

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES



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

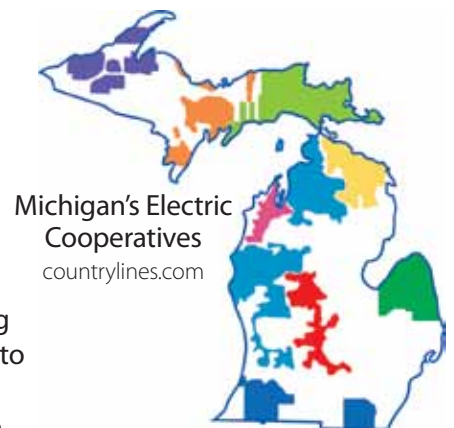
YOUR CO-OP

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*Not in all editions

On the Cover*

Cook up some holiday fun with your family by trying some dessert recipes sent in by our readers. Thanks to all who sent in recipes in 2013!

Photo – Robert Bruce Photography/robertbrucephotography.com





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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Capital Credits Are a Membership Value

Capital credits are the financial reward that comes with being a member of an electric cooperative.

Electric co-ops operate at cost—collecting just enough revenue to run and expand the business. When Great Lakes Energy has money left over, it's allocated back to you and other members as capital credits. When our financial position permits, the capital credits are retired and returned to members. We do this because you are an owner of this business which entitles you to share in the value it provides.

We are again issuing capital credit refunds this year. A \$5.3 million capital credit retirement package was approved in September by your cooperative's board of directors. It includes \$1 million in capital credits earned by members in 2012 and \$4.3 million from 1988. Members who purchased electricity in 2012 or 1988, or both, will receive a refund. Most members will receive their refund as a credit on their December bills.

By retiring capital credits from the oldest year (1988) and most recently completed fiscal year (2012), your board is able to reward both long-time and new members for their patronage. Also, all capital credits earned by members prior to 1989 are now retired.

Great Lakes Energy has retired capital credits every year since 2003. This year's retirement brings the total amount returned to members over that time to \$34.3 million.

They are called "capital" credits because your investments allow us to obtain the capital we need to operate and expand. Much of that capital goes for large-scale

construction of poles and wires. That includes emergency repairs, too, when big storms damage our system.

Everyone who serves you at Great Lakes Energy has a role in ensuring that your cooperative remains a strong, well-run business. It's their hard work that made the annual return of capital credits over the last 11 years possible.

An active capital credit retirement program is one key indicator of a financially healthy electric cooperative.

We join other electric co-ops who support their communities

by putting money back into their members' pockets. Nationally, electric co-ops have retired \$11 billion in capital credits since 1988, and \$768 million in 2012 alone. It's something we've been doing for years and makes our business model special. And that's *the cooperative difference.*



Steve Boeckman
Great Lakes Energy
President/CEO

Co-op Principles

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice. Your co-op returns profits to members because of principle #3:

- 1** Voluntary and Open Membership
- 2** Democratic Member Control
- 3** Member Economic Participation
Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative.
- 4** Autonomy and Independence
- 5** Education, Training and Information
- 6** Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- 7** Concern for Community



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Capital Credit Refund Coming

Watch for
it on your
bill!

Great Lakes Energy members who purchased electricity in 2012 or 1988 (or both) will receive a capital credit refund (also see p. 2). Most will see the refund applied to their December bill.

Refund amounts will be based on electricity purchases made by GLE members during 2012 and 1988. Members who spent more for electricity in these years will receive larger refunds. For example, a \$7.07 refund will be issued to the average residential member whose electricity purchases totaled \$1,236 in 2012. The refund will be more if the member also purchased electricity from the co-op in 1988.

Members with refunds over \$1,000 will receive a check.

Former co-op members entitled to a refund will also receive a check.

Since 2003, Great Lakes Energy has issued \$34.3 million in capital credit refunds to members.

Answers to Typical Questions About Capital Credits

Q. *What are capital credits?*

A. Capital credits are a key reason why you're more than just a customer. As a Great Lakes Energy member, capital credits represent your share of profits (called margins in the co-op world) that are generated when revenues exceed our operating costs. In a cooperative business, margins are not kept but instead are allocated back to the members who provide the revenue through the electric rates they paid during the year. Unlike investor-owned utilities, cooperatives do not have shareholder investor-owners. Our members are our investor-owners. Every time you pay your bill, you're making an investment in a business you co-own.

Q. *Why is the refund on my bill smaller than my neighbor's?*

A. Your share of the margins is based on the amount you spent for electricity during the years involved. If your neighbors spent more for electricity in these years than you, they will receive a larger refund.

Q. *Why are the refunds based on 2012 and 1988?*

A. Capital credits were retired from the oldest year (1988) and most recently completed fiscal year (2012) to allow both long-time and new members to receive the benefit. Also, all capital credits earned by members prior to 1989 are now retired.

Q. *What if I don't receive a refund?*

A. You should receive a refund if you were a GLE member who purchased electricity from us in 2012 or 1988, or both. If you do not get a refund, you may be a member who joined us in 2013 or assumed the electric account from a relative who is now deceased. We will provide you with instructions on how to claim any capital credit refunds that may be issued in the deceased person's name.

Anyone who plans to move off our lines should provide us with their new address for our records. Your assistance will help limit the amount of unclaimed capital credit refunds.

Q. *What about capital credits earned in other years? Will they be returned, too?*

A. Yes, we plan to continue retiring capital credits annually, provided financial conditions allow us to do so.

Q. *What do you do with the capital credits that haven't been retired and returned yet?*

A. They remain part of the capital invested in the cooperative that allows us to build, maintain and improve our power line distribution system and provide the other services that you expect as a GLE member.

Q. *Will I receive a refund again next year?*

A. It is too early to predict how well your cooperative fared financially in 2013. However, based on how well we've done in the past with returning capital credits, we expect to continue this program next year.

Including this year's retirement, a total of \$34.3 million in capital credits have been retired and returned since 2003.

Most importantly, we have remained financially strong despite economic conditions, changing energy prices, and other issues and challenges facing the electric industry today.

How Do Capital Credits Work?

Because electric co-ops operate at cost, any excess revenues, called margins, are returned to members in the form of capital credits.

5 Your co-op notifies you of how and when you'll receive your capital credits retirements.

1 Your co-op tracks how much electricity you buy and how much money you pay for it throughout the year.

Electric co-ops have retired

\$11 billion to members since 1988.

At the end of the year, your co-op completes financial matters and determines whether there are excess revenues, called margins.

4

When the co-op's financial condition permits, your board of directors/trustees decides to retire, or pay, the capital credits.

2 Your co-op allocates the margins to members as capital credits based on the amount they spend on electricity during the year.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation

Letters & More

Reader letters, Mystery Photo, phone scams and more. It's all here on your Readers' Pages.



Crisp Point Light

The [Sept. mystery] photo is Crisp Point Lighthouse, located on Lake Superior, 14 miles west of Whitefish Point. By car, it's accessible by following County Road 412 "forever" (about 18 miles off the main road). Our last visit was for our 45th anniversary in June 2012. Just after the Duck Lake fire in Luce County that threatened the whole area, CR 412 was the fire break line.

Built in 1904 as part of the U.S. Life Saving Station (USLS), it was part of a building complex established in 1878. The Light was automated in 1947. It is now manned by volunteer keepers. In 1965, all the USLS buildings and keepers' quarters were razed by the Coast Guard. Only the lighthouse and a reconstructed fog-signal building remain today. The light was deactivated in 1989, but is being restored and maintained by volunteers. Threatened by shoreline

erosion, it was once listed as the most endangered lighthouse on the Great Lakes. Much effort was put forth by the "Save Crisp Point Lighthouse" group, for a job well-done. Thanks for featuring one of the most remote land lights in Michigan.

– *Mary Ellen Krieg, Big Bay Alger Delta Cooperative*

This little light has come a long way. Not that long ago, I stood with my dad at the base of it, thinking Lake Superior only needed a few more feet and that tower would be hers. I spent many free weekends, as did my siblings, dad and many more volunteers keeping Lake Superior at bay. Thanks to many, this light is now much more accessible than it was the day I stood at Crisp's tower watching the waves lash her base.

– *Dianna Koteskey, Boyne City Great Lakes Energy*

Crisp Point Light is a favorite place that we visit at least once a year. They have raised enough money to build a gift shop with bathrooms (all solar powered) and they just installed the light and stones on the eastern shore to help stop erosion. It is a great place!

– *Cindy Miller, Ravenna Great Lakes Energy*

Getting Green...Again

While reading your September recycling issue, I was inspired to try, try again. My first attempt to get "green" was in the late '80s. I thought I could

simply be a good example to my children by making it fun and educational, as my sixth grade teacher had at the beginning of my conservation era. Those concepts were similar to what my father ingrained in us at home. We were expected to make sure we left a room better than we found it, and no shirking. Unfortunately, what worked for our family's version of conservation probably wouldn't have worked for society.

To error on the fun side, we set up bins in the garage. As our children grew into teen-hood, crushing cans was a good vent for them. Then the novelty wore off and we moved, and my plans were lost amidst packing. Excited to get my act together, I called our disposal company and asked how to get rid of batteries (I collected a milk gallon full) only to be told it was best to just put a few in our garbage can per week. The not-so-merry-go-round of recycling fizzled again. If only there was a "Crash My Bin" series for us recycling wanna-be's.

Now our kids are on their own, and hopefully recycling. I thought recycling would be easier as empty nesters. Not! We've made our last move, edging toward retirement. Yet, here I am back at the starting line reading an article that encourages me to try again. I read it several times and decided that instead of trying to race with what seems like Olympic conservationists, I will be content to be my own shade of "green." I may not

be the deep-green oxygen-rich "rally the community with style" type, nor will I be the barely-green slug that snarls at any form of segregated refuse. I will inch my way into leaving things better than I find them and fight against becoming a shirker, 'cause that would be, you know, yellow.

