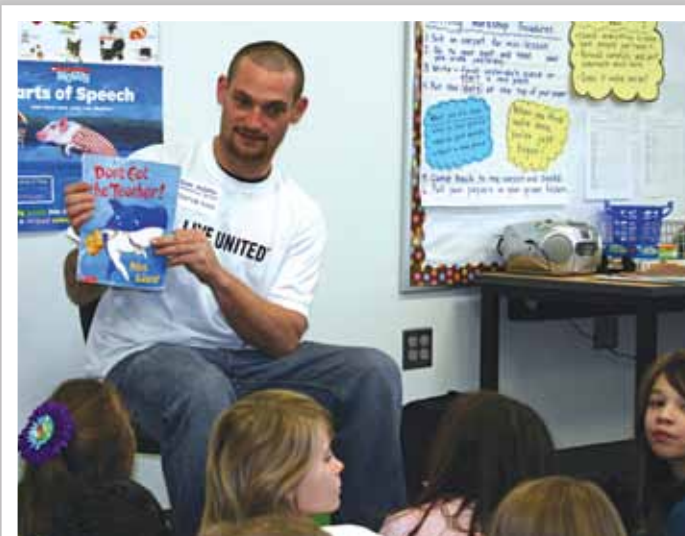
Giving back to our communities is one of the core values of Midwest Energy. We believe in doing what we can, individually and as a family of employees, to strengthen and support the communities in which we live, work and serve. Following are some of the ways we impacted our communities over the last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

United Way Action Day of Reading

On March 16, 10 members of the Midwest employee family volunteered in eight elementary schools around southwest Michigan as part of this annual event, which is designed to promote literacy and make reading fun.

When I Grow Up I Want To Be...

Students at Constantine Middle School have been pondering that thought, and a couple members of our employee family helped provide options at the school's recent Career Day. **Eric Keck** and **Chad Ritchie** addressed their respective roles as lineman and electrical technician, and shed some light on opportunities in the electric utility industry.



Lineman Jeremiah Hunsberger (above) gauges the reaction of his class of students before diving in to his book selection, "Don't Eat the Teacher," while Jan Mikel (L), billing representative, gets into character while sharing her story.



(Below) Rich Drews, field technician, passes out book-marks after sharing a story with his class.



Career Day: Eric Keck coaches as a student attempts to pick up a quarter after being outfitted in gloves and other gear used in day-to-day linework.



Midwest Energy offices will be closed for Memorial Day on Monday, May 28. Payments may be made at the drop box and will be posted on the next open business day.

Have a happy, safe Memorial Day weekend!

Letters

The loss of Don Ingle, more apples, hospital costs, storm help, and the Youth Leadership Summit. It's all here in your reader pages.

Loss of Don Ingle

The people of northern Michigan have lost an articulate and ardent spokesman for the outdoors (also *Country Lines'* Outdoors writer, see p. 17).

Don Ingle and his wife, Jean, tragically perished in a house fire on March 9, 2012. Don played an active role in the preservation and enjoyment of the northern Michigan environment. He participated in many outdoor organizations throughout northern Michigan and was an articulate voice in both community activism and his extensive writing. But Don's career as an outdoor writer was not his only career.

Don was the son of Red Ingle, a clarinetist with Spike Jones' band. Unlike his father's interest in comic showmanship, Don built a career in straight jazz, playing the coronet with the group Frank Assunto and the Dukes of Dixieland. In the 1980s, Don played with the Michigan Nighthawks, appearing at events around the Midwest. The Michigan Nighthawks produced three albums (youtube.com/watch?v=Y7pAFKaJEVg&feature=related).

Don graduated from Michigan State University in 1952. In the 1980s, Don also had his own outdoor show on channel 9, and



"The weekend that was" when we were all without power... A big "thanks" to all of you servicing on foot and snowmobile where the trucks couldn't go...if you missed these guys in action, you missed alot.

—Jan Goodwin, East Jordan

wrote a column for the *Big Rapids Pioneer* in the 1980s. In his retirement, Don wrote freelance for a number of publications.

Like Don, his wife Jean was active in the community, working for Child Protective Services in Baldwin. They were the kind of people who deeply touched the lives of everyone who met them.

Don was a personal friend and mentor to me, but his enthusiasm, energy and knowledge of the outdoors captivated anyone who personally knew him. Anyone who met Don, even briefly, became a friend. That's the way he was. That's the way they both were.

Don and Jean Ingle are already missed.

—Tim DeBlaey

More About Apples

Your apples article ("Ramblings"/Mike Buda/February) brought back many 'good' memories. I grew up on a farm with an apple orchard, and I vividly remember my siblings, cousins, neighbors and myself sitting in the trees eating the 'green apples'—especially the Transparent type. Mom was always wondering where her salt shakers were disappearing to. Yup, we had them up the tree with us. Only one time I remember getting a belly ache.

Sad to say the apples of today are a big disappointment to me. Whatever happened to Northern Spies or Wealthies, just to name a couple? The 'new' ones are way too big and sweet. Am I the only one who has noticed? But, I do still eat them because they are

good for you and an-apple-a-day keeps the doctor away, but they sure aren't like they used to be.

—Susan Heil, Farwell

March Mystery Photo

The picture of the sculpture of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox pulling a sleigh of logs is located in the front yard of Clayton Smith on U.S. Hwy 31 south of Charlevoix.

Clayton is 96 years old and has a world of wisdom and a history of experience—from hitchhiking to California from Michigan in his late teens to working the CCC camps.

What an artist, as seen in his depiction of Paul Bunyan and Babe, and also writing two books. He is truly a man who lives by the road and is a friend to man!

—Lorraine Warner, Charlevoix

The March mystery photo of Paul Bunyan and his ox Babe is in front of "Smith's Little Acre" just south of the city limits of Charlevoix on Highway 31. Clayton Smith, the owner of the property, has created many unique displays of rural characters and legends at the side of the road for travelers to enjoy. We've lived in Charlevoix for over 35 years and each year have enjoyed his artistic creations. Clayton used to be active in hunting and trapping, and years ago different elementary school classes would go out to "Clay's Cabin" and he would show them historical tools used in these activities and talk to them (he is a great storyteller). It would be interesting if you



DO YOU KNOW WHERE THIS IS?

Every co-op member who identifies the correct location of the photo at left by **June 10** will be entered in a drawing for a \$50 credit for electricity from their electric cooperative.

We do not accept Mystery Photo guesses by phone! Email mysteryphoto@countrylines.com, or send by mail to *Country Lines Mystery Photo*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, 48864. Include your name, address, phone number and name of your co-op. Only those sending complete information will be entered in the drawing. The winner will be announced in the July/August 2012 issue.

The March contest winner is Cindy Morgner of Central Lake, who correctly identified the photo as taken on U.S. 31 south of Charlevoix.



would do a story about him and his accomplishments.

— *Dianne VanGuilder,
Charlevoix*

Hospital Costs

I just finished reading the April 2012 issue of *Country Lines*, and with particular interest the letter from Jeff Lange of Alanson in reference to “Who’s Paying Hospital Costs?” (in reference to “Ramblings” column/January).

I’m afraid the gentleman is very badly misinformed. He does not understand that the 2,700 page document of Obama Care is not the solution to the health care problem. That document is not only about government controlling health care, but more accurately about the government eroding our individual rights as American citizens.

Although health care reform is needed to make medical care more available and affordable to the average person, the plan that is taking place before our eyes isn’t the answer. Just look at England or any other country that has socialized medicine in

place and you can see the quality and availability of human health care diminishes.

Immigrants have come to this country for over 200 years for individual freedoms. Taking away the right to choose your health care is a dangerous road that we are traveling toward complete Socialism.

A step in the right direction is to replace our federal, state and local elected officials with ones that will work to make sure American citizens have the rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and not a dictatorial, oppressive leadership. Vote in November and make yourself heard.

— *Mrs. James Lyons, Grayling*

Editor’s Note: “Obama Care” is actually the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act,” passed by Congress in 2010.

Readers can learn more about this law and its provisions by visiting wikipedia.org, a free encyclopedia, and typing the Act name in the search box.

Thanks For Storm Help

“The weekend that was” when we were all without power (March) two or three days or more...I was amazed to see how remarkably well Great Lakes Energy took care of a real emergency in our rural area. A big “thanks” to all of you servicing on foot and snowmobile where the trucks couldn’t go was cool.

If you missed seeing these guys in action [also throughout Alger Delta, Cherryland Electric, Cloverland Electric Cooperative, and Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op service areas], you missed a lot (see the story, April issue, on countrylines.com). Thanks again.

— *Jan Goodwin,
East Jordan*



Permission To Dream

Co-op students expand their horizons at Youth Leadership Summit.

You’re here because your electric co-op recognizes you as a leader—in your schools and in your communities,” began Ferris State University president, David Eisler. “And as a leader, your most important asset is your ability to dream.”

Eisler’s discussion about the value of education kicked-off a three-day Youth Leadership Summit presented by Michigan’s electric cooperatives. Twenty nine students from across the state were chosen to attend the summit to develop their leadership habits, explore career opportunities in the electric industry, and learn how to be actively involved in the democratic process.

Above, Ferris State University President David Eisler addresses YLS participants.

Small-group discussions helped students explore how leaders take control of their lives by choosing their response to situations, and how to identify, focus on and achieve their highest priorities. In a session titled “The Next Great Challenge,” students learned about the cooperative business model by discussing the early challenges electric co-ops helped overcome in America’s rural areas. Discussion quickly moved to the great challenges faced today, such as making renewable energy more affordable and available, and to student challenges, such as finding “good” jobs after college. Students had an opportunity to get an up-close tour of a working “wind farm” and formed a mini-democracy by electing team members to represent their interests during a mock co-op board meeting.

