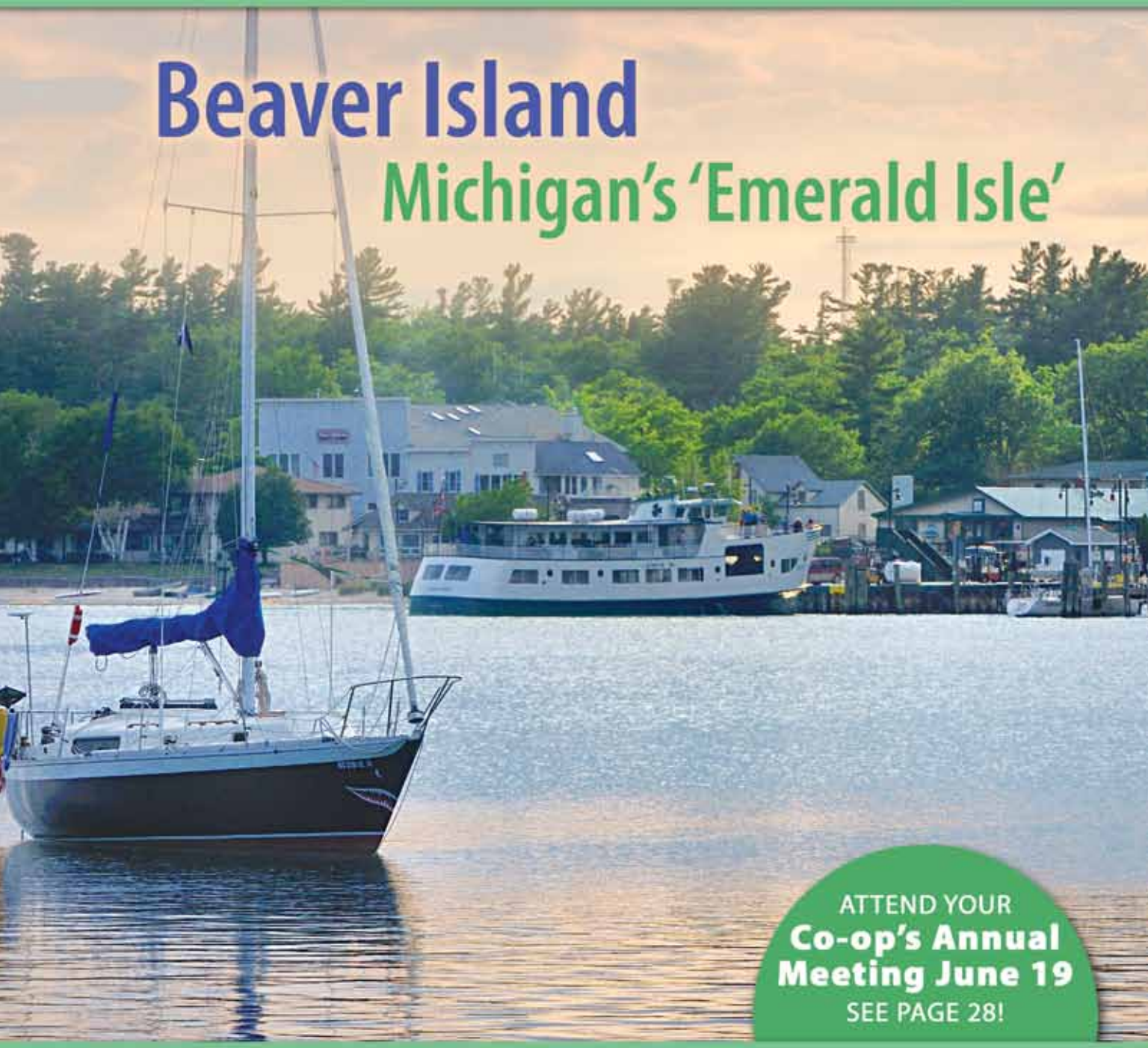
A Service of **Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association**

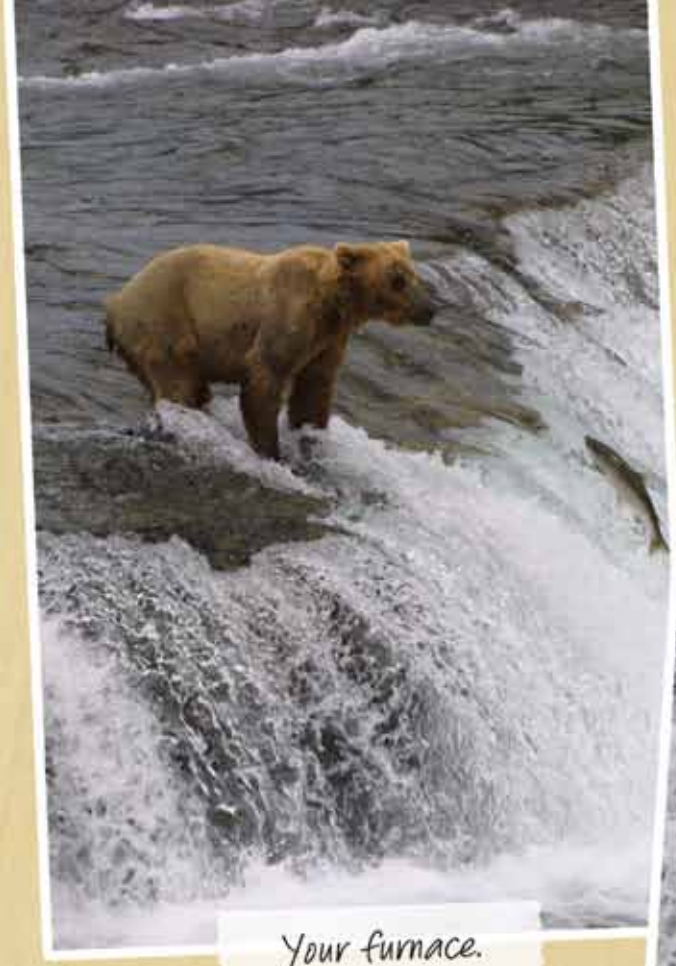
May/June 2013

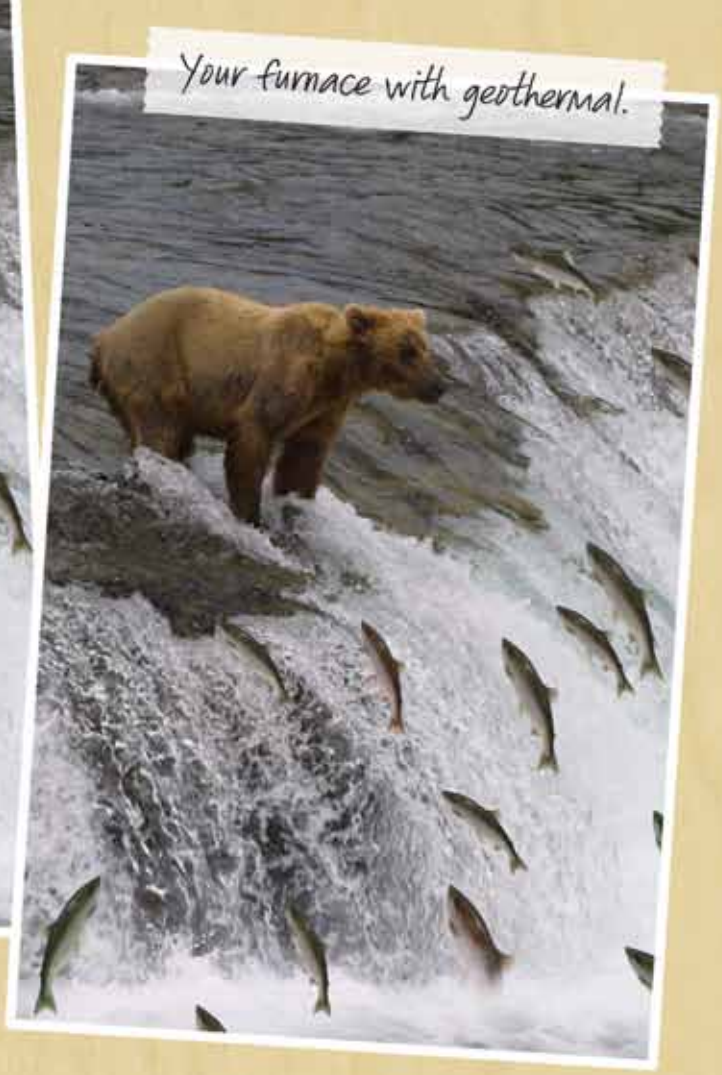
Michigan COUNTRY LINES



Beaver Island
Michigan's 'Emerald Isle'

ATTEND YOUR
Co-op's Annual Meeting June 19
SEE PAGE 28!





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May 2013
Vol. 33, No. 6

Michigan COUNTRY LINES

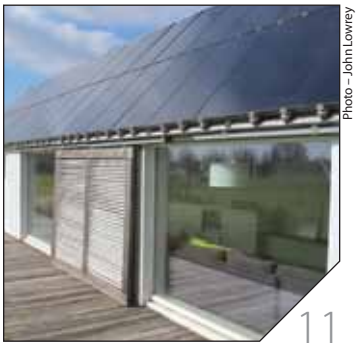
Photo – John Lowrey

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Photo – 831 Creative

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DEPARTMENTS

COLUMNS

FEATURES

YOUR CO-OP

Pages specific to your electric cooperative: Cover, 2-3, 6-7, 18-19, 22-23, back
*Not in all editions

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POSTMASTER: SEND ALL UAA TO CFS.

Letters to the editor should be sent to Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Phone 517-913-3531. **Email: gknudtson@meca.coop**.

Association officers are **Tony Anderson**, Cherryland, chairman; **Ken Swope**, Midwest Energy, 1st vice chairman; **Robert Schallip,** Cloverland, 2nd vice chairman; **Eric Baker**, Wolverine Power, secretary-treasurer; and **Brian Burns**, PIE&G, past chairman. **Craig Borr** is president and CEO.

Unsolicited letters, photos and manuscripts are welcome. *Country Lines,* however, will not be responsible for their safe keeping or return.

Change of Address: Please notify your electric cooperative. See page 2 for contact information.

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Michigan's Electric Cooperatives
countrylines.com

On the Cover
This serene shot of Beaver Island's Paradise Bay also shows the *Beaver Islander*, a smaller, older ferry boat, at her berth where she is most of the time because the newer *Emerald Isle* carries the majority of passengers.
Photo – Jeffrey Cashman, Island Design

Alger Delta Electric
ALGERDELTA.COM

Tom Harrell
General Manager
tharrell@algerdelta.com

Office Headquarters:
426 North 9th St.
Gladstone, MI 49837

Office Hours/Phone:
M-F, 7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. EST
906-428-4141 • 1-800-562-0950
FAX: (906) 428-3840

algerdelta.com

The State of Your Cooperative

Alger Delta's annual audit is complete, the books are closed on 2012, and your electric co-op is strong and financially healthy. I say "your electric co-op" because Alger Delta belongs to you, the members. The people who work at Alger Delta are only stewards of what has been entrusted to them for a little while. Alger Delta is 75 years old, and it transcends any one manager or employee. A strong and healthy cooperative is a good thing because it allows us to effectively serve you, the members. So, I'd like to share with you some of the reasons why the co-op is healthy today.