– *Sylvia Zion-Harris Midwest Energy*

Shale Gas Story

Your "Shale Shock" article [October] failed to mention the costs that are not yet being met by the fractioning drillers. Below-ground fresh water consumption by the fractioning process threatens, in some cases, the ground water supply for neighboring homes and farms. Contamination of surface water sources by undefined effluent is real and very serious and damaging to human beings and other animals for great distances downstream. These costs MUST be borne by the drilling companies, and the ultimate cost will be passed on to individual and corporate consumers. Please publish!

– *Rev. William Fleener Sr., New Era, Great Lakes Energy*

I was disappointed in the way your article 'glossed' over the impact of hydro-fracking in the quest for natural gas. I recently read these statistics:

Hydro fracking is responsible for the following: 450,000 tons of air pollution produced in one year; 250 billion gallons of fresh water used since 2005; 360,000 acres of land degraded



◀ DO YOU KNOW WHERE THIS IS?

Every co-op member who identifies the correct location of the photo at left by **Dec. 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; enter your guess at 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 Jan. 2014 issue.

The September contest winner is Mary Lapinski of Mason, who correctly identified the photo as Crisp Point Lighthouse in Luce County on Lake Superior.



Photo - Jayne Graham

September photo

since 2005; 100 million metric tons of global warming pollution since 2005.

Those 250 billion gallons of fresh water are contaminated and lost to our use forever. Can we afford that? I think you owe it to your readers to disclose ALL the facts, not just the ones that support your argument.

– Duane De Vries, Newaygo Great Lakes Energy

concerns about the environment. Our main objective is providing you with safe, affordable, dependable electricity in the most environmentally-sound manner possible.

In its fact sheet, “Questions and answers about hydraulic fracturing in Michigan” (tinyurl.com/o2yfr8j or call 800-662-9278), the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) provides answers to the concerns noted in your letter(s). One section notes that, “Many people are surprised to learn that 99.5 percent of ‘fracking fluid’ is water and sand.” Chemicals comprising the other .5 percent are also listed.

Michigan has some of the nation’s most protective regulations governing oil and gas development, and are updated regularly. New rules, developed with public input, were released just this week that strengthen regulation and provide some answers to citizen concerns.

The MDEQ also notes that fracking has been used on over 12,000 wells here for over 50 years “without any consequence to the environment or public health.”

Editor’s Note: Thank you for taking time to write. The natural gas article wasn’t intended to have a pro/con focus. Rather, it’s part of a series on how various fuels (including coal, nuclear, wind and other renewables) are used to generate electricity. It also shares the fact that natural gas use is increasing and predicted to majorly impact America’s energy future. Particularly, due to new emissions standards, power plants are moving away from burning coal and towards gas because most newer gas facilities produce emissions within range of the law limits.

Based on scientific research and facts, electric co-ops support natural gas exploration, but also recognize co-op member



Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

Consider using solar lights for outdoor lighting. Solar cells convert sunlight into electricity that can be stored in a battery and tapped at night to make light. Check manufacturers’ instructions to make sure your solar lights are situated to receive sufficient sunlight to recharge each day.

– Source: U.S. Department of Energy

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

Please call or mail information to your electric co-op, as they maintain the mailing list. See page 2 for your co-op’s contact information.

Scams Targeting Consumers Increase

The number of phone scams trying to get money and personal information from unsuspecting victims is increasing, reports the Better Business Bureau (BBB). Callers pose as representatives of utilities, Medicare, law offices, charities and even the BBB. Some scammers have even shown up at homes, demanding payments.



Electric co-ops are also being warned of increasing scams that target both the utility and their members, reports Timothy Johnson, deputy chief member counsel for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

The newest is a text message telling a co-op member their electric account has been hacked and asks them to text back “send now” to reactivate it. Immediately delete this type of text without replying, and call the co-op (preferably on a different phone). Texting back could completely compromise personal identification information.

Another scare-tactic is a call claiming your power will be cut off if you don’t immediately pay the bill over the phone with a credit card. Utilities nationwide are reporting similar scams. Sometimes they instead ask you to make a payment through a third-party pay system or by getting a prepaid debit card. Others may say you have an unpaid credit card or traffic ticket and threaten legal action if you don’t pay immediately.

In almost every situation, fraud experts say you should always be the one to initiate a call where you need to give personal information. It’s your money and your identity, so ask questions and stay alert.

If it’s utility-related, also contact your local electric co-op or other provider to report the incident. By calling directly, you can talk to a service representative who will confirm your bill and let you know of any problems with your account.

Your electric co-op will not call or email for your account number or password. Also, don’t trust caller ID to show a location because scammers use internet calling technology that may not reflect where they really are.

Here are other tips from the Better Business Bureau:

- Always confirm that you are speaking to a legitimate company representative. If there’s doubt, hang up and call the company back by using the phone number on your bill (not a number the scammer may have provided).
- Be wary of demands for immediate payment or in forms that are hard to trace, such as Western Union or MoneyGram.
- Never give your credit card, debit card, Social Security, ATM, checking or savings account numbers to anyone who comes to your home or asks for information by phone, text, or email. You should always be the one to initiate such transactions.
- Never allow anyone claiming to be a utility service person into your home unless you made an appointment and they show proper identification. Contact police if you become concerned for your safety.

If you have any concerns about calls or visits from utility representatives, please call your local electric co-op at the number on your bill immediately.



Strong Safety Message

Over 3,000 students and adults from various schools and organizations attended Great Lakes Energy's safety demonstrations during 2013.

It was another successful year of safety education GLE offers to the public as part of our commitment to the communities we serve.

HOT DOG! Great Lakes Energy's power line safety demonstrations show how we look out for our members by bringing our electrical safety message to them. We even roast a hot dog on the power line, as shown in this picture.

Spectators witness a custom-built hotline trailer with a 7,200 volt mini-distribution system of poles, wires and equipment used to show the dangers of contact with live electrical wires. Students watch the presenters try to make different types of clothing sizzle on the wire, but the excitement really starts when a hot dog burns on the wire. Presenters use a hot dog to demonstrate a human finger and the danger to

life-and-limb when coming into contact with electricity. Presenters also explain the many safety precautions that everyone should take around electricity or downed power lines.

This year, audiences for the demos expanded from fourth and fifth grades at area schools to include local fire departments and road commissions in the Great Lakes Energy service area. Since volunteers and employees at these organizations sometimes have to deal with live power during emergencies, they want to learn how to keep themselves and the public around them safe. Volunteers and employees at 10 fire departments and four road commissions attended GLE's safety presentations this year.

We thank all the schools and groups that allowed us to take our important electrical safety message to them this year.

If you know schools or organizations serving GLE members who could benefit from these safety presentations, invite them to find more information on our website at gtlakes.com/our-community/safety-demonstrations/. They may also call us at 888-485-2537, ext. 8174.

Good Third Quarter For Reliability



SAIDI Says

SAIDI (pronounced SAY-DEE) says Great Lakes Energy finished the third quarter of 2013 with fewer average outage minutes than for the same period last year.

On Oct. 1, 2013, average outage minutes totaled 126.24 compared to 137.94 minutes reported on the same date a year ago. We remain on-track to reach our 2013 reliability

goal, which is to not exceed 167 average outage minutes.

The goal is based on average outage minutes recorded in the previous five years during normal conditions. Typically, the outages are due to weather, animals, equipment failures, vehicle accidents and other causes.

The cooperative uses an industry standard index for determining average outage minutes. The System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI) is an indicator of the average amount of time a GLE member could be without power in a given year. Since it represents an average, some members actually experience no outage times while others experience more than the SAIDI number.

Weather-related outage events are factored into the SAIDI calculations, with the exception of major event days (MEDs). Storms that create MEDs, such as the December 2012 snowstorm, are not common and only happen once or twice a year across the co-op's entire service area.

Great Lakes Energy will continue to take measures to limit the weather's damaging impact on its distribution system. Investments in automated equipment, additional line protection devices, the use of new technologies, and continued intensive vegetation management activities within power line rights-of-way are all helping to get the lights back on safely and more quickly for members during storms.

The co-op's ultimate goal is to not exceed 90 average outage minutes a year. It will take time to do this, given our large 26-county service area and the financial resources required. We will continue to make improvements each year in areas where reliability still lags behind other electric co-ops.

Keep reading *Michigan Country Lines* for future SAIDI goal updates.

Rate and kWh Use Information Available

Please be advised that the following information is available to Great Lakes Energy members:

- 1) Complete rate schedules;
- 2) Clear and concise explanation of all rates that the member may be eligible to receive;
- 3) Assistance from the cooperative in determining the most appropriate rate for a member when the member is eligible to receive service under more than one rate;
- 4) Clear and concise explanation of the members' actual energy use for each billing period during the last 12 months.

The information can be obtained by contacting Great Lakes Energy at 1-888-485-2537.

Have Fun and Get Discounts, Too

Take advantage of local recreational opportunities and receive Co-op Connections® card discounts, too.



Use your Co-op Connections discount card at these participating area businesses and receive:

- **Cross Country Ski Headquarters**, Roscommon – 2-for-1 facility pass good anytime; includes groomed trails and day lodge.
- **Gaylord Bowling Center** – Buy one game of open bowling and get one free.
- **Cheboygan Bowling Center** – Free shoe rental with paid bowling games, valid during open play only.
- **Bay Tennis & Fitness**, Harbor Springs – 10% off memberships or group fitness punch cards.
- **America's Fitness Center**, Ludington, Hart, Whitehall – Free two-week trial membership for full-time area residents.

These and many other discounts are available through the Co-op Connections program to Great Lakes Energy members. Take advantage of bargains online or use your Co-op Connections® card at participating businesses that offer savings on dining, auto repair, health care, prescriptions, hotels, gifts, car rentals and more. Valuable offers from local and national merchants are available.

Save up to 85 percent on prescription drugs and refills at participating retailers. Other healthy savings discounts are available, too.

The best part about the Co-op Connections® card is it's free to GLE members. This is a discount card, not a credit card.

Don't have a card? Simply call us at 888-485-2537, ext. 8957, and start saving today.

Business Owners Benefit, Too

Local business owners are invited to join us in the Co-op Connections program. It's your opportunity to offer our co-op members valuable discounts. In exchange for your participation, we will promote your business and discount offers to our members at *no cost* in our magazine, bill inserts, website and other advertising. The program is designed to benefit your business and offer added benefits to our members.