In the “Careers In Energy” portion of the event, lineworkers from Midwest Energy, Great Lakes Energy and HomeWorks Tri-County Electric co-ops talked about their work and training, then gave bucket truck rides and helped students gear-up to try climbing a pole. Twelve co-op employees and directors serving as chaperones for the event also discussed their jobs and education.

“YLS was a real leadership experience for me,” one student commented after the event. “I finally got to act [like] myself, talk about pressing issues, and enjoy time with new friends—and that was really cool!”

The Michigan Youth Leadership Summit is held annually at the Kettunen 4-H Center in Tustin. Seventeen of the students have been chosen to attend the Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., coming in June. Learn more about these co-op-sponsored youth programs at myYLS.com.

Learn About Co-ops

It’s a Matter of PRINCIPLE

The Rochdale Principles

Co-ops deliver electricity, sell produce, provide loans, and arrange for housing, health care, and more. But despite these differences, they all have one thing in common—seven cooperative principles:

- Voluntary and Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Members’ Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training, Information
- Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- Concern for Community

Learn more at www.go.coop.

Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World

A message from America’s Electric Cooperatives



**Regularly staffed
Monday – Friday,
8 a.m. – 5 p.m. at
TeamMidwest.com**

TeamMidwest.com Now Offers “Live Chat”

The world of technology has virtually exploded, giving us the online ability to do, buy and act on almost anything. But sometimes we get lost in that online world and yearn for a human interface to answer a question, provide information, or just guide us in the right direction.

Midwest Energy offers many options for members to contact us, and one of our newest features is our “Live Chat.” It’s a tool you can use on our website, and allows you to engage in a real-time, online conversation with a member of our expert customer care team. Whether you want to report an outage, get information about your recent bill, or learn

more about an upcoming energy education program, this tool offers you the flexibility to engage from the privacy of your own computer and get your answer fast.

“Live Chat” is regularly staffed Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. If you want to make contact outside of those hours, you will have the option to leave contact information and a message, and a member of our team will be back in touch during regular business hours. For more urgent needs, please call us after hours at 800-492-5989. That line is staffed 24/7 to allow us to handle emergency after-hours outage calls and other situations in a more immediate way.

Why Do We Send You *Country Lines*?

We send *Country Lines* to you because it is the most convenient and economical way to share information with Midwest Energy Cooperative members. It takes the place of many mailings we would otherwise make to get information to you about our services, director elections, member meetings, and the staff and management decisions you should know about as an owner of the co-op. The magazine also carries legal notices that would otherwise have to be placed in local media at a substantial cost.

And, sending *Country Lines* to you helps the co-op fulfill one of its basic principles—to educate and communicate openly with its members.

The board of directors authorizes the co-op to subscribe to *Country Lines* on your behalf at a cost of \$4.04 per year, paid as part of your electric bill. The current magazine cost is 40 cents per copy, less than the cost of a first-class stamp.

Country Lines is published for us, at cost, by the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association in Okemos. As always, we value your comments about your magazine.



Midwest Donates Kill-A-Watt Meters

Midwest Energy Cooperative recently donated Kill-A-Watt meters to libraries throughout its service territory to help promote greater understanding of energy use and management.

The Kill-A-Watt meter is a popular tool that the co-op makes available as a free loan to members. The easy-to-use tool records various power measurements of a selected appliance or electrical device, accumulating data that allows the user to project the cost of running that item for various periods of time and better understand how the use of certain appliances impacts overall energy use.

“By training library personnel and making these devices available through this community partnership, we are hoping that even more people will take an active interest in how they use energy and initiate steps to better manage their use,” said Patty Nowlin, director of

Left: Patty Clark (R), community development specialist for Midwest Energy’s southeast Michigan service territory, presents a Kill-A-Watt meter to Sheri Frost, a representative of the Stair Library in Morenci.

Right: Lori Ruff (R), community relations specialist in Midwest’s southwest Michigan service territory, instructs Hank Yeomans, treasurer of the Cass District Library, on use of the donated Kill-A-Watt meter.

communications and community relations.

These donated meters are available throughout the Cass District Library system (Edwardsburg, Howard, Mason/Union and the main branch), the Lenawee County Public Library system (Addison, Britton, Clayton, Deerfield and Onsted), as well as the Adrian Public Library, Tecumseh Public Library, Stair Library in Morenci and Schultz-Holmes Memorial Library in Blissfield.

Watch Out For Downed Power Lines

Downed lines may still be energized and can easily injure or kill someone nearby, so please use these tips for safety:

- ▶ Treat all power lines as energized. Never climb or touch a tree that has a limb caught in a power line.
- ▶ Maintain required clearances between equipment and power lines.
- ▶ If a fire starts from a fallen line, stay away. Call the fire department and Midwest.
- ▶ Do not use water on or near a fallen power line.
- ▶ Look for nearby power lines before you cut down or trim trees. If a tree falls into a power line, call Midwest Energy at 800-492-5989.

You can help stop power line problems by notifying the co-op of trees or branches that may interfere with the lines.



March Winner!



The votes are in and Sarah Schmidt, a member from Lyons, OH, is the March winner of our 2012 "Your Perspective Photo Contest." Her entry, which features her daughter McKenzie in a quiet moment with her horse Clarabelle, secured the most votes by Mar. 31 and won Sarah a \$20 bill credit. There's still plenty of time to submit your entry for our 2012 contest. Visit us at [Facebook.com/TeamMidwest](https://www.facebook.com/TeamMidwest) for details and official rules.

Preferred Energy Auditor Contractors

These days we're all looking for ways that we can maximize our energy dollars by increasing our home's efficiency, but knowing where to start and what to do can be overwhelming.

As a service to our members, we have researched and interviewed a number of energy auditors that provide service within our territory. We have identified contractors below that

we are confident will provide you with the same high level of customer service that we expect from our own employees. We will also use these contractors in the future as we embark upon education and demonstration projects.

Please feel free to contact any of these contractors with confidence if you are interested in more information about their services.

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or
395 East 500 North
Valparaiso, IN
219-464-4457, 800-390-8091
energydiagnosticsinc.com
Michigan, Indiana and Ohio

Energy Saving Services, Inc.

3025 Emerald Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49001

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Southwest Michigan (Allegan, Barry, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties)

Green Building Consulting Homes +

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byankie@fuse.net
Michigan, Indiana and Ohio

Home Energy Insight, LLC

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Portage, MI
269-372-2496
rlkildea@sbcglobal.net
Berrien, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties

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Infrared-energy.com
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419-890-8067
snergys.com
Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan

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Michigan, Indiana and Ohio



Photo: FEWA

To Finish or Not to Finish?

How do you get the most bang for your buck in home improvements during a down economy?

Americans are staying put. The down economy has been driving most people to bunker down in their homes instead of moving, and many wonder whether to finish that attic or replace the front door as they try to sit-out hard times.

Only 10 percent of the general public feels that now is the time to sell their home, according to Fannie Mae's National Housing Survey released in November 2011. The survey shows 75 percent of Americans believe the economy is on the wrong track. It stands to reason then that long-term homeowners want to make their property as livable as possible. So, which specific home improvements are shown to deliver the most value right now, according to the experts? On the flip side, can a home improvement actually reduce property value?

Exterior home improvements have customarily given homeowners the best return for their dollars, and today is no exception. The National Association of Realtors' (NAR) Cost vs. Value Report ranks exterior improve-

ments among the best home investments on HouseLogic.com, NAR's consumer website.

Good deals aren't limited to the exterior, however. Conversion of existing space, such as a minor kitchen remodel, turning an attic into a bedroom or finishing a basement is more likely to bring a better return than an addition.

The cost vs. value report "shows the value of putting your home's best façade forward, so to speak," says NAR President Moe Veissi, broker-owner of Veissi & Associates Inc., in Miami. Exterior projects are important to a home's regular upkeep and are expected to recoup far more than many other home improvements. Plus, they add instant curb appeal when times are finally right for selling.

A home's attractiveness, the indicator of initial appeal, makes a big difference. Exterior elements covering large areas such as siding, entry and garage doors have the greatest visual impact. Updated exteriors give sellers an edge, because buyers are attracted to a home before entering.

Top 7 Most Efficient Projects

Seven of the top 10 most cost-effective projects nationally in terms of value recouped are exterior projects, reports the NAR. The NAR has judged an upscale fiber-cement siding as the No. 1 improvement value, with an estimated 78 percent of costs recouped upon resale.

Two other siding projects ranked in the top 10, including foam-backed vinyl and upscale vinyl. Both are expected to recoup roughly 70 percent of costs. A steel entry door replacement, the least expensive project in the report, averages little more than \$1,200 and is expected to recoup 73 percent of its cost.

Garage door replacement, a wood deck addition, and vinyl window replacement are all expected to recoup around 70 percent of costs.

On the interior, NAR considers three kinds of remodeling projects worthwhile investments. The least expensive way to add a bedroom and bathroom within a home's existing footprint is a mid-range attic bedroom, expected to return 72.5 percent of

◀ Fiber-cement siding is considered the No. 1 ranking, top-value home improvement, according to the National Association of Realtors. Fiber-cement siding is also used in wind-resistant building techniques to help protect buildings during tornadoes and high winds.

costs. A minor kitchen remodel, expected to return 72 percent of costs, is fourth overall.

