

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



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— A LEAP INTO —  
UNCHARTED WATERS

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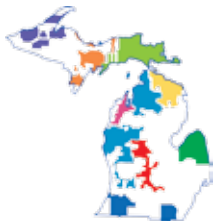
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1. 7 Series unit uses approximately 900 watts while running in speeds 1-2.





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Photo—Rudy Malmquist



## ON THE COVER

A true family affair, Miller Family Farm, in Carney, MI, has mastered the system of aquaponics.

Standing left to right: Dawn Miller, Rob Miller, Sandy Miller, Fred Miller  
Kneeling left to right: Jake Miller, Hannah Miller

Photo—Emily Prehoda

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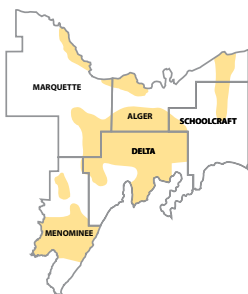
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Guess Our New Mystery Photo And Win A Bill Credit!  
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*Alger Delta Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*

**algerdelta.com**

# Learning The Cooperative Principles



**Tom Harrell**  
Chief Executive  
Officer

Many folks might not know this, but seven co-op principles were originally developed in 1844. One of them contained the simple phrase, "Promotion of Education." Today, Cooperative Principle Five states that all co-ops should promote "Education, Training and Information." This is intended for the employees, members and the community at large.

Principle Five is based on the simple premise that the more people know about the cooperative business model, the better equipped they are to understand the benefits of that business model and promote better use of the co-op and its resources.

While there are almost 1 million people in the U.S. that work for cooperatives of all types, very few of us learn about the seven cooperative principles in school. That creates a real challenge when trying to explain the cooperative difference. People understand an investor-owned business is designed to make a profit or that a nonprofit, like the Red Cross, is designed to serve the community. What many don't know is that cooperatives have both an economic and a social purpose. Co-ops are organized and operate as not-for-profit businesses so we can pass along the best price for our goods or services to you, the member.

Since the co-op business model is normally not taught by teachers, it is up to Alger Delta and other co-ops—through publications like *Country Lines*—to ensure that you know about the differences and benefits of being a co-op member. Consumer surveys by Touchstone Energy and others consistently affirm that people prefer to do business with a cooperative when they have a choice.

So why is the co-op business model less well known? One theory is that there is not enough academic research about co-ops, which is often the source for curriculums. Another reason offered is that the co-op community is so diverse that teaching about it only creates confusion. The first issue about the lack of research is being addressed by the Cooperative Business Research Institute at Indiana University. The second can be addressed by taking an interest in learning about Alger Delta or any other co-op through their websites, meetings, or even by stopping by the offices in person. These are all good ways to better understand the cooperative model of which you, as a member-owner, are a part.

By knowing more about how cooperatives operate, you are in a better position to participate as member-owners. We always welcome your questions and comments and your help to promote the Cooperative Way of doing business. ■



# Electricity: The Gift That Keeps On Giving

**W**hen you get your electric bill in late January, you might be shocked—no pun intended—by what you see, especially if the bill is higher than normal. Alger Delta did not increase rates, but your bill might have gone up for other reasons. Let's take a look at what might make your electric bill higher than you expect.

**The Billing Period.** One of the first things to be aware of is the length of the billing period. It can range between 28 and 35 days depending on what day of the week is the last day of the month. The longer the billing period, the higher the bill will be—simply because there are more days included in the billing period. Alger Delta tries to keep the billing period equal to the calendar month. Even so, December and January are back-to-back 31-day months. Also, your December, January and February bills all include holidays. Your December bill includes Thanksgiving. Your January bill includes Christmas, and your February bill includes New Year's Day. If you see an uptick in your electric bill for those months, here are some things that may have contributed.

**Holiday Entertaining.** Cooking and food preparation take a lot of energy, and holiday entertaining usually involves plenty of eating and drinking. Even simple presentations such as hot or cold drinks and cookies can add to your energy bill. The refrigerator typically opens and closes more frequently than normal when entertaining, too.

Whether you're entertaining for an evening or your guests are staying for the holidays, they will use water, and that takes energy. Every time your visitors wash their hands, use the toilet, take a shower or launder their clothes, the water pump—

and therefore the electric meter—is running. Guests usually bring chargers for their electronic gadgets and they might bring other things, too, such as hair dryers, curling irons, c-pap machines, and humidifiers.