Visit the "Co-op Connections" section at gtlakes.com for information.



GLE Directors Complete National Training

Great Lakes Energy directors (L to R) Paul Schemanski, Richard Evans and Robert Thurow recently completed training offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Schemanski completed the Credentialed Cooperative Director program that focuses on basic governance knowledge and the skills required of co-op directors. Evans and Thurow completed the Board Leadership Certificate program that focuses in greater depth on specific industry and governance issues.

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Extreme Efficiency Makeover

Wrap your home in savings.

Extrême home makeovers can update your living space, but an energy efficiency makeover will ensure your home performs at its peak. Everything from “low-hanging fruit,” like swapping out lightbulbs, to “bigger ticket” items such as replacing appliances with newer, energy-saving models is fair game.

Finding ‘Energy Hogs’

If you’re ready to take on a home efficiency makeover, the first step is to call your local electric co-op about an energy audit.

Your electric co-op or a qualified, licensed contractor can conduct blower-door tests or even imaging tests with an infrared camera.

less energy than a traditional incandescent bulb, lasts up to 10 times longer, and can save about \$40 in energy costs over its lifetime. Light-emitting diodes (LEDs) can last even longer, but costs are still high although they keep dropping as the technology becomes less expensive to produce.

A word of warning when purchasing new types of bulbs: You generally get what you pay for.

“Some manufacturers exaggerate claims of energy savings and lifespans, and cheaper models probably won’t last as long as higher-quality bulbs,” says Brian Sloboda, senior program manager for the Cooperative Research Network, an arm of the Arlington, Va.-based

dryer vents, and fans, and weather strip around doors.

There are also some not-so-obvious places for air to flow in and out of your home, notably outlets and behind switch plates. To see if you have air flowing through your outlets or switch plates, light a stick of incense, hold it in front, and watch for the smoke to be disrupted. You can find special sealing kits for outlets and switch plates at home improvement stores.

And don’t forget about applying weather stripping around your attic hatch or pull-down stairs. You may also want to install an insulator box to place over the opening. A kit costs around \$40.



Source—Polk Burnett Electric Cooperative

Infrared cameras can help energy auditors pinpoint areas of air loss.



Source—Boone Electric Cooperative

Sealing up cracks and joists in your attic will help your insulation do its job. Additional or a different type of attic insulation might also be necessary for the roof.



Sealing leaky ductwork will go a long way to improving your home’s energy efficiency.

Blower-door tests find out how much air your home loses every hour, while infrared cameras can more accurately pinpoint where your home loses air. Common culprits include windows, doors and roofs, but air loss can occur in small and innocuous places, such as recessed canister lights and outlets, too.

Next, evaluate your appliances, HVAC (heating, ventilation and cooling) system, and even landscaping for more opportunities.

Lighting

An ENERGY STAR®-qualified compact fluorescent lightbulb uses about 75 percent

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. “If you look for the ENERGY STAR label, that means the bulb exceeds minimum efficiency standards as tested by the federal government.”

He adds: “The best way to benefit is to purchase a more energy-efficient lightbulb the next time you need one.”

Visit energysavers.gov/lighting to learn about other lighting options.

Seal Air Leaks

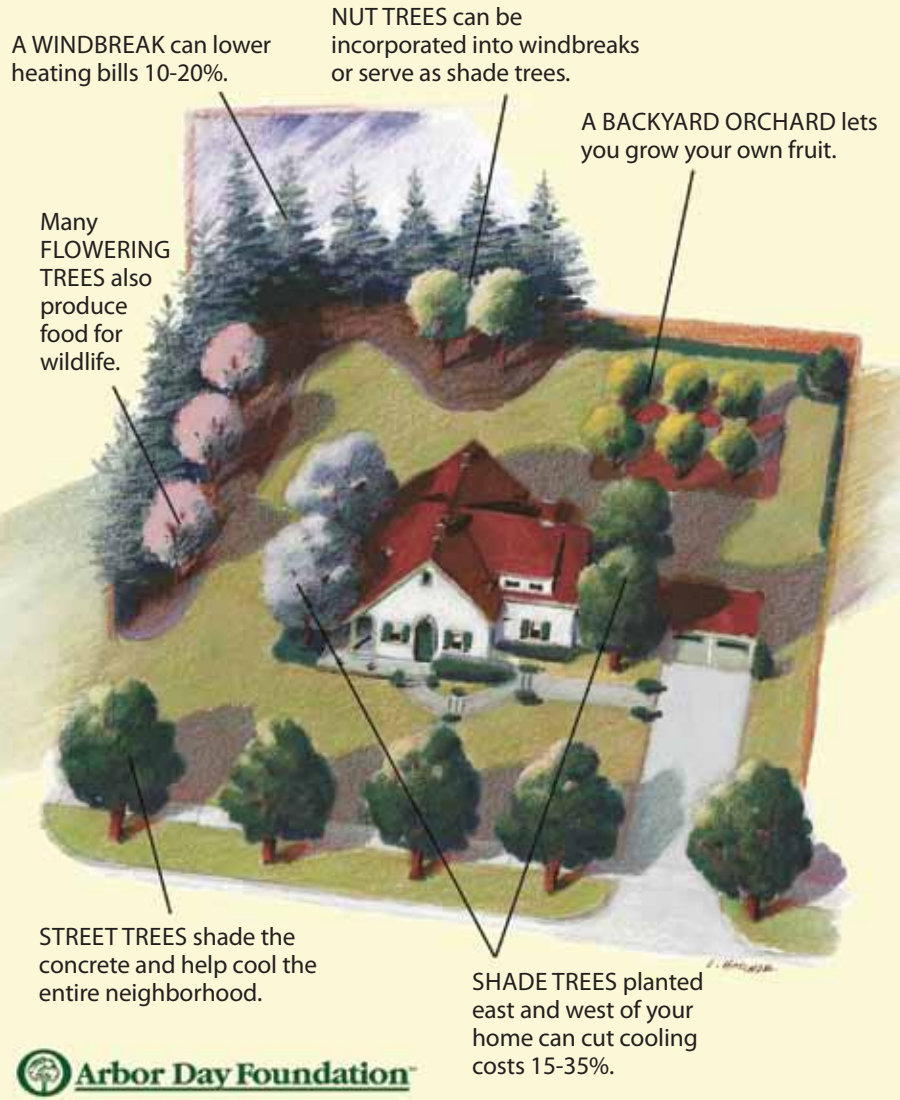
A tube of caulk and a roll of weather stripping can go a long way toward saving money on your electricity bill. Caulk around windows,

Sealing up cracks and joists in your attic will help your insulation do its job. But if an infrared scan reveals heat loss through the roof, additional or a different type of attic insulation might be necessary. Use the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) calculator to see how much is recommended for your climate: tinyurl.com/nbtmt5y.

Programmable Thermostats

A programmable model could help you save big bucks if it fits your lifestyle. This device will turn your temperature up automatically during times of the day you specify. But if you purchase one, it’s important to take

TREES around your home can increase its value up to 15% or more. The trees you plant remove CO₂ from the air, produce oxygen and give songbirds a home. Trees provide many other benefits:



the next step and program it—a step many people fail to take.

“A programmable thermostat is an excellent tool to improve your home’s energy efficiency, but you have to actually program it, and then you have to leave it alone,” Sloboda explains. “Fiddling with the settings won’t help—but getting the settings to where you’re comfortable when you’re home and then forgetting about it will really help with energy savings.”

Programmable thermostats are best for people who regularly leave their homes (without pets inside) for at least eight hours at a time.

Sealing Ductwork

Ductwork could be the most important piece of equipment to seal. If it’s exposed, you can do this yourself with a paintbrush and mastic, which you can purchase at any home improvement store. If not, hire a professional HVAC contractor.

Leaky ductwork will make your HVAC system work a lot harder than it should have to, which drives up your electric bills and wears out HVAC equipment more quickly.

“Ductwork is one of the first places you should look if you’re trying to lower your energy costs,” stresses Art Thayer, energy efficiency programs director for the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. “Sometimes, ducts aren’t even properly joined at all. That wastes a huge amount of energy. Sealing them up goes a long way to improving your home’s energy efficiency.”

Landscaping

Planting a tree or climbing vine not only adds flavor to your home’s landscape; it can also cool down your house when the sun beats down. Trees in the right spot can decrease your home’s energy use by up to 25 percent, according to DOE.

Plant deciduous trees—those that lose their leaves every year—to the south and west of your home, and you’ll gain shade in the summer and sunshine in the winter. According to DOE, a 6-foot, 8-inch deciduous tree will

begin providing shade the first year. And it only gets cooler after that, reaching your roof line in five to 10 years.

If you want shade all the time or need to block wind, choose evergreens. But when you’re preparing to choose your greenery, keep in mind that trees should never be planted underneath a power line. Call your electric co-op to find out how far from lines you should plant, and visit ArborDay.org to learn about the types of trees that are best for your home’s landscape.

Appliances

Appliances more than 10 years old don’t work as efficiently as newer ENERGY STAR-rated models. ENERGY STAR-qualified refrigerators are 15 percent more efficient than non-qualified models and are 20 percent

more efficient than models that simply meet the federal minimum standard for energy efficiency.

Clothes washers manufactured before 1998 are significantly less efficient than newer models; ENERGY STAR-certified washers use about 20 percent less energy and 35 percent less water than regular washers.

ENERGYSTAR.gov lists dozens of appliances and electronics that exceed efficiency standards; check there for more information.

Magen Howard writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation’s 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric co-ops.

Biomass Fuels Renewable Energy

This is fifth in a series on how electricity is generated. The others covered clean-coal technology, nuclear, wind power and natural gas. Watch future issues for stories about other fuel sources.

Biomass” consists of any biological material that can be burned as fuel to produce electricity, and it’s everywhere. A quick drive down a country road provides a virtual tour of this renewable energy resource: trees, grasses, crops, livestock waste, and even landfill gas. Recent advances in technology have made it possible to use tried-and-true biomass in more efficient ways.

Today, the U.S. has over 13,000 megawatts (MW) of biomass generating capacity, making it the third-largest source of renewable energy behind hydropower and wind.