Tom Harrell
General Manager

Service Charges, Energy Rates & Fees – Alger Delta's last service charge/rate adjustment occurred two-and-one-half years ago. In October 2010, the service charge was increased to $25 monthly, per meter. At the same time, the energy rate was reduced by 3 percent. This step was taken in order to align cost recovery with how costs are incurred, which is fairer to all members. As a result, the financial strength of the cooperative has improved without further rate adjustments. Alger Delta was an early leader in implementing this rate structure, and other utilities in Michigan are now following our lead and taking steps to decouple their fixed costs from the cost of energy.

Also in October 2010, Alger Delta adopted a new fee structure for additional services. In the past, nearly all the cost of providing additional services—such as estimates for new construction or reconnecting electric accounts—was included in the energy rate. These costs have been broken out into a separate fee schedule and Alger Delta charges accordingly. The fee schedule can be seen in the Jan/Feb issue of *Country Lines* (or visit countrylines.com and choose My Co-op/ Alger Delta and the Jan/Feb cover image).

Efficient, Effective Use of Members' Money – Alger Delta is always looking for ways to work more efficiently and effectively. This includes managing the cost of labor, benefits, fuel, equipment, maintenance, and a host of other things, so that we get the most value out of every dollar spent. A great example of this is when we implement technology to make our work simpler or less time consuming. In 2012, we completely upgraded the member information system and accounting and billing software programs. We also installed an outage management system (OMS) that uses computer power to identify problem areas and dispatch and track personnel working to restore power. These upgrades help reduce labor costs while enabling office staff and others to work more efficiently.

Financial Performance – Like other co-ops, Alger Delta's overall financial performance is measured by whether we can pay our debts, maintain the distribution system, and build equity. Alger Delta has struggled in these areas in the past, but in recent years we have built up reserves that help provide adequate working capital, pay our debts, and operate the distribution system in a safe and reliable way. Our key economic indicators are positive, and Alger Delta's outlook is healthy and robust.

Mission and Strategic Planning – In January and February, the board of directors worked on strategic planning to determine the co-op's future direction. Through this process, the board redefined our mission and identified eight key initiatives that must be undertaken to propel the co-op to its desired future. The strategic planning outcome will guide how resources are used over the next several years. Because Alger Delta sees itself as "Your partner for safe and reliable energy," our strategic goals are to:

- Achieve a higher level of member satisfaction
- Improve Alger Delta's culture
- Achieve the best safety record
- Pay (retire) capital credits
- Improve our technology capabilities
- Strengthen economic development efforts
- Advance renewable energy and Energy Optimization programs on the Alger Delta system
- Pursue a modern/updated facility.

Watch for more about these initiatives in upcoming editions of *Country Lines*.

Districts 1 and 6 Director Election Winners

Mike Nason

Paul Sederquist

Alger Delta Cooperative conducted district elections on April 22 and 23 in districts 1 (Big Bay) and 6 (Nathan/White Rapids).

In District 1, Mike Nason outpolled Darryl Small to be propelled to his first term on the Alger Delta board. Nason is a consultant in two businesses in Marquette and ran on a platform of improving member relations.

In District 6, Paul Sederquist ran unopposed and was returned to the board for another term. Sederquist has served on the board for 24 years (from 1986 to 1995, and from 1998 to the present).

Sederquist and Nason will begin their terms at Alger Delta's annual meeting, which is set for June 19. Each will serve a three-year term.

Congratulations!

Notice of Annual Meeting of the Members of ALGER DELTA COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

Pursuant to the Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the Annual Meeting of the members of Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association will be held on **Wednesday, June 19, 2013**, at 6:15 p.m. Eastern Time at **Grace Church, 528 28th St., Gladstone, MI**. **A meal will be served from 5:30 to 6 p.m. Eastern Time. The business meeting will start at 6:15 p.m. Actions will be taken on the following matters:**

1. **Installation of directors**
2. **Presentation and consideration of reports**
3. **New business**

Dated at Gladstone, Michigan
this 20th day of March, 2013
Darryl Small, Secretary

Vote for your District 9 director!

The following district is currently electing a member to Alger Delta's board of directors:

DISTRICT 9: Hiawatha – May 20, AuTrain Township Hall
6 – 7 p.m. EST – *Refreshments will be provided*

Your voting ballot is the cover wrap on this issue.
See the candidates on p. 6!

STATE OF MICHIGAN

BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

* * * * *

In the matter of the Commission's own motion, regarding the regulatory reviews, revisions, determinations, and/or approvals necessary for Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association to fully comply with Public Act 295 of 2008.

Case No. U-16589

NOTICE OF OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

On December 6, 2012, in Case No. U-15825 et al, the Michigan Public Service Commission (Commission) ordered Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association to file a renewable energy plan on or before May 12, 2013 to comply with the "Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy Act" (2008 PA 295, MCL 460.1001, et seq.) and MPSC order in Case No. U-15800 dated December 4, 2008. On April 15, 2013, Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association filed its Notice of Intent to File an Application for a Renewable Energy Plan with the Commission.

Any interested person may review the filed Renewable Energy Plan on the MPSC website under Case No. U-16589 at: www.michigan.gov/mpscedockets and at the offices of Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association, 426 North 9th Street, Gladstone, Michigan, or at the office of the Commission's Executive Secretary, 4300 West Saginaw, Lansing, Michigan, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Written and electronic comments may be filed with the Commission and must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on June 12, 2013. Written comments should be sent to the: Executive Secretary, Michigan Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, Michigan 48909, with a copy mailed to Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association, 426 North 9th Street, Gladstone, Michigan 49837. Electronic comments may be emailed to: mpscedockets@michigan.gov. All comments should reference Case No. U-16589. Comments received in this matter become public information, posted on the Commission's website, and subject to disclosure. Please do not include information you wish to remain private.

The Commission will review the renewable energy plan together with any filed comments and provide a response within 60 days of the filing of the application indicating any revisions that should be made. If the Commission suggests revisions, Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association will file a revised RPS plan no later than 75 days after the filing of the application. A Commission order will be issued on or before the 90th day following the filing of the application.

Any proposed Renewable Energy Plan Charges may not exceed $3 per meter per month for residential customers, $16.58 per meter per month for commercial secondary customers or $187.50 per meter per month for commercial primary or industrial customers.

ALGER DELTA COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

Letters & More

Reader letters, electricity is a good value, Mystery Photo, energy efficiency in churches, and more. It's all here on your Reader's Pages.

Mystery Photos

Well done magazine. Excellent regarding co-op and energy issues, and even more so, it has introduced us to info on unknown gems of people, places, things in this (shhhhh...) One-of-a-Kind(!) state.

Some of the best discoveries are from our reading more about any Mystery Photos that we're unaware of. But, I've missed some over the years and wonder if there is an archive of them or if there could be? Would be wonderful to have an online source to look back at past years of "Mysteries." It takes us to places we might not know or might be just around the corner, but waiting to be discovered. Thanks again for a great resource.

– VerJean Mirrielees, Shelby Great Lakes Energy Co-op

Editor's Note: *Thanks for reading with us. At countrylines.com Mystery Photos can be seen in archived issues back through 2010.*

Fish Decoy Carver

A perfect time to stop by Dave Kober's wood shop [April issue/Michigan Made products series], heading to McGuire's for my husband's plumbing inspector's seminar.

Dave greeted us at the door [of his Wooden Fish Gallery] and showed us his awesome fish carvings and his room of collectable fishing lures. He was so kind and we saw how proud he is of his carving talent in his conversation.

As we left on a snowy and icy day in late April, I even got a nice picture of Dave and I – well worth the stop!

– Tom & Jill Katich, Waterford Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op

HOW TO SEND A LETTER Readers are encouraged to submit thoughtful, courteously-worded letters, and we print as many as possible in the space and time allowed.

Country Lines reserves the right to print letters at the publisher's discretion, based on length, space and content, and to edit slightly for space and facts. Please limit comments to 240 words or less. Submit by posting online at countrylines.com, email gknudtson@meca.coop, or mail to: Editor, Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MAILING ADDRESS

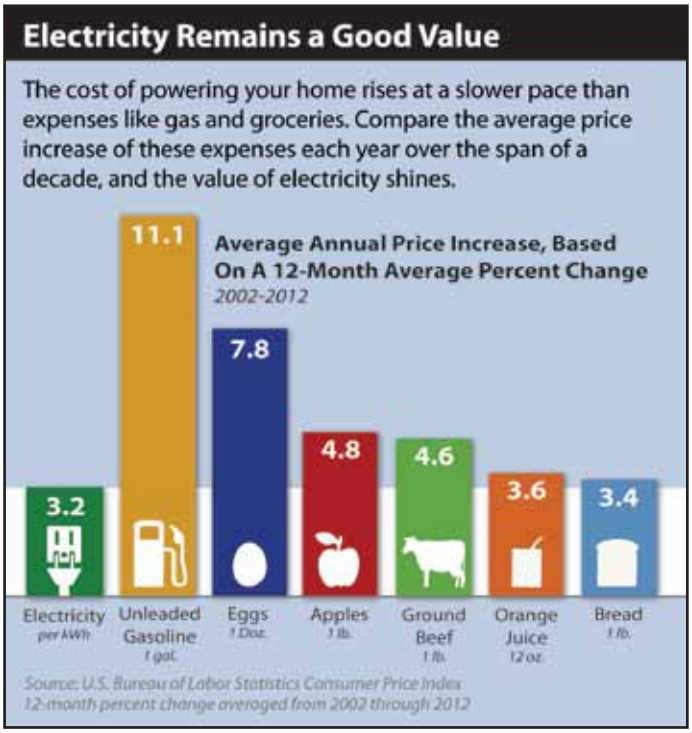
Contact your electric co-op—they maintain the mailing list. See page 2 for your co-op's contact information.

Costs for Consumer Goods Climbs

Popular demand and short supply drives the cost of everyday necessities higher. Some price tag changes—like the cost to fill your car's gas tank—are obvious to anyone driving down the road. Other increases at the grocery store are more subtle but still impact your family's bottom line. Compare the average price increase of a few household expenses to see how the rising cost of electricity stacks up.

The cost for a gallon of unleaded gasoline shot up 11.1 percent on average every year between 2002 and 2012, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Eggs don't go over easy—the cost for a dozen eggs increased 7.8 percent. Bakers watched the price of flour rise 5.7 percent, and apples felt the crunch with a jump of 4.8 percent—every year.

The cost of electricity grew at a slower pace—3.2 percent a year, on average. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) reports homeowners across the nation pay an average of 11.7 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). In Michigan, electric cooperatives also keep costs affordable—the



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 2013 issue.

The March contest winner is Judy Schaefer of Jackson, who correctly identified the photo from McCourtie Park in Sommerset Center, Mich.

average price for power is 13.3 cents per kilowatt-hour.

Unlike eggs or apples, electricity is a 24-hour-a-day commodity. Despite energy efficiency advancements, the average household uses more electronic gadgets—and needs more power to operate them—every year.

In the past 30 years, the amount of residential electricity used by appliances and electronics has increased from 17 percent to 31 percent according to the Residential Energy Consumption Survey by EIA. More homes than ever have major appliances and central air conditioning. Digital video recorders (DVRs), computers, and multiple TVs are common.

Your local electric cooperative works hard to keep your electricity safe, reliable and affordable. But you also play a role in the price of your power. Just as you might cut back on eggs if your budget is tight, we can work with you to cut your monthly electric bill. See how little changes add up atTogetherWeSave.com.

– Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Energy Information Administration

Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

Properly installed shades can be one of the most effective ways to improve windows' energy efficiency. Lower them during summer; in winter, raise during the day and lower at night on south-facing windows. Dual shades, with reflective white coating on one side and a heat-absorbing dark color on the other, can be reversed with the seasons and save even more energy. Learn more at EnergySavers.gov.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

Interfaith Group Helps Churches 'See the Light' of Energy Efficiency

Photo, from left: Frank Wilhelme, Michigan Interfaith Power and Light advisory board member; Temple Kol Ami members David Henig, Rhonda Kotzen, Kineret Gable, Rabbi Ariana Silverman and Sara Kravitz; and Larry Kaufman, Michigan Interfaith Power & Light vice president. The Temple received an award from IPL for their energy efficiency efforts.