Least Cost-Efficient Projects

Least-return improvements are a sunroom addition and a home office remodel, both estimated to recoup less than 46 percent of costs. An in-ground pool can add to home value, but there's little chance of recovering the money spent on upkeep. The NAR says an above-ground pool and its high upkeep factor can actually reduce the resale value of a home.

All homes benefit from increased insulation and sealing, regardless of climate. Older homes are usually under-insulated compared to new homes. Adding more can help you realize a return on your investment. Beefing

up R-values in an attic or crawlspace also helps cut energy use.

Do-It-Yourself Or Not?

Most homeowners can handle routine maintenance projects and cosmetic touch-ups, but it's recommended that you consult with qualified professionals for larger remodeling jobs and major structural changes.

After deciding on one or more projects, how can you get started? What to do first on a project can be daunting in itself, so what's the best solution to avoid confusion?

Jerry Fedewa, president of The Greater Lansing Home Builders and Remodelers Association, suggests the priority should be to stick to the scope of work unless you become aware of additional items that make sense to complete at that time. "It's best to know exactly what you want done and to be able to communicate the scope of the project," Fedewa explains. "If the builder or remodeler sees additional work that needs to be done, they will suggest it."

Fedewa recommends contacting the local homebuilders and remodelers association for a list of licensed and insured contractors. "I would choose three contractors to visit your project," he advises.

The down economy offers homeowners some opportunities for savings, he relates. "Additions and remodels really did not slow nearly as much as home building has," Fedewa says. "So, more homebuilders started taking on more additions and remodels." This means there is probably some savings

for homeowners here, because more contractors are chasing the same amount of work. "Customer service has improved and project time has improved," Fedewa says.

Asking contractors important questions makes all the difference, adds Roger Weymouth, broker/owner of Weymouth & Associates in Holt, MI. "Regarding the best questions to ask, I would say, 'as many as you can think of.'" For instance:

▲ Are you licensed and insured? (Make a copy of the license and insurance.)

▲ Do you carry workman's comp insurance? (Make a copy.)

▲ How long have you been in business?

▲ Can you provide me a list of the last three projects you did with names and phone numbers of the people that hired you?

▲ Is this your best price?

"I personally prefer to pay when the job is complete," Weymouth advises. "Be careful of the contractor that wants money up front." Always make sure your agreement with the contractor is in writing, he adds, and everything should be understood beforehand.

"It's very important to always include a project completion date in your contract, and what happens if the project isn't finished by that date," Weymouth continues. "For example, include wording such as 'contractor to pay owner x amount each day thereafter completion date if the project is not completed.'"

Homeowners should also be aware that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has passed regulations for contractors working in homes built before 1978. The new rules are enforced, and consumers should check to see if contractors follow the law.

There's a lot to gain through home improvements, such as increased functionality, new appliances, efficient systems, updated décor and additional living space. But following expert advice helps you realize the pure enjoyment of making a home truly "your own."

More on home improvement, page 12 ▶

Countdown to Value!

The top seven home improvement values, per the National Association of Realtors:

#7: Vinyl siding (shown below)

#6: Deck

#5: Garage door

#4: Minor kitchen remodel

#3: Converting attic to bedroom

#2: Steel entry door

#1: Fiber-cement siding



Other Resources

nariremodelers.com

Find home improvement professionals who voluntarily subscribe to a strict code of ethics.

HouseLogic.com

Find dozens of remodeling project ideas here. Each shows the recouped project value; lots of information on home maintenance and green remodeling. Also visit greenremodling.org.

ask-the-rehabber.com

Do-it-yourself remodeling information, with emphasis on saving money.

Home Improvement Help on the Computer

Search the internet by name to find details on the following programs, or more programs, and online help for planning home improvement projects.

Home Designer Suite 2012, \$98

Highly-rated. It can help plan and estimate costs before you begin. Create a new room, bath, kitchen or other space. View cabinet combinations, countertops, appliances, fixtures, custom colors, and more.

Home & Landscape Design Premium NexGen3, \$99

Planning tools for both home improvements and landscape/backyard beautification. Apply paint, carpet or other materials to a surface, room or entire house with a click. Pick default materials and colors before you start designing. Measuring distances within the drawing enables quick reference or planning for furniture. Accurate imaging and user-controlled sun angles and shadows add detailing.

HGTV Home Design & Remodeling Suite, \$49

Beginner's software with wizards to design bathrooms, kitchens or a full home. Ceate a new living space, add a fireplace, make your home energy efficient with new appliances, replace countertops, cabinets and fixtures, and enhance any room.

Big Hammer Deck Designer, free (requires Internet Explorer)

Over 70 customizable deck templates, or draw your own. Choose materials by classification, size and grade; provides a list of materials.

Energy Star Home Advisor, free

Simple, free and anonymous energy advice, with a summary of estimated savings in total energy, electricity, fuel use, and carbon emissions associated with custom-recommended measures, based on typical energy use of homes in your area.

Typical recommendations include sealing air leaks, adding insulation, replacing old heating and cooling equipment, installing a high-efficiency water heater, installing a programmable thermostat, and replacing lights and appliances with Energy Star® models.



Tough Flooring for Tough Times

Photo – Flooring Source/Michele J. Zelman

Laminate flooring is tough and low-maintenance, but looks impressive, which makes it perfect for an active home in a down economy.

One of the toughest, most appealing, functional, and simple-to-install floors just happens to be one of the least costly. Laminate flooring has come a long way since its invention in the 1970s and deserves serious consideration by anyone contemplating a new floor, particularly during tough economic times.

Laminate flooring doesn't enjoy the media attention of bamboo, wood, stone or tile floors. Ironically, homeowners can find laminate flooring products to match the look of every variant of each of those products. Laminate flooring's composition of a high-resolution image bonded to a composite core, sealed under a clear resin-based wear layer, lets it match the look of any surface. Natural designs from hardwood, bamboo, granite, marble, and even tile and carpet are all available in laminate. So, while laminate's popularity has skyrocketed because of price and performance, its looks are impressive, too.

Compared to wood, laminate's toughness shines—its resistance to scratches, dents and capacity to stand up to daily wear all exceed the performance of wood. Kids and pets have proven laminate's record. The first layer of laminate flooring is an abrasion resistant finish of aluminum oxide (diamond is the only material that is harder). Laminate does not require waxing, oiling or staining, but should be kept clean, as dust, dirt and sand particles can scratch the surface.

Laminate flooring's chief vulnerability is high moisture, which can harm the composite core. If you're planning on putting laminate in a kitchen or bath, make sure it's a type that is approved to minimize the risk of damage in high-moisture areas.

Laminate also provides better stain resistance compared with hardwood and bamboo, because the first layer is stain resistant.

Another plus is easy maintenance. All that you need to maintain laminate is a cleaner and rag. You can remove a broken plank and replace it in case of damage.

Toughness alone might sell a homeowner on laminate, but ease-of-installation is just as convincing, making it the flooring of choice for a do-it-yourselfer. Known as a "floating floor system," think of each plank of wood being nailed to the sub-floor, one after the other. By comparison, once assembled, laminate rests atop an existing floor. With click-together laminate, there is no nailing, screwing or gluing. you don't glue planks together. Installing the floor is as simple as laying down underlayment, cutting planks to the right lengths, and snapping them together.

Perhaps the biggest attraction of laminate, however, remains the price. For those feeling the crunch, every cent makes a difference, and economy lines are sold for less than \$1 per square foot. For a little more, high-end laminates provide a tougher, more appealing look. Either way, installing laminate is a low-cost solution to a high-cost project.

Gone are the days when laminates were easy to spot, too. Manufacturers now create strikingly realistic visuals and textures that often cannot be distinguished from the real thing.

Laminates are ideal for homeowners who desire the attractiveness of wood, stone or other costly coverings, but not the upkeep.

Source: World Floor Covering Association

Electrical Safety During and After Storms

Frequently Asked Questions

Severe storms and natural disasters can cause a variety of electrical safety hazards in and around our homes and businesses. Unfortunately, many of these hazards remain long after the storm has passed.

Lightning

What should I do if I am caught outside in a lightning storm? Lightning hits the tallest available object, so get down low in a crouched position if you are in an exposed area. Also, stay away from trees and don't hold onto metal items. Stay away from metal sheds, clotheslines, poles and fences, as well as water, including puddles, and anything damp—even grass. Don't stand close to other people. Spread out.

Is there a warning before lightning strikes? Sometimes. If you feel a tingling sensation or your hair stands on end, lightning may be about to strike. Do not lie down; crouch, tuck your head, and cover your ears.

What should I do if I encounter a lightning storm while driving? Slow down, and do not drive over downed power lines. If possible, pull off the road into a safe area. Do not leave your vehicle. A vehicle is considered safe if it is fully enclosed with a metal top. While inside, do not use electronic devices.

Are we safe from lightning if we stay inside the house? Stay away from windows and doors. Unplug electronic equipment before the storm arrives. Avoid contact with electrical equipment and cords, as well as water and plumbing. Use corded telephones only for emergencies. You can use cordless or cellular phones. Also, bring pets inside—doghouses are not lightning-safe, and chained animals can easily become victims of lightning strikes.

Power Lines

What should I do if I encounter a downed power line? Move at least 10 feet away from the line and anything touching it. The human body is a ready conductor of electricity. The proper way is to shuffle with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times. This minimizes the potential for a strong electric shock. Electricity wants to move from high voltage to low, such as through your body.