How It Works

The basic premise behind this power source is simple: Burning actual biomass feedstock or methane gases produced by decomposition of organic material—in whatever form—creates steam, which then spins a turbine and generates electricity.

Given the wide variety of biomass resources available, questions on what to burn and in what manner can be answered in a number of ways:

▲ **Direct-fired systems:** This remains the most straight-forward, time-tested means of producing electricity with biomass. Quite simply, material (like wood “slash” from timbering operations) is shoveled into a boiler to produce heat and steam. Residual heat from the process can be piped off to heat buildings or re-used in other ways, increasing plant efficiencies.

▲ **Co-fired systems:** This method adds biomass to existing fossil fuel-fired plants, mixing wood chips with coal, for example. In this way, fossil fuel plants can lower emissions of certain pollutants while maintaining the same electrical output.

▲ **Gasification:** Slightly more complex, this process converts biomass to a gas through superheating. The resulting synthetic gas (syngas) can be burned in a conventional boiler or used as a substitute for natural gas.

▲ **Pyrolysis:** This technical term describes changing solid biomass into a different form. If biomass is superheated in an area void of oxygen, it will not catch fire but instead will liquefy. The resulting oil can be burned to generate electricity or used in making plastics,

adhesives and other products.

▲ **Anaerobic digestion:** Instead of burning biomass as fuel, this method amounts to piling up waste and waiting. As the name implies, bacteria (anaerobes) literally digest molecules in waste—be it livestock manure or garbage—and produce methane as a byproduct. The gas is then captured and burned to make electricity. Leftover material, in many cases, can be used as compost.

The Future of Biomass

Biomass has come a long way from putting a log on a fire. Applications continue to develop, many of which involve converting biomass to other forms to supplement petroleum use.

New sources of electricity and fuel production are researched every day, and soon, waste such as corn stover (stalks, leaves and husks) and wheat straw will be added to the mix. Non-food crops such as trees and grasses are also being researched for their energy-producing potential, especially in liquid form.

Scott Gates writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Energy Information Administration



Burning actual biomass feedstock or methane gases produced by decomposition of organic material—in whatever form—creates steam, which then spins a turbine and generates electricity.

Plants for a Cause

Tis' the season for giving, as is apparent by the pleas that appear in our mailboxes from worthwhile charities this time of year. Gardeners can get in on the giving in their own special way by purchasing plants that support a cause.

There have been some very successful campaigns to raise money for different causes by selling plants that are appealing to gardeners and carry a message of hope and inspiration.

Remember Your Loved Ones

'Hosta Remember Me' is a plant that was bred as "June" for Walters Gardens of Zeeland, MI. They renamed it in honor of one of their co-workers, Sandy de Boer, who succumbed to breast cancer in 2001. The folks at Walters Gardens have since raised over \$60,000 to give to the Grand Rapids affiliate of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure organization by donating a portion of the sales of this beautiful plant.

"We are proud to support this cause in the name of Sandy and countless others whose lives have been affected by breast cancer," says Susan Martin, director of Marketing communications at Walters Gardens, Inc.

If a plant could talk, I think 'Hosta Remember Me' would speak of hope and inspiration. The spring leaves emerge in a bright yellow with a narrow, dusty-green edge. By summer they turn a pure white, signaling peace and hope. Like most hostas, this variety is hardy throughout the state. To find it at a garden center near you, visit perennialresource.com and enter the plant name into their plant locator.

Susan G. Komen For The Cure (visit komen.org) was founded in 1982 by Nancy Brinker in honor of her sister, who died of breast cancer at the age of 36.

Pink in the Garden

If you're a hockey fan you may have heard of "Pink in the Rink," a hockey fundraiser for



Invincibelle® Spirit Smooth Hydrangea



Hosta Remember Me



Hosta American Hero

cancer research and awareness. There's also "Pink in the Garden," thanks to the Proven Winners company and their introduction of Invincibelle® Spirit Smooth Hydrangea. Sales of the Invincibelle Spirit has not only raised cancer awareness, but over \$645,500. Of each plant sold, \$1 is donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Sales of this popular plant and the corresponding Pink Day Fundraisers hosted at garden centers across North America, have helped Proven Winners raise 65 percent of their goal of \$1 million for cancer research.

This is the first pink hydrangea of its kind, according to Proven Winners. It will start flowering in early summer and continue blooming into fall. Like 'Remember Me Hosta,' Invincibelle Spirit is not only beautiful, but hardy even in the Upper Peninsula, which is better known for snowmobiling than lovely gardens!

Honor Our Heroes

Another fundraising campaign initiated by Walters Gardens benefits the troops that so courageously defend our country. For each

Hosta "American Hero" sold, the company donates 25 cents to Project EverGreen, a national nonprofit organization and creator of the GreenCare for Troops program. To date, Walters Gardens has donated over \$4,500 to the program, and the fundraising continues.

The GreenCare for Troops program (visit projectevergreen.org) offers military families assistance in sprucing up their yards by providing landscaping services while their loved ones are off serving their country. Thus far, over 9,000 military families have been connected with over 2,400 volunteers.

Like the heroes they honor, hostas are tough hombres, and the 'American Hero' variety is no exception. This particular hosta has bold variegation that will light up your garden and thick, durable foliage that looks great all summer while you honor the people that serve our country.

Perhaps this holiday season you can buy a gift card to a garden center near you that carries these beautiful plants, or keep them in mind when you're planning ahead for the next growing season.



Croff Craft Custom Driftboats



Small Boats With Big Attitude

Phil Croff wasn't planning to start a boat-building business when he constructed his first driftboat in 2006, using Michigan cedar and walnut. He was looking for a safe way to fish rivers at night—a time when big brown trout come out to feed and anglers wade cautiously to avoid stumbling in the dark.

Croff had worked in the construction trade for years as a finish carpenter. He envisioned a small-but-wide and very stable craft, just perfect for the “tip of the mitt” rivers he likes to fish. When others saw what he built, he began getting orders from anglers who wanted one. And so, a new Michigan business was born: Croff Craft Custom Drift Boats. Its catchy slogan is: “Small Boats with Big Attitude.”

Now, seven years later, Croff's boats are being showcased by Orvis Co., the Vermont-based fly-fishing giant, known for its discerning client base. The company's website features a special 12-foot Orvis Edition Croff Craft that sells for \$10,000.

“I had discovered night fishing for big

brown trout,” explains Croff, the 43-year-old master wood craftsman from Alanson. “It's very addicting, but I hated wading at night. So I got online, trying to figure out how to get on the water to do it. The rivers up here are small. There were 12-foot boats out there, but I couldn't find one stable enough.

“So, I told my wife, ‘I am going to build a boat.’ And her response was: ‘But you don't build boats.’”

Trude Bigelow Croff, his wife of 16 years, laughs about the story. She loves floating on rivers with her husband. Wooden boats have “atmosphere,” she notes, more so than fiberglass, the typical construction material. She's noticed that heads turn when people see a Croff Craft boat go by.

“When Phil told me ‘I am going to build a boat,’ I said ‘you've got to be kidding,’ Trude says wryly. “But Phil is that kind of guy, even in our house. He can't go out and buy something. He has to make it.

“He drew that design on a napkin and I'll be darned if he didn't do it.”

Croff Craft driftboats are handcrafted, one

at a time, to customer specifications. Croff builds them from 12 to 15 feet long. Their deck layouts can be customized, and each offers seating, dry storage, rod storage, an anchor system, and casting braces.

Building a driftboat requires 350-plus hours of labor, Croff explains. The hull is coated with epoxy and fiberglass and then sprayed with a Kevlar-enhanced polyurethane product. All of the other woods get two coats of epoxy and seven coats of clear varnish for a brilliant sheen. His custom oars are built from Douglas fir and clear cedar. Each boat is delivered on a trailer for \$14,000.

“Upper Peninsula cedar is the most outdoorsy wood there is,” adds Croff, a Petoskey native and Great Lakes Energy Cooperative member. “It is the lightest and most weather-worthy wood I can use to build these.”

Croff grew up fishing northern Michigan's small, spirited streams, so he knew a wide, stable hull was in order—one that draws just a few inches of water.

The Croff Craft driftboat is the product of an inspired moment in 2005 when Croff was sitting in a local pub with a buddy. They were comparing notes about boat design, so he grabbed a napkin and began sketching lines. The result became his signature design.

“He's gotten a lot of attention for it,” adds Trude, an artist and the owner of Beveled Edges, a Harbor Springs custom frame shop. “He built that first one for himself, but people keep asking him to build one.

“We still have that napkin. I am going to frame it someday.”

croffcraft.com



Page 12: Top – A Croff Craft three-seat driftboat model called “Traditional,” is the type Phil Croff uses to guide clients in his fishing guide business. A magazine for engaged couples, called “Destination I Do” (spring 2012), also featured his guided fly-fishing trips as an idea for a customized bachelor party. **Left** – Phil Croff gears up for some river fishing on one of his favorite northern streams. **Right** – To find out more about these handcrafted boats call 231-330-5762, visit croffcraft.com or join a blog about them at <http://tinyurl.com/k9tsnsr>.

Page 13: Phil Croff displays a beautiful 19-inch rainbow trout that he caught on an egg-fly while fishing the Pere Marquette River.

Give Thanks!

Kids who practice gratitude grow in health, happiness and learning.

My grandson D.J. performs a trick these days that makes us all melt. His dad calls out, “D.J., you’re welcome.” To which D.J. chirps, “Thank-you!” in his not-quite-2-year-old dialect.

He also says “thank you” when you hand him something he loves—say a blueberry, a ball, or his own special blankie.

Some experts would say that D.J. is too young to understand the concept of gratitude—that he’s just learning by rote what might better be taught later on. I’m not worried. His older sisters learned the habit of gratitude early and, wow, has it caught on.

Last November, the girls created a yards-long paper chain in preparation for Thanksgiving. On every link is written something they expressed thanks for. The attitude stuck, and over the past year they’ve initiated a “Thankful Christmas Tree” and a “Thankful Birthday Countdown” poster.