More people in your home also means more opening and closing the doors as people are coming and going. Every time the door opens, warm air escapes and the demand on the heating system increases. No matter what kind of heating system is in use, more energy will be consumed as the system works to replace the heat loss.

**Lights.** Lighting accounts for approximately seven to 10 percent of a typical electric bill. It's typical to have more household lights on, more frequently, and for longer durations. This might be for entertaining, but it's also because December and January have the least daylight hours. Holiday lighting also adds to the electric bill.

**Electronics.** For several years now, electronic gadgets have been the hottest items on most peoples' Christmas list, and they usually get used more in the depths of winter. Everything from a new TV with Surround Sound to a full set of rechargeable power tools all need to be plugged in. Also, most electronics are "phantom" power users—which means they consume energy anytime they are plugged in unless they are switched off using a power strip or some similar arrangement.

These are just a few of the reasons that electric bills may be higher following the holidays. If you have questions about your electric bill, call one of Alger Delta's Member Service Representatives at 906-428-4141 for assistance. ■

# NO BARRIERS

ADVENTURES FOR RURAL VETERANS—APPLY BY JAN. 31

Michigan electric cooperatives believe there should be “No Barriers” for veterans with disabilities. That’s the name and idea behind CoBank’s No Barriers initiative. Michigan cooperatives are looking for qualified veterans\* from our local community to participate.

No Barriers is a five-day, all-expenses-paid, expedition in Colorado, designed to help veterans with disabilities transform their lives through curriculum-based experience in challenging environments (climbing, rafting and hiking).

**If you are a disabled veteran, or you know of a disabled veteran in our community who would like to participate in the No Barriers program, please complete the form on our website:**  
**[countrylines.com/nobarriers](http://countrylines.com/nobarriers)**

*\*Must have VA disability rating to be eligible.*



## Storm Watch: Plan Ahead And Be Prepared

**W**hen winter temperatures drop and storms hit, it can be challenging to stay safe and warm. Your electric cooperative cares about your safety, and we want you to be prepared. Heavy snow and ice can lead to downed power lines, leaving you without power. During a power outage, our crews will continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but there are a few things you can do to prepare yourself.

### Winterize Your Home

- Inspect and maintain heating equipment and chimneys to ensure they’re working safely and properly.
- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows to stop air leaks and related heat loss.
- Freezing temperatures can cause water pipes to burst. Wrap pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic. Allow faucets to drip during extreme cold to avoid frozen pipes.
- Consider installing storm windows for better insulation. From the inside, windows can also be covered with plastic.

- Make sure everyone knows where the fire extinguisher is and how to use it. House fires occur more often in winter, especially from using alternative heating unsafely.

### Stay Warm And Safe

Plan ahead for alternate heating or other places you can go. A fireplace, propane space heater or woodburning stove is sufficient. Fuel and wood-burning heating sources should always be vented and used with caution—make sure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working. If you use a portable generator, make sure it is placed outside the home for proper ventilation. Be careful not to overload it, and use a proper outdoor extension cord that can handle the electric load.

Visit [ready.gov](http://ready.gov) or call 1-800-BE-READY (1-800-237-3239) for more tips on preparing for winter storms. ■





ELECTRIC CO-OPERATIVE  
**YOUTH TOUR**



## Michigan Co-ops Inspire Tomorrow's Leaders Today With **YOUTH TOUR 2017**

An exclusive summer highlight for the best and brightest youth in the state.  
**June 10–15, 2017**

Designed to inspire the leaders of tomorrow, Youth Tour teaches the brightest students of Michigan about their past—and helps equip them with the skills they need to be Michigan's next generation of energy-minded leaders. This is a once-in-a-lifetime, all-expenses-paid leadership travel opportunity for high school sophomores and juniors (going into their junior or senior year this summer) and is sponsored by Michigan's electric cooperatives. From the battlefields of Gettysburg to the halls of Congress in Washington, D.C., the program explores the leadership lessons of our nation's history and will immerse students in the cooperative spirit.

Youth Tour offers a unique opportunity to build leadership and public speaking skills, enhance students' knowledge of the cooperative form of business, and build life-long friendships with other student-leaders from across the country.