What can I do to help someone who has contacted with a downed power line? Do not touch the person! You could become the next victim. Call 911 instead.

Do not try to move a downed power line or anything in contact with the line by using another object, such as a broom or stick. Even nonconductive materials like wood or cloth, if slightly wet, can conduct electricity. **What if a power line comes down onto my car or I didn't see it until I've driven into it?** Stay in your car and tell others to stay away.

If you must leave your car because it's on fire, jump out with both feet together and avoid contact with the live car and the ground at the same time to avoid being the path of electricity from the car to the earth. Shuffle away from the car.

Is a downed power line still dangerous in water? Any amount of water—even a puddle—could become energized. Be careful not to touch water—or anything in contact with it—near a downed line.

Flooded Areas

Is it safe to go into a flooded basement? Use extreme caution. Submerged outlets or electrical cords can energize the water.

Electrical items, such as circuit breakers, fuses, ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), receptacles, plugs and switches can malfunction when water and silt get inside. Discard them if they have been submerged and have a licensed, qualified professional replace them.

Do not use electrical appliances that were wet until they have been examined by a qualified service repair dealer. Electrical equipment exposed to water can be extremely dangerous if re-energized. Damage to electrical equipment can also result from exposure to flood waters contaminated with chemicals, sewage, oil and other debris.

The National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA) has a brochure, "Guidelines for Handling Water Damaged Electrical Equipment," that can be downloaded free at: nema.org/stds/water-damaged.cfm.

Can flooded outside areas be dangerous, too? Yes, downed power lines or submerged outlets from adjacent homes could energize the water. Use extreme caution when entering any flooded area.

Portable Generators

▶ A licensed electrician should install home generators to ensure they meet all electrical codes. Make sure it is properly grounded according to manufacturer instructions.

▶ Do not connect generators directly to the household wiring unless the proper transfer switch has been installed by a licensed, qualified electrician. Without this, power can "backfeed" along the power lines, creating an electrocution hazard for anyone coming in contact with the lines, including lineworkers making necessary repairs.

▶ Never operate a generator inside your home or any enclosed, or partially enclosed area. Generators very quickly produce carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless and poisonous gas that can easily enter your home. Opening windows, doors or using fans does not provide adequate ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide build-up. Generators must be located outside, over 15 feet from windows, doors and vents, through which carbon monoxide can enter your home. Keep it a safe distance away from your neighbors' homes, too. Make sure there is at least one battery-operated or battery-backup carbon monoxide alarm in your home. Test it before using the generator.

▶ Place the generator on a *dry* surface under an open, canopy-like structure. Do not operate the generator in wet conditions or where there is standing water.

▶ Keep children away from portable generators and fuel at all times.

▶ Generator capacity varies. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully, and do not overload it.

▶ *Refueling the generator while it is running is a fire hazard.* Unplug all appliances from the generator before shutting it down; turn it off and let it cool down before refueling.

Post-Evacuation

First and foremost, do not return home until instructed by the appropriate local authorities. Once they give the go-ahead, return home during daylight hours, especially if power has not been restored.

If you smell gas, leave the premises and notify emergency authorities immediately. Do not turn on lights, light matches, or engage in any activity that could create a spark.

Source: Electrical Safety Foundation International

Install Your Own Irrigation System

I can't imagine a better investment these days than a lawn or garden irrigation system to put the right amount of water where it's needed, when it's needed. However, until now it's been a little difficult to find such a system that a homeowner can easily install, and having a professional install one can be a little pricey for some of us.

Thanks to John Coyne, of Marquette, a lawn and garden irrigation system is available that is both affordable and practical to install for the do-it-yourselfer (DIY). It's also a self-draining system, which means one less chore to do on weekends in the fall.

Coyne invented what he has patented and calls Auto Rain Lawn Gear® (ARLG). These irrigation kits come in six different sizes and zones, to suit the size and layout of your lawn—from an inexpensive, small, one-zone kit that covers 800 square feet, to larger three-zone kits that cover as much as 25,500 square feet. The kits use Rainbird® brand components.

"These do-it-yourself kits can save over 70 percent of the cost of hiring a contractor," explains Coyne, who has been installing irrigation systems for the past 17 years. Detailed instructions come with each kit, and there is a helpful instructional video on the ARLG website (noted below). Of course, if you're not the DIY type, you can hire a landscaper or other contractor to install a kit for you.

The ARLG systems can hook right up to an outdoor spigot, or you can have a professional plumber attach it directly to a water source under the house. If done the latter way, make sure a back-flow preventer is included to avoid contamination of your water supply. First, though, make sure you have adequate water pressure for the system. If you can fill up a five-gallon bucket in a minute or less—which is achievable in most homes—then you're all set, Coyne says.

The system itself can be installed with a minimum of tools, such as a shovel and a few hand tools to fasten parts together. The actual poly-plastic hose is purchased separately at any hardware store. Because the hose need only be buried under the sod, a spade shovel is all you need for digging—no backhoes or pipe pullers required. Running the hose under a sidewalk requires that it be fed under the



Photo courtesy-John Coyne

What will lawn irrigation do for you?

SAVE TIME. Connect a timer to an irrigation system and you can water your lawn while you're at work, on the golf course, or out in the boat.

SAVE MONEY. Water is expensive these days, not to mention a precious resource. Consistent watering directed only where it is needed saves money.

IMPRESS THE NEIGHBORS. A nice lawn is a joy to look at and will be the envy of the neighborhood.

RELIEVE STRESS. No more kinked hoses or shoddy sprinklers. Pour yourself your favorite beverage and leave the rest to your irrigation system!

concrete, perhaps attached to the end of a metal or galvanized pipe.

"If you can use a shovel and turn a screwdriver, then you can do this," he adds.

Coyne spent 23 years as a pharmaceutical salesperson before inventing his irrigation system. After losing that job to corporate downsizing, he was looking for a way to continue making a living. He believed that at the age of 50 he would be hard-pressed to find another job in sales (at least in the Marquette area) that paid him the money he was accustomed to. Besides, he said, most employers wouldn't have faith that he'd stay with the company very long at his age.

Luckily, Coyne had already been operating a part-time sideline business for 17 years, called U.P. Irrigation. While installing irrigation systems that other companies had designed, he was also thinking about how to improve them. This gave him a back-up plan for a career change after he lost the pharmaceutical job. The problem with those

John Coyne, of Marquette, has invented a do-it-yourself lawn and garden irrigation system.

systems was they were difficult for the do-it-yourselfer to install, and added work for gardeners who had to fuss with draining all the system lines each fall.

Out of this angst with the status quo came a new type of lawn irrigation system, and a new career for Coyne. So, about three years ago he came up with the idea for his new product. A year later, he was approaching stores to see if they were interested in selling it. He hopes this will be the career move that will sustain him in the years to come.

"I'd like to thank my employer who laid me off," Coyne says, noting it was that pink slip that forced him to come up with a new line of work, and one that he is very satisfied with today.

His biggest challenge now is getting his product into the big-box stores. It's hard when you're an unknown entity from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to get noticed by the big guys, Coyne explains. However, with hard work and persistence, which included traveling as far away as Texas to pitch his product, he's making progress. The Auto Rain Lawn Gear kits are now carried by Lowe's stores in northern Michigan, and select Ace and True Value Hardware stores in the U.P., and are also available from the company website at autorainlawngear.com.

An irrigation system is a good investment because you'll save money by not watering more than a lawn or garden needs, and your plants will be healthier. In fact, when you water by hand you waste over 50 percent of the water applied in runoff and evaporation. You'll also save time, especially when you attach a timer to the system, allowing you to work on some of those other home improvement projects, go golfing, or have a barbecue.

Neil Moran offers garden tips on his website: northcountrygardening.neilmoran.com.



Luminature

Wildly unique lighting and decor

It started with a sketch of a tree and branched out into a business specializing in “wildly unique lighting.”

In the 15 years that Owosso native Lori McCarthy worked in the lighting field she was dismayed to see production move overseas and inferior fixtures swamp the market. Cheap materials, poor workmanship and boring, “copycat” designs replaced quality American-made goods. With the explosion of big-box stores, she says, “The integrity of the lighting industry has gone down the drain.”

After living in upstate New York for several years McCarthy returned to central Michigan and decided to create original, hand-made fixtures under the name Luminature Design. She found a local computer-aided design (CAD) source and fabricator who plasma-cut her hand-drawn tree illustration from steel in a silhouette effect. “It’s a complicated process, but I finally got my tree,” she says, stressing the importance of using her original artwork. “I want every single thing on my light fixtures to be my designs.”

Inspired by nature, McCarthy added moose, fish and pinecone motifs to her chandeliers, wall sconces and home décor items, such as paper towel holders. When Owosso, home of the Steam Railroading Institute, hosted the national Train Festival in 2009, McCarthy launched a line featuring powerful locomotives.

She and her husband Paul live north of Owosso in Henderson, where they turned their century-old barn into a workshop. “It was always my dream to have that barn studio,” she says, “and it’s gorgeous: two stories with a 30-foot-high ceiling.” The couple hand-torches their cut-out art to finish the steel in shades of orange and blue, and welds and wires the pieces into functional, decorative fixtures.

Although most of her work features plasma-cut steel, McCarthy also likes to assemble found objects into one-of-a-kind fixtures. A stunning example is a chandelier crafted from an 1895 hay pulley with thick, 100-year old rope holding the antique amber light globes. A bundle of unused, vintage burlap potato sacks became drum lampshades. And she creates stained glass art, much of it custom. “One woman brought some wheat to incorporate in a glass project,” she explains.

