

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



MILLER FAMILY

FARM

— A LEAP INTO —
UNCHARTED WATERS

'Be Green!'
Drop Paper Bills

Changes Make Budget
Plan Easier to Use

Classroom Grants,
Scholarships Available

Both of these devices create hot air but which uses less power?



Space Heater (high)
1,500 watts



**7 Series
Geothermal Heat Pump**
900 watts¹

WaterFurnace—The smartest way to heat and cool your home.

You may not realize it, but your home is sitting on a free and renewable supply of energy. A WaterFurnace geothermal heat pump taps into the stored solar energy in your yard to provide savings up to 70% on heating, cooling, and hot water. It uses less power than a typical space heater—and it won't singe the hair on your legs. Geothermal is a smart investment in your family's comfort. Contact your local WaterFurnace dealer today and find out how much you can save by switching to geothermal.

Bad Axe

B & D Htg
(989) 269-5280
bdheating.com

Berrien Springs

WaterFurnace Michiana
(269) 473-5667
gogreenmichgeothermal.com

Big Rapids

Stratz Htg & Clg, Inc.
(231) 796-3717
stratzgeocomfort.com

Caro

AllTemp
Comfort, Inc.
(866) 844-HEAT (4328)
geo4less.com

Carsonville

Certified Temperature
Innovations
(810) 300-7748

Clifford

Orton Refrig & Htg
(989) 761-7691
sanduskygeothermal.com

DeWitt

S & J Htg & Clg
(517) 669-3705
geothermalservicesofmichigan.com

Grand Rapids

Total Comfort Resource, LLC
(616) 406-3182
totalcomfortresource.com

Hart/Ludington

Adams Htg & Clg
(231) 873-2665
adamsheatingcooling.com

Indian River

M & M Plmb & Htg
(231) 238-7201
mm-plumbing.com

Jackson/Adrian

Comfort 1 Htg & A/C
(517) 764-1500
comfort1.net/geothermal

Kalkaska

Kalkaska Plmb & Htg
(231) 258-3588
kalkaskageothermal.net

Mt Pleasant

Walton Htg & Clg
(989) 772-4822
waltonheating.com

Muskegon

Adams Htg & Clg
(231) 873-2665
adamsheatingcooling.com

Kiessel Geothermal
Htg & Clg
(231) 747-7509
kiesselsgeo.com

Portland

ESI Htg & Clg
(517) 647-6906
esiheating.com

Sunfield

Mark Woodman
Plmb & Htg
(517) 886-1138
mwphonline.com

Traverse City

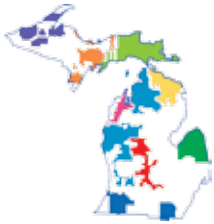
Geofurnace
Htg & Clg
(231) 943-1000
watergeofurnace.com

D & W Mechanical
(231) 941-1215
dwgeothermal.com



visit us at waterfurnace.com





Michigan's Electric Cooperatives
countrylines.com

January 2017
Vol. 37, No. 1

Executive Editor
Casey Clark

Editor
Christine Dorr

Copy Editor
Heidi Spencer

Design and Layout
Karreen Bird

Publisher
**Michigan Electric
Cooperative Association**

Michigan Country Lines, USPS-591-710, is published monthly, except August and December, with periodicals postage paid at Lansing, MI, and additional offices. It is the official publication of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933.

Subscriptions are authorized for members of Alger Delta, Cherryland, Great Lakes, HomeWorks Tri-County, Midwest Energy, Ontonagon, Presque Isle, and Thumb electric cooperatives by their boards of directors.

POSTMASTER: SEND ALL UAA TO CFS.

Association officers are **Robert Kran**, Great Lakes Energy, chairman; **Mark Kappler**, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, vice chairman; and **Eric Baker**, Wolverine Power Cooperative, secretary-treasurer. **Craig Borr** is president and CEO.