**Youth Tour applications accepted  
between now and Feb. 28.**

### **Trip Highlights Include:**

- Visit the Gettysburg Civil War battlefields
- See Fort McHenry, birthplace of "The Star Spangled Banner"
- Explore the Washington, D.C., monuments and memorials
- Attend a theater performance at the Kennedy Center
- Explore the museums of the Smithsonian Institution
- Pay respects at Arlington National Cemetery
- Meet with Michigan Senators and Congressmen
- Batter up! Enjoy a Washington Nationals baseball game

**Additional information and online application  
are available at [CooperativeYouthTour.com](http://CooperativeYouthTour.com).**

# Agribusinesses: Save Energy And Money Now

Reducing the amount of energy used to power your farm equipment is a smart way to cut costs. Upgrade your outdated equipment today to save energy and receive cash incentives from the Energy Optimization program.

## Rebates For Energy-Efficient Products And Equipment

Receive cash back when you purchase and install energy-efficient measures, such as: low-energy livestock waterers, fans and controls, milk-handling equipment, variable speed pumps, dairy refrigeration tune-ups, lighting upgrades and controls, water heaters, and more.

## Farm Energy Audit

The Energy Optimization program has partnered with the Michigan Farm Energy Program (in conjunction with Michigan State University

Extension) to offer a \$500 rebate toward the cost of a farm energy audit. The audit will help you identify where and how to implement practical, energy-saving alternatives to outdated, inefficient equipment.

## Rebates For Custom Projects

Have an energy efficiency project in mind, but don't see it on our list? The Energy Optimization program provides rebates for innovative and unique energy efficiency projects designed to meet specific needs, such as long-day lighting systems, milk harvesting and cooling equipment, high-efficiency, in-floor radiant heat, and more.

These are just a few of the energy-saving offers currently available for Michigan agribusinesses. View all farm services incentives at [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org) or call 877-296-4319 for details. ■



Lighten  
your  
load

## Farm savings for the long haul

Reduce your energy use and costs now and into the future! The Energy Optimization program provides cash incentives for installing energy-saving lighting, fans, controls, pumps, compressors, and more.

**ENERGY TIP:** Custom rebates are available for large or complex projects unique to your agribusiness.

ONLINE: [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org)

PHONE: 877.296.4319



Energy Optimization programs and incentives are applicable to Michigan electric service locations only. Other restrictions may apply. For a complete list of participating utilities, visit [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org).



# Wild Weather



A view of a beautiful, stormy sunrise from our back patio. *By Lynn Shultz*



It's pretty to watch the snow blow across the farm fields, but too cold to spend much time photographing on days like this. *By Kim Foos*



Lake Superior as seen from the Porcupine Mountains. *By Tiki Wilson*



**Submit  
Your Photos**

Alger Delta invites members to share their amazing photos. Selected photos will be published in *Michigan Country Lines*. Upcoming topics and deadlines are: **Family** due **Jan. 15**—March issue and **Animals Near Me** due **Feb. 15**—April issue.

Go to <http://bit.ly/countrylines> for details on how you can submit your photos.

We look forward to seeing your best photos!

# HEALTHY LIVING

Great tasting, good-for-you recipes.

## Energy Bars

Joyce Tamminga,  
Great Lakes Energy

- 1 cup peanut butter, sunflower butter or almond butter
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup honey
- 3 cups rolled oats
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup ground flaxseeds or chia seeds
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup mini chocolate chips
- 1 cup any combination of nuts, seeds, and soft dried fruit (sunflower seeds, raisins, dried cranberries, etc.)
- shredded coconut

Combine the peanut butter and honey in a large mixing bowl and stir until smooth. Gradually add oats and chia seeds/flaxseeds. Add chocolate chips and nut/seed/fruit mixture. Mix gently to combine. Use a 7x11 or 9x9 pan sprayed with baking spray. Sprinkle bottom with coconut, pat down mixture firmly, and sprinkle more coconut on top and pat down. Refrigerate and cut into small bars. Enjoy for a healthy snack! Keep refrigerated.





## Fresh Corn Salsa

Mary Babcock, Thumb Electric



- 2 cups corn kernels, fresh or frozen
- ½ cup red onion, diced
- ½ cup red pepper, diced
- 1–2 jalapeños, seeded and minced
- ½ cup cilantro, chopped
- 4 teaspoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

Sauté corn over medium-high heat until kernels begin to char. Set aside to cool. In a medium bowl, combine onion, red pepper, jalapeño, cilantro, lime juice, and salt. Add sautéed corn and stir to combine. Enjoy with fresh chips!