Now, here’s what’s great: this attitude of gratitude is propelling D.J. and his sisters toward health and happiness, and there is hard science to prove it.

Robert Emmons, a PhD, psychology professor at UC Davis, and arguably the world’s leading expert on the science of gratitude, has compiled the work of dozens of scientists and philosophers in his book, “Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007).

Emmons reports that in contrast to people who listed their hassles, people who wrote down blessings they were thankful for slept better, had more energy, suffered less illness, exercised more, were more optimistic about their future, and felt better about their lives.

And here’s a really surprising part: It turns out that the simple act of giving thanks can even affect how much our kids learn.

The best part is, modeling and teaching gratitude doesn’t cost a dime. It doesn’t take special training, and no special equipment is needed.

Ann Voskamp, author of the best-selling

book, “One Thousand Gifts,” posted a blog describing “15 Happy Ways to Grateful, Joyfilled Kids.” Here is just a sampling of her ideas:

▲ Post a sticky note on the mirror that asks, “*What are you grateful for right now?*”

▲ Make space for thanks. Fill a window or wall with sticky notes of thanks. Hang a paper banner or “Grateful Tree” at the back door and invite the whole family (guests, too) to grab a pencil and writing down one or two gifts every time they come in or out the door.

▲ Leave out a basket of thank-you notes, an invitation to always give thanks to someone.

▲ Leave a “Family Gratitude Journal” permanently open on the counter.

▲ Tuck a note into a lunchbox or a coat pocket inviting kids to focus on what’s good, and write it down. Share their finds every night at dinner.

▲ Take the “no complaining” challenge. Dare to go all day with no complaining. Slip a rubber band or bracelet on your wrist and every time you complain, move it to the other wrist. Celebrate with a special treat when the whole family can go the whole day without moving their bands.

▲ Model gratitude yourself. More is caught than taught. Intentionally live wholesale gratitude. *Let your family see your joy!*

Whatever you decide to do, establish your own daily ritual of sharing thanksgiving...not just in November, but all year long. Chances are, you’ll experience a happier, healthier family.

NOTE: You can read Anne Voskamp’s entire blog post at aholyexperience.com/2012/03/how-to-help-raise-grateful-kids/

Not your style? Check out the PBS Parents article, “10 Ways to Raise a Grateful Kid” at pbs.org/parents/special/article-ten-ways-raise-grateful-kid.html

Call 2-1-1 For Heating, Human Services Help

Thanks to 2-1-1, a free community health and human services information and referral service, help is available to people in need.

By simply dialing 211, available 24 /7, callers will be connected with a trained, caring professional who will confidentially assess their situation, identify their needs and refer them to local resources for help.

The 2-1-1 program provides information and referral for:

● **Basic Human Needs:** food, clothing, shelter, utility assistance, etc.

● **Physical and Mental Health:** medical information, crisis intervention services, support groups and counseling, etc.

● **Support for Older Americans and People with Disabilities:** home health care, adult day care, independent living, workforce training, Meals on Wheels, etc.

● **Support for Children, Youth and Families:** quality childcare, early childhood programs, after-school programs, summer camps, mentoring, tutoring, etc.

● **Crisis Calls:** suicidal thoughts, domestic violence, Public Health Emergencies, etc.

The implementation of 2-1-1 is spearheaded nationwide by United Way and information and referral agencies in states and local communities.

Individuals who need information on how to volunteer or have items to donate to their community can also connect by calling 211.

For more information about services in Michigan, visit uwmich.org/2-1-1; nationwide, visit 211us.org; or, simply dial 211.

Michigan 2-1-1 Service Areas By Regional Call Center

(as of March 2013)



Home Heating Assistance Programs • 2013–2014 Season

Program: Winter Protection Plan

Contact: Your Local Utility Company

# in Household	150% Poverty Guide Maximum Income
1	\$17,235
2	23,265
3	29,295
4	35,325
5	41,355
6	47,385
7	53,415
8	59,445

Add \$6,030 for each additional member.

Note: All customers 65+ are eligible regardless of income. Customers are responsible for all electricity and natural gas used. At the end of the protection period, participants in the plan must make arrangements with their utility company to pay off any money owed before the next heating season.

The **Winter Protection Plan** protects eligible senior and low-income customers from service shut-offs and high utility bill payments during the winter months (Nov. 1–March 31). You may enroll between Nov. 1 and March 31. If you are an eligible low-income customer, your utility service will remain on from Nov. 1 through March 31, if you:

- pay at least 7% of your estimated annual bill each month, **and**
- make equal monthly payments of 1/12 of any past due bills.

When the protection period ends (March 31), from April 1 through Oct. 31, you must begin to pay the full monthly bill, plus part of the amount you owe from the winter months when you did not pay the full bill. **Participation does not relieve customers from the responsibility of paying for electricity and natural gas usage, but does prevent shut-off during winter months.**

You qualify for the plan if you meet at least one of the following requirements:

- you are age 65 or older,
- you receive Department of Human Services cash assistance, including SSI,
- you receive Food Stamps,
- you receive Medicaid, or
- your household income is at or below the 150% of poverty level shown in the Income Guidelines chart at left.

Senior citizen customers (65 or older) who participate in the Winter Protection Plan are not required to make specific payments to ensure that their service will not be shut off between Nov. 1 and March 31. However, seniors are encouraged to pay whatever they can during the winter so they will not have large, unmanageable bills when the protection ends.

Program: Home Heating Credit

Contact: Mich. Dept. of Treasury

# Exemp.	Max. Income	# Exemp.	Max. Income
1	\$12,642	4	25,929
2	17,071	5	30,328
3	21,500	6	34,757

Add \$4,429 for each additional member.

You can apply for a **Home Heating Credit** for the 2013 tax year if you meet the income guidelines listed at left, or you qualify based on alternate guidelines including household income, exemptions, and heating costs. Additional exemptions are available for seniors, disabled claimants, or claimants with 5% or more of their income from unemployment compensation.

If you qualify, you may receive assistance to help pay for your winter heating bills. Forms are available mid- to late-January wherever tax forms are provided, or from the Michigan Dept. of Treasury (517-636-4486, or michigan.gov/treasury). The Home Heating Credit claim form must be filed with the Michigan Dept. of Treasury **before Sept. 30, 2014**.

Program: Earned Income Credit

Contact: U.S. Treasury Dept.,
Internal Revenue Service
irs.gov/EITC

Michigan Dept. of Treasury
michigan.gov/treasury

The **Earned Income Credit (EIC)** is a refundable federal income tax credit for low-income working individuals and families who meet certain requirements and file a tax return. Those who qualify will owe less in taxes and may get a refund. Even a person who does not generally owe income tax may qualify for the EIC, but must file a tax return to do so. If married, you must file jointly to qualify. File Form 1040 or 1040A and attach the EIC.

You may claim a **Michigan earned income tax credit** for tax year 2013 equal to a percentage of the federal earned income tax credit for which you are eligible. Visit the website or see the 2013 MI tax booklet for additional information.

Program: Crisis Assistance Program

Contact: Local Michigan Department
of Human Services (DHS)
michigan.gov/mdhs

State Emergency Relief Program (SER): You do not have to be a DHS client to apply. All energy-related SER requests, including furnace repairs, heat and electricity services must fall within the crisis season, which now runs from Nov. 1 through May 31 each year. Program is subject to funds availability to assist low-income households, and other requirements. However, if you receive a DHS cash grant, you may vendor part of it towards heat and electric bills. Contact your local DHS or call the Home Heating Hotline, 855-275-6424.

Program: Low-Income Home Weatherization

Contact: Local Community Action Agency

You may be able to receive help with weatherizing your home to reduce energy use if you meet low-income eligibility guidelines (150% of poverty guidelines shown above) and funding is available. **Weatherization** may include caulking, weatherstripping, and insulating. Contact your local Community Action Agency for more information. Visit mcaaa.org to find one in your area.

Program: United Way

Contact: Call 2-1-1 or UWmich.org/2-1-1

2-1-1 is a free phone service operating 24 hours per day providing callers information about resources that may be available in their particular area to help with utilities and other needs. Learn more at UWmich.org/2-1-1.

Program: Medical Emergency Protection

Contact: Local Utility Company

You are protected from service shut-off for nonpayment of your natural gas and/or electric bill for up to 21 days, possibly extended to 63 days, if you have a proven **medical emergency**. You must provide written proof from a doctor, public health or social services official that a medical emergency exists. Contact your gas or electric utility for more information.

Program: Shut-off Protection for Military Active Duty

Contact: Local Utility Company

If you or your spouse has been called into **active military duty** you may apply for shut-off protection from your electric or natural gas service for up to 90 days. You may request extensions. You will still be required to pay, but your utility company will help you set up a payment plan. Contact your utility service provider.

Program: MI Energy Assistance Program

Contact: Utility or 2-1-1 in late November

Agency assistance through MEAP, which includes funds from the Low Income Energy Assistance Fund (LIEAF), will be available Dec. 1. Visit Michigan.gov/mpsc for details about organizations that have received MEAP grants. Shut-off protection is provided Nov. 1-April 15 for all residential customers (regardless of income) of any Michigan electric that has chosen not to collect 99 cents monthly from its customers for the LIEAF fund.

See story on p. 14 or dial 211 for more information on heating and other human services programs and help.

HOLIDAY DESSERTS



Red Velvet–Raspberry
Tiramisù Trifle

Holidays are a wonderful time to spend with family and friends, but don't forget about the great food! These festive dessert recipes will bring holiday cheer in every bite.

Red Velvet–Raspberry Tiramisù Trifle

1 c. seedless raspberry jam
1/4 c. black raspberry liqueur
1/4 c. fresh orange juice
2 8-oz. containers mascarpone cheese
2 c. heavy cream
1/3 c. sugar
1 t. vanilla extract

Red velvet cake, broken in pieces
3 6-oz. containers fresh raspberries

Whisk together first three ingredients in a small bowl. Stir together mascarpone cheese in a large bowl. In another bowl, beat heavy cream at high speed with an electric mixer until foamy; gradually add sugar and vanilla, beating until soft peaks form. Stir one-fourth of whipped cream into mascarpone using a rubber spatula; fold in remaining whipped cream. Arrange one-third of Red Velvet cake pieces in a 3-quart trifle dish, drizzle with one-third of jam mixture, top with one

container of raspberries, and dollop with one-third of mascarpone mixture. Repeat layers twice. Cover and chill 4 to 24 hours before serving. Make snowflake garnishes by tracing snowflake templates on wax or parchment paper with royal icing. Let them dry at room temperature; peel off and place on top.