Can the city of Detroit be saved? That is a difficult question, but there are a number of people and organizations trying to make that happen, and I want to tell you about one of them.

I am vice president of Michigan Interfaith Power and Light (IPL). This is an organization that promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy to houses of worship all over Michigan. We currently have about 200 churches that are members with over 150,000 people in their congregations. Our board has a priest, imam, nun, Jew, Quaker, Hindu, and non-believer on it. Michigan was the third state in the U.S. with an IPL, and today there are now over 40 states with IPLs.

In 2011, we received a grant from Detroit Edison to improve churches in downtown Detroit. In the past, we have done a number of energy audits for churches, but when we went back two years later, we found that none of the recommendations were done. Churches were too busy with other matters or didn't have the funds to make the suggested energy efficiency improvements. Organizations in Michigan have done thousands of these audits, but an energy audit itself has never saved one penny on a utility bill—only implementing the audit recommendations can save money on the bill.

Therefore, we used a different model. In the updated program, Michigan IPL not only performed the audits, but subcontracted out the improvements and monitored the results. Basically, we provided a full-service program from soup to nuts. The churches' only job was to join Michigan IPL and provide us with utility bills to monitor the results.

A year later, the results are stunning. The $40,000 investment in the 50 churches has resulted in over $108,000 in energy savings in the first year. That is money the churches can use to feed the poor and help the needy, and this savings will continue every year as long as the churches are open.

We have also received a number of thank-you letters from these churches, as the lighting is now improved and the comfort increased, and it has been a huge customer satisfaction measure for a minimal investment.

Another sidebar is that Michigan is now ranked No. 1 in the country for the most houses of worship that are Energy Star® certified. That's one more step to moving Michigan forward.

Michigan IPL provides a number of services to churches all over the state, including the Upper Peninsula (visit miipl.org or contact me at energyczar@sbcglobal.net). So, keep the faith—there is help out there.

– Larry Kaufman, Executive Director
Michigan Geothermal Energy Association

Meet the Director Candidates

District 9 – Hiawatha

Mail-in ballot voting instructions are on the cover wrap of this issue only if it's election time for your co-op district. Only District 9 is voting at this time.

Dennis Gramm

(Incumbent)

Munising

Current Occupation:

Retired/Manages Rental Properties

Other Occupations or Positions:

Business administration for State of Michigan for over 25 years. Small business owner/operator for over 40 years. Degree in business administration/finance and criminal justice. Chairman of Alger Delta Finance & Rates Committee, and member of Employee Relations Committee.

Affiliations, Community Activities, Volunteer Service:

Alger Delta Cooperative Board Member, AuTrain Township Trustee, AuTrain/Onota School Board Member/Member of American Legion.

Candidate Comments:

My experience, college degree in business/finance, and over 10 years on the Board highly qualify me to continue serving as your District Representative. I will support the interests of all members equally, make tough budget decisions, and hold management accountable. I will continue to take educational classes that relate to the electrical industry and operating a cooperative in a sound financial manner. In order to serve you better, I have achieved "Credentialed Cooperative Director" status and I am working towards my Board Leadership Certificate. An educated Board is an asset to the cooperative and its members.

My commitment is, "Reliable & Affordable Energy." I will work closely with management and fellow board members to control our cost during these tough economic times. One of my main goals during my next term will be to improve communications between members and the cooperative during outages.

I would sincerely appreciate your vote and continued support.

Ron Oberg

Manistique

Current Occupation:

Retired

Other Occupations or Positions:

U.S. Air Force veteran; Police Officer; Air Traffic Controller with over 31 years of experience. In addition to this experience, I hold an associate of science degree in business and a bachelor of arts degree in labor relations.

Affiliations, Community Activities, Volunteer Service:

Affiliated with the National Air Traffic Controller's Association (NATCA) for 25 years. I served as the national workman compensation chairman for 6 years, being responsible for a yearly budget, training, and reports for a national committee, as well as assisting membership nationwide with work related injuries. State certified mediator in 4 areas of expertise. I volunteer my mediation services through UPCAP in Escanaba, MI; Garden Township Board Trustee; Secretary of my church council.

Candidate Comments:

I have been a member of Alger Delta since 1982 and I am running for director of Hiawatha District 9 because I feel I have the ability to serve the membership in a positive and progressive manner. I possess excellent communication, organizational and human relation skills, which have allowed me to handle many diverse situations. As a member of a democratic-structured organization, I am a strong advocate of business transparency and full disclosure of information.

With me as a director, co-op membership will have a representative that will be available to them 24/7. I am a person of high trust and integrity, and will work tirelessly to ensure your interests and concerns are always addressed.

Patty Trenary

Gladstone

Current Occupation:

Dental Receptionist

Other Occupations or Positions:

Computer technician; secretary.

Candidate Comments:

I was born and raised in Marquette and graduated from Marquette Senior High. Upon graduation, I enlisted in the USAF and served honorably for 5 years. During that time I learned the work discipline and organizational skills that I still practice and believe in today. Over the years I earned degrees in Liberal Arts and Electronics. I continue to stay up-to-date on technology as well as working part-time and managing our home.

I spent a great deal of my childhood at my aunt's cabin on Crooked Lake. My love of the area led my husband and I to purchase a seasonal residence on Crooked Lake. After spending over 50 years visiting the Hiawatha District area and now having a place of our own, I understand the importance of dependable, affordable electric service for Alger Delta consumers. After reviewing the list of members in the Hiawatha District, I estimate that 60 percent of the users are seasonal members like me.

I feel my background, education and knowledge of this district will help me be a strong advocate on the co-op board. Without a doubt, the most pressing issue facing the co-op is to continue to provide excellent service at the lowest possible cost to our members.

Thank you for your support.

That Old Fridge or Freezer is Too Costly to Keep!

Recycle now to earn a $30 rebate.

Do you have an old refrigerator or chest freezer taking up valuable space in your basement or garage? While you may not think much about these secondary appliances that are typically out of sight, refrigerators or freezers that are over 10 years old are most likely costing you hundreds of dollars per year to power.

You can eliminate unnecessary energy use and costs by recycling these old appliances with the help of Alger Delta Co-op and the Energy Optimization (EO) Appliance Recycling program! *Earn a $30 rebate* by contacting us when you are ready to turn in your old ones (rebate limited to two refrigerators or freezers per home).

What qualifies for a recycling rebate?

The appliance(s) must currently be in your home or garage and in working order. Sorry, but rounding up trashed or curbside refrigerators or freezers won't earn you rebates! A few other things to keep in mind:

- To be eligible for pick-up and a rebate, the refrigerator or freezer must be a secondary unit.
- The refrigerator or freezer must be between 10 and 30 cubic feet.
- Side-by-side refrigerators count as one appliance for recycling.

How does it work?

1. Call **877-296-4319** to schedule your appliance pick-up between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Or, visit **michigan-energy.org** and click on "Appliance Recycling".
2. The refrigerator or freezer must be clean, empty, and defrosted by pick-up day.
3. Your appliance(s) must be plugged in and running on pick-up day.
4. Disconnect your appliance(s) from water lines prior to the pick-up crew's arrival.
5. Provide clear and safe access to remove your appliance(s).
6. Our service provider, JACO Environmental, will come to your home and haul your old appliance(s) away.
7. An adult must be present to sign off on the appliance(s).
8. Feel good knowing your old appliances are being recycled properly!
9. Best of all: enjoy your energy savings and extra spending cash!

Have any other old appliances lying around?

While we're at your home, we can also pick up outdated (yet functioning) air conditioning units or dehumidifiers for free recycling. Receive a *$15 bonus rebate* per item!

Use an EO rebate as a valid excuse to finally get rid of these old appliances. And, if you have any questions about appliance recycling or residential, business or farm rebates, don't hesitate to give us a call. Saving energy and claiming rebates is easy with the Energy Optimization Program!

Colorful Beaver Island *America's 'E*

Photo – Jeffrey Cashman

Beaver Island's draw for most visitors is its remoteness. They say it can snap a vacationer from the real world in just a few minutes.

"You really feel like you've left the mainland and that you're on 'island time,' says Linda Gallagher, a frequent visitor. "Islanders make you feel like an old friend instead of a visitor."

One of the best ways to reach Beaver Island is the two hour-and-15-minute ferry ride from Charlevoix to St. James. The leisurely ride allows you to chat with islanders that call it home. They love to talk about their island and its relaxed way of life, and it's a great way to learn about interesting spots to visit.

You can also fly over in about 15 minutes (from Charlevoix) on Island Airways or Fresh Air Aviation, if you're in a hurry to slow down.

The Great Lakes' third largest island is home to about 650 year-round residents, many whose Irish immigrant ancestors made it a bustling 19th century fishing port.

The Irish were the first to arrive and settle at Whiskey Point, but in 1848, James Jesse Strang, a Mormon Church leader, brought his followers here after a split in the church, and Brigham Young took his followers to Utah.

Strang claimed that an angel visited and told him to seek a place surrounded by water with great forests. Beaver fit the bill, and the Irish were forced off the island when the "War of Whiskey Point" confrontation was won by Mormons firing a cannon at an unruly gang gathered at the trading post.

Strang won a seat in the fledgling Michigan Senate and declared himself "King" of the island. But his reign was short-lived, as a revolt in 1856 left him dead. Some say it was sparked by jealous husbands when he began taking additional wives. When word of the revolt and Strang's death spread to the mainland, the Irish quickly returned and drove the leaderless Mormons off.

During their eight-year occupancy, however, the Mormons left it for the better, according to Steve West, head of the Beaver Island Chamber.

"They cleared and cultivated ground, built roads, farms, houses, and changed it from a wilderness to a civilized outpost, but never got to reap the benefits. Today, it's the Irish heritage that's celebrated on the island."

Beaver was blessed to be near some of the Great Lakes' best fishing grounds, and the Irish wrote to family and friends back home about America's "Emerald Isle." The population grew to over 1,000 by the early 1880s, and the island became the largest freshwater fish supplier in the U.S. By the mid-1890s, overfishing caused the harvest to decline drastically and provided the impetus for Michigan to start a hatcheries program and close fishing seasons during fall spawning.

"Fishing and timber made Beaver Island one of the most important ports on the Great Lakes around the turn of the last century," West explains. "As commercial fishing dwindled and shipping entered the modern era bypassing the island, the population reached a low of 150 residents in the 1960s."

A visit today to the Mormon Print Shop Museum provides a vivid account of those times. It's located on Main Street in St. James, the only village, which gently curves around Paradise Bay, the largest natural harbor on the Great Lakes.

Take a stroll along the quiet harbor roads to a handful of other shops and galleries, or relax in the colorful Shamrock Pub (an island tradition) or hike to nearby windswept Whiskey Point to admire the 19th century lighthouse (today, the island gets its electric lighting from service provided by Great Lakes Energy Cooperative).

Whitefish dinners at the Beaver Island Lodge at sunset are a must, where a wall of windows frames Lake Michigan and distant islands.

Visitors don't need a car, but having wheels makes it easier to visit the undeveloped one-third of the island, which is mostly state-owned. "Gravel and sand roads lead through thick sugar maple forests along inland lakes and the Lake Michigan shoreline on the south end," West says. There are over 100 miles of roads, but only eight miles leading

Photo – Kevin Morlock

Photo – Jeffrey Cashman

Photos – Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce

out of St. James is paved.