CONTACT US/LETTERS TO EDITOR:

Michigan Country Lines
201 Townsend St., Suite 900
Lansing, MI 48933
248-534-7358
cdorr@meca.coop
countrylines.com

 Join us on
Facebook

Change of Address:

Please notify your electric cooperative. See page 4 for contact information.

The appearance of advertising does not constitute an endorsement of the products or services advertised.

IN THIS ISSUE

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

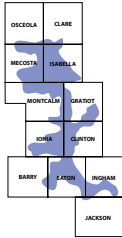
6 Adventures For Rural Veterans
SAFETY
Storm Watch: Plan Ahead And Be Prepared

7 **OUR ENERGY**
Michigan Co-ops Host Youth Leadership
Travel Opportunity

10 **COOKING COMMUNITY**
Healthy Living—Great Tasting, Good-For-You Recipes
Christin McKamey & Our Readers
Enter Our Recipe Contest And Win A Bill Credit!

14 **FEATURE**
Miller Family Farm: A Leap Into Uncharted Waters
Yvonne Whitman
Miller Family Farm Vegetarian Minestrone Recipe

18 **READER'S PAGE**
Sky's The Limit
Jack O'Malley
Guess Our New Mystery Photo And Win A Bill Credit!
Submit An 'I Remember' Story And Earn \$50!



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Blanchard office:

3681 Costabella Avenue
Blanchard MI 49310
Open 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday–Friday

Portland office:

7973 E. Grand River Avenue
Portland, MI 48875
Open 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday–Friday

Electric bill/account questions:

517-647-7554 or 1-800-562-8232

Pay by phone, anytime:

1-877-999-3395

Service questions/outages:

517-647-7554 or 1-800-848-9333
(24 hours for emergency calls)

Tri-County Propane:

1-877-574-2740

High Speed Internet

1-800-668-8413

homeworks.org

E-mail: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

Board of Directors

District 1 — John Lord

2276 Plains Rd., Leslie, MI 49251
517-974-2518
jlord@homeworks.org

District 2 — Wayne Swiler

Vice-Chairman
11750 Ainsworth Rd., Lake Odessa, MI 48849
616-374-3141
wswiler@homeworks.org

District 3 — Luke Pohl

Chairman
15560 W. Hanses Rd., Westphalia, MI 48894
989-292-0427
lpohl@homeworks.org

District 4 — Kimber Hansen

Secretary-Treasurer
6535 N. Wyman Rd., Edmore, MI 48829
989-506-5849
khansen@homeworks.org

District 5 — Corinna Batora

7655 N. Watson Rd., Elsie, MI 48831
989-862-3004
cbatora@homeworks.org

District 6 — Ed Oplinger

10890 W. Weidman Road, Weidman, MI 48893
989-644-3079
eoplinger@homeworks.org

District 7 — Shirley Sprague

15563 45th Ave., Barryton, MI 49305
989-382-7535
ssprague@homeworks.org

Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC



Find us on Facebook.

[facebook.com/HomeWorks.org](https://www.facebook.com/HomeWorks.org)



Dropping Paper Bill Statements Saves The 'Green' (Trees And Money)

More and more of our member-owners are looking for ways to save time, money and be environmentally conscious. Look no further than our SmartHub service online or through a free smart-device app!

With SmartHub, your account information is available 24 hours a day, year-round. You can see helpful graphs of your energy use, make payments, change your account details or report an outage. And, if you choose, you can tell us to stop sending you paper bills.

Going paperless is easy. You can view your bill online (it's basically a PDF copy of your paper statement—actually, the previous 18 months are available online) and even download a copy to save in your own records at home. You'll get an email from us letting you know when your statement is ready for viewing.

Going paperless prevents the possibility of delayed or lost bills in the mail. It keeps paper out of your trash and, eventually, landfills. And, it helps your cooperative control costs. Between paper and postage, sending a paper bill to 26,000 member-owners each month adds up! Controlling costs helps us keep your rates stable.