McCarthy recently moved from her own storefront in Owosso to Artisan Alley Mall in Corunna, and is excited about being under one roof with other creative folks. The market-like showcase occupies part of a former window factory that is anchored by 2nd Chance Wood Company (2ndchancewood.com).

Tadd Wilson founded 2nd Chance Wood as a source for building materials rescued from fallen trees, barns and other structures, but the company evolved into making rustic furniture, cabinetry, mantels and decorative accessories from the reclaimed wood. By welcoming other artisans and antique dealers to his building, Wilson has created a one-stop decorating shop for the individuals, designers, architects and restaurateurs who travel to see his wood products.

“It has the most elegant pieces of junk you’ll ever see,” says McCarthy of Artisan Alley Mall and 2nd Chance Wood. “It’s just a place to go for really cool things.”



Photos - David Olds

Lori McCarthy uses a grinder on a steel panel which will be used to produce a lamp. She and her husband make decorative home products out of wood, steel, glass and other resources.



Lori uses a blow torch to add color to a steel panel which will be used, along with thin sheets of the mineral, mica, to produce a lamp.



Lori and Paul McCarthy of Luminature Design in their studio, a renovated barn in Henderson. Their website is wix.com/mccarthylori/luminature and “Luminature Design” on Facebook.

Going Solo

Single-child Families Are On The Rise

What do Albert Einstein, Joe Montana and Brooke Shields have in common? Fame, of course, but also a shared experience with 20 million of today's young Americans: each was an only child.

Whether they formed by choice or by circumstance, the single-child family is the fastest-growing family type in the U.S. and most of Western Europe. And contrary to lingering stereotypes, studies show that singletons are not measurably different from other kids—except that they, along with first-borns and people who have only one sibling, score higher in measures of intelligence and achievement.

Attention + Confidence = High Achievement

This higher-than-average achievement comes partly from getting more than their share of nurturing attention. Plus, family time often involves adult-oriented activities such as trips to museums and historic attractions.

"My dad would insist on reading every sign in every museum display...out loud," says Jeremy Harder, who grew up as an only child in Owosso, MI. "Without any siblings to run off with, or form a protest, I pretty much just slumped along, listening. ...These are experiences I really appreciate now that I'm older. And it's surprising how much knowledge I've retained from those museums."

He describes another set of powerful drivers of academic achievement: freedom and confidence.

"I could watch whatever I felt like, or play with whatever toy I wanted without conflict, or judgment," he said. "If I wanted to try building a donut-making machine out of spare lawnmower parts, no one told me it was a stupid idea that wouldn't work."

Only children also benefit from having parents involved at school. They're often the ones who can chaperone trips or volunteer in the classrooms, which can be a boon for teachers.

As it turns out, this combination of self-



Photo: iStockphoto.com

Resources:

▶ onlychild.com

▶ parents.com – Search for "10 Tips for Parenting Only Children: How to handle your overly mature, diligent, conscientious, perfectionist only child."

▶ susannewmanphd.com – Dr. Susan Newman is author of *Psychology Today's* "Singletons" blog and a new book, "The Case for the Only Child: Your Essential Guide."

confidence and focused parent involvement provides a powerful formula for success.

Raising One Child Presents Some Unique Challenges

On the other hand, teachers say single-child parents sometimes need to leave their child alone so all that focused attention doesn't encourage helplessness. She urges parents to teach children—especially as they enter middle and high school—to advocate for themselves in asking for extra help or discussing a grade. And as hard as it might be,

parents sometimes need to look the other way so their child can feel the consequences of their actions.

Michigan attorney Mercedes Dordeski agrees. As an only child, she benefited from both homework help and high accountability from her parents.

"If I ever complained about a particular subject being difficult, the teacher being mean, or how I just 'didn't get it,' my parents would never let me use that as an excuse," Dordeski said. "They just told me that I needed to work harder."

Their methods paid off. Like a higher-than-average number of singletons, Dordeski stayed out of trouble, graduated high school with honors, and went on to college and an advanced professional degree.

"My advice to parents would be to never let your kids take the easy way out... If you make them do something, they will," she says.

Parents in single-child families also are on the hook for providing the competition, camaraderie, and entertainment that come naturally with siblings. This is especially true if school friends live far away or keep too busy to visit often.

"One of the downsides of being an only child is boredom," said Harder. "My parents were pretty good about joining in, but an adult's threshold for playing games, throwing balls or playing pretend just isn't nearly as wide as a kid's."

Harder offered parents his own set of tips—starting with the gift of time.

"Be involved daily in doing homework, playing, having dinner together, watching television together, listening to your child—everything—because your child doesn't have anyone in the house to share that with."

He also stressed the importance of getting an only child involved in extra-curricular activities, even if they are reluctant.

"A child who only spends time with adults can often feel awkward when alone with other kids. It will help them immensely if they are at a sports practice or music lesson a few times during the week. Ask them all about it when it's over, but give them that time to learn how to interact without a parent there guiding the way."

And his final tip: "Get a dog."

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



Jerry Regan Is 'Der Flymeister'

If there ever was a master of the trout fly, it would have to be Jerry Regan, of Grayling. Most knowing fly-fishers around the "Holy Waters of the Au Sable" say no one is more worthy of the title, "Der Flymeister."

Jerry retired from downstate and moved back home to pursue what has turned out to be busy second occupation—fly-tying. He is also busy demonstrating and teaching fly-tying while pursuing an increasingly important role as a historian of the arcane craft.

When it comes to Michigan and nationwide, Jerry is one of only a few tiers that have become walking encyclopedias of fly patterns, old and new. This scribbler can attest to that. When I had tied up a pattern I used to fish in western waters and showed it to him, he barely looked before naming it. "A 'picket pin'—an old-time fly seldom seen used these days," he said.

Regan is the third generation in his family to tie flies. His grandfather and uncle tied flies as well as guided on the AuSable and Manistee rivers. And like most guides, they tied to have flies available for clients to use and buy.

"They called these 'pocket flies'—a few proven patterns they'd developed to give to their clients when fish got lockjaw," Jerry said. "Every guide has some of these 'go to' flies when things got tough—patterns that they knew would take fish in almost every situation."

It wasn't only the men in his family that were involved in tying feathers to a hook. "My Aunt Mary Carr tied the feather dressings on the hooks for lures from the Eppinger Company, makers of the old "Dardevle" and "Five O'Diamond" spoons and other lures," he added.

As a youngster, Regan used to hang around with the old-timers that ran a local fly shop, called the Fly Factory. "I remember the old-timers like Sailor Bill, and later Art Westerville and the Southard family, that ran the Fly Factory (since renamed the Old Au Sable Fly Shop), and I have tied lots of flies for them over time." Regan also noted that giving demonstrations on fly-tying came naturally since his Uncle Ralph tied and gave demonstrations at sports shows for many years.

Regan spent much of his adult life working



Jerry Regan is a master fly-tier.

as a barber in a shop in Davison, near Flint, and like many older fly-tiers of the north country, he tied flies in the shop when not busy clipping hair off humans. He also saved his off-work time for periodic trips back to Grayling to fish and later to begin both guiding and tying for more outlets in the north.

He knew many of the early tiers that formed what some call the "AuSable School of Tying." He was a good friend of the late Bob Smock, one of the few remaining masters of the AuSable deer hair dry flies. "Bob only

tied dry flies—he never liked tying wet flies and stuck to tying the classic dry flies like those originated by Earl Madsen, Clarence Roberts, Marion Burtch, Ernie Borchert, Jim Wakely, Eggie Bugby, and Horace Failing," Regan said. "Those were the ones we younger tiers learned from as we grew up and their patterns are still good flies for the AuSable and Manistee."

Jerry Regan ties all types of flies, wet and dry, streamer, nymph, or dries tied with spent, divided or parachute hackle wings (resembles wings and legs of a mayfly). And there are few standard patterns that he cannot identify at a glance. When I wanted a pair of the classic Mershon wet flies for my collection of Michigan patterns, he had a pair—the light and dark—in my mailbox within the week.

Since retiring, Regan lives in his family home in Grayling, which he had kept all these years while working downstate, and is busy guiding in a classic AuSable riverboat, tying flies, and demonstrating at clubs and shows. The only change is that he now gets more time to fish for himself, as well.

"We talked about you and me going down the stream for a fishing day for several years, so let's do it this summer, maybe during the 'hopper hatch about August," Jerry told me. "Neither one of us is getting any younger, so let's do it."

It did not take much time to say "yes" to an opportunity to fish the "Holy Waters" with the "Flymeister," Jerry Regan.

Regretfully, Don Ingle and his wife Jean died recently in a tragic house fire, but this column was the last he submitted as the Outdoors writer for Michigan Country Lines for over 25 years, and we know he would've liked going out by talking about his love of fishing. (Also, see the reader letter about Don on p. 6). Rest in peace, Mr. Ingle, with dreams of fly-tying and fishing the "Holy Waters of the Au Sable."





Crêpes

Sweet & Savory

Sunday Morning
Crêpe Cake

The word “crêpe” is of French origin, stemming from the Latin word *crispa*, which means “curled.” If you stroll through Paris, you’ll find many vendors serving these hot treats right on the street. Crêpes resemble thin pancakes, and they’re surprisingly easy to make. They are also so versatile you can eat them for breakfast—filled with sweets and creams—or enjoy them with savory meats and vegetables.