"You'll see flocks of sandhill cranes, admire Fox Lake where beavers are reported to reach 60 pounds, and stop to climb Beaver Head Lighthouse on the southern tip. The lighthouse climb yields an impressive view of many of the smaller islands that form an archipelago around Beaver," he adds.

You can rent vehicles on the island, and West advises this for quick visits of a day or two, "but more than that, it's probably more economical to bring your own vehicle over on the ferry."

Bicycles (mountain style is best for the clay-gravel roads) are also popular, and easy to bring over on the ferry or plane. Riding from St. James, where most lodging is found, around the south end and back is about 40 miles. There are also a few campgrounds popular with cyclists—one on the north end and another half-way down the east side.

A shorter ride from the village to Donegal Bay, about 12 miles, is one of Keith Seeloff's favorites.

"You pass by old Irish homesteads with wooden and stone fence lines, century-old wooden cabins along dirt roads with names like Paid een Og's, Donnell Mor's Lane, Barney's Lane and Sloptown Road," says the mainlander. "Some of these lanes are lined by beautiful old oak trees, and Donegal Bay is a beautiful Cape Cod-like bay with white sand beaches and cottages tucked into dunes."

Following Kuebler Trail from Sloptown Road brings you to McCauley's Point, a state preserve with panoramic views of High Island. Hike the shoreline through low dunes to Mt. Pisgah, a towering sand dune rising 150 feet above the bay. It's along Donegal Bay Road on the way back to the village, and is one of the highest points.

"Climb up the dune for a nice view of the bay and islands nestled off-coast. Looking inland, treetops stretch as far as the eye can see, and it's a great place to watch a sunset!" Seeloff exclaims.

Other preserves to hike are Barney's Lake, Erber, Miller Marsh and Little Sand Bay, which is closest to St. James. A long trail and boardwalk traverses various wetlands and streams before arriving at a beautiful deserted sand beach. Knotted trillium, a rare sight on the mainland, lines the boardwalk.

The island has long been known for its smallmouth bass, but fly-fishing for giant carp along the flats has really taken off, says Kevin Morlock, of Indigo Guides Charters. It's been popularized as "golden bone fishing" by outdoor writers, and fly-fishers from California and Texas have made the pilgrimage.

"It's challenging. That's why it has become so popular," Morlock explains. "Bone fish are about 8 pounds, and you might get about 20 shots at catching one on a typical Florida outing. Carp weigh 20 to 30 pounds, put up quite a fight, and you'll get around 200 shots at hooking one on a typical Beaver outing. Europeans consider carp a prized game fish and we are starting to catch on."

After a trip to the island, Kirk Deeter wrote on his *Field & Stream* magazine blog, "Beaver Island is home to some remarkable smallmouth bass fishing. But, we were there to explore the flats fishing. And—I kid you not—I would rate the flats action on Beaver with any other flats experience in America. Yes, that also includes Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Nantucket and Hawaii. It's absolutely insane around Beaver Island."

Go, relax, and enjoy the experience, because after all, you're on "island time."

For more about Beaver Island, places to stay and all its amenities, click on beaverisland.org.

PHOTOS: 1) An aerial view of Whiskey Point, at the entrance to Paradise Bay/Beaver Harbor. In the background is Garden Island, second largest in the archipelago. **2)** Catching golden bonefish (carp family) on a fly rod is very popular around Beaver Island. This one is over 30 pounds. **3)** From McCauley's Point, on South Donegal Bay, you can see panoramic views of High Island, 4 miles west. **4)** St. Patrick's Day on the island includes events such as a frozen fish toss. **5)** A full *Emerald Isle* ferry makes an unusual early evening arrival on Beaver Island.

Photo: Steve West

Island Power

Keeping Beaver Island plugged in. **Howard Meyerson**

When the power goes out in the middle of the night on Beaver Island, Mike McDonough is the one who climbs out of bed. No matter that a blizzard may be raging over Lake Michigan on this remote island 32 miles offshore from Charlevoix.

McDonough (pictured above), a 27-year old Island native, will pull on winter clothes and head out to his truck at any hour. He is the Great Lakes Energy Cooperative lineworker tasked with making things right by keeping electricity flowing to 500 year-round residents, a population that swells to over 3,000 in the summer.

"I enjoy the work and seeing things get done," says McDonough, a fifth-generation Islander. "This year we had a rough time. The winter storms were hard and we had a half-dozen or more households that were without power for over a day.

"You can spend 16 to 18 hours a day working on lines and restoring power. It's a lot of work, but after it's over, everyone is really appreciative. They realize it's not the easiest thing to do."

Winter storms dumped an extra load of heavy ice and snow on the Island this season, toppling trees that in turn fell on power lines. The area gets its electricity from the mainland, but there is a backup generator just in case of an on-shore problem, or on the lake bottom, where three 27-mile long cables carry electricity to the Island's harbor.

Along with causing darkened homes and businesses, downed power lines present additional problems. Beaver Island is covered by thick forests, and is 13 miles long and about 6 miles across at it's widest point. So, line repairs—especially this ferocious winter—were made all the more difficult when trees fell across roads and blocked access to areas needing a power line fix.

"This was one of the worst times we have seen over here," says McDonough, who began working for the co-op in 2006 and later spent three years on the mainland as an apprentice training to become a lineman, a job that he started four years ago.

"He's the guy who does the day-to-day things like maintaining the lines on the Island," adds Dave Matz, operations director for Great Lakes Energy, which is based in Boyne City. Matz began his 32-year career with the company as a lineman, so he knows the job well.

"It's not a job for everyone," he says. "You learn how to climb poles and to respect electricity. When the weather gets nasty, these guys are out working. They're a special breed."

Mainland power was first extended to Beaver Island in the 1970s, but the system has since been upgraded. The latest underwater cables were installed in 1999, and the Island's 3-megawatt backup power plant was built in 2000. Three 20,000-gallon fuel tanks are also maintained to run the backup generators. Once winter arrives and Lake Michigan freezes, there is little chance of getting a fuel delivery, Matz explains.

Despite these preparations, other events also happen to cause occasional outages, such as squirrels chewing on things they shouldn't in the summer, Matz adds.

McDonough says he has the job covered, though.

"In the middle of the night you are on your own," he says confidently. "But if it happens early in the day, I hit the gas station and stock up on junk food; beef jerky and Mountain Dew get me through the day."

Getting Comfo Home Energy

Melanie wants her home to be comfortable and bright. Winter gusts send her to the thermostat to fight the chill, and in summer she nudges the temperature down to keep cool.

Meanwhile, Melanie's husband Scott finds comfort in lower utility bills, so he frowns on tweaking the dial and walks through their home, turning off lights.

Fortunately, a comfortable middle ground is both affordable and available. Energy-saving products combined with efficient design trends and building techniques are revolutionizing home energy use.

Regardless of location or residence type, people like Melanie and Scott are finding that being energy efficient brings comfort as well as positively impacting their wallets and the world.

"If you're concerned about the environment, being energy efficient is a priority," says Brian Sloboda, a senior program manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). "But efficient energy use is also important for other reasons. First, you save money. Second, you save energy, which leads back to saving money."

If you can do things to reduce the cost of energy, you'll have more money to spend on other things.

It's easy to ignore being wise with our energy consumption. After all, electricity is a good value. Unlike other energy sources, electricity is very flexible—we can use it for everything from cooking and cleaning to powering entertainment devices and even automobiles. Regardless, it makes sense (and cents) to be more energy efficient in all areas.

"Energy efficiency is a pocketbook issue," adds Alan Shedd, residential/commercial energy director for NRECA's Touchstone Energy Home program. "If you can do things to reduce energy costs, you'll have more money to spend on other things." Sure, we can't control all energy costs (gasoline, for example), but we can make a difference in

ortable With Efficiency

Photo – John Lowrey

Experts predict that future homes and remodeling will focus even more on energy efficiency, including designs that take advantage of natural light and ventilation, as well as water conservation design and products. The windows above are installed in a demonstration solar home built by University of Illinois students (http://2009.solardecathlon.illinois.edu) and are Optiwin® triple-paned thermally broken, argon-filled, wood windows with cork interiors.

our own homes.

But *how* do we make that difference? Experts say future home construction and remodeling will focus even more on energy efficiency—especially proper sealing.

The best time to focus on energy savings, however, is at construction. "We've got to do a better job of sealing penetrations and gaps between the conditioned space—areas of the home that we heat and cool—and unconditioned spaces," explains Art Thayer, energy efficiency programs director for the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. "Find and seal gaps, cracks and penetrations near plumbing, cables, utilities, furnace runs, fireplace installations, and electrical wiring—anything that may allow air to move from one space to another." When these gaps are sealed in a typical home, energy costs can drop between 20 and 40 percent.

Doing Detective Work

Home energy audits can help identify energy-loss areas, and audit professionals use special tools to identify potential improvements.

After a quick safety check on gas appliances, an energy audit expert will place a blower door on an exterior door. The device pressurizes the home, making air leaks easier to find. "The door simulates a 20-mile-per-hour wind coming at the house from all sides," Thayer explains. "It creates a negative pressure so we can find out what the biggest problems are when it comes to comfort and energy. When we fix the comfort problem, we save energy, too."

An energy auditor can also picture the home through an infrared camera to spot energy leaks, which most often occur in the attic. "Air escapes from places like the flue and chimney chase, plumbing stacks, electrical penetrations, and around kitchen and bathroom soffits," Thayer says.

But trouble spots can't be fixed just by rolling out more insulation. Specific spaces need to be sealed first. "Insulation is not air-sealing," Thayer says, noting that many states require the blower test on new construction.

Electric co-ops are also willing to help their consumer-members learn about energy efficiency, and this varies by co-op from providing Energy Optimization programs (see story and ad in this issue offering free recycling and appliance rebates) to *Country Lines* articles and holding educational seminars. Other co-ops sell highly efficient water heaters and provide low-interest financing for energy efficiency improvements.

As an example, Midwest Energy Cooperative (Cassopolis) has an "Energy Express" demonstration trailer it uses at fairs, festivals, trade shows and other community events. "It's an interactive educational tool that helps people understand some simple and inexpensive ways to increase home energy efficiency and maximize energy dollars," says Patty Nowlin, communications director for Midwest.

"Finding efficiencies house-by-house or business-by-business, is a good thing," Thayer adds.

Photo – Midwest Energy Cooperative

Midwest Energy Cooperative's "Energy Express" trailer has become a popular exhibit at home shows, fairs and other community events. It's an interactive demonstration unit that helps consumers learn how to save energy and money in ways that are practical, affordable and easy to understand.

Designed to Save

Older homes were built to a different standard, when energy was less expensive and efficiency less important, and some leak like sieves, Thayer continues. And, while these concerns are key for both remodeling and new home construction, it's especially important in new homes where it's a one-time decision about insulation, caulking and weather stripping. "With a little up-front investment you build-in lower overall operating costs," he says.

Energy efficiency can also come from a home's appliances, and many are

Continued on page 12

Getting Comfortable, *from page 11*

manufactured with this emphasis, such as clothes washers, refrigerators and other aids bearing the Energy Star® logo.

Energy Star is branded by the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. This means the appliance is a better value, and was proven in testing to provide significant energy savings over comparable products. Over 75 percent of the public understands the importance of looking for the Energy Star label, Thayer notes, and realizes that just a little more money means long-time savings.

Geothermal Offers More Savings

Perhaps nothing is as valuable, however, as savings realized after installing a geothermal heat pump as an alternative to more traditional heating and cooling units, Thayer advises. Using liquid-filled loops buried about 5 feet underground, this system uses the earth's steady temperature to transfer heat.