If you're thinking about going paperless with your HomeWorks Tri-County bills, here's one more incentive:

Everyone who is signed up for paperless billing by March 31 will be entered into a drawing for one of two iPad® mobile digital devices, to help you use SmartHub.



Missy Robson
Customer Service
Manager

When you also set up automatic payments—having your bill amount deducted from your designated bank account or charged to your credit or debit card on your billing due date—you'll get a second entry into the drawing.

Make your life a little more convenient and do a nice thing for the environment. Check out SmartHub today, by clicking on My Account at the top of homeworks.org or downloading the free app. You'll be amazed at all the information at your fingertips! ■

Improved Budget Plan Offered To HomeWorks Members

By Lesa Barker

A lot of our living expenses have consistent payments. You know what to expect from your phone bill, mortgage, or rent from one month to the next.

We know the seasonal highs and lows of a utility bill can be a burden, so our improved budget plan may be just what you need! There will no longer be a “catch-up” month. Your budgeted amount will automatically be recalculated and adjusted (if needed) twice a year.

You can now enroll in our budget plan at any time—no more waiting for open enrollment in May! Here’s how:

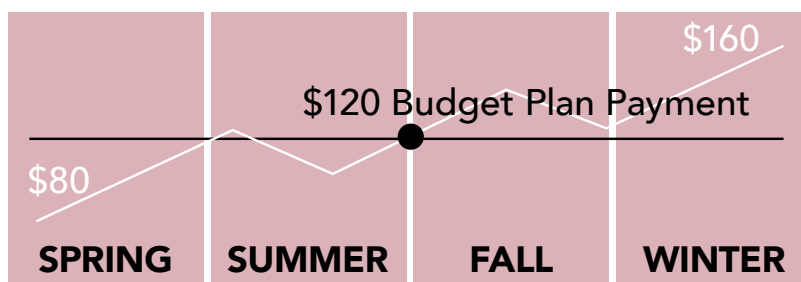
- Contact the office for your budget amount, calculated using the last 12 months of usage.
- You will be sent a contract and asked to sign it, agreeing to pay the calculated amount.
- Your budget amount will be reviewed and recalculated in May, and then again in December, with the adjusted payment amounts due in June and January, respectively.

You qualify if:

- You have at least 12 months of usage at the same location.
- Your account is current.
- You agree to make your budget payment by the due date every month.

If you’re interested in signing up for our new and improved budget payment program, call us at 800-562-8232. ■

HomeWorks Tri-County’s budget payment plan balances out your monthly bills*



**This chart is for illustration purposes only and represents a simulated budget payment plan. Your payments will vary based on your actual usage history.*

Need Help With College Costs?

Click on homeworks.org for information on winning your share of \$4,000 in HomeWorks Touchstone Energy scholarships offered to members.

High school seniors are eligible for one of three \$1,000 Touchstone Energy scholarships, awarded to students served by HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative. The scholarships are based on a combination of merit and need. We also offer two adult education scholarships of \$500 each to member-owners of the cooperative.

Scholarship applications are due March 15. Look for application forms and complete rules online at homeworks.org or contact Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252, or jgraham@homeworks.org.

Teachers: Apply By Jan. 16!

Applications are due Jan. 16 for our 2017 Touchstone Energy Classroom Technology grants.

Public or private school districts in our 13-county mid-Michigan service area which serve children of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric members can receive a grant of up to \$2,000 to fund innovative programs or technology that enrich student education.

For an application form with grant guidelines, visit homeworks.org, call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252 or email jgraham@homeworks.org.



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

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



Storm Watch: Plan Ahead And Be Prepared

When 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 or call 1-800-BE-READY (1-800-237-3239) for more tips on preparing for winter storms. ■



ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
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.**

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 or call 877-296-4319 for details. ■



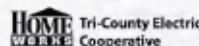
**Lighten
your
load**

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
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.

2016 Winners Named

We received a total of 163 entries in 2016 from 72 different photographers. From them, we drew two winners of a \$100 credit on their December electric bills: **Ronalda Keefer** of Mulliken, and **Tanya Troupe** of Lake.