Sunday Morning Crêpe Cake

3 c. sifted flour
4 T. sugar
2 t. baking powder
1/2 t. salt
4 eggs, beaten
4 c. milk
4 T. butter or margarine
fruit preserves

Frosting:

8 oz. cream cheese, softened
3 T. sugar
2 t. vanilla

Sift flour with sugar, baking powder and salt. Combine eggs and milk; beat until well mixed; pour into dry ingredients and beat with mixer until smooth. Spray an 8-9-inch

skillet, pour 1/4 cup batter, rotating pan so batter quickly covers bottom of entire pan. Cook over high heat about 1 minute per side. Remove from heat. Begin by stacking each crêpe on a 10-inch plate. Lightly spread preserves over the top of each crêpe, stacking them on top of each other and spreading preserves as you go. Makes about 24 crêpes. Do not put preserve on last crêpe, finish with a plain crêpe. Combine all frosting ingredients together and frost cake. Top with fresh berries and powdered sugar.

Julie McDonald, Freesoil

Hot Fresh Peach Souffle

1 c. fresh peaches, pureed (2 peaches)
3 T. cornstarch
1/4 c. sugar
2 t. fresh lemon juice
dash of salt

4 large eggs, separated (1/2 c. whites)
1 peach sliced, for garnish

Butter a large bowl. Sprinkle bowl with sugar. Mix puree with cornstarch, sugar, lemon juice, salt and egg yolks. Beat egg whites until stiff, but not dry. Carefully fold egg whites into peach mixture. Turn into bowl and bake at 375° for 35 minutes, until puffed and brown. Serve with sliced peaches. Serves 6-8.

Joan Leahy, Bay City

Cherry Blintzes

3 eggs
3 T. oil
1-1/2 c. milk
1 c. flour
1/2 t. salt
1/3 c. melted butter
2 T. butter
confectioners' sugar
1 c. sour cream
1 can cherry pie filling

Cheese Filling:

1 egg yolk
2 T. sugar
1 c. cottage cheese
8 oz. cream cheese
1 t. vanilla

Combine eggs, oil, milk, flour and salt in

Photography by: 831 Creative

blender container. Blend until smooth. Heat 8-inch skillet until drop of water sizzles. Brush with butter. Quickly pour in 3 tablespoons of batter, tilting pan to spread evenly. Cook until golden on underside. Dry on paper towels; stack with waxed paper between. In medium bowl, combine egg yolk and sugar; beat until thick and yellow. Add cheeses and vanilla and stir until well-combined. Spread 3 tablespoons of filling on browned side of each crêpe, making a rectangle 4 inches long. Fold two opposite sides of crêpe over filling; overlap ends, covering filling completely. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in large skillet over medium heat; add half of crêpes, not touching, seam side down. Sauté until golden; turn and sauté other side. Keep warm. Serve warm with confectioners' sugar, sour cream and cherry pie filling. Serves 16-20.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

Mexican Crêpes

1 can pie filling, any flavor
1 pkg. small flour tortillas
1½ c. sugar
1½ sticks of butter
1 t. vanilla
2 c. water

cinnamon and nutmeg, to taste

Equally divide pie filling between tortillas. Roll up like enchiladas. Place in 9x13-inch baking dish. Melt together sugar, butter, vanilla and water. Pour over roll-ups. Sprinkle with cinnamon or nutmeg. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes. Serve hot or cold. Serve with vanilla ice cream.

Debra Looney, Grayling

Crêpe Appetizers

1 c. pancake mix, plain
1 egg, beaten
¾ c. water
8 oz. cream cheese
3 T. chopped onion
2 T. chopped sweet pickle
deli-style ham slices

Mix first 3 ingredients (should be thin, if too thick, add water). Heat skillet to 375°. Pour batter in skillet to make 7-inch crêpe. When bubbles form, turn over until both sides are golden brown. Lay crêpes flat, and cool. Mix cream cheese, onion and pickle. Spread mix on flat crêpes. Top each one with thin slice of ham and roll up (tube-like). Can be served cold or warm.

Deborah Black, Sandusky

Lemon-Blueberry Crêpes

1 c. Bisquick baking mix
2 eggs
¾ c. milk

Filling:

1 pkg. (3-oz.) cream cheese, softened
1 ½ c. half-and-half
1 T. lemon juice
1 pkg. (3-oz.) lemon instant pudding and pie filling, dry
1 c. blueberry pie filling

Lightly grease 8-inch skillet, heat until hot. Beat Bisquick, eggs and milk with hand beater until smooth. For each crêpe, pour 2 tablespoons batter into skillet, rotate skillet until batter covers bottom. Cook both sides until golden brown. Beat cheese, half-and-half, lemon juice and instant pudding on low

speed until well blended, about 2 minutes. Refrigerate at least 30 minutes. Spoon about 2 tablespoons of pudding mixture onto each crêpe; roll up. Top with remaining mixture and garnish with pie filling.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

Basic Crêpes

1½ c. milk
1 c. flour
2 eggs
1 T. cooking oil
2 T. sugar

In a bowl, combine all ingredients; beat until well-mixed. Heat a lightly greased 6-inch skillet. Spoon in 2 tablespoons of the batter; lift and tilt skillet to spread batter all the way around. Return to heat; brown on one side only (about 30 seconds to 1 minute). Invert pan over paper towels; remove crêpe. Repeat with remaining batter. Fill as desired, then roll up. Can be served with whipped cream or ice cream. Makes about 18 crêpes.

Mary Ellen Wynes, Mt. Pleasant

Orange Crêpe Recipe

1½ c. milk
2 eggs
1 c. flour
pinch of salt
1-2 T. orange zest
1 T. melted butter

Mix all ingredients together; batter will be somewhat lumpy. Spray pan with cooking spray. Heat pan on medium heat. Pour ½ cup batter into pan. "Swirl" pan so batter coats pan bottom evenly. Cook for 1-2 minutes. Flip crêpe when edges begin to brown. Cook for additional minute. Suggested filling: cottage cheese. Topping: blueberries, fresh or frozen. Sprinkle with powdered sugar.

Heather Ann Alpin, Traverse City



Mexican Crêpes

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 **FRESH FROM THE GARDEN** recipes by May 10, **MULTI-MEAL** recipes by June 10, and your favorite **TRICK-OR-SWEET** recipes by July 10.

Mail to: *Country Lines Recipes*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email recipes@countrylines.com.



Energy Retrofit Clinics Help Mobile Homeowners

When we first started interviewing candidates for our 2010 Home Energy Makeover contest, we saw a clear need to provide some help and hope to our many members who live in mobile (or manufactured) homes. Air quality and comfort issues were often shared by these applicants, and their accounts clearly showed disproportionately high energy use.

One of our many goals is to help our members understand how they use energy so they can make better decisions on managing it through behavioral and structural changes. As energy prices continue to escalate, members are looking for creative new ways to control use. Mobile homes, as an often forgotten housing stock, present a unique set of challenges for energy efficiency.

To help provide qualified resources for members across our service territory, Midwest Energy recently hosted two energy retrofit clinics to equip home performance and general contractors with knowledge about the challenges and unique details in imple-

menting energy efficiency improvements for mobile homes. Nearly 40 contractors representing 26 companies participated. Bob Pfeiffer, a senior trainer with the Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation (WECC), provided in-class instruction and field-based demonstrations on unique components and characteristics of manufactured housing, including air duct system testing and sealing, floor cavity/wall/attic insulation and air sealing, health and safety, and building science best practices.

Pfeiffer has honed his craft through roles with the Department of Energy, low income weatherization assistance, and Wisconsin's Focus on Mobile Home Energy Programs since 1982. He is nationally recognized for his expertise and travels the country speaking and providing instructional demonstrations. He trained our participants to Building Performance Institute standards and best practices for mobile homes, and showed contractors these standards can be upheld and made available to our members in a practical and

Above, Bob Pfeiffer demonstrates the proper dense-packing technique for blown fiberglass insulation in the under belly of a mobile home for attendees of the southwest Michigan clinic.

affordable application.

Not only do we want to provide members with an expertly-trained group of contractors, but also information on ways they can finance improvements. Todd Parker, contract services manager for Michigan Saves, oversees a network of authorized contractors that promote the Michigan Saves Home Energy Loan Program. Todd instructed our participants on how to become authorized contractors and help our members apply for low-interest energy efficiency upgrade loans.

The late March training was very successful and well received. We will provide follow up training in partnership with WECC in July, gearing our efforts directly to members who live in mobile homes.



Too many bills and not enough time?

Pay your bills the Easy Way!

Easy Ways to Pay takes the hassle out of paying your bills by offering two convenient autopay options: bank draft and credit card. To enroll, simply complete the Personal Information and Service Sign-Up sections, then complete the payment program selection (bank draft or credit card) that you would like to use. Return the completed form at your earliest convenience.

Personal Information (please print):

Name _____ Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Service Address: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Service sign-up:

Please check which Midwest service(s) you would like to pay through the Easy Ways to Pay program, and include the appropriate account number(s).

☐ Electric _____
Account number

☐ Propane _____
Account number

☐ WB _____
Account number

Payment Selection:

Automatic Bank Draft Option:

I hereby authorize Midwest Energy Cooperative to make withdrawals as indicated on my monthly statement. Since these regular payments may vary in amount, we will notify you at least 10 days before each payment as to when it will be made and how much it will be. This will be in the form of a bill showing payment to be made by AUTOPAY.

I agree that adjustments to correct errors are authorized. It is agreed that these withdrawals and adjustments may be made electronically and under the rules of Michigan Automated Clearing House Association.

