

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



MILLER FAMILY FARM

— A LEAP INTO —
UNCHARTED WATERS

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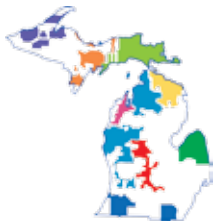
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1. 7 Series unit uses approximately 900 watts while running in speeds 1-2.



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Photo—Rudy Malmquist



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Kneeling left to right: Jake Miller, Hannah Miller

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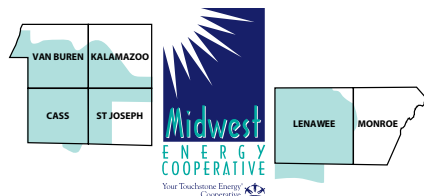
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Submit An 'I Remember' Story And Earn \$50!



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Midwest Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Cost Is More Than The Commodity



Robert Hance
President/CEO

When did you last enjoy dinner out? Maybe it involved an elegant setting with soft music, candlelight, and chefs with fancy hats preparing your food. Or maybe, like my own last experience, it involved a colorful play area, the aroma of greasy fries, and a teenager in a paper hat taking orders and handing out trays.

Whether it's a burger under golden arches or a fillet served with fine silver, when we enjoy an evening out we purchase more than the commodity. We pay for people to prep, serve and clean. We pay for the facility's utility costs and building maintenance. We even pay for the paper or linen napkins used to wipe our faces. Most of all, our purchase provides some sort of profit for the owner or shareholders. Yet all I saw on my most recent experience was a burger combo meal for \$6.39.

There are fixed costs behind all retail and service experiences. The facility has to be open and staffed, whether or not anyone stops. It's the cost of doing business.

Your electric service is no different. You make choices every day about how you use the commodity, the kilowatts that run through your meter. But there are significant costs to ensuring that you can access those kilowatts 24/7: items like labor, buildings, vehicles, substations, poles and wires.

Our 2016 cost of service study showed that the cost of making electricity available to every residential member is \$39.16 per month. It doesn't matter if the meter ever turns; it's the fixed cost of ensuring the commodity is there when you need it.

Fixed costs are currently represented in the \$18 Monthly Service Charge and the Distribution Charge, which is variable based on the kilowatts used. So members using more energy are paying more for our operational costs of doing business.

Your board wrestled with tough conversations about how to equitably spread fixed costs. In April, they will vote on a proposed four-year plan to shift these costs to the Monthly Service Charge. Details of the open meeting will be shared in the April magazine. Most members will see minimal impact on the bottom line. Those using significantly less energy will see some increase, and those using significantly more will see some decrease as fixed costs will no longer be tied to usage.

There is one important distinction between your co-op and other retail providers: our goal is not to make a profit because ultimately any margins are allocated back to you and other member-owners. Our goal is to create a better experience through innovations and solutions. That's the co-op difference. ■

Co-op Rates And Growth Focus Of 2017 District Meetings

Ever wish you could bend the ear of Midwest leadership with some of your burning questions? Things like:

- Why is my monthly service charge going up?
- When will I get fiber internet?
- How can I report my outage or pay my bill online?
- Why are you building a new headquarters?

We're launching our 2017 Dinner & Dialog events—your opportunity to meet face-to-face with Midwest leadership to ask questions and learn more about your co-op. No question is off limits!

Regional dinner events will be scheduled throughout late winter and early spring in both southwest and southeast Michigan. We pick up the dinner tab for you and your guest, asking in return only for your active participation in what we hope is a meaningful and productive two-way conversation about what's going on at Midwest.

Members are invited by random selection, and invitations will be mailed this month. We limit attendance to about 40 individuals, based on the size of the venue and in an effort to promote a meaningful and productive exchange. If you are interested in attending one of the meetings, please



contact Nicole Barfell at 269-445-1112 or sign up at TeamMidwest.com. We will add you to our preferred waiting list and contact you if we have openings at any of the meetings.

This year, we're also adding a daytime session that will be live-streamed, allowing members to actively participate from the comfort and convenience of their own computer. Information about that will be shared through our Facebook page at Facebook.com/TeamMidwest. ■

Supporting Today's Students, Tomorrow's Leaders

Every high school senior considering a higher education path could use a little extra cash to help cover future expenses, and Team Midwest is again offering some help and support with our annual scholarship program.