Amy Breimayer, Westphalia

Chocolate–Cherry Bars

2 c. all-purpose flour
2 c. quick-cooking oats
1 1/2 c. sugar
1 1/4 c. butter, softened
1 21-oz. can cherry pie filling
1 t. almond extract
1/4 c. semi-sweet chocolate chips
3/4 t. shortening

In a mixing bowl, combine flour, oats, sugar and butter until crumbly. Set aside 1 1/2 cups for topping. Press remaining crumb mixture into an ungreased 9x13-inch baking dish.

Bake at 350° for 15 to 18 minutes or until edges begin to brown. In a bowl, combine pie filling and extract; carefully spread over crust. Sprinkle with reserved crumb mixture. Bake 20 to 25 minutes more or until topping is lightly browned. Melt chocolate chips with shortening in microwave; stir until smooth. Drizzle over warm bars. Makes three dozen. These bars are not only delicious but very festive-looking.

Bonnie Gauld, Fife Lake

Cranberry Pudding

1/2 c. boiling water
2 t. baking soda
1/2 c. dark molasses
1 1/3 c. flour
1 t. baking powder
1 c. whole, raw cranberries

Sauce:

1/2 c. sugar
1/2 c. whipping cream
1/4 c. butter

Mix water, soda and molasses. Add flour and baking powder. It will foam and look terrible. Add cranberries. Pour into a quart-size greased, steamed pudding mold or coffee can. Cover tightly. Place in a steamer or large pan with about 2 inches of water. Cover tightly and steam gently for two hours or until center is set. When ready to serve, unmold and slice or scoop out of steamer into individual bowls. For sauce, mix ingredients together. Heat over low heat until butter melts and mixture is hot, but not boiling. Pour sauce over pudding while sauce is still hot. This is my grandmother's recipe, and I've never seen one quite like it.

Chris McAfee, Pointe Aux Pins

Double Chocolate Bread Pudding

2 packages (4-serving size) chocolate cook & serve pudding and pie filling
5 c. milk
5 c. french bread cubes
4-oz. package Baker's German Sweet Chocolate, chopped

In a large bowl, stir pudding mixes into milk with wire whisk for 1 minute or until well blended. Stir in bread. Pour pudding mixture into 9x13-inch baking dish. Sprinkle evenly with chopped chocolate. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes or until pudding just comes to a boil in the center. Remove from oven and let stand for 10 minutes before serving. Serve warm. Store leftovers in fridge.

Marcia Scully, Atlanta

Photography by: 831 Creative



Pretzel Treats

Pretzel Treats

- 1 bag small round pretzels (or waffle-style)
- 1 bag M&M's®
- 1 bag Hershey's Kisses®

Put small round pretzels on cookie sheet and place an unwrapped Hershey's Kiss® on top of each pretzel. Put in 200° oven for 5 minutes. Take out and add an M&M to each top.

Caroline Dinse, Idlewild

Layered Christmas Jello

- 1 small package lime jello
- 1 c. pineapple tidbits, drained
- 1/3 c. drained pineapple juice
- 1 c. boiling water
- 1 package unflavored gelatin
- 2 T. cold water
- 8-oz. package cream cheese (softened)
- 1/4 c. milk
- 1 large package strawberry jello
- 2 c. boiling water
- 1 can whole cranberries

Dissolve jello in boiling water. Add pineapple and juice. Chill in a glass serving bowl. Sprinkle gelatin over cold water to soften. Add cream cheese softened with milk. Mix well and spread over firm lime layer. Dissolve strawberry jello in hot water. Add cranberries; cool. Pour over cheese layer. Chill until firm. This dessert is prettiest when served in a trifle-shaped bowl, but any container works.

Jan Seidel, Gaylord

Oatmeal Cake

- 1 1/4 c. boiling water
- 1 c. quick oatmeal
- 1/2 c. shortening
- 1 c. brown sugar
- 1 c. white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/3 c. flour
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1/2 t. nutmeg
- 1 t. baking soda
- 1 t. cinnamon
- 1 1/2 c. raisins (optional)
- 1 c. walnut pieces (optional)

Pour boiling water over the oatmeal and let stand for 20 minutes. Cream shortening and

sugars, then add softened oatmeal and rest of ingredients; raisins and walnuts last. Pour into greased and floured 9x13-inch cake pan. Bake at 325° for 40 to 45 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. This cake does not need icing, as it is moist and tastes just as good without it.

Jean Onsted, Adrian

Cinnamon Cream Cheese Delight

- 2 containers crescent rolls
- 2 8-oz packages cream cheese (softened)
- 1 1/2 c. cinnamon sugar
- 1 stick of butter

Spray a 9x11-inch pan with non-stick cooking spray. Place one layer of the rolls on bottom. Mix cream cheese with 1 cup cinnamon sugar until smooth. Smooth mixture over first layer of rolls. Layer another set of rolls. Melt butter and pour over second layer. Sprinkle top with remaining cinnamon sugar. Bake at 350° for 30 to 35 minutes. To make it as a holiday dessert, sprinkle top with colored sugar. Enjoy!

Deborah Wright-Finedell, Kalamazoo

Christmas Coconut Cake

- 1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 2 c. sugar
- 6 egg whites
- 2 1/4 c. cake flour
- 2 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1 t. coconut flavor
- 1 c. unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 c. flaked coconut
- garnish: 2 1/2 to 3 c. flaked coconut*

Icing:

- 2 sticks butter
- 1/4 c. shortening
- 1 1/2 lbs. confectioner's sugar (3/4 of 32-oz. bag)
- 1 t. coconut flavor
- 4-5 T. unsweetened coconut milk (shake can well)
- 1 1/2 c. flaked coconut

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter and flour two round 9-inch cake pans. With electric mixer, beat butter with sugar for 3 minutes, until light and fluffy. Slowly add egg whites until blended. In a large bowl, sift together the cake flour, baking powder and salt. Add flour mixture to butter mixture until blended; don't overmix. Divide batter evenly between the cake pans. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until lightly golden and firm to touch. Completely cool in pans on wire rack, then carefully unmold. Using a serrated knife, cut each cake horizontally into 2 equal layers (creating a total of 4 layers).

For icing, cream butter, shortening and confectioner's sugar in a stand mixer until light and fluffy. In another bowl, combine coconut flavoring and coconut milk; add 1 cup flaked coconut. Beat coconut mixture into fluffy icing. Remove 2 cups of the whipped icing and stir 1 1/2 cups flaked coconut into it; set aside.

When ready to ice cake, place first cake layer on serving dish. Dollop one-third of frosting with coconut flakes and spread evenly; continue for each layer. With the remaining frosting, frost the top and sides of cake. Finish by gently pressing the remaining 2 1/2 to 3 cups flaked coconut on frosted cake. Serve on elegant glass cake stand.

Karen Belinger, Rothbury

Pecan Derby Pie

- 1 9-inch pie crust
- 3 eggs
- 4 T. butter, melted
- 1/2 c. granulated sugar
- 1/4 c. brown sugar
- 3/4 c. corn syrup
- 2 T. flour
- 1 t. vanilla
- 1 T. bourbon (optional)
- 3/4 c. chopped pecans
- 1/2 c. chocolate chips

Prick piecrust with fork; set aside. In blender, beat eggs, butter, sugars, corn syrup, flour, vanilla, bourbon and pecans. Blend until combined. Spread chocolate chips on bottom of crust. Pour egg mixture over chocolate and bake at 350° for 45 minutes.

Jennifer Sylvester, Sand Lake

Submit your recipe! Contributors whose recipes we printed in 2013 have been entered in a drawing: *Country Lines* will pay the winner's January 2014 electric bill (up to \$200)! The winner will be announced in the January 2014 issue. A new contest will begin with the January issue.

Thanks to all who send in recipes! Please send in your favorite "Cooking For One" recipes by **Dec. 10** and "Easter" recipes by **Jan. 10**.

Mail (handwritten or typed on one side) to: *Country Lines* Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email recipes@countrylines.com.



Visit recipe editor Christin McKamey's website, veggiechick.com, for healthy, vegetarian recipes and info!

Save Energy While Enjoying the Holidays!

Chances are you're already planning your festivities and pondering that gift list. But there is one thing you may not have thought about yet—your energy use. The holidays are one of the most energy-intensive times of year, but making even small adjustments can turn into big savings! Read below to find out how Great Lakes Energy's Energy Optimization program can help.

1. Deck the halls with LED lights. Light-emitting diode (LED) holiday lights are a hot item for many reasons. They use up to 90 percent less electricity and last up to 10 times longer than standard bulbs, produce almost no heat, and are nearly impossible to break.

2. Be smart about lights. Wait until it gets dark to turn on your holiday lights and turn them off before going to bed. Or, put them on a timer to automatically save energy and money.

3. Choose energy-efficient electronics. Any equipment with a plug comprises, on average, up to 15 percent of your electricity use. When buying electronics this holiday (plan on surprising your spouse with a new



water heater?) or anytime, shop the ENERGY STAR® label. You'll get all the same features plus proven, long-term energy savings.

4. Become an efficient chef. No, we're not talking about cranking out 50 pounds of peanut brittle in an hour. It's easy to become an energy-efficient cook! First, preheat your oven as late as possible—there's no sense in wasting heat while you gather ingredients. Second, don't open the oven door to check on your treats—use the oven light instead. Opening the oven door lowers the temperature by as much as 25 degrees, increasing cooking time and wasting energy.

5. Turn down the thermostat when you have guests. With extra warm bodies in the house, you won't need to crank the heat. Save energy and keep your guests comfortable by turning down the thermostat. Also, remember to lower the thermostat when you're asleep or away. **BONUS:** Get an Energy Optimization rebate with a programmable thermostat.