Name of Banking Institution _____ Account type: ☐ Checking ☐ Savings
Account number: _____ Routing number: _____

I also agree that adjustments to correct errors are authorized. It is agreed that these withdrawals and adjustments may be made electronically and under the rules of Michigan Automated Clearing House Association. I further understand that I must provide notice of two business days to change this information.

Please attach a voided check to this authorization

Automatic Credit Card Option:

I hereby authorize Midwest to charge payment of my account to my: ☐ VISA ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ DISCOVER

Credit Card Account Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Name on Credit Card: _____

I understand that I will receive a copy of my electric bill monthly and that the balance due shown on my bill will be charged to my authorized credit card on or before the due date shown. I agree to notify Midwest Energy immediately if I wish to change the credit card being used, or if any information, such as the expiration date, on the authorized card changes. I also agree that charges to correct errors are authorized. I further understand that I must provide notice of two business days to change this information.

Court Affirms WCEV Air Permit



Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Rosemarie Aquilina recently denied a petition challenging aspects of the air quality permit for the Wolverine Clean Energy Venture (WCEV) power plant development near Rogers City.

The Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) filed the lawsuit in September 2011, seeking a court order to return the permit, granted in June 2011, to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) for further review. The suit claimed the MDEQ's permit issuance was

“arbitrary, capricious and not authorized by law,” and contained additional allegations regarding the need for the project, technologies proposed, and anticipated emissions.

Aquilina heard arguments on the case and ruled to affirm the air permit in late March. “We are pleased with the judge’s decision,” says Brian Warner, director of environmental services for Wolverine Power Cooperative. “It speaks to the quality of the air permit and the dedication of our team and the MDEQ staff throughout the permitting process.”

Wolverine is continuing development of

the WCEV in 2012, although work on the project will be limited. New emission rules set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in February 2012 make construction of a new power plant extremely difficult for not only Wolverine, but any utility in the country.

Wolverine is monitoring regulatory and political developments, and under state and federal law has an initial 18 months from the permit issue date to begin construction of the power plant. The proposed facility would consist of two generating units, each capable of producing 300 megawatts of electricity.

Power Supply Resources Serving You

Wolverine Power Cooperative has made great strides in building its generating fleet over the last decade to serve its members. The goal is to own and/or operate various power supply resources that keep the lights on cost-effectively and reliably.

Today, the co-op has peaking power plants in Belleville, Burnips, Gaylord, Hersey, Tower and Vestaburg. Peaking plants are operated when electricity is needed quickly and for brief periods of time. Combined, Wolverine's peaking facilities are capable of generating 565 megawatts of electricity.

“The Sumpter power plant in Belleville is our newest peaking facility,” says Dan DeCoeur, Wolverine's vice president of power supply. “The plant consists of four units, and we are currently exploring conversion of one unit to combined-cycle generation.”

Wolverine also owns 165 megawatts of baseload generation, including its recent acquisition of 150 megawatts from the Ohio Valley Electric Corporation (OVEC). Baseload power plants typically generate electricity 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“OVEC consists of two coal-fired plants, one located in Indiana and the second in



Wolverine is serving its members with baseload power from the Clifty Creek power plant (L), one of the two OVEC plants, and renewable energy from the Harvest Wind Farm.



Ohio,” Dan explains. “With modern pollution control equipment, both operate more cleanly than most baseload power plants in Michigan and the Midwest.”

Renewable energy is part of Wolverine's power portfolio as well, with the Harvest Wind Farm providing the majority of the co-op's renewable supply. Harvest is Michigan's first commercial-scale wind farm, and Wolverine is buying its entire 53-megawatt

output under a long-term agreement.

“We still have work to do to meet our members' power supply requirements,” Dan says. “We need additional baseload generation.”

The co-op is looking at two options for baseload power. Its development of the Wolverine Clean Energy Venture near Rogers City continues, and a baseload opportunity at an existing power plant in Marquette is being evaluated.



Central Air Conditioner Upkeep

Q: *I want my old air conditioner to run as efficiently as possible. If my cooling costs are still too high, I will think about replacing it. Other than a professional service call, what can I do to tune it up myself?*

A: It is wise to make sure your existing central air conditioner is running as efficiently as possible to reduce your electric bills. Because actual cooling costs depend upon weather conditions, they can vary significantly from year to year, making accurate comparisons difficult.

The easiest way to determine the savings from installing a new central air conditioner is to compare the SEER (seasonal energy efficiency ratio) of your existing model to of a new model. You can be pretty sure your existing unit is not operating more efficiently than when it was brand new, so the savings from this comparison will be on the conservative side.

There are additional savings from installing a more efficient model. Electric utility companies have to provide enough electricity generation capacity to meet peak demand even though it is not needed that often. If peak electricity demand can be decreased by homes running newer, higher-efficiency air conditioners, then fewer power plants may have to be built.

There are some things you can do yourself to keep your central air unit running as efficiently as possible. This does not preclude having regular professional service calls, however. Technicians have special equipment and

pressure gauges to check the system's internal components, which is impossible for a homeowner to do on his or her own. Regular service calls can also extend the unit's life.

It also helps to have an understanding of how an air conditioner works. It operates on a delicate balance of air flow rates over the indoor and outdoor coils, and proper pressures of the refrigerant. The compressor compresses the refrigerant to make it very hot. This hot liquid is hotter than the outdoor air, so it loses heat to the outdoor air through the condenser coils.

The cooler refrigerant then goes through an evaporator, which makes it very cold. This is similar to how your skin cools off when perspiration evaporates. This cold refrigerant flows through the indoor coil. The blower moves indoor air over these cold coils, which cools your house air. At the same time, water condenses on the cold coils so the indoor air is both cooled and dehumidified.

As you can see, getting adequate air flow through the outdoor condenser coils is important for efficiency so the refrigerant will be colder when it gets indoors. It can really help efficiency to make sure weeds and shrubs have not grown too close to the outdoor unit and impede air flow. Also, don't rest rakes or other items against it which may

block air flow.

Switch off the circuit breaker to the unit and remove the outdoor cabinet. Clean out any debris that has accumulated inside it, which may block the coils. You don't have to make it spotless, though. If fins have been

Clean leaves and other debris from the top of the central air conditioner or heat pump, even though many will blow away by themselves when the unit starts.

bent over in spots, try to straighten them out enough so more air gets through.

It is important that all the screws holding the cabinet sections together are

tight when you reinstall the cabinet. Even if it is clean and you do not remove the cabinet, check all the screws. If they are loose, leaks will draw air in gaps instead of through the coils as designed.

Just as the proper amount of air flow is important through the outdoor coils, it is also important through the indoor coils. With the circuit breaker still switched off, remove the side cover on the indoor unit to expose the evaporator coils and the blower. When you reinstall the cover, make sure to tighten the screws.

Quite a bit of dirt can accumulate on the indoor coils, blocking air flow and insulating them from the air. This is because the coils get damp when the air conditioner is running and dirt sticks to it. Wipe the coils and then use the brush attachment on your vacuum cleaner to clean them and the blower.

Even though everyone has heard about changing the blower filter regularly, most people don't do it. At the beginning of the cooling season, change the filter whether you think it is dirty or not. A dirty filter increases air flow resistance, which reduces efficiency. Also, check the joints in the ducts for any air leaks, and seal them with aluminum tape or black Gorilla duct tape.

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.



Treat Do-It-Yourself Wiring Projects Carefully

If spring sends you into remodeling mode, consider checking with professionals before migrating to the nearest hardware store. While do-it-yourself (DIY) projects can be very satisfying to complete, they pose risks when it comes to electricity.

“Mistakes can be costly—or even deadly,” warns John Drengenberg, consumer affairs manager for Underwriters Laboratories, Inc., (UL), a Chicago-based nonprofit firm that tests and sets minimum standards for electric products. “The first and best safety tip is to call in an expert rather than be your own electrician.”

An ongoing study by the Fire Protection Research Foundation has given UL engineers a better understanding of typical DIY wiring mistakes. The most common are:

Working With a Live Wire

It may seem obvious, but thousands of do-it-yourselfers get electric shock injuries each year. To avoid becoming a statistic, always turn off the circuit breaker (or remove the fuse) before working on or replacing electrical equipment. If you have a pre-1940s home, you probably have more than one breaker box, or panel board, as electricians call them.

Using the Wrong Lightbulb

Most lighting fixtures have a sticker on the socket that tells you the proper type and maximum lightbulb wattage to use. Installing a different type of bulb, or one with higher wattage, will not only make the room brighter, but could damage the lights and cause a fire. The higher the wattage, the hotter the bulb, and the hotter the wire that goes to the lighting fixture.

Not Being Grounded

For optimal safety, receptacles should be wired with the proper grounding and polarity. Generally, three-pronged outlets signify an effective ground path in the circuit. However, homes built before the mid-1960s probably don't have a grounding path, and simply replacing the existing outlet with a three-pronged outlet won't give you one.

“You see instances of this in homes with older wiring,” Drengenberg says. “It's no

worse than if you plug your two-pronged device into a two-pronged outlet. But it does give the homeowner a false sense of security.”

Wiring with a grounding path usually has a copper grounding wire with the cable. If you are uncertain whether your home's wiring is grounded, inexpensive UL-listed outlet circuit testers are available to check for proper grounding and polarity. If your outlet is improperly grounded, call an electrician before moving forward in any project.

Splicing, Splicing, Splicing

Always make sure your wiring size and type match. Splicing wires by simply twisting them together and covering them with electrical tape is rarely a good idea. Instead, use wiring suitable to your home's wiring and place wiring connections in metal or plastic boxes to decrease fire risk.