## Overnight Oatmeal (Muesli)

Mary Ellen Wynes, HomeWorks Tri-County



- ½ cup oatmeal
- ½ cup yogurt (your choice)
- any fruit
- any nuts
- any fruit juice

Combine your oatmeal and yogurt. Add your fruit juice, nuts and fruit. Stir and refrigerate overnight. Enjoy in the morning!

## Delicious And Healthy Avocado Pudding

Cindy Dickinson, Presque Isle Electric



- 1 ripe avocado
- 2 tablespoons cocoa powder
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons almond butter or peanut butter
- pinch of salt
- chocolate chips

Mash avocado in bowl until smooth. Stir in rest of ingredients. Chill 30 minutes or more. Sprinkle chocolate chips on top as garnish.



# Gather Round The Co-op Kitchen Table

Join our exclusive online cooking community to submit your recipes and try recipes from other members.

Please submit your favorite recipe for a chance to win a \$50 bill credit and have your recipe featured in *Country Lines*:

**"Muffins & Breads" due Feb. 4**

**"Breakfast & Brunch" due Mar. 4**

Enter your recipe online at [micoopkitchen.com](http://micoopkitchen.com) or send to (handprint or type on one side, please): *Country Lines* Recipes, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Please note the co-op from which you receive your electric service.

**Go to [micoopkitchen.com](http://micoopkitchen.com) to register.**



View from inside the burner of the still-intact, beautiful, steel and wire mesh dome. The dome prevented embers from escaping from the burner.

Photos—Emily Prehoda

# The Nahma Burner Standing Proud for 117 Years

By Yvonne Whitman

**D**riving into the quaint Upper Peninsula town of Nahma, it is impossible not to notice the imposing 125-foot-tall structure looming on the shore of Lake Michigan. 'The Burner,' as it is referred to locally, is an iconic and historical landmark, a reminder of an era gone-by from the town's bustling lumber-industry heyday.

In 1881, the Bay de Noquet Company built a mill in Nahma to process lumber from trees that had been harvested from the 220,000 acres of timberland that it owned in Alger and Delta counties. Logs for the mill were floated down the Sturgeon River, and the mill operated each year from spring until the freezing of the river forced a shutdown in early winter. The lumber was then shipped on barges, mainly to New York and Chicago, for use in the demanding construction industry.



A historic photo (L) of the burner picturing one of the conveyors that transported wood waste from the saw mill directly to the burner. The conveyors no longer exist. The photo on the right is the burner in its present-day condition.



Amazingly the weathervane atop the historic burner has stayed intact throughout 117 consecutive years of U.P. weather.

Bay de Noquet Lumber, like every mill at the time, struggled with how to handle the unwanted wood product generated by the sawmill, and disposal of it created an ongoing problem. Burners were eventually developed to provide a contained method to dispose of the bark, sawdust and shavings. In 1899, the company built a towering burner complete with conveyors that took the unwanted byproduct directly from the sawmill and transported it into the burner.

Along with a sawmill and burner, a company town emerged, and Nahma soon had a school, general store, hotel, hospital, clubhouse and a company payroll building. At its peak, the mill and logging operations employed 1,200 people; and for more than 70 years the company town flourished. However, in 1951, with timber supplies dwindling, the last board was cut, and the lumber company sold all its holdings, including the town, to the American Playground Company. The company used the facilities to produce the wooden components for playground equipment. In 1989, due to rising costs in shipping the finished products and the fact there were only six employees left, most at retirement age, American decided to relocate Nahma operations to Indiana. The mill was now quiet, and the townsfolk were concerned about their futures. With everything else becoming a memory, the burner continued to stand proudly at the water's edge.

Today the burner is both an icon and a representation of the timber industry of the 1900s. According to Nahma Recreation Coordinator Glenn Lamberg, "It really is a link to the past for current residents and living descendants. The burner is a reminder of their ancestors, the true pioneers of logging in the U.P." Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011, the burner is the last known one of its kind in the United States.

But the burner has begun to deteriorate, and the structure is now at a slight tilt. Remediation to

prevent the structure from falling into the lake will be necessary. Formal efforts to save the burner began in December 2013 when a grassroots group, in conjunction with the Nahma Township Historical Society, formed a committee. The group recently received the results of an engineering study that indicated it would cost around \$370,000 to repair the structure. The group is actively seeking public and private funding. "There is grant money out there to fund historic preservation," Lamberg explains. "What we need is for someone in our community with grant writing expertise to step forward and help us out."