Christine Loose of Buchanan, who receives HomeWorks Tri-County service at Lake, shared this winter scene from last winter, taken on Littlefield Road. "(It's) my favorite road for all seasons!"



Judy Hull of Rives Junction shared several photos, including this one, taken in 2014. "The day had been kind of stormy, rain on and off, with weather alerts for severe storms! But at the end of the day it was calm. I saw this beautiful sky like the moon was ablaze! It was gorgeous; you can see the moon in the background."



Pat Kline of Eagle took this Snap Shot at Mesick on October 30.



Debby Pung from Fowler took this photo of a "cool shelf cloud" this past summer on Grange Road, traveling toward Westphalia."

Submit Your Photo!

Contributors whose photos we publish in 2017 will be entered into a drawing and *Country Lines* will choose two winners for a bill credit of \$100 each on their December electric bill, due in January 2018!

Upcoming Snap Shot Contest Topics And Deadlines

"Family," Deadline: **Jan. 16** (March issue)

"Animals Near Me," Deadline: **Feb. 15** (April issue)

Go to homeworks.org/content/snapshots to submit your photos and see additional themes. It's fast and easy. To send by mail: include your name, address, phone number, photographer's name, and details about your photo. Mail to Attn: *Country Lines* Snap Shots, 7973 E. Grand River, Portland, MI 48875. Photos will not be returned. Do not send color laser prints or professional studio 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 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 to register.

Your Board In Action

Meeting at Blanchard on Oct. 24, your board of directors:

- Met with district officers to discuss governance of the co-op, including the nomination and election processes.
- Heard a presentation on winter collection procedures and assistance available to members between November 1 and April 15.
- Approved the 2017 Touchstone Energy budget in support of community projects including scholarships and classroom technology grants.
- Learned about proposed fiber to the premise broadband service and the results of a just-completed member survey regarding need for and interest in the service.
- Read and approved Board Policy 102 – “Functions of the Board of Directors.”
- Learned there were 130 new members in September.
- Acknowledged the October safety report, listing employee training, and employee and public incidents.

Meeting at Portland on Nov. 28, your board of directors:

- Reviewed and adopted the 2017 Capital and Operating Budgets for the cooperative.
- Authorized the write-off of uncollectible accounts receivable for 2015 totaling \$112,484.84, although collection efforts will continue.

- Approved three renewable energy tariffs developed in conjunction with Wolverine Power Cooperative.
- As part of the budget discussion, learned about public safety outreach, pole testing, vegetation management, and the Michigan Public Safety Communications System.
- Read and approved Board Policy 201 – “Safety” as revised.
- Learned there were 126 new members in October.
- Acknowledged the November safety report, listing employee training, and employee and public incidents. ■

Time Set Aside For Members To Comment Before Cooperative Board Meetings

The first 15 minutes of every board meeting are available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. The next meetings are scheduled for 9 a.m. on Jan. 16 and March 27 at Portland. Members who need directions to the meeting, or wish to have items considered on the board agenda, should call 517-647-7554.

Fancher Elementary, St. Patrick's Receive Classroom Grants

Fancher Elementary School in Mount Pleasant received a Touchstone Energy Classroom Grant to purchase electronic reader pens, which assist students who have reading difficulties. Shown receiving the grant are teacher Georgia Poprave and several Fancher students.



St. Patrick School in Portland received \$2,500 toward purchasing Chromebooks for students to use in various classes. Principal Randy Hodge shared this photo of the school's freshmen (Class of 2020) and their Chromebooks.