Also keep in mind that circuits protected by 15-amp fuses or breakers should be wired with No. 14 AWG copper wire minimum. For 20 amps, use No. 12 AWG minimum size copper wire. Other guidelines apply, so seek professional help before you begin.

Hooking New Lights to Old Wires

Most light fixtures are marked with instructions for supply connections, such as “Use wire rated for at least 90C,” which refers to the maximum temperature—90 degrees Celsius or about 200 degrees Fahrenheit—under which a wire's insulation can safely be used safely. Again, if you have an older home (pre-1984, in this case), wiring may have a lower temperature rating than a new luminaire.

“This isn't something most DIYers even think to consider,” Drengenberg cautions. “It probably won't burst into flame immediately, but it does increase the risk of a fire.” To avoid that risk, check your wire rating first, and either upgrade it or buy fixtures within the supply connection range.

Other Electrical Clues

Electrical upgrades often require a professional who knows what inspections and permits are needed. Following are a few other clues to help you find out if your home's electric network needs a professional switch.



Source: Electrical Safety Foundation International

Be careful not to install new lighting to old, inferior wires. To avoid this fire hazard, check your wire rating first, and either upgrade it or buy fixtures within the supply connection range.

● **Type of wiring.** Modern wiring is insulated, meaning covered in plastic. Older homes may have copper or aluminum wiring. Copper wiring can work just as well as modern wiring if it is still in good condition and has not been altered or improperly installed. However, fire risk also increases in homes with both copper and aluminum wiring. Corrosion to aluminum from copper can lead to loose connections causing fires. Use only aluminum-approved switches, outlets, and other accessories if your home has aluminum wiring.

● **Plugs fall out of outlets easily.** Loose plugs are a high fire danger. Older outlets that have lost their grip need to be replaced.

● **Not enough outlets.** The increasing use of chargers for phones and electronic devices means outlets are in high demand, especially in older homes where outlets are not as plentiful. This can result in overuse of extension cords and power strips. Be sure to use quality, 14-gauge or thicker cords that are approved by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Never overload an outlet. Overloading can cause heat, leading to fire risk. Consider hiring a licensed electrician to add outlets to your home.

● **Danger in wet areas.** GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) outlets are now required in areas around water like near a kitchen or bathroom sink or outdoors. But in older homes, GFCIs may not have been installed. It is fairly simple to replace old receptacles with GFCIs; hire a professional to upgrade outlets near water.

● **Wind causes lights to blink.** If you notice your lights blinking on windy days, it may be due to worn wiring in the weatherhead (where overhead lines enter your home). Contact your electric co-op to check weatherhead wiring.

Sources: *This Old House*, Underwriters Laboratories, Kelly Trapnell

Out With the Old...For Real

Midwest Energy Cooperative offers recycling for refrigerators and freezers.

Over the past two years, many consumers received federal rebates when purchasing a new refrigerator, water heater, or other household appliance. About 1.7 million rebates were redeemed, and the U.S. Department of Energy estimates these appliances will cut \$65 million from electric bills every year. Around \$48 million of that chunk will be saved mainly by consumers who bought energy-efficient refrigerators, clothes washers, and dishwashers.

Great news, right? But suppose you just bought a new refrigerator or freezer, what did you do with your old one? Kick it to the curb? Move it out to the garage? Recycle it? The reason we ask isn't to make you feel guilty, but to point out that recycling old appliances isn't the first thing most of us think about.

In fact, a lot of us are still using our old refrigerator and the new one. A national survey from the Cooperative Research Network, a branch of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, reported that 19 percent of U.S. homes have two refrigera-

tors running at all times. Another 2 percent of U.S. households operate three or more refrigerators at the same time.

So much for the adage, "Out with the old and in with the new."

One Is Best

The problem with keeping an old refrigerator or freezer is simple: It costs you money. By continuing to use these "energy hogs" in your basement or garage, your energy bills may be \$100-200 higher per year than necessary.

The older your refrigerator or freezer is, the more energy it wastes. For example, a modern refrigerator costs 60 percent less to use than a 1970s-era unit. In addition, a new refrigerator is about 20 percent larger than the 1970s avocado green or blaze orange

versions, making it easier for most families to have just one fridge.

Energy Optimization Appliance Recycling

As your energy provider, we want to help you really save energy when you buy a new Energy Star® or energy-efficient refrigerator or freezer. That's why we're proud of our refrigerator recycling program.

How you benefit:

- \$30 rebate on each recycled refrigerator or freezer. Appliance must be in working condition. (Limit 2)
- Convenient door-to-door pick up
- Ongoing savings on your electric bills

Bonus rebate alert

You know every dollar counts. So, if you're in the market to buy a new refrigerator or freezer, be sure to check out rebates that may be available through Midwest Energy's Energy Optimization program for Energy Star appliances.

Call 877.296.4319 or visit Michigan-energy.org to schedule a pick-up of your old refrigerator.



Get \$30 for your old refrigerator or freezer.

Have an extra working refrigerator or freezer? Don't let it sit there wasting energy. Turn it in. You'll receive a \$30 rebate from the Energy Optimization (EO) Appliance Recycling program and we'll recycle it. Schedule your FREE pick-up today.

recycle it

ENERGY TIP: Shopping for new appliances? Take advantage of EO rebates on ENERGY STAR models.

Online: michigan-energy.org Phone: 877.296.4319

 **Energy Optimization**

 **MIDWEST ENERGY COOPERATIVE**

Energy Optimization programs and incentives are applicable to Michigan service locations only. Other restrictions may apply. For a complete list of participating utilities, visit michigan-energy.org.

Never Trust A Fire

Remember that week of midsummer weather in March, when Michigan skipped spring and went right to shorts and sandals weather, and we all said, “Global warming isn’t all that bad,” and decided to get a jump-start on cleaning up our yards?

That was the week I became the pinup boy for Smokey Bear’s first principle: “Only you can prevent wildfires.” (When did it change from “forest fires” to “wildfires”?)

Those of us who live in the country don’t have a service that picks up yard debris, so we get rid of it by burning, when permitted. A yard full of trees and plants creates a heck of a lot of combustible stuff.

Burn permit in hand, I collected dried tall grasses and dead tree limbs and burned them over several days, along with a tangle of tree and brush limbs cut during the past year. The yard was looking good. I was way ahead of any other year in memory.

The day was hot, again in the 80s, with a slight breeze. The under layer of fallen leaves was still damp from a previous rain. A fire I had tried to start in the back “forgotten” corner of our almost-acre just wouldn’t take, because of the dampness. So I went in the house for lunch. Big mistake.

Within an hour, our neighbor Randy was yelling at our door. When I got outside, he was behind our house using a rake to beat out flames that had spread in a 50-foot radius around that wouldn’t-start fire. Flames were licking at the bases of white pine, maple and dead ash trees, following a trail of dead leaves through the understory and threatening to enter a particularly dense thicket of dead and dry brush. We rigged up hoses to get water to the fire and sprayed for more than an hour before getting the fire under control. My heart was beating faster than for any medical stress test. I was ready to call in the fire department, but Randy said, “We’ve got this.”

And we did, thanks to him and his son, Alex, who was the first to notice the smoke. But for them, this would have been a disaster. I thank them mightily.

Was I careful? I thought so. Was I care-

ful enough? Apparently not. The thing about fire is that you can’t be too careful. Fire experts say every wildfire starts from just a spark or by creeping into dry vegetation. There is always the possibility of it going awry. And possibility turns to likelihood when you leave a fire alone.

That happens a lot, and more so this year, when you consider the Michigan wildfire count posted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR website (michigan.gov/dnr, also a good place to find out about burn permits) breaks down the causes of wildfires and compares year-to-year occurrences. As of April 8, the state has seen 104 wildfires and 463 acres burned this year, an eight times increase over the same period in 2011, with 43 percent caused by debris burning, just like I was doing.

So I’m not alone, but I knew that because others have told me about their own fire mishaps.

A few years ago at an annual meeting of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, from which I’m retired, I used the space between speakers to provide a humorous tale, and a teaching moment, of another fire mishap. That time I left a small bed of embers to die-out while I went in the house for dinner. A half-hour later, my son Jon looked to the back lot and saw flames shooting up the 25-foot dead trunk of a once-mighty oak. Since this happened on a windless evening, with the tree trunk 20 feet from the fire, I suspect a rock in the fire exploded in the heat, sending embers to the base of the trunk.

With help from our friend Dave, we strung hoses together to reach the fire with water and doused the trunk base with buckets of water from our pool. Once the flames were gone, the inside of the tree smoldered for days. I stayed up all night watching and spraying and continued periodic spraying for days after. On



I should read the Smokey Bear pledge every time I burn. You can find it—and the Smokey mask—at smokeybear.com.

the fifth day, I came home for lunch and found the inside smoldering again. Only a heavy rain the next day put that fire out for good.

After I recounted the tale, along with pictures, several people let me know that I wasn’t alone in my stupidity. They also had dealt with wildfires of their own making, some quite stunning. Their secrets are safe with me.

But I’m a repeat offender. Apparently I’m not to be trusted with matches, or around fire, or even anything combustible.

My brother Tom is a firefighter. He puts fires out. He’d be handy to have close by, but he lives in Minnesota.

My dad warned me about fires when I was about five and had been “playing with matches” in an empty lot behind our house. I managed to get that fire out, too. Coincidentally, my dad died two days before my last fire fiasco. He would have said, “I warned you.”

And I warn you, too. Never trust a fire.

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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