6. Give your appliances a vacation. Before heading off to grandma's house,

unplug as many appliances as possible because many of them continue using energy even when they are turned off. You can also safely lower your thermostat to 55 degrees and turn your water heater to the lowest setting.

7. Take advantage of rebates. Before ringing in the New Year, take advantage of 2013 Energy Optimization rebates and tax credits! There are many options available for residents, businesses and farms.

Rewards are available on countless energy-efficient products, including:

- Lightbulbs
- Furnaces
- Water heaters
- Refrigerators
- Washing machines
- Clothes dryers
- Commercial equipment
- Farm systems
- Smart power strips



Visit michigan-energy.org to view current incentives or call 877-296-4319 for details.

Going, going...



Claim your rewards before 2013 is GONE!

Looking for ways to save money this holiday season and beyond? Great Lakes Energy's Energy Optimization program offers rebates on LED holiday lights, ENERGY STAR® appliances, smart power strips and more. **Take advantage of holiday sales AND Energy Optimization rebates** to save now and into the New Year.

ENERGY TIP: Make your energy efficiency purchases by December 31, 2013, before rebates run out and tax credits expire.

ONLINE: michigan-energy.org PHONE: 877.296.4319



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

They Love Their Geothermal

A posting on Great Lakes Energy's Facebook page about special incentives for heat pumps got a quick reply from GLE member Larry Bolhuis of Middleville.

"21 years with geothermal on GLE," he wrote. "Absolutely love it! It's all indoors, too, so nothing to rust or gather leaves and junk or make noise."

His comment is shared by his wife, Brenda.

The geothermal unit's annual operating cost to heat and cool their 3,200 square-foot home—which includes a full, finished basement—is \$367.

Not included is the extra cost of the supplemental heat generated by a large computer system in the home. The system draws 2,000 watts and runs constantly at a cost of just over \$5 a day. It adds heat to the home year-round, which creates lower heating and higher cooling loads for the geothermal unit.

"Some heat from the computer system is extracted to heat my water and the remainder helps heat the house," says Larry, who works with businesses as a computer technology consultant, writer and speaker. In the summer, his geothermal system helps heat the water, too.

The main reasons for the low operating cost are:

- A geothermal system is very efficient because far less energy is required to move heat (from ground to home and vice-versa) than to generate it. In this case, the heat is solar energy stored in the earth.

- A well-insulated home and energy-conscious use of the thermostat mean lower heating and cooling costs. The Bolhuis home has 18 inches of blown-in insulation in the attic, 6 inches in the walls, plus high-efficiency (thermal pane, argon-filled) windows.

- He took advantage of GLE's Controlled Heating rate for electric heat and receives a 3 cents/kWh discount on the operation of the geothermal system.

Their geothermal unit extracts heat from 50- to 55-degree well water to warm the home. In the summer, heat removed from the home is dumped back into the ground-water passing through the geothermal unit and discharged into a separate drainfield not connected to his septic system. With the temperature raised to between 75 and 80 degrees, the discharged water is also used for irrigation and to fill his pool.

Their maintenance costs are minimal as the couple's first geothermal system lasted 16 years before failing. "We could have repaired it but instead we replaced it as the new unit was much more efficient than the older one and did a much better job cooling," Larry says. The current unit is also smaller and operates quietly.

"Geo units have gotten so much better even though they were good when we bought our first unit," he adds.

Most of the maintenance to their system is cleaning and replacing air filters. "Depending on the water quality, you may need to flush

Bolhuis Home Geothermal Heating & Cooling Usage/Cost

	kWh	Cost*
August 2013	347	\$25.46
July	375	\$34.23
June	398	\$36.33
May	40	\$3.65
April	327	\$29.85
March	632	\$57.69
February	740	\$67.54
January	835	\$76.21
December 2012	341	\$29.21
November	65	\$5.56
October	10	\$0.86
September	7	\$0.60
TOTALS	4,117	\$367.19

* Cost based on 3 cents/kWh electric heat discount. PSCR charges and sales tax included.

Find a dealer who can select the right heat pump system for you by visiting earthcomfort.com

EARTHCOMFORT
Natural Heating and Cooling

out the heat exchanger," Larry says. "Our water quality is very good and we never flushed the original system's heat exchanger in 16 years."

As an experienced owner, he also offered tips for others interested in a geothermal system. Finding a reputable dealer who can size and install the system correctly is critical, he says. A geothermal system, for example, that is oversized for cooling may not be able to reduce the humidity to a comfortable level resulting in a "cold-but-clammy" house.

A reputable dealer can help determine if the ductwork is suitable for adding geothermal to an existing home. A geothermal unit moves more air than a conventional furnace, so the ductwork must be sized to handle it.

Bolhuis warns that setting the thermostat back at night with a geothermal system could lose rather than save money. It takes the system longer to recover when the thermostat is dialed back up again than a fossil-fueled furnace. To speed up the heating process, back-up electric heaters within the geothermal system kick on and are much more expensive to operate.

If an open-loop system like the Bolhuis' is your choice, ask about variable speed motors and cycle stop-valves that can help the well pump run more smoothly and efficiently.

Electric Heat Pump Rebates

When you have either a geothermal or air-source heating and cooling system installed in your home you may be eligible to receive up to \$500 in rebates from Great Lakes Energy, and even more in tax credits.

■ **Geothermal System** – \$500 rebate with minimum requirements of EER 14.1, COP 3.3 closed loop; EER 16.2, COP 3.6 open loop; EER 15, COP 3.5 direct expansion.

■ **Air Source Heat Pump** – \$250 rebate with minimum requirements of HSPF 8.2, EER 11.5, & SEER 14 for split systems and HSPF 8, EER 11 & SEER 14 for package systems.

Tax Credits

For full details on the tax credits available, please visit the Department of Energy website at doe.gov or contact your tax preparer.

All rebates are subject to verification. The program is subject to change or cancellation at any time without notice.

For more information, email controlprograms@glenergy.com or call 1-888-485-2537, ext. 8957. Ask about our lower electric heating rates, too.



MDEQ Issues Draft Air Quality Permit

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) issued a draft air quality permit in late September for installation of an air quality control system (AQCS) at the Presque Isle Power Plant in Marquette.

Wolverine Power Cooperative and We Energies announced plans to pursue joint ownership of the power plant in 2012. In exchange for an approximate one-third ownership in the facility, Wolverine agreed to fund construction of a state-of-the-art AQCS. “The new AQCS will meet current and

proposed air quality requirements,” explains Brian Warner, vice president of environmental strategy for Wolverine. “It will help keep an important source of electric generation in the Upper Peninsula running.”

The MDEQ will review public comments on the draft air quality permit and is expected to approve or deny the permit by year end. The air quality permit is one of several regulatory authorizations needed to proceed. The Michigan Public Service Commission, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin and Federal Energy Regulatory

Commission have approved the partnership between Wolverine and We Energies at the Presque Isle Power Plant.

Located on the Lake Superior shore, the plant consists of five coal-fueled units built between 1974 and 1979. Under the joint ownership agreement, We Energies and its employees will operate both the plant and AQCS.

Construction of the AQCS is expected to take two years to complete. Operation of the power plant with the new controls is planned for 2016.

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Historical Society Now Offers Bicentennial Farm Signs



It's been a great year for our state's Centennial Farm Program. “The Historical Society of Michigan has certified 41 Centennial and 14 Sesquicentennial farms,” says Kellie Bolster, membership and awards coordinator. “There have also been 22 orders for replacement Centennial signs.”

As a result of this growing interest, the Historical Society is now certifying Bicentennial farms and has updated the Centennial and Sesquicentennial certification applications, making them more organized and easier to understand. The new signs look similar to the Centennial signs, with the exception of the “Bicentennial” wording.

Visit hsmichigan.org/programs/centennial-farm-program/ apply-or-order/ to find the new applications, call 517-324-1828, or email bolster@hsmichigan.org.

Sizing Up Storm Doors

A variety of options can fit any efficiency need or budget.

Q: *I feel air leaks around my doors, so I'm thinking about adding storm doors. I want ones that also have screens, but my budget is limited. Is it worth-while adding storm doors, and what should I look for?*

A: Even though it is a relatively small area compared to the entire wall of a house, just one door can lose a significant amount of energy. Even insulated doors typically have some glass, which have lower insulation value, and inadequate weather stripping will allow air to leak through.

Before buying anything new, make sure your primary doors are as airtight as possible. Adding storm doors can certainly improve the energy efficiency of almost any house, but they are not designed to correct efficiency problems of an old, warped primary door.

If possible, buy replacement weather stripping for your existing doors from the original manufacturer. If you can't find it, most home improvement stores sell many generic types that should fit. Pry off the old door molding, fill any gaps around the framing with non-expanding foam insulation, and caulk around the door frame.

The quality of the storm door construction is important for a nice appearance, long life, and security. It must withstand a lot of abuse, so it's best not to pick the cheapest one. From an energy efficiency standpoint, however, the most important factors are the dead air space between the storm and primary doors and how well it blocks the wind.

Buying an aluminum storm door and installing it yourself is the typical low-cost option. They're very lightweight and made to fit standard-size openings, so installing one is a simple do-it-yourself project.

When you see the door on display attached to a wooden frame at the store, the aluminum frame will feel very strong. When you open the box at home, you may find the unattached aluminum frame strips are somewhat flexible. Be careful not to kink them during handling. Apply a generous bead of caulk on the back of the aluminum frame when screwing it to

the door frame.

If you plan to use natural ventilation in the summer, a self-storing triple-track storm/screen door is your most convenient option. The screen panel has its own vertical track in the door, so it never has to be removed. At the end of winter, just slide one of the glass panels down and slide the screen panel up for ventilation.

A fairly new design of storm/screen door uses a spring-mounted roll-up retractable screen that is built into the door. When you're ready for ventilation, just lower the glass and pull the screen down as far as you wish. This design is attractive because the screen is hidden away during winter without having to remove and store the screen panels.

If your budget allows, some very attractive all-wood framestorm/screen doors (made with mortise and tenon joints) are available. These are strong and secure, but do require some regular maintenance-similar to any wood door. For added security, ornate wrought iron storm doors are available with actual deadbolts and very tough, break-in resistant stainless steel screens.