Installation costs are high, but geothermal heat pumps deliver a 30 to 70 percent reduction in home heating and cooling costs. Plus, by using a desuperheater, they also deliver about 60 percent of a family's hot water heating needs for free.

Because of their connection to the earth, geothermal heat pumps represent an interesting application of renewable energy, and currently receive a 30 percent tax credit. "That really brings the cost down to a level that's par with high-efficiency systems," he adds. "For new home construction, it's a no-brainer. Why not do it?"

Heat pumps are also hard to beat because they can pay for themselves in just a few years.

The Future is Now

With today's stringent building codes, new homes are much more energy efficient than even just a few years ago, Thayer adds, and co-ops are increasing their educational efforts.

As another example, Midwest Energy is partnering with the Lenawee Intermediate School District's Center for a Sustainable Future and other southeastern Michigan groups to build a state-of-the-art Sustainable Energy Efficient Demonstration House (SEED). The planned SEED house would serve as a unique educational tool for the whole community.

"We're planning to build this house so that any of our co-op members, the community, and students can walk through and realize that energy conservation is practical, affordable and easy to understand in their own homes," says Roger Bowser, Midwest's energy programs and services manager.

Photo – Midwest Energy Cooperative

Roger Bowser (L), energy programs/services manager for Midwest Energy Cooperative, uses the "Energy Express" trailer at a county fair to show consumers how to save energy and money. For example, consumers can easily plug certain home air leaks themselves with proper caulking, insulation and sealants.

Plans are for the house to be a "cut-away" design so it can show that if a house is newly-built, remodeled or energy-retrofitted as a "system," it can be air-tight, comfortable and affordable, but still provide fresh, healthy, indoor air quality. "I want our members to understand if they are building, remodeling or energy-retrofitting their home, it should be very attainable and affordable for them," Bowser explains.

Another co-op, Cherryland Electric, is offering its members that are interested in energy efficiency the opportunity to buy solar panels. The plan is to build a community solar panel array near the co-op's office on U.S.-31 in Grawn. Now in the first phase, a total of 80 panels are being offered. Cherryland will retain ownership of the panels, then lease them to members for a one-time fee of $470 per panel. In return, members will receive an approximate $2 rebate per bill. Participating members can expect to break even on the investment in about 20 years, and that time frame could be shortened with energy optimization credits. The project's size could eventually offer 360 panels or more over the long-term.

"It's been very positive," say General Manager Tony Anderson. "I think people want to support our renewable energy, and they are interested in making it work."

Homes will soon be designed with future energy upgrades in mind, such as solar opportunities, Thayer adds. As we move to electric cars, we may begin seeing more solar panels on garages and carports, too.

Homes will also have "smart" appliances, energy efficiency controls, and a monitoring system. "Appliances will have a bigger impact because energy-efficient ones will be prevalent," Thayer says, adding that the move to LED lighting will quicken and TVs and computers will become even more efficient.

"From the outside, you probably won't see a lot of difference in the way homes look," Thayer notes, "but what's on the inside—from construction to appliances—will definitely be different."

Above: Plugging open spaces around plumbing and other air leaks is an easy fix that saves energy and money.

Photos – Illinois Country Living

Right: A blower door test should be a part of any professional energy audit. A temporary door with a pressurizing fan makes it possible to measure and find energy leaks in a home.

Trenary Wood Products:
White Cedar From the Heart of the U.P.

The incense of cut cedar fills the air; motes of sawdust drift through the sunlight that streams through large windows. The high-pitched whine of the saw makes conversation difficult as the four-man crew cuts, sorts, squares off, and packs.

Trenary Wood Products is in full production, crafting custom shingles and shakes from Upper Peninsula-grown white cedar logs. Their merchandise takes advantage of northern cedar's unique properties: insect and moisture resistance.

Owners Steve and Sharon Boyer have been Alger Delta Electric Co-op members for all 36 years of their marriage. Sharon's mother, Ruth Niemi Kaukola Holmquist, was born on the family farm where the Boyers also live, and remembers when they first got electricity in North Delta back in 1938.

"They were one of the first Alger Delta members around here because their house was so close to the road," Sharon explains.

The Boyers are also proud of the homegrown tradition of their business: they give full-time employment to eight Trenary residents, purchase only local cedar from area loggers, and have perfected a product for their customers that is made to survive harsh, snowy conditions. Their shakes and shingles can be seen on buildings in many U.P. state parks: Fayette State Park in the Garden Peninsula, Fort Wilkins in the Keweenaw, and Fort Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, among others. They were surprised when their cedar shingles found national appeal, too. "I never know who'll be on the other end of the phone when it rings," Sharon says.

"Most of our shingles go to the U.P. or Wisconsin, but we've taken orders from all over the country—New Jersey to California," Steve says. Their biggest job so far was a stave church—a replica of a Norwegian church—built in Moorhead, Minn. "Those were custom cut 6-inch shingles," Steve remembers. The order called for 55 squares (275 bundles of 6-inch shingles), and the customers placed the order a year in advance.

"We can do anything—long as we have enough time to do it," Steve says.

The Boyers' operation is a study in utilizing every scrap of a natural resource. They prefer to buy older cedar logs that have rotted in the center because the outer edges of these trees don't have knots. "That's the stuff they can't get rid of," Steve explains. "And yet, that's the clear [knot-free] wood—we can't get that from the younger cedar because of the branch growth. The old wood is what makes the good shingles."

Trenary Wood Products sells three shingle grades in custom sizes ranging from 3 inches to 8 inches wide. But that's only the beginning: the trimmed-off scraps are sold in kindling bundles, and also used to heat the family's sawmill and home. The sawdust is baled and sold as animal bedding, spread on muddy farm paths, and used as bow targets. "An arrow won't go through it," Steve says. Any leftover scrap is then trucked downstate to be converted to cedar mulch. "The only thing we don't make is the mulch. We don't throw anything away from this operation—everything gets used," Steve says proudly.

If they could just bottle that woodsy cedar scent and sell it, they might find their biggest market yet.

Steve Boyer stands next to ready-to-ship bundles of shingles from the Trenary Wood Products business he owns with his wife, Sharon. Visit trenarywoodproducts.com to see more products, or contact them by e-mail at holmquist@tds.net or call 906-446-3326.

Inset photo: This shingled cottage perched on a sand dune overlooking Lake Superior is owned by an Alger Delta Co-op member, Judy Deboer. The cedar shingles, stained a gray tone rather than waiting for them to weather to that shade naturally, are installed with a small space in between each shingle because they absorb water and swell in wet weather. That's the reason cedar offers the best moisture protection and good energy efficiency—it swells and seals tightly.

▶ ***Tell us about your favorite Michigan-Made product!*** Please send a few short paragraphs describing the product and why you like it, along with your email and phone number to gknudtson@meca.coop or call 517-913-3531.

Use Your Own Money!

How to start your child on an allowance.

Photo – iStockphoto.com

A teen magazine caught my daughter's eye in the store recently. She wanted it, but not enough to spend her allowance. This is exactly the decision-making we were hoping to inspire when we began giving her an allowance.

Many Michigan schools are incorporating financial literacy, and giving children an allowance is one way to extend the learning at home.

There are several ways to go about giving an allowance, some basic factors to consider when determining what is right for your family.

How old is your child and what is their maturity level?

These factors will help steer your decisions in determining the allowance system. You don't want to make it so easy that your child takes an allowance for granted, but you want to set realistic expectations based on their age and maturity.

Visit a local library or bookstore with your child to help explain money management and the concept of receiving an allowance. "Michigan Jump $tart!" also has a website with activities to teach children of all ages about money management. "Money Smart Kids" offers fun games about financial literacy.

What purpose do you want the allowance to serve?

Is it to teach the value of money, be an incentive for chores, or simply provide some in-pocket cash? There is no right or wrong reason here, but having a clear concept of why you are giving it will help you plan. You should also explain to your child why they are getting an allowance and what you hope it will help them achieve.

Will the allowance be contingent on anything?

Some children need to complete all of their chores, meet behavior goals, earn certain grades, or meet other criteria in order to receive an allowance. In other families, the child receives it no matter what. Another option is to blend the two methods, so the child receives a small base allowance but has a list of "extra" chores he can choose to do for additional funds.

How will the money be administered?

Options include:

- Handing out cash every Friday
- Paying in a lump sum monthly
- Putting the money directly in your child's savings account
- Adding the funds to a prepaid debit card
- Holding onto the money and tracking your child's credits and debits for her

Will there be restrictions on how the money is spent?

If your family has specific rules, such as forbidding toy guns or candy, make sure your child knows the rules still apply even if he has his own money. Some parents require their child to devote certain percentages of the allowance to charity or savings. Others give their child free reign on how it is spent.

What will they be expected to pay for out of their allowance?

Will your child be expected to use the allowance for lunches, clothing or school supplies? A popular option is to give older children and teens a budget and allow them to keep any excess funds. For example, they may receive $20 a week, which includes lunch money. However, they can choose to brown bag it to school and use the money in other ways. Or, you may prefer to buy all of your child's necessities and give a small allowance to cover "wants."

How much should you give?

Once you determine if your child will have to pay for certain items out of the allowance or not, you can determine how much to offer. There are many formulas used for this, such as a dollar a week per the child's grade. This is a starting point, but only you can determine the right amount for your child based on all of the above considerations.

It's important to allow some freedom in children's spending, so they learn the value of money firsthand. I don't always agree with how my daughter spends her money, but she's learning to splurge on the items that make her happy and skip the ones she can do without—like teen celebrity magazines.

Rachael Moshman is a mom, freelance writer, educator and family advocate. Find her at rachaelmoshman.com.

The Saskatoons Are Here

There's a new berry in town. It's called the Saskatoon, and it's been growing wild across the prairies of western Canada and the northwestern United States since the buffalo roamed. The Saskatoon "blueberry," as some catalogs call it, has the same look and nutritional value as a regular blueberry, but with a different, sweet-yet-nutty taste.

Saskatoons could become a hit with Michigan gardeners, commercial growers, landscapers and naturalists alike. They can be planted in the garden and trimmed to about 4 feet tall, used as a flowering shrub along a foundation, or allowed to grow wild, free and tall out in the "back 40."

"I think they'll be a lot of fun and easier to grow than blueberries," says Erwin "Duke" Elsner, an MSU fruit and viticulture specialist from Grand Traverse County, and a member of Cherryland Electric Cooperative. "They're also quite adaptable to northern Michigan."

The plants branch off from the trunk like a clump of birch trees and can reach 20 feet tall and about 4 feet wide. However, Elsner says they can be kept trimmed down for garden production or to form an attractive hedge. The pretty spring flowers make Saskatoons a wonderful landscape plant that doubles as a food source. White blooms show in mid-spring, and the deep-purple fruit appears about July.

Saskatoons are used for pies, jam, wine, cider and beer, and are good in cereal or trail and other snack mixes. These berries are healthy little buggers, too, as they're chock-full of protein, vitamin C, calcium, iron and cancer-fighting antioxidants. They're hardy as a polar bear, growing as far north as Alaska, and do well in most soils, except very wet clay. A similar species, known locally as juneberry, grows wild in our northern lower area and the U.P., mostly in upland, sandy areas.

How to Plant

Plant Saskatoons in full to partial sun and light sandy or sandy-loam soil that drains well. In the garden, space them about 3 to 4 feet apart. They're self-pollinating, but will bear heavier fruit if planted with other Saskatoons. Prepare the soil as for any tree or shrub by digging a hole about twice as wide and deep as the root ball. Back-fill with a mix of compost and good topsoil, water-in the plants well, and then mulch around the trunks. A slow-release or organic fertilizer applied moderately once or twice a year will keep them healthy. Unlike blueberries, Saskatoons don't require acidic soil.