High school seniors whose families receive monthly service from Midwest Energy Cooperative, Midwest Propane and/or Midwest Connections at their primary residence are invited to apply for one of the four \$1,000 college scholarships. Scholarship applications must be submitted by March 20, and awards will be announced in April.

Selection for the scholarship is based on academic performance, extra-curricular activities, community involvement and/or employment, and honors and awards. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a four-point scale is required, and an official transcript must be submitted for final approval. Every applicant must also submit a short



video essay about their home community. Show and tell some little-known facts or hidden gems. Your unique, creative, funny or even quirky perspective might just put \$1,000 towards your education!

Full details can be found with the online application at TeamMidwest.com. ■

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 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.**

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. ■



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.

Wild Weather

Photo Contest Winners

The votes are in, and we're happy to share the winning photo (and some great runners-up) from our November photo contest. Thanks to everyone who submitted a photo, voted and spread the word by sharing the post on Facebook.

Visit teammidwest.com/photo-contest/ to view all the photos submitted.

Winner!



Darlene Burgener, Constantine—South Haven Light House



Dorothy Boerman, Decatur—A Beautiful Winter Scene In Decatur

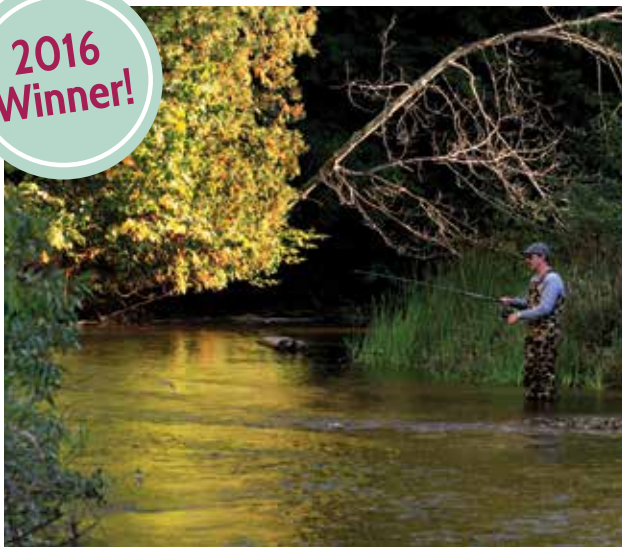


Matthew Carpenter, Hudson—Stormy Night



Mariam Tanner, White Pigeon—Winter Wonderland

2016 Winner!



Ian Sindell of Cassopolis is the winner of our 2016 photo contest. His photo was randomly selected from all published entries over the course of the year. Thanks you to the Midwest members who submitted over 400 shots in 2016!



Enter Your Photos And Win!

Every month we will announce a new theme. Just submit your best shot and encourage your friends to vote! The photo receiving the most votes from our Facebook contest will be printed in an issue of *Country Lines* along with some of our other favorites. If your photo is printed in *Country Lines* during 2017, you will be entered to win a credit of up to \$200 on your December 2017 bill. Visit facebook.com/TeamMidwest and click on "Photo Contest" from the menu tabs to submit your high-resolution photos. Not on Facebook? You can also enter at TeamMidwest.com/photocontest. Make sure to vote, and encourage others to vote for you, too!

Our **January** theme is **Family. Photos** can be submitted from **January 1 to January 20** to be featured in our March issue.

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.

MIDWEST *in* *the* COMMUNITY

Neighbor helping neighbor—that's how your Team Midwest family approaches daily work and efforts to give back. We live, work and serve right here in the local community, striving to actively demonstrate our community values in meaningful and impacting ways. Here are several ways we gave back last fall.



Customer Care Rep Evan Bressler kicked up some color while blowing leaves at last fall's United Way of Southwest Michigan Day of Action for Seniors. Midwest was one of 60 local teams who joined forces to serve 300 area seniors—raking leaves, cleaning gutters, and checking smoke alarms. Our nine volunteers winterized seven homes, making a personal and significant impact on some of our most vulnerable neighbors.



Team Midwest volunteers take a break from winterizing work for a group shot.



Lineman Kurt Schantz treated young guests at the Harvest Fest & Trunk or Treat event at Dr. T.K. Lawless Park. Cass County Parks & Rec combined efforts with the Cass County 4-H Youth Program to create one memorable October event for local families. Many family-friendly activities were offered, and participants were asked to donate \$1 or a non-perishable food item. More than 1,800 people attended the event, including about 1,100 trunk or treaters.