If properly preserved, 'The Burner' will continue to stand as a beacon for future generations to appreciate and understand the significance of the lumber era to the history of the Upper Peninsula. Donations and community involvement are still needed to bring this important project to fruition.

For more information on the project and to find how you can help, visit their Facebook page at [facebook.com/savethenahmaburner/](https://facebook.com/savethenahmaburner/). ■



One of the mill's working crews circa 1920. Company records indicate that at one time the mill employed 1,200 people.



A photo from a story on the Bay de Noquet Company selling all of its holdings, including the town of Nahma, that ran in the October 1951 issue of *Life* magazine.





# MILLER FAMILY

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# FARM

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## — A LEAP INTO —

## UNCHARTED WATERS

By Yvonne Whitman

**A**fter a long career in the construction business, Rob Miller, then a Madison, WI, resident, found himself at a crossroad when he lost his job during the 2008 economic downturn. During this time, his son, Jake, was working for a vegetable farmer. Jake's work in the agriculture industry piqued Rob's interest in how foods were being grown. "I realized that food is a commodity that will never go away," Rob says. It was a realization that steered him and Jake to investigate alternative methods for farming. "And that led us to aquaponics," Rob explains.

Aquaponics is the marriage of aquaculture (raising fish) and hydroponics (the soilless growing of plants) that grows fish and plants together in one integrated system. The fish effluent provides an organic food source for the growing plants, and the plants provide

a natural filter for the water in which the fish live. This environmentally-sustainable method of farming is free of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, plus it uses just one-tenth of the water expended in traditional field growing methods.

The Millers began working with Nelson and Pade, a Wisconsin aquaponic company, to learn everything they could about the technology. When trying to decide where to locate their operation, the decision was easy. "When I was a kid my favorite spot was Michigan's Upper Peninsula to visit my grandparents. I love it up here," Rob reflects.

In 2013, Rob, his wife, Dawn, and their three children all took a leap of faith into uncharted waters and moved their family to a seven-acre farm in Carney. Once owned by his maternal great grandparents, the farm is currently owned by Rob's parents, Fred and Sandy. Purchasing a nearby additional 60 acres, Rob began construction on the first building for the aquaponic operation.

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In 2016, the farm was recognized as one of three finalists in the Governor's Energy Excellence Award for Best Project in the Agriculture sector.



Tilapia are a critical component to the farm. Jake is holding a fish in front of one of the farm's six fish tanks. Each carefully monitored 500-gallon tank holds approximately 250 fish.

The first shipment of 276 tilapia fish were delivered in 2014. It took them approximately one year to get the system operating at full capacity, growing both fish and produce. So, how does it work? The nutrient-rich water from the fish feeds the 200 lettuce seeds that are planted every day, six days of the week. Approximately 40 days later, the crop is harvested and ready to sell. The farm now produces several types of lettuce, kale, tomatoes and cucumbers. The produce is sold in 10 U.P. grocery stores, in addition to supplying healthy food to the Carney and Gladstone school lunch programs. This has all been accomplished with little to no advertising, but rather through word-of-mouth publicity. The quality of the produce advertises for itself, the Millers attest.





Rob Miller proudly stands in the rows of his impressively tall tomato plants.

Photos—Emily Prehoda

Still in its infancy, the operation will reach full capacity in five years when it is expected to produce 60,000 heads of lettuce and 70,000 pounds of tomatoes annually. Future plans include a certified kitchen on-site, so that they can sell the fresh fish, as well as constructing more greenhouses for crops, such as strawberries and peppers.

Family involvement weaves its way through the fabric of the farm with Rob's son, Jake, handling fish operations, his daughter, Hannah, as a greenhouse technician, and son, Jon, as general help. Rob's wife, Dawn, initially a bit reluctant at the prospect of relocation, adds, "Now that I'm up here, I love it. I love working on the farm. I've always enjoyed gardening, and this is just gardening on a different level."

"I have to attribute all of this to my mom and dad," Rob thoughtfully acknowledges. "They have been entrepreneurs their entire lives, and they taught by example. I saw first-hand their successes and failures and how they got through them. Those sorts of life lessons helped me through my own trials and errors with this business."

Together, as a family, the Millers have traversed uncharted territory to be able to supply fresh, sustainable food throughout the U.P.'s four seasons.

