

A Service of **Midwest Energy Cooperative**

May 2012

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES

Michigan-made:

Luminature

*Wildly unique lighting
and decor*

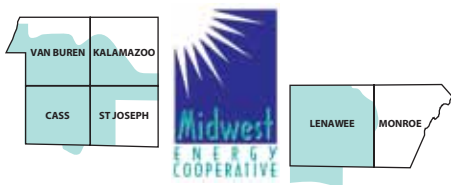


**Home
Improvement**
EDITION

4 Line Clearance Is
Also About Safety

8 Our Website Now
Offers 'Live Chat'

9 Preferred Energy
Auditors List



PRESIDENT & CEO
Robert Hance

CASSOPOLIS OFFICE
P.O. Box 127 (901 E. State Street)
Cassopolis, MI 49031-0127
M-F, 8 a.m.– 5 p.m.
Drive-up window: M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

TELEPHONE
269-445-1000 or 800-492-5989
Fax: 269-445-3792

PAW PAW OFFICE
59825 S. LaGrave
Paw Paw, MI 49079
M-F, 8 a.m.–1 p.m. and 1:30–4:30 p.m.

ADRIAN OFFICE
1610 E. Maumee St.
Adrian, MI 49221
M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

TELEPHONE
517-263-1808 or 800-492-5989

INTERNET TeamMidwest.com

E-MAIL info@teammidwest.com

EDITOR
Patty Nowlin

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Clarence (Topper) Barth *Chairman*
Three Rivers

Kenneth Swope *Vice Chairman*
Adrian

Colyne Sorsby *Secretary*
Cassopolis

John Green *Treasurer*
Dowagiac

Ron Armstrong, Lawton

Jerry Campbell, Decatur

James W. Dickerson, Bloomingdale

Harry Gentz, Blissfield

Ben Russell, Constantine

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

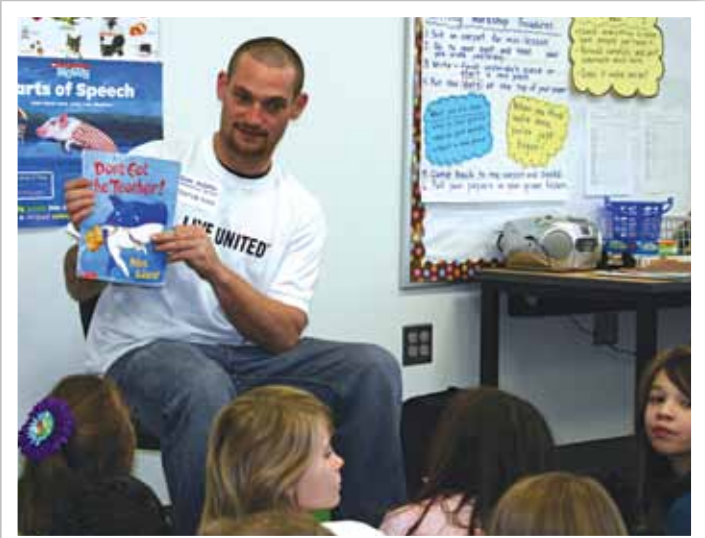
Giving back to our communities is one of the core values of Midwest Energy. We believe in doing what we can, individually and as a family of employees, to strengthen and support the communities in which we live, work and serve. Following are some of the ways we impacted our communities over the last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



**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.

Thermal Inspection Services, LLC

27253 T Drive N.
Springport, MI
517-745-7100
thermal@springcom.com
Michigan, Indiana and Ohio

Energy Diagnostics

68597 Hill Street
Sturgis, MI
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

269-341-HEET (4338)

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

Green Building Consulting Homes +

P.O. Box 43497
Cincinnati, OH
513-272-2005 or 513-477-0130
byankie@fuse.net
Michigan, Indiana and Ohio

Home Energy Insight, LLC

P.O. Box 1536
Portage, MI
269-372-2496
rlkildea@sbcglobal.net
Berrien, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren Counties

Infrared Energy Analysis

920 Loyola St., Ste. 107
Ann Arbor, MI
734-995-6339
Infrared-energy.com
Southwest Michigan

Superior Energy Solutions, LLC

819 N. Locust St., Ste. B
Ottawa, OH
419-890-8067
snergys.com
Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan

Think Green Midwest

3997 Reily Milville Road
Hamilton, OH 45013
513-477-0130
Emkenn1995@aol.com
Michigan, Indiana and Ohio



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.

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. 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 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.



ENERGY COOPERATIVE

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

TeamMidwest.com

Your **Perspective** PHOTO CONTEST

WIN a **\$250** Bill Credit!



Step 1:

Visit Midwest Energy Cooperative's Facebook page to submit your unique photo of our community.



Step 2:

We will pick a winner every month. Each winner gets a **\$20 bill credit** on your account! We're influenced by voting; ask your friends to visit Facebook and "like" your photo.



Step 3:

In December 2012, we will pick a grand prize winner from the monthly winners. The grand prize winner will receive a **\$250 bill credit**.

Facebook.com/TeamMidwest

See TeamMidwest.com/rules for official rules