People Fund Assists Museum, Library, Food Pantry

Meeting Nov. 16, the Tri-County Electric People Fund board made nine grants totaling \$10,756.24, including:

- \$1,000 to Hope's Pantry, Stanton, to purchase items for their food pantry;
- \$2,200 to Montcalm CASA, Stanton, to purchase laptops and software for staff to use in serving client families;
- \$1,500 to the Sunfield Historical Society to help with roof repairs to the Welch Museum;
- \$500 to St. Mary's St. Vincent de Paul, Charlotte, for their rent and utility assistance program;
- \$1,000 to Montcalm County Great Start for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program;
- \$1,194.38 to an Ingham County family to help with medical bills;
- \$600 to an Ionia County family, and \$1,650 to another Ionia County family, to help with housing expenses; and
- \$1,111.86 to an Isabella County family for medical bills. ■



The Sunfield Historical Society received a People Fund grant for repairs to the Welch Museum roof. Accepting the grant check were SHS Trustee Don Foltz, left; SHS Secretary Doris Feasal, Trustee Orpha Stiffler, and SHS President Jan Sedore. Presenting the grant were Richard Palermo, far right, board chairman, and Karen Beard, second from left, from the HomeWorks Tri-County customer service team. (Photo by Tanya Schneider)

How To Apply For A Grant

The Tri-County Electric People Fund provides grants to individuals and organizations in the co-op's service area for food, shelter, clothing, health, and other humane needs, or for programs or services that benefit a significant segment of a community.

Write to 7973 E. Grand River Avenue, Portland, MI. 48875, for an application form and grant guidelines, or visit the People Fund tab at homeworks.org.

Note: Applications must be received by Jan. 16 for the January board meeting, and by Feb. 27 for the March board meeting.



IN MEMORIAM: Dan Kaufman

Former lineman Dan Kauffman, 83, died Oct. 3 at his home in Mount Pleasant.

A native of Ann Arbor, he served in the U.S. Army's Third Armored Division before working as a lineman for Southeastern Michigan Electric Cooperative in Adrian from 1963–1971.

Dan joined HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative at our Blanchard facility in 1971 and stayed until his retirement in 1992.

He enjoyed farming, hunting, collecting tractors, country music, and history. Dan is survived by his wife of 63 years, Luella; four sons and two daughters; 14 grandchildren; and 25 great-grandchildren.



MILLER FAMILY FARM

— A LEAP INTO — UNCHARTED WATERS

By Yvonne Whitman

After 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

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.

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.

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.



HomeWorks Crews Show Off Line Equipment

Lineman Jeremy Smith and Portland operations Supervisor Chris Teachout put a large bucket truck, and our track vehicle with its digger, on display at the Ionia County Central Dispatch Open House in early October.

This was the third time the county department invited the public to its building at 545 Apple Tree Drive to meet first responders and see the technology used in emergency situations. The county road commission also brought trucks, a police officer and her K9 partner were at the event, and two driving simulations were available at the all-day event. ■

Notice to Members of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Tariff Changes Effective February 15, 2017

The HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors, at their regular meeting held November 28, 2016, adopted three new tariffs dealing with renewable energy:

1. Schedule CS – Community Solar.
2. Schedule BASA – Buy-All/Sell-All.
3. Schedule DRE – Distributed Renewable Energy (Net Metering)

These rates were developed in coordination with Wolverine Power Cooperative to make the tariffs consistent among Wolverine's member-cooperatives, and as part of their 10 MW standing offer re: renewable energy. They take effect February 15, 2017.

For specific details on any HomeWorks tariffs or fees, please call us at 1-800-562-8232 or visit our website at homeworks.org.

Note: We published notice of a revised Net Metering tariff in the September 2016 issue of *Michigan Country Lines*. The above-referenced rates, developed by Wolverine since the June 27 meeting when that tariff was approved, are more favorable to members interested in renewable energy.

How Did I Use That Much Energy?

by Lesa Barker

Close your eyes and picture yourself outside in bright blue skies. You hear the sounds of children splashing in a pool. You're sitting back with your shades on reading a book, relaxing in the hot summer sun. It's a beautiful day in Michigan. Now, open your eyes and look around because it's January—and, baby, it's cold outside!