*Miller Family Farm is a member of Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association. For more information on the farm, contact them at 906-639-2506, millerfamilyfarm2013@gmail.com or eatupmichigan.com.* 🐟

## VEGETARIAN MINESTRONE

*A Miller Family Farm Favorite*

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- ¼ cup celery, diced
- 1 cup carrots, peeled and sliced into thin half moons
- 1 cup fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 teaspoon basil
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 2 tablespoons chicken flavored seasoning (vegetarian)
- 6 cups boiling water
- 1 teaspoon steak sauce
- ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce (Annie's vegetarian)
- 12 ounces fresh kale, chopped
- 3 ½ cup tomatoes, crushed
- 4 cups spaghetti sauce (homemade or store bought)
- 3 ½ cups navy beans canned (drained & rinsed)
- 1 ½ cups zucchini, cut into small bite size
- 2 cups ditalini, cooked (or other small pasta)
- salt and pepper to taste

Heat oil in a large soup pot. Add onion, garlic, celery and carrots. Sauté 2–3 minutes until onion is translucent. Add mushroom, oregano and basil and cook 2 minutes over medium heat or until mushrooms are softened. Prepare broth by dissolving vegetarian chicken seasoning into boiling water, then add to pot with onion mixture. Add steak sauce, Worcestershire, kale, tomatoes, spaghetti sauce and beans. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 10–20 minutes, add zucchini and cook 10 more minutes or until zucchini is tender. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper, then add the cooked pasta. Remove from heat and serve. Makes about 1 gallon.



Find this recipe and more at **micoopkitchen.com**.



# Alger Delta to Hold Director Elections in 2017

**A**lger Delta Cooperative will hold director elections in three of its nine Districts in 2017. District 5 (Gourley/LaBranche/Cornell); District 7 (Stonington/Rapid River); and district 8 (Nahma/Isabella) will elect representatives to the board of directors.

Serving on the board of directors can be rewarding, and members should be aware of the qualifications and responsibilities associated with the position.

To qualify, a person must be a member of the cooperative in the district they want to represent, and they must be at least 18 years old. They must not be employed by, or have a financial interest in, a competing business. Candidates must complete and submit a nomination petition.

Directors are elected for a three-year term and are entrusted with the responsibility of governance of the cooperative, including strategic planning, fiduciary responsibility, setting policy and direction, and other duties relating to the cooperative. Board members are expected to prepare for and attend monthly board meetings and the Annual Meeting.

Board members are assigned to serve on at least one standing committee. The cooperatives' standing committees include the Policy Committee, the Employee Relations Committee, the Finance & Rates Committee, and the Executive

Committee. Committees meet two or more times each year.

In addition to the regular board meetings and committees, directors may participate in state, regional, and national events related to the electric business. These meetings are usually business and training related, or political in nature. They often require advanced preparation such as reading briefing materials or researching issues. These meetings range from one half-day to five days for travel and participation. Directors are also encouraged to complete Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) training. Finally, directors are required to represent Alger Delta in their community and elsewhere, which may include public speaking.

Directors are paid "per diem" plus mileage and reasonable and customary expense reimbursement. Per diem rates range from \$100 to \$350 per meeting.

For more information about serving on the board of directors, you can read Article III of the cooperative's bylaws at [algerdelta.com](http://algerdelta.com) under the tab "About Us" then "Bylaws/Tariffs/Rates." You can also find more details or print out the nominating petition from our website under the "About Us" then "Board of Directors" tab. If you cannot access our website and would like to receive a copy of the bylaws or a nominating petition, please call Alger Delta at 906-428-4141. ■

# Virtual Home Energy Audit

By Tom Tate

Is your home using energy efficiently? Unless it was built quite recently to stringent energy efficiency standards, there are bound to be areas of your home where you can improve efficiency, save money and reduce your carbon footprint.

In a perfect world, your best option is to hire a trained professional to conduct a full-blown, in-home energy audit. This usually involves a detailed inspection of your home's insulation levels, HVAC system, lighting, appliances and exterior space. A professional energy auditor will typically conduct a blower door test to check pressurization and spot hard-to-find leaks in the exterior. Also, a professional may use a duct blaster to identify leaks in your home's ductwork.

One drawback to the in-home energy audit is finding a time that works with your busy schedule. An energy audit can typically take several hours.

