

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



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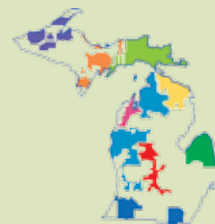
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Photo—Michael Galetto/Brockway Photography/brockwayphotography.com

**Some co-op editions have a different cover.*



Michigan's Electric
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Making the Cost of Service Fair to All

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On the surface, it seems simple. When we perform a cost-of-service study, we look at each individual rate class such as residential, general service, small commercial, large commercial, etc. Then, we take all of our expenses for a given year and assign each dollar to a particular rate class.

It gets much more complicated when we try to divide out over \$40 million dollars in expenses. We have over 30 vehicles, 52 employees and a little over 3,000 miles of electrical distribution lines. Each mile driven, each hour worked, and each foot of line must be allocated to a member rate class.

A cost-of-service study is a time-consuming spider web of details that is performed every four to five years. In fall 2014, the task fell to Cherryland's rates analyst, Jason Rice, with the assistance of experienced engineers and accountants at a firm called Power Systems Engineering. Over a period of months, they painstakingly went through the necessary calculations to make sure each class is being charged properly.

What is the big deal? We want each class to stand on its own. This means commercial members should not be subsidizing residential members, and vice versa. It would be easy to lower commercial rates and make up the losses on the backs of area homeowners. Obviously, that would not be fair.

I am happy to report that the results of this year's study are very positive. On revenues of nearly \$49 million, we found it necessary to make corrections amounting to less than 2 percent of our total revenues.

In 2015, four of our commercial rate classes will see *decreases* that will range from 5 to 7 percent. Because our revenues and expenses are forecasted to be sufficient to meet our future mortgage requirements, we will *not* be adding these cost-of-service reductions to other rate classes. We will simply reduce our estimated 2015 revenues by \$654,000.

Residential members will not see an increase in rates for the fourth year in a row. The cost-of-service study did indicate that the availability charge (monthly charge necessary to recover costs before any electricity is used) should be raised from \$15 per month to almost \$24 monthly. However, your management team and board of directors agreed that this change is better left to a year when it is also necessary to increase our revenues.

While expenses are increasing in 2015, financial forecasts show that we should be able to get through the year with sufficient margins to maintain our strong financial position. Thus, the timing is not right for making a big change to the availability charge.

One could argue that the low availability charge does cause a higher energy charge. This argument would be absolutely correct. I would counter with the fact that this has always been the case at Cherryland. It is simply the way we have chosen to cover our costs. Energy costs, plus the availability charge, must cover the cost of service for each rate class. There is no real "right" way to reach this number.

I am very pleased with the results of our study, and the bright financial outlook for Cherryland in 2015 and beyond. We will continue to update and tweak the cost of service in the years ahead to make sure that each rate class continues to fairly carry its own weight as we move forward. ■



Tony Anderson
General Manager



New YMCA is a Testament to Determination

It's Traverse City's version of the "Field of Dreams."

That is, "if you build it, they will come."
And they have.

Before the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA moved to its new facility on Silver Lake Rd., its membership numbers were in the 600–800 range.

Once the doors opened at the site, which is served by Cherryland Electric Cooperative, people kept coming...and joining. First, the Y hit the century mark shortly after it opened. Then it reached 2,400 members in early January. That news is what welcomed new executive director Jay Buckmaster when he took over six weeks ago.

"Once people get inside and see everything that's offered, they want to be part of it," explains Kerry Kalbfleisch, of Cherryland, a YMCA board member who takes over as board president this spring.

The state-of-the-art facility offers something for everyone. There are two pools—an eight-lane competitive, and a warm water recreational. There are treadmills, elliptical machines, free weights, aerobics, cardio and strength training. There are also numerous fitness classes, tennis courts, yoga, a hot tub, splash pad and handicap accessible fitness machines. The lighting for all these was enhanced by Cherryland's energy optimization program, which provided \$15,000 for one of its newest members.

"This new facility is such an exciting addition to our area," says YMCA board president, Lynn Schultz. "A lot of people put in a lot of time planning and fundraising for this. All the hard work was worth it."

The old YMCA at Logan's Landing opened in 1964. It still exists, and features basketball courts, pickleball courts, and limited workout facilities. But it began to lose its luster when a Y study revealed that 40 percent of area seventh graders can't swim 25 yards.

Fifteen years ago, the YMCA began to consider a new facility. There were starts and stops along the way—some of it dealing with sites for the facility and some because of a slow economy—before the final hurdles were cleared two years ago. Now, the new \$16.5 million facility is a showcase that will benefit thousands of area residents.

"Thanks to the work of the community and the volunteer efforts of so many people, the feeling you get when you walk in the new Y is just overwhelming... it's literally overwhelming," says past YMCA board president, Marc Judge. "This will give more people—especially more families—something to do in the heart of winter."