It's a 'Super-fruit'

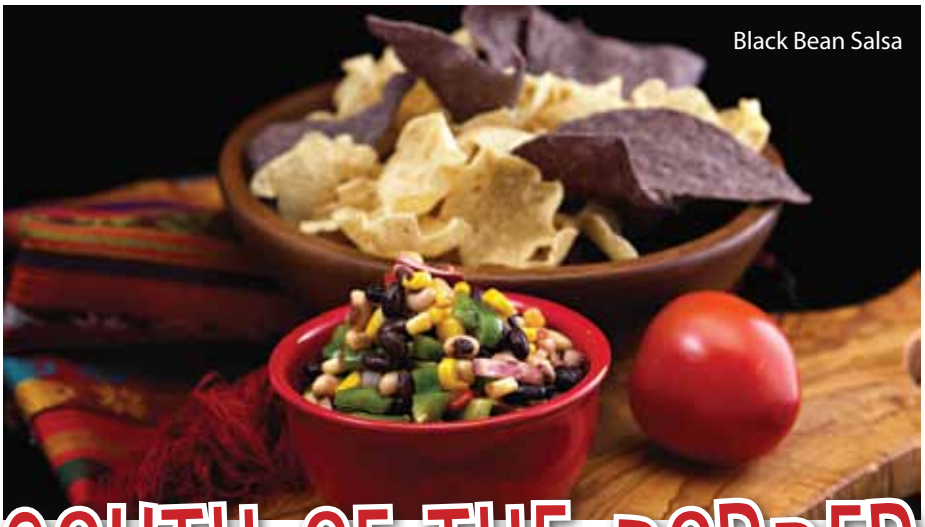
There is interest in this once-ignored berry out East, and Michigan farmers haven't overlooked them either, Elsner says. In fact, some call it a "super fruit" that is about to take our farm markets and roadside stands by storm. However, the exact amount in production is hard to estimate. Elsner's best guess is that 70 to 100 acres are scattered throughout Michigan, and MSU will conduct surveys to determine how much acreage is under production and what markets are interested in the berries.

"They are fairly simple to grow, they don't require machine harvesting—although they could be harvested with machines—and are not a huge up-front investment, Elsner explains. "They also follow a trend toward native plants and are good for you."

Like blueberries and other edibles, Saskatoons are tempting to birds, so using bird netting is worth considering. Rose chafer pests have also found these plants to their liking, adds Elsner, who is also a highly regarded entomologist. He's working with others at MSU to invent an appropriate insecticide to deal with the chafers.

Interest is also picking up on a commercial scale here, and a group has formed to support efforts to grow and market the fruit. "Because of the enthusiasm of local growers, we have started an organization called 'The Saskatoon Berry Institute of North America' to support the development of this new crop, which we all feel has a lot of potential," reports Jim Dixon of Williamsburg, also a Cherryland Electric Co-op member. Dixon has 250 Saskatoon plants in the ground and expects to eventually have berries for the farm markets.

If you're interested in growing Saskatoons, get involved or simply check-in with this enthusiastic group of growers by visiting the Institute on Facebook at facebook.com/SaskatoonBerryInstituteOfNorthAmerica.


Black Bean Salsa

SOUTH OF THE BORDER

These Mexican-style recipes will turn your dinner into a fiesta. Discover enchiladas, tacos and other creative variations of traditional Mexican dishes.

Black Bean Salsa

1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
1 can white and yellow corn, drained
1 can black-eyed peas, drained
1 jar diced pimentos, undrained
1 green pepper, diced
1/4 red onion, chopped
2-3 avocados, diced (add just before serving)
"scoops" tortilla chips
Dressing:
5 T. Tiger sauce (or Red Hot® sauce)
1/2 c. red wine vinegar
1/2 c. canola oil
1 T. sugar, optional
salt and pepper to taste

Mix beans, corn, peas, pimentos, pepper and red onion. Mix dressing ingredients together and pour dressing on bean mixture. Serve with chips. This is also excellent with BBQ or grilled chicken.

Mary Scodeller, Lansing

Enchilada Casserole

2 lbs. ground beef
chopped onion
salt and pepper to taste
1 package taco seasoning
1 can enchilada sauce (mild or spicy)
1 can water
1 can refried beans
1 c. cheddar cheese, shredded
1 c. mozzarella cheese, shredded
1 package flour tortillas
optional: chopped green pepper, green onion, lettuce, tomatoes, sour cream

Brown beef with salt, pepper and onion. Add taco seasoning, water and beans; mix well. Grease a 9 x 13-inch pan. Layer enchilada sauce, tortillas, meat and cheeses. Bake at 350° until heated through. Serve with chopped vegetables and sour cream, as desired.

Sue Kolean, Holland

Upside Down Sombreros

1 lb. lean ground beef
1 small onion, chopped
1 10-oz. can medium-spiced enchilada sauce
1 2.25-oz. can sliced black olives, drained
1 8-oz. can whole kernel corn with red and green peppers, drained
4 8-in. flour tortillas
1 16-oz. can refried beans
4 tomato slices
6 oz. (1 1/2 c.) shredded cheddar cheese or Mexican-blend cheese, divided
1/2-3/4 c. sour cream
1 medium avocado, peeled, pitted, sliced
4 oven-proof, 1 1/2 c. size ramekin dishes (about 5 1/2 in. wide and 2 1/2 in. deep)

In a medium skillet, cook ground beef and onion until meat is no longer pink; drain. Add the enchilada sauce, olives and corn; cook and stir 3 to 4 minutes or until heated through. Place one tortilla in bottom of each ramekin dish, allowing tortilla to overlap sides of dish. Spread refried beans equally among the four dishes, then spread meat mixture over beans. Place dishes on a baking sheet. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 25 minutes. Place 1 tomato slice on top of each; sprinkle each with 1/4 cup cheese. Bake until cheese is melted, about 5 minutes; remove from oven. To serve, dollop each dish with sour cream; sprinkle with remaining cheese. Stand two avocado slices, one on each side of each dish, facing toward the center to resemble hat ties.

Marilyn Partington Frame, Traverse City

Slow Cooker Chicken Taco Soup

1 onion, chopped
1 16-oz. can chili beans
1 15-oz. can black beans
1 15-oz. can whole kernel corn, drained
1 15-oz. can tomato sauce
1 12-oz. can or bottle beer
2 10-oz. cans diced tomatoes with green chilies, undrained
1 1.25-oz. package taco seasoning
3 whole skinless, boneless chicken breasts
optional toppings: shredded cheddar cheese, sour cream, crushed tortilla chips

Place the onion, chili beans, black beans, corn, tomato sauce, beer and diced tomatoes in a slow cooker. Add taco seasoning, and stir to blend. Lay chicken breasts on top of the mixture, pressing down slightly until just covered by the other ingredients. Cook on low, covered, for five hours. Remove chicken from soup, and allow to cool long enough to be handled. Shred and stir chicken back into the soup; continue cooking for two hours. Serve topped with shredded cheddar cheese, a dollop of sour cream and crushed tortilla chips, if desired.

Jacquelyn Guisbert, Drummond Island

Peppery Meatloaf

2 lbs. ground beef
1/2 c. V-8® juice
1 t. cumin
1/4 c. onion, diced
1/4 c. jalapenos, chopped
1 c. oatmeal
1 t. salt
2 eggs
1/2 t. pepper
1/2 c. chili sauce
1 t. taco seasoning
1 c. pepper jack cheese, shredded

Mix in order and bake at 350° for 45-55 minutes. Top with cheese and return to oven until cheese melts. Great for next day sandwiches also.

Marie Danis, Pelkie

Photography by: 831 Creative

Crock Pot Picnic Pork Tacos

Combine in a crockpot:
1 picnic ham (not smoked)
2 T. Chili Ancho Powder (or chili powder)
1 white onion, chopped
1 t. rosemary
1 T. seasoned salt
2 whole garlic cloves
1 T. black pepper
1/4 in. of water in pot

Pico De Gallo:
2 fresh tomatoes, chopped
1 onion, chopped
1 t. minced fresh garlic
1/4 c. chopped jalapeno
1/4 bunch cilantro, chopped
2 avocados, chopped
juice from 1 lime

flour or corn tortillas
slices of queso fresco cheese
sour cream

Cover and cook on high for eight hours. Remove ham and shred with a fork. Chop all pico de gallo ingredients and mix in a bowl; add lime juice. Add meat to tortillas and top with cheese, pico de gallo and sour cream.

Mary Gorshe, Suttons Bay

Taco Soup

1 lb. ground turkey or beef
1 large onion, chopped
1 package dry Hidden Valley® dressing mix
1 package taco seasoning mix
1 15-oz. can pinto beans
1 15-oz. can hot chili beans
1 15-1-oz. can whole kernel corn
1 15-oz. can stewed tomatoes, Mexican flavor
1 15-oz. can stewed tomatoes

Brown meat and onions; drain. Mix dressing and taco seasoning mixes into meat and add all other ingredients. Simmer 1 hour. If desired, serve with baked Tostitos® chips.

Thomas Anderson, Cheboygan

Taco Lasagna

1 lb. ground beef
1 package taco seasoning
jar of salsa, optional
1 can refried beans
8 soft flour tortillas
3-4 packages shredded taco or Colby Jack cheese

Fry ground beef and add taco seasoning and salsa, to taste. For the first layer, place two tortillas on the bottom of a baking dish, spread with one-half of the meat mixture and top with one package of cheese. For the second layer, place two tortillas on top of the first layer, spread with one-half of the refried beans and top with a package of cheese. For the third layer, place two tortillas, spread with the remaining meat and a package of cheese. For the final layer, place two tortillas, spread with remaining refried beans and the last package of cheese.

Bake at 350° for about 30 minutes, or until cheese is melted and starts turning a golden brown. Let cool for a few minutes and serve with your favorite toppings (tomatoes, lettuce, sour cream, jalapeno, avocado, etc.) and enjoy.

Tami and John Smith, Boyne City

Enchilada Crepes

Crepes:
1 c. baking mix (Bisquick®)
3/4 c. milk
1/2 t. chili powder
2 eggs
1/4 c. green onions, finely chopped
Filling:
3 c. cooked chicken, finely chopped
1 c. shredded Monterey Jack cheese
1/2 c. salsa
1 avocado, peeled and cut up
1/2 c. sour cream
1/2 c. water
1/4 t. salt
1/8 t. pepper
1 clove garlic, crushed
chopped tomato
shredded cheddar cheese

To make the crepes, beat baking mix, milk, chili powder and eggs with wire whisk until almost smooth; stir in onions. Pour 1/4 cup batter into hot, lightly greased 10-inch skillet; rotate skillet until batter covers bottom. Cook until golden brown. Gently loosen edge; turn and cook other side until golden brown. Place between sheets of waxed paper.

Mix chicken, cheese and salsa and spoon mixture down center of crepes. Fold ends of crepes over chicken mixture; place folded sides down on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes. Place avocado, sour cream, water, salt, pepper and garlic in blender container; cover and blend on high until smooth, about 1 minute. Pour into saucepan. Cook and stir over low heat until hot. Serve over crepes. Garnish with tomato and cheddar cheese. Serves 6.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

King Ranch Mexican Chicken

1 boiled or rotisserie chicken, deboned and cut into small pieces
1 can cream of celery soup
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 can Rotel® diced tomatoes and green chilies
1 small can diced green chilies
1 16-oz. package soft corn tortillas
2 c. grated Mexican cheese

Combine chicken, soups, tomatoes and chilies and place in a 9x13-inch baking pan sprayed with nonstick spray. Cut tortillas into bite-size pieces and layer over chicken. Sprinkle cheese over top and bake at 350° for 20 to 30 minutes, or until cheese is bubbly. Let sit for a few minutes and serve.