If your budget is really tight, consider making your own storm door. It is easy to mount hinges in the existing door opening for the storm door. Make a simple wooden frame with only the top half open and a plywood lower panel. This panel improves rigidity

The following companies offer storm/screen doors:

- **Cumberland Woodcraft**
800-367-1884
cumberlandwoodcraft.com
- **Emco Specialties**
800-933-3626, emcodors.com
- **Homeguard Industries**
800-525-1885
home-guard.net
- **Pella**
800-374-4758, pella.com
- **ProVia Door**
877-389-0835, proviador.com.



Source—Pella

It is easy to install a storm door. With pre-assembled parts, no cutting is required, and pre-drilled installation and assembly holes eliminate any guesswork.

for a more airtight seal and better durability.

Most home improvement stores carry sheets of clear acrylic plastic to mount in the frame. Make another narrow wooden frame slightly larger than the open half and mount the acrylic sheet in it. Screw it over the storm door opening. Make a similar frame with screening in it for summer use. If you prefer more durability and efficiency, and a perfectly clear view outdoors is not critical, select double-walled polycarbonate instead of acrylic. You can barely break the polycarbonate, even with a big hammer.

Nail spring-steel weather stripping in the door opening on the latch side, and top and bottom. This type of weather stripping is very durable where there is sliding friction. Adhesive-backed foam weather stripping is effective in compression on the hinge side.

Send inquiries to James Dulley, Michigan Country Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit dulley.com.

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



Safety Tips for Portable, Standby Generators

When Superstorm Sandy knocked out power to millions on the East Coast last fall, many of those affected turned to portable, standby generators to help keep food safe, lights on, and safety and medical equipment operating. The growing popularity of emergency generators has resulted in several million being placed in homes and small businesses across the nation.

However, only a small percentage are hooked up or used correctly, so it's important for consumers to understand proper generator safety steps.

"Generators can be a lifesaver for some and can improve the quality of life after a natural disaster such as a hurricane, tornado or earthquake," explains Molly Hall, executive director of the Safe Electricity program. "However, it's critical that proper safety precautions be taken to prevent accidents that could affect you, a family member, neighbor or utility lineworker."

Generators can be installed temporarily or permanently. A permanent generator is wired into a house by a qualified electrician using a transfer switch. This protects you, your neighbors, and repair crews from electricity backfeeding onto power lines. This can seriously injure anyone near those lines, especially co-op crews working to restore power. A temporary generator fired by gas or diesel fuel should not be attached to a circuit breaker, fuse or outlet.

Improper use of a standby generator can lead to injury or death, so please follow these usage tips to keep you and your family safe:

- ▶ Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions to properly ground the generator. Be sure you understand them before starting it up.

- ▶ Standby generators should have a transfer safety switch installed by a professional. Portable generators should never be plugged directly into a home outlet or electrical system—use an extension cord to plug appliances into an outlet on the generator.

- ▶ Never operate a generator in a confined area, such as a garage. Generators produce gases, including deadly carbon monoxide. They require proper ventilation.

- ▶ When venturing outside after a severe storm, stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard.

Portable generators are helpful during an extended power outage, but they can be extremely dangerous if not used properly.

Assume that any downed or dangling wires you encounter are electrical, and treat them as if they are energized. Warn others to stay away, and then contact the electric utility.

- ▶ Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions. Use a generator only when necessary when the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain

under it. Make sure your hands are dry before touching a generator.

- ▶ When refueling a generator, make sure the engine is cool to prevent a fire, should the tank overflow.

- ▶ Make sure nothing is plugged into a generator when you turn it on. This prevents a surge from damaging your generator and appliances.

- ▶ Keep children and pets away from the generator, which could burn them.

Safe Electricity is the safety outreach program of the Energy Education Council, a nonprofit organization with over 400 electric co-op members and many others who share the mission of educating the public about electrical safety and energy efficiency.

Please contact Great Lakes Energy before installing a generator. GLE also sells special meter bases for safely installing a generator. For more safety information on the use of portable and standby generators and safety after a storm, go to **SafeElectricity.org**.



Easy Way to Pay

Your electric bill can be automatically deducted from your checking or savings account on the due date with Great Lakes Energy's Automatic Bill Payment program. It's easy, reliable and best of all, there's no charge for this service.

■ **How will I know the amount of my bill?** You will still receive a billing statement indicating the amount due and the due date. If you have a fixed billing amount, you will retain the current payment amount and due date and may not receive a statement unless the amount or due date changes.

■ **How do I know the bill has been paid?** Each payment will be clearly itemized on your next billing statement and financial institution account statement.

■ **Can payments be withdrawn from a savings account?** Yes, however, federal regulations limit the number of transactions on some accounts. Contact your financial institution for information about your specific account.

■ **What if I change financial institutions?** You will need to complete a new enrollment form and allow approximately 30 days for the change to go into effect. If you decide to cancel your participation in the plan, simply give us a call.

To enroll, call 1-888-485-2537, ext. 8924, or visit gtlakes.com/billing/automatic-payment-program.

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call toll free 866-632-9992 (voice) or 800-877-8339 (TDD) or 866-377-8642 (relay voice users). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Drums of Joy

Volunteers beat the drums made from huge hollow tree sections at the Howard Christensen Nature Center in Kent City, which recently received a \$1,256 People Fund grant. The grant helped pay for equipment to remove dead and dying trees that will make the nature trails safer for more than 12,000 annual visitors who use the center for everything from hiking to picturesque wedding settings. The downed trees are cut into firewood and sold with proceeds used to help support the nonprofit center.

You could win! If you sign up to participate in the People Fund program by Dec. 1, you could win a \$100 billing credit.

People Fund contributors allow Great Lakes Energy to round up their electric bills to the nearest dollar each month. The rounded-up amounts, which averaged 41 cents monthly in 2012, are used to award grants to food pantries, senior citizen centers, youth programs and other local charities and community groups.

Become a permanent contributor to the People Fund program and earn your chance to win. Winners are selected at random from two drawings held each year. Two winners are selected from each region (north, central, south) for a total of six winners each drawing. All GLE members who are already permanent contributors to the People Fund are automatically entered in the drawings.

No billing round-up contributions are used to fund this contest. Prize costs are covered by Great Lakes Energy as part of our commitment to support local communities and say "thanks" for supporting the People Fund.

Get involved and help the People Fund expand to meet the growing needs of local people young and old. You can also enroll online by clicking on the QR code at right.



Friendly Skies

If you're flying somewhere this Thanksgiving, good luck. Not only will you be joining millions of other passengers in the friendly skies on one of our busiest travel weekends, but you'll be on planes that have become more like cattle cars than the civilized cabins they once were. (Thanksgiving is our biggest travel weekend, but not the biggest for air travel. Those largely fall in the summer, travel experts say.)

Flying isn't what it used to be. No longer can we run into an airport terminal and book a same-day flight without a satchel of credentials, a body search and myriad questions from security personnel. Seats sure seems smaller, too (even as we get bigger). We have to pay extra for luggage, drinks (even water, on some airlines) and snacks. We can carry-on our own food if we don't wish to subsist on peanuts (also missing on some airlines). Some of this inconvenience is the result of security needs, but others are profit-driven, thanks to fewer airlines with fewer seats to sell.

We can still call a travel agent or airline to book flights, but it's often faster and cheaper to go online and do it yourself. That's intimidating, too. An internet search can reveal a squadron of possibilities, ranked by cost and date; organized by airline. Do you fly out in the morning or on the red-eye? Direct flight or connecting? Carry-on luggage or checked? By the time you're done making decisions, you're worn out and don't even want to think about packing.

My wife Barbara and I have family scattered around the country, so flying is sometimes the only smart option. Still, we try to avoid it—mostly because it's often more trouble than it's worth. Flying is easy from gate-to-gate, but home-to-home can be a different calculation. We figure that the hours waiting in airport lines and sitting on the tarmac might be worse than driving or even staying over-

night on the way, if the scenery is decent and interesting, the traffic is acceptable and we can visit friends along the way.

Then there are the germs. Is there any better place to catch an illness (other than a hospital)? That closed cabin with hundreds of people inside is the perfect place to latch onto a tricky virus just waiting for a host. Almost every trip we've taken recently has ended with one or both of us sick. When I see an airplane now, I think of it as a ferry for viruses spreading from one part of the country to another.

But serendipity does happen on planes sometimes.

A month ago we went to Arizona, where we visited Barb's brothers, drove a restored 1960 MGA into the mountains, participated in an old car show, and got sunburned.

We got there in five hours' flying time, but it took us all day with a plane change in Denver, and we never caught up on the sleep we missed until days after we got back home. We had a great time, but we don't travel as well as we once did.

The trip back from Phoenix was uneventful until we changed planes in Denver. We had only 36 minutes between planes. I asked the flight attendant if we would have a problem making our connection. "You'll have the same problem everybody else will have," she said. Like that really answered my question. It occurred to me that the airline would like to charge extra for information, too.

We made our flight, but sat apart because adjoining seats weren't available when I booked it. I sat next to a mother and her young son, Jayce. He was a handful, as all 22-month-olds are bound to be on a long flight. (I remember those days with our boys.) They were on their way to visit his grandfather in Macomb County. Jayce had trouble sitting on his mother's lap. He squirmed and jostled, ate snacks and drank milk, kicked the seat in front of him, tried coloring and watching a



"Cars" video, played with a "Cars" metal replica, and started dropping it in hard-to-reach places. His mother tried reading to him. He wasn't having it.

I found a card of oxygen mask instructions in the seat pocket, folded it to make a tunnel, put it on the tray and showed Jayce how to push the car through. It intrigued him for several minutes. Then he started calling me "daddy."

He finally settled down, with about a half-hour left in our flight, as his mother had predicted. He grabbed one of my fingers in his small hand and pulled it to him. He fell asleep in his mother's lap, holding my hand in his lap. There is nothing quite like the human connection of a child's grasp.

So, sometimes flying is worth it.

But it's always good to be back home, in Michigan, with reasonable temperatures, four seasons, real trees, snow, lakes, and your own bed.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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





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