The Niles Salvation Army hosted its annual Thanksgiving feast on Sunday preceding the holiday. Team Midwest volunteers dished up turkey and all the traditional fixings for more than 150 grateful guests, who were welcomed in from the cold, blustery day to enjoy the great food and fellowship.



On Veterans Day, Midwest donated more than \$2,000 to two programs that provide services for local veterans. Midwest encouraged the community to recognize veterans by lighting up homes and neighborhoods with energy-efficient, green LED bulbs. The bulbs were available for a donation at the co-op's district service centers, and all proceeds supported the Post Relief Fund of the Decatur VFW Post 6248, and Housing Help of Lenawee. Midwest lineman and veteran Mark Kangas (left) presented a check to radio personality John Koehn during a live Veterans Day remote in Adrian.



Team Midwest collaborated with TLC Community Credit Union, Lenawee College Access Network and Adrian College to offer "It's Reality" to students from Morenci and Addison High Schools. The program is designed to provide high school juniors and seniors with an impacting experience to learn about post-secondary opportunities and provide them with a practical, hands-on exercise in personal financial management. Customer Care Rep Dawn Mallo staffed the furniture table, helping students make important household purchases and decisions.



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

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.

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**.

Midwest Recognized As Calix Innovation Award Winner

Calix, a leading global provider of broadband communications access systems and software, honored Midwest Energy Cooperative with the 2016 Innovation Award in late October at their User Group Conference in Las Vegas. A highlight of the annual event, the Innovation Awards honor customers that best demonstrate how Calix solutions have transformed their businesses and customer experiences. Calix has a customer base of service providers in 85 countries and is the largest telecommunications vendor in the world focused solely on the access space.

Calix recognized Midwest for its leadership in bringing high-speed internet solutions to its largely unserved and underserved rural service territory. In 2014 Midwest began implementing a robust, two-way fiber communication system across its electric distribution grid to maximize smart grid opportunities for utility and member benefit. Midwest is now leveraging that investment by using Calix hardware and software solutions to deliver fiber internet to homes and businesses through Midwest Connections.

"In the 1930s, electric cooperatives were organized to bring power and light to the rural space when incumbent utilities wouldn't," says Robert Hance, president/CEO of Midwest Energy Cooperative. "Fast forward nearly 80 years, and we have a similar inequity with internet access. Our members have looked to us for years for a solution, and now we're actively bridging the rural digital divide with fiber internet."

More than 3,000 co-op members across southwest Michigan are now using the service, with thousands more in the pipeline. "High-speed internet is no longer a luxury; it's a necessity," Hance continues. "This is a game changer for rural America. We are ensuring that rural residents have the same opportunities



Calix representatives John Colvin (left), Senior Vice President of Sales, and Geoff Burke (right), Senior Director of Corporate Marketing, present Midwest Energy Cooperative CEO Robert Hance with the 2016 Innovation Award at the User Group Conference on October 24.

as their urban counterparts, including options like telecommuting, online education and entertainment, home security, and telemedicine services."

Midwest soft-launched the fiber deployment in Schoolcraft and Edwardsburg in 2014. Based on the success of the soft launch, the cooperative board directed staff to fully deploy service across southwest Michigan over a five-year build, from 2015 to 2019. Officials divided the service territory into 23 zones, based largely on electric substation service area. By the end of 2016, 11 of the 23 zones were lit and service activation underway. The 2017 construction plan includes the North Dowagiac, Marcellus and Mattawan zones. The remaining nine zones will be built and lit between 2018 and 2019, the final two years of the initial deployment. Once the southwest Michigan electric service territory is fully built, attention will turn to the southeast Michigan service territory and remote areas outside of the electric distribution system.

Visit TeamFiber.com to learn more. ■



Changing The Landscape

In just six short months in 2016, the intersection of M-60 and Decatur Road in Cassopolis was transformed from a farm field to a developing campus that will house your 'Utility of the Future' later this year.



We approached the building of our new headquarters with great thought and care. Not only are we currently housed in a facility with significant structural and security concerns, but we're also out of space at a time that we must add staff and resources to fulfill our vision of providing amazing innovations and solutions that change the quality of life and opportunity for members across our rural service area.



Visit UtilityoftheFuture.coop to learn more about the need, opportunity and impact of this building project. ■



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." ■

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«« 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.





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