Nancy Abbott Wilson, Traverse City

Crock Pot Picnic Pork Tacos

Submit your recipe! Contributors whose recipes we print in 2013 will be entered in a drawing to win a prize: *Country Lines* will pay their January 2014 electric bill (up to $200)! The 2013 winner will be announced in the Jan. 2014 issue.

Thanks to all who send in recipes! Please send in **"No-Cook Meal"** recipes by **June 10** and **"Diabetic Favorites"** by **July 10**.

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

The 'Good Sisu' Shepherd

A "bold and risk-taking" adventure. **Donna Mullen Campbell**

It was the middle of March, 2013, during one of those northern late winter/early spring storms. Two feet of wet snow had fallen on an existing 3 feet of soft, slushy snow from the previous storm. It was late Monday night, after a day when schools were closed and highway traffic nearly at a standstill. To top off this dangerous storm, there was a fog so thick you could see only an arm's length ahead of you. Later, people would comment that there was lightning involved, making it one of the worst snowstorms in years.

Three farmers were sleepless that night. Rudy Kangas, a rancher, had noticed a group of Black Angus restlessly moving in a circle behind the barn. One was missing! It was a small heifer, and expecting a calf. Rudy, at 72, could see a section of broken fence and drifts of snow indicating tracks. The tracks headed towards a low, swamp-like area near the back hills of his farm. A place where wolves and coyotes were seen occasionally. He could not deal with this situation by himself as he was recovering from a bad cold, and so he called his brother Alan at a nearby family farm to explain the situation. Alan, age 65, had a bad hip, and could not really offer help. It was Alan's son Jason, age 35, who agreed to come over with his dad to help assess the situation.

Upon arrival, Jason could barely make out the tracks leading to the swamp area. Rudy intuitively pointed out the direction the heifer would have taken and that she probably calved over where there was a clump of tamarack trees. About a quarter-mile in would be the spot where she would be and most likely try to hide the calf. Suddenly, the young heifer appeared out of the fog, struggling in chest-high snow as she made her way to the barn. Mooing in distress, she reached the back door and quickly huddled with the other animals. But where was the calf? Perished, most likely. Yet Jason had to be sure and as there were no predictions of when the storm would let up, he wanted to be sure it wasn't alive. There were hungry predators out there waiting for a moment like this.

Jason put on a pair of Finnish skis that were hanging in the barn. They were the long, old-fashioned kind, with just some leather straps that fit over boots. An old wooden pair that hadn't been used in years, Rudy commented, like two gray boards with tips that would surely sink in the wet snow.

I can try, Jason reasoned. There weren't any ski poles, so he had to balance his sturdy body without them. With trepidation, he cautiously trekked over the snow and toward the fog bank. A howling wind could not silence the sound of the skis swishing over the snow as the two older men watched him disappear into the fog. He followed the heifer's tracks through the broken fence, appearing as a silhouette, then a gray shadow, and then into the fog that swallowed him up. It was very quiet, and the older men could no longer hear the skis swishing. Then, the howling wind seemed to stop temporarily while both men waited and watched in the direction where Jason vanished.

Long minutes went by, and finally the men could again hear the faint swishing sound of the skis. More long minutes followed. A shadow appeared like an apparition out of fog. It was Jason struggling to carry the newborn calf over his shoulders. He was clearly exhausted, stopping at the part of the fence that was still up because he could not cross it or turn to find the broken spot. Alan ran to his son, waist-deep in snow, as Jason took the calf off his shoulders and rolled it over the fence. Alan took the calf in his own arms, but could not carry it. Instead, he gently rolled it over and over the top of the snow until he reached the partially plowed road. Rudy was then able to help get the calf back to the barn and reunited with its mother.

What was this farmer quality that led to such a rescue? A combination of three important character traits: Rudy's intuition, Alan's determination, and Jason's SISU. Sisu can mean a lot of things in the Finnish language, but for Jason it meant "a bold and risk-taking venture in a life-threatening situation." After this story made the family rounds, told and retold again, the family asked this writer to put the story on paper.

Then the howling wind seemed to stop temporarily while both men waited and watched in the direction where Jason vanished.

Hauntingly, it was the image of Jason carrying the calf on his shoulders and coming out of the fog that left the deepest impression on me. It calls to mind a certain famous shepherd that went out and found that lost lamb and brought it back into the fold.

Donna Mullen Campbell is a member of Alger Delta Electric Cooperative.

Batteries *ARE* Included

Electric co-ops are testing energy storage systems to better harness renewable energy.

One of the main obstacles to widespread use of wind and solar power production is nature itself: The wind doesn't always blow, and the sun doesn't always shine. But electric co-ops are on the cusp of efforts to develop technology aimed at storing excess renewable energy for when it's needed most.

Battery storage systems were developed in the 1970s and have become more viable on a large scale, thanks to recent chemistry breakthroughs that increase the longevity while lowering the cost of batteries. If battery energy storage at the utility level can be made commercially viable, it could result in a revolution for the aging American electric grid.

Wind and solar energy are called "intermittent" power sources—meaning they don't provide a steady supply of electricity like traditional generation fuels, such as coal or natural gas. Even in the best situations, the wind blows an average of only about 30 to 40 percent of the time and usually not during hot, humid weekday afternoons or extremely cold mornings when electricity use spikes. Meanwhile, solar energy production can dramatically drop even when a band of fluffy clouds briefly passes over the sun.

That's where battery energy storage comes in. For example, this technology can store electricity produced when the wind blows at night and the sun shines for use during times of "peak demand"—the electric utility industry's version of rush-hour traffic, when power use skyrockets—to avoid buying expensive supplemental power.

So far, a handful of electric co-ops across the country are testing various ways to use these batteries.

Harnessing Energy Saves Money

Battery storage systems are a big investment for any electric co-op, but the good news is that benefits exist beyond leveling out renewable energy supply.

"Properly managed battery storage systems can delay the need for building expensive transmission lines that are difficult to get permits for in the first place," says Dale Bradshaw, a senior program manager with the Cooperative Research Network (CRN), the research and development arm of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). "It also reduces wear-and-tear on baseload power plants, which operate year-round to provide dependable electricity at a low cost, and can make electric distribution systems run more efficiently. All these opportunities add up to cost savings for consumers."

At present, pumped-storage hydro—a hydroelectric plant that generates power by using water previously pumped to an elevated reservoir during off-peak hours, when electricity is less expensive—remains the largest-capacity form of energy storage available. Another option, compressed-air energy storage—power plants "fueled" by air pushed into an underground cavern during times of low electricity consumption—has received increased attention because it can be expanded relatively cheaply. PowerSouth Energy Cooperative, a generation and transmission co-op based in Andalusia, AL, operates one of only a few compressed-air energy storage facilities in the United States.

"Pumped-storage hydro and compressed-air energy storage facilities generally operate when electric use soars," mentions John Holt, former NRECA senior manager of generation and fuels. "But geography limits where they can be located."

This means development of better batteries could be the key to wide use of energy storage technologies.

Before central station electric service came to rural America via the electric cooperative movement in the 1930s, farmers used "battery sets" that were recharged with windmills and ram pumps. In this situation, the ram is often useful—especially for pumping water uphill—because it is self-powered. A ram pump requires no outside power source other than the gravity from flowing water. Like conventional, sealed lead-acid car batteries, those contraptions could go only through a limited number of discharge/charge cycles before they were exhausted.

Fast-forward to 2013, and developers are aiming for batteries that can function through 80 percent discharge for 10,000 cycles—allowing for longevity of three decades or more.

"If you're supplementing wind or solar, you're going through a complete cycle on a daily basis," Bradshaw notes. "In other words, a long-cycle life remains key."

What Energy Storage Means for the Future

The U.S. Department of Energy forecasts that energy storage will significantly change the electric grid. With it, the nation could possibly create an electricity "stockpile" like the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. But initially, energy storage systems will make renewable generation sources more financially feasible—a critical step as U.S. lawmakers contemplate ways to create a more diverse energy production portfolio.

This technology can store electricity produced when the wind blows at night and the sun shines for use during times of "peak demand"—the electric utility industry's version of rush-hour traffic.

"Co-ops could also use battery storage systems to cut down on blinks—those momentary service interruptions that force you to reset your digital clocks," Bradshaw notes. "If enough energy is stored, power could continue to flow to homes during such an event."

He concludes: "Electric co-ops are leading the charge in researching and testing energy storage systems that will directly benefit consumers—from reduced operational costs and better service reliability to environmentally responsible power production."

The Biggest User

Estimating the energy used by your appliances can help determine if it's time to upgrade them.

You've had your fridge forever. With the exception of some crumbling parts of the seal, it's in pretty good shape and keeps your food cold. Why worry about budgeting for an upgrade?

For starters, inefficient appliances can have a huge impact on your monthly electric bill. Replacing a refrigerator made before 1993 with a new, ENERGY STAR®-rated model can save up to 30 percent on energy use each year.

When evaluating older appliances, one key question emerges: Which is the biggest user? To estimate the energy consumption of an appliance, use this general formula provided by the U.S. Department of Energy (EnergySavers.gov):

(Wattage × Hours used per day × Days used per year) ÷ 1,000 = Annual kilowatt-hour (kWh) used

[Remember: 1,000 watts = 1 kilowatt (kW)]

Then, calculate the annual cost to use an appliance by multiplying the kilowatt hours per year by your electric cooperative's rate per kilowatt-hour used.

For example, a PC and monitor:

[(120 Watts + 150 Watts) × 4 hours per day × 365 days per year] ÷ 1,000 = 394 kWh × 11 cents/kWh = $43.34/year

You can usually find the wattage of most appliances stamped on the appliance bottom or back, or on the nameplate. The wattage listed shows the maximum power drawn by the appliance. Because some appliances have a range of settings—just like the volume on a radio—the actual amount of power consumed depends on the setting used at any one time.

Keep in mind that as electronics and appliances become more high-tech, they draw power even while they are turned off. A good indicator of this—called "phantom load"—is to check the device for a light that stays on all the time.

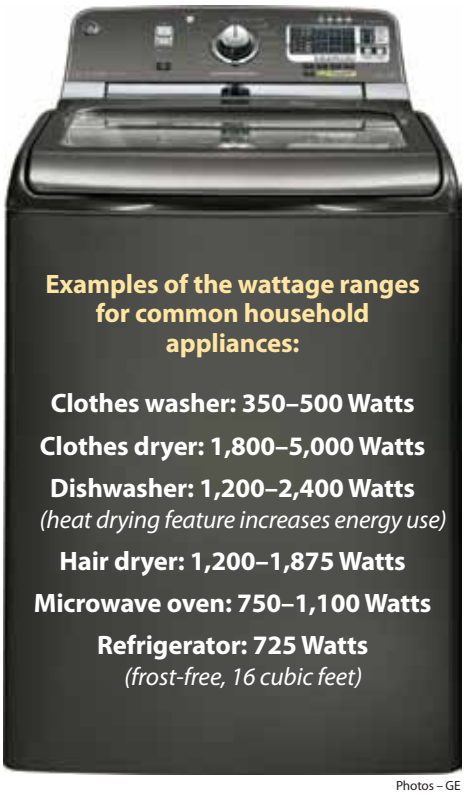
Phantom load will add a few watt-hours to energy consumption, but a few watt-hours on each of many electronic devices adds up. To avoid this silent power draw, unplug the device or invest in a "smart" power strip, which allows certain electronics—such as a cable box, which takes time to reboot after it's been unplugged—to continue using electricity while others can be completely shut down.