It's easy to forget the hot summer we had last year, just as easy to forget that extreme temperatures have a direct impact on your energy use.

We help keep the cost of your electricity down by clearing the right of way, ensuring poles and meters are well maintained and keeping our system running efficiently and reliably.

Technological changes have also helped keep costs down. From reading meters electronically to using mobile work orders, we can use technology to save both time and money, which in turn helps keep the cost of electricity stable.

You can make a difference, too. Because you control what happens on the inside of your home, it's important to know how you can control your energy usage. HomeWorks energy advisor Brandon Trierweiler offers a few simple tips that will help keep your electric bill down during the cold winter months:

- **Avoid constant thermostat adjustments.** Install programmable thermostats to control temperature settings at a level that's comfortable for your family.
- **Add insulation** to keep your home comfortable and energy efficient. Usually, the most effective place to add insulation is in the attic. Trierweiler says having a good barrier between your home and the outside elements keeps the warm air in and cold air out.
- **Seal air leaks** to reduce drafts and get full performance out of the insulation you already have. *Always seal air leaks before adding insulation.*
- **Clean or replace all filters** in your heating and cooling systems monthly.
- **Remove** unneeded light bulbs or use lower wattage bulbs, such as the LED bulbs you can buy at our offices in Blanchard or Portland with instant rebates.
- **Lower** your water heater thermostat to 120 degrees.
- Finally, **take advantage of rebates.** Don't forget to claim your Energy Optimization (EO) rebates for energy-efficient products, such as light bulbs, TVs, refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers/dryers and more.

According to Trierweiler, Energy Optimization (EO) helps our members use energy more efficiently. In fact, since 2012, more than \$600,000 in residential incentives have been paid back to HomeWorks members through rebates for Energy Star appliances, LED lights, and recycling old, inefficient appliances.

These programs focus on areas of the home which use more electric energy, such as cooling, heating, lighting and appliances. EO's primary goal is to help you save energy in a cost-effective manner and encourage members like you to install high-efficiency equipment. View current incentives at michigan-energy.org/products/HomeWorks or call 877-296-4319.

When you look at your bill, remember that it's for the energy you used four to six weeks ago.

Was the weather extremely hot or cold? Did you have houseguests, or another unusual use, during that time?

We can help you take a closer look at your energy use, or clarify an item on your bill if you have a question. Call us at 1-800-562-8232 for assistance. ■



Energy Advisor Earns National Certification

Energy Advisor Brandon Trierweiler not only has tips for home energy users, he also works with our largest accounts, such as manufacturers and farm operations. In that role, he recently received his Key Account Executive certification, being presented here by board chairman Luke Pohl. The national CKAE designation requires on-site classwork and an exam, along with creating a business plan and member engagement strategy.

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



«« 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 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.





FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

American Metal Roofs
is offering

50% OFF

**Your Garage or
Outbuilding Roof**

when you purchase
a new American Metal Roof
for your home!

GOT ICE DAMS?

WE CAN HELP!

**HEATED SHINGLE
ICEDAMCUTTER**

De-Icing Systems Now Available

- Can Be Installed On Asphalt Or Metal Roofs.
- Do-It-Yourself or
- Let Us Install It For You!
- *Ask About Ice Removal Service*

FINANCING IS AVAILABLE!

Call Today! 844.638.2576
844.METAL.ROOFS

VISIT OUR SHOWROOMS:

FLINT - 6140 Taylor Drive • CHARLOTTE - 1875 Lansing Road



AmericanMetalRoofs.com



THERE'S NO TELLING HOW *Youth Tour* WILL INSPIRE YOU,
JUST KNOW THAT IT WILL.

From the battlefields of Gettysburg to the halls of Congress in Washington, D.C., *Youth Tour* will explore the leadership lessons of our nation's history and immerse you in the cooperative spirit. Learn more about this FREE leadership travel opportunity, sponsored by Michigan's electric cooperatives, at **CooperativeYouthTour.com**.