Luckily, there is a viable alternative: the online or "virtual" home energy audit. These online tools have come a long way over the last 10 years. Today's online energy audits are user-friendly and take only a few minutes to complete. An online energy audit can provide an assessment of your home's energy efficiency and typically provides helpful tips on how to reduce energy waste. The audits utilize sophisticated computer models that typically use local housing types—factoring in the age, size, flooring and construction materials of the home—and local weather data.

I have used several of these audits and found they typically come within a dollar or two of my actual energy bills when fed the correct information. Amazing! True, the audit won't provide a pressurization test of your home and ductwork, but it is a convenient start.

Here's where to look for online energy audits:

- [michigan-energy.org/audit/Alger](http://michigan-energy.org/audit/Alger)
- The Department of Energy:  
([hes.lbl.gov/consumer/](http://hes.lbl.gov/consumer/))

A word of caution: Be careful when using online energy audit software provided by organizations other than utilities, government agencies or universities. Unfortunately, some companies may try to obtain information to sell their products and services. If you see phrases like, "*Learn what your*



*power company does not want you to know"* or the site looks like a marketing page, I'd suggest moving on. Unless you are dealing with a local electric co-op or your trusted fossil fuel provider, do not provide any personal information outside of your physical address (for data accuracy) or an email address for receiving a full report.

If an online energy audit doesn't interest you, the Department of Energy offers a DIY energy audit section on their website at [energy.gov/energysaver/do-it-yourself-home-energy-audits](http://energy.gov/energysaver/do-it-yourself-home-energy-audits).

The bottom line? Choose the energy audit that works for you, then implement as many of the recommendations as you can. Even taking small steps can add up to significant results, and you'll see the benefits in your utility bills for years to come. ■



# Sky's The Limit

By Jack O'Malley

What happens when you combine a master electrician, educator, licensed contractor and self-described tinkerer? You get Mike Schmerl, an instructor at Northwestern Michigan College and owner of Panoramic Electricity.

Since starting his electrical company 23 years ago, Mike has made the study of electricity something of a hobby, fueling the fiddler within while inspiring a new generation of electricians. In fact, one of Mike's electrical apprenticeship classes was awarded a grant to study solar power. With his home now covered in solar panels, wired with various switches and batteries, Mike uses his personal experiences with this alternative energy source in the classroom. And his students seem to be warming to the idea.

"Solar has amazing benefits," Mike said. "We are much further along in its day-to-day use than people even know." An electric car, for instance, can run approximately 238 miles between charges. Mike says, "that pretty much covers the average day driving for most of us."

But what happens when you combine an electric car with solar power? Mike discovered you can have an affordable and comfortable means of transportation as proven by the solar powered golf cart he built! And while he admits some working vehicles might still need gas or diesel fuel to operate, Mike remains confident that soon we'll be picking up groceries in electric powered cars.

Some argue that Michigan's often cloudy, overcast skies make solar impractical. Mike insists that's not true. He cites Germany, a country sharing its latitude with Michigan, as a global leader in solar energy. While acknowledging that solar might not be the total solution to man's energy needs, Mike



says sun power complements other energy forms, pointing out that "even oil companies see the value of finding alternative energy sources so as to extend their production life."



Jack O'Malley

Describing solar power as the perfect marriage of old and new technology, Mike understands many of us will never be truly off the grid. "We will always need bigger generating capacity to power an ever-growing infrastructure," Mike explained. "If you want a hot tub or larger appliances, you will always need the power grid." ■

## I Remember...

**We invite members to share their fondest memories.**  
*Country Lines* will pay \$50 for stories we publish.

### Guidelines

1. Approximately 200 words
2. Digital photos must be at least 600 KB
3. Only one entry per household, per month
4. *Country Lines* retains reprint rights
5. Please include your name, address, email, phone number and the name of your electric co-op
6. Submit your memories online: [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com)



## «« Where In Michigan Is This?

Identify the correct location of the photo on the left and be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 electric bill credit. Enter your guess at [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com) or send by mail to: *Country Lines* Mystery Photo, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Include the name on your account, address, phone number, and the name of your co-op.

Our Mystery Photo Contest winner from the November/December 2016 issue is Cathy Kinzey, a Great Lakes Energy member who correctly identified the photo as The Blue Buck on 72, a specialty market in Kalkaska.

Winners are announced in the following issues of *Country Lines*: January, March, May, July/August, September and November/December.





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