Once you calculate how much money you spend to run aging appliances, compare this to what it would cost to use more efficient models. There are other benefits, too. For example, not only have clothes washers become 64 percent more energy efficient since 2000, but the tub size has increased by 9 percent. With a new model, you can wash more clothes for less money every month.

If you don't want the hassle of adding up the potential savings, try visiting the Touchstone Energy® cooperatives' website, **TogetherWeSave.com**, which demonstrates how small changes such as replacing an appliance or unplugging electronics can lead to big energy savings. Under the "Add Up Your Savings" tab, you can walk through a typical home's kitchen, living room and other common areas, and make appliance upgrades and other energy-smart choices in each room. Each time you make a change, you're shown how much money you could save on your annual electric bill.

For more savings, find information about Michigan Energy Optimization programs and rebates offered by your electric co-op in this issue, or visit michigan-energy.org. And before making any energy efficiency upgrade, remember to check **energy.gov/savings** and **dsireusa.org** to find what rebates or incentives are available in Michigan.

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, ENERGY STAR®



Examples of the wattage ranges for common household appliances:

Clothes washer: 350–500 Watts

Clothes dryer: 1,800–5,000 Watts

Dishwasher: 1,200–2,400 Watts
(heat drying feature increases energy use)

Hair dryer: 1,200–1,875 Watts

Microwave oven: 750–1,100 Watts

Refrigerator: 725 Watts
(frost-free, 16 cubic feet)

Photos – GE

Cut Through Sales Hype Before Replacing Windows

Q: *We need replacement windows for our home, but every salesman makes his sound like the best and most efficient. How do I choose among the various frame materials, styles and glass types?*

A: It can be extremely difficult to sort through all the sales and marketing hype to make the proper replacement window decision, and there are many absurd claims out there.

First, it's important to note that because windows are expensive, energy efficiency should not be the only reason to buy new ones. Other efforts will save more money, and you can visit EnergySavers.gov to find ways to make your existing windows more energy efficient. But if you truly need new windows, there are some other considerations.

Proper selection depends on the characteristics of the window, the specific house, and your lifestyle. What is best for your next door neighbor may not be best for you. For example, you may want a view of a particular outdoors area or springtime ventilation, whereas your neighbor may keep the blinds closed and use air-conditioning continuously.

The main criteria for selecting replacement windows are frame material, window style, and glass type. From the energy efficiency standpoint, the glass type and window style are more important than the frame material, which has a greater effect on functionality, durability, maintenance and appearance.

FRAME MATERIALS The most common frame materials for residential windows are vinyl, fiberglass, wood, and clad wood.

Vinyl is energy efficient, virtually maintenance free, and made to the precise dimensions of the window opening instead of having to shim out standard sizes.

To attain adequate rigidity, the vinyl frame extrusions have many internal webs and chambers that create natural insulation. Plus, the vinyl material itself is a poor heat conductor. For greater R-value, several vinyl window manufacturers inject expanding foam insulation inside the chambers as the frame is assembled.

Always look for sash frames that have welded corners for strength. Because the outer window frame is screwed rigidly into the framing for the window opening, welded corners in it are not as important as with sash frames. If you select vinyl frames for large windows, especially in hot climates, they should have internal steel reinforcement. When vinyl gets hot in the sun, it loses strength and rigidity.

Fiberglass frames are extremely strong and can be painted any color to match interior or exterior house colors. Because the primary component is glass, these frames expand and contract with temperature changes at about the same rate as the glass panes to minimize stress. This characteristic is an advantage for dark frame colors exposed to the sun, which can create a substantial temperature range throughout the day and night. The strength of fiberglass frames is also an advantage for smaller windows because narrower frame cross-sections are acceptable. With other frame materials, a thicker frame can reduce the glass area too much.

Wood window frames have been around forever, and when properly maintained, have a very long life. Wood frames are also the most attractive, even if you choose to paint them. It's easier to cut more complex and sharp detail into wood frame surfaces.

The drawback of wood is some regular maintenance is required for appearance and energy efficiency.

Exterior vinyl- or aluminum-clad wood frames greatly reduce the maintenance requirements. The natural wood can still be exposed on the indoor surface so they look like wood windows indoors. Some vinyl and fiberglass frames are also available with natural wood indoor cladding to provide the appearance of real wood frames.

Further reading on windows:

- *Tips on style, including energy considerations:* **thehousedesigners.com/articles/selecting-the-right-window.asp**
- *Shopping tips:* **energy.gov/energysaver/articles/tips-windows**
- *Code requirements for new home construction and details on U-factor and SHGC:* **energy.gov/energysaver/articles/energy-efficient-windows**
- *Window ratings from the National Fenestration Rating Council:* **nfrc.org/WindowRatings/index.html** *and ratings label:* **nfrc.org/WindowRatings/The-NFRC-Label.html**

Source: Weathershield

Double-hung windows have hidden latches that allow each sash to be tilted in for easy cleaning.

STYLE The proper style of window depends primarily on the appearance and features you desire. For example, people often select double-hung windows because they can be tilted inward for easy cleaning from indoors.

Windows that close on a compression seal, such as casement and awning types, tend to offer the best long-term airtight seal. Casement types can also catch breezes and direct them into the house for natural ventilation.

GLASS Because glass is most of the window, the type you choose is the key to its energy efficiency. Double-pane glass with low-E (low-emissivity) coatings and inert gas in the gap between the panes is adequate for most climates. Triple-pane glass may make sense for severely cold climates.

The location of the low-E coating on the various pane surfaces, often more than one, affects whether the glass is better for winter or summer savings. You may want to select different glass options for different windows in your house.

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

Keep Safety in Mind With Do-It-Yourself Projects

If you are a homeowner, you know that there is always a project to complete around the house. Building a new deck, remodeling the basement, fixing the garage door, planting a tree…the list seems endless. But there's one item that needs to be at the top of your list, no matter the project, and that is electrical safety.

Photo – iStockphoto.com

Safety tips to keep in mind when tackling DIY projects include:

▼ Take a few minutes to prepare. Make sure you have the right tools, and check cords for cracks or frayed insulation and proper connections.

▼ Take note of potential hazards in the work area. Be sure to look up and around you. Always be aware of the location of power lines, particularly when using long metal tools like ladders, pool skimmers and pruning poles; when installing rooftop antennas and satellite dishes; or doing roof repair work.

▼ Be especially careful when working near power lines attached to your house. Keep equipment and yourself at least 10 feet from the lines. Never trim trees near power lines—leave that to the professionals. Never use water or blower extensions to clean gutters near electric lines. Contact a professional maintenance contractor.

▼ Use only extension cords that are rated for outdoor use when working outside. Keep your work area tidy and do not allow power cords to tangle.

▼ Use heavy duty, three-prong extension cords for tools with three-prong plugs. Never remove or bend back the third prong on extension cords. It is a safety feature designed to reduce electrocution or shock risks.

▼ If your projects include digging, like building a deck or planting a tree, call 811 to have utility lines marked before you begin. Never assume the location or depth of underground utility lines. This service is free, prevents the inconvenience of having utilities interrupted, and can help you avoid serious injury.

▼ Electricity + water = danger. If it is raining or the ground is wet, do not use electric power or yard tools. Never use electrical appliances or touch circuit breakers or fuses when you are wet or standing in water. Keep electric equipment at least 10 feet from wet areas.

▼ Make sure outdoor outlets are equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). If your outdoor outlets do not have them, use a portable GFCI. It is also a good idea to have GFCIs professionally installed in wet areas of the home—such as kitchen, bath and laundry.

For more tips on staying safe around electricity while you finish your projects, visit SafeElectricity.org.

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For the **Love of Wood**

Fine wood furniture warms our homes and continues to play a role in Michigan's economy.

We bought a table and two chairs a few months ago. They're counter-height and sit in a bay window where we can catch the southern sun on a bright winter day. The spot is also great for coffee and a book, lunch or an evening beer. The warm wood tones add luster to the room.

It's solid furniture, made from real cherry—not fiber board and veneer. One look and you know it was made by someone who loves wood.

It was made in that old furniture capital of America: Michigan. The pieces are not antiques that were made in long-ago Grand Rapids. They were made a few months ago in the heart of Michigan's Thumb.

The L. J. Gascho Furniture Company has been making furniture since 1986, after a young Lyle Gascho returned to the family farm near Pigeon and remodeled the shed and chicken house into a wood shop. He learned woodworking in a small furniture shop in northern Indiana, where he apprenticed with Amish and Mennonite craftsmen. His company is now made up of 22 small Amish and Mennonite wood shops located in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Michigan. All of these pieces are now delivered to the company complex on the Gascho farm for finishing. The furniture is sold in stores in the Midwest and a few Eastern states (ljgaschofurniture.com).

This furniture caught my eye when we were in an Art Van Furniture store. I was captivated by its simplicity, grace and quality. When I found out where it was made, I was sold. We're trying to buy American-made products, and though it seems to be getting a little easier, it still takes effort to find them.

As our state comes back from the economic edge, we seem to be chasing the newest thing to create jobs for the future. Technology is cool, and it's helped our auto industry return to competitiveness with the rest of world, but it's not a panacea, and not for everyone. Some of the start-up businesses regularly featured in this magazine's "Made in Michigan" series depend on technology, but most still rely on good, old-fashioned creativity and handcrafting. We ought to be fostering that kind of business development, too. Jobs that are attracted by incentives can leave the same way. Growing our own, like Gascho's, sometimes called "economic gardening," makes sense. While we're at it, we should be giving our kids the chance-in a school curriculum—to explore manual skills that also lead to meaningful work.

Before Michigan became known for cars, it was the furniture state. Once upon a time, Grand Rapids was the Silicon Valley of the craft era, a "Sawdust Valley" of sorts. After the Civil War, furniture-making became a booming business that continued to be a big part of our economy for the next century. Michigan-made furniture was sold and treasured all over the world. Furniture designers and manufacturers made Grand Rapids their headquarters, with associations of all kinds started to protect and grow the industry. A good bit of it remains, but now it centers on office furniture, since manufacturing in southeastern states, and then foreign imports, have chipped away at the home furnishings business.

Like many retired men, my dad dabbled in wood after he retired. He set up a woodworking shop next to the garage and turned out a series of shelves, quilt racks, picture frames and tables. We're happy to have a few of those pieces scattered around our house.

My own woodworking skills are still undeveloped and likely to remain so. Maybe that's why I'm drawn to heirloom furniture.

Still, I have one connection to our state's wooden past. For a blessedly brief time in the summer before my junior year of high school, a friend's father hired me and two friends to peel pulp. Eino laughed as we swatted mosquitos and no-see-ums that buzzed us incessantly, drawn by our sweat. Eino, a big, hearty Finn, was immune to the bugs. He dropped the poplar ("popple" in Yooper talk) trees with a chainsaw, cut them into 10-foot lengths, and taught us how to use a bark spud to skin the sinewy bark from the slippery white wood, destined for local paper mills.

It was hot, dirty work. We got so thirsty and hungry that we finished our water and food long before we should have. We were paid 10 cents a length, or "stick." Insect repellents being useless, our bodies were masses of bug bites. We lasted about two weeks, but the memory lasted a lifetime. I still itch and scratch when I see poplar trees, and I hear Eino laughing.

Mike Buda is editor emeritus of Country Lines. Email Mike at mike.f.buda@gmail.com or comment on his columns at countrylines.com/ramblings.

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