Work at the new facility isn't done, however. The YMCA board hopes to raise \$3 million to start Phase II, which is a new gymnasium.

But, the YMCA and the community can bask in the knowledge that Traverse City's newest "Field of Dreams" did get built...and is already making a difference. ■

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ON THE COVER

Jay Buckmaster (L), YMCA executive director, and Kerry Kalbfleisch, incoming YMCA board member and Cherryland human resources manager.

Try Zone Heating and Cooling for Home Comfort

Family members may complain that some rooms in your house are too hot or cold, but it's likely there's not a home in the entire country that has even temperatures throughout all the rooms. Actually, depending upon the activity level in each room, a range of temperatures may be more comfortable for the whole family, since some people simply prefer to have it warmer or cooler.

There are many factors, such as the length of ductwork, bends, orientation to the sun, and the number of windows and exterior walls that impact room air temperature. What you keep in a room is also a factor—for example, if you have a large TV in a small room, it can raise the temperature.

A single furnace or heat pump is a common system in many homes. If you set the thermostat to keep the chilliest room warm, it causes many of the other rooms to become too warm. A warmer house loses more heat and forces the heating system to work harder. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, for each degree the thermostat is set lower for an eight-hour period, heating bills can be reduced by up to 1 percent.

Understanding Zone Control Systems

- Installing an automatic zone control system is the best and most energy-efficient way to control individual room temperatures. This type of system adjusts special duct dampers, based upon both actual and desired room temperatures.
- Many homes have access to only main ducts that branch out to individual rooms. In this case, a zone system will control the temperatures in each room grouping, such as all the bedrooms, kitchen/dining areas, and the living room. While it is optimum to control each room independently, having just three or four zones is adequate for comfort and energy savings.
- A programmable thermostat is mounted in each room or grouping to control the motorized duct damper leading to it. If the room is too warm in winter, the damper partially closes. For example, a zone thermostat may continuously readjust the damper position as the

intensity of the sun shining through a window changes throughout the day.

- Most of the energy savings with an automatic zoning system is gained because each room temperature can be varied throughout the day. There is no need to keep the bedrooms toasty warm during the day, or the living room warm overnight. The programmable thermostats are designed to bring room temperatures back up without having the backup resistance elements come on.
- There are various zoning damper designs, from a simple flat damper unit to bladders that inflate with air to close off the ducts. They all function equally well. With the many new thermostats and use-control electronics, adding a zoning system requires professional installation, so it's wise to consult a qualified technician for help in designing the best system for your needs.

Companies offering zoning systems include Aprilaire (800-334-6011; aprilaire.com); Arzel Zoning Technology (800-611-8312; arzel.com); Durodyne (800-899-3876; durodyne.com); EWC Controls (800-446-3110; ewccontrols.com); and Zonex Systems (800-228-2966; zonexsystems.com). ■



This programmable zone control thermostat has a large digital readout with information about the temperature/comfort conditions in the zone.

Photo provided by Zonex Systems.



OH-SO-TASTY SANDWICHES

Look forward to lunch with these unique, tasty sandwiches from our readers.

Balsamic Chicken Sandwich

2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cubed
 ½ t. salt
 ¼ c. whole wheat flour
 3 T. olive oil
 ½ t. pepper
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1 c. lowfat, reduced sodium chicken broth

½ c. balsamic vinegar
 6 T. firmly packed dark brown sugar
 6 ciabatta rolls
 6 large slices tomato
 ½ c. grated part-skim mozzarella
 fresh basil, optional

Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper. Spread flour on a sheet of waxed paper. Toss chicken chunks in flour to coat completely. Preheat oven to 350°. Warm oil in large skillet over medium high. Add chicken and garlic. Lower heat to medium and continue to cook until chicken begins to brown and garlic becomes fragrant, 8–10 minutes. Add chicken broth, vinegar and brown sugar. Bring to a boil. Cover and simmer 10–15 minutes, until chicken is cooked through and no longer pink in the center. Place rolls on a large baking sheet. Top each of the 6 bottom halves with a tomato slice (and fresh basil, if desired). Divide chicken among them and sprinkle with mozzarella. Bake until cheese is melted and edges of rolls are crisp; 5–7 minutes. Serve immediately.

Elizabeth Taylor, Hesperia

Spicy Tuna Melts

1 can (6.5 oz.) tuna in water, drained
 ¼ c. finely chopped celery
 ¼ c. chopped onion
 ¼ c. sweet relish

2 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
 ⅔ c. mayo or salad dressing
 2 T. chopped jalapeños
 8 slices pepper cheese
 4 English muffins, split

Mix all ingredients and spread on muffins. Top with pepper cheese and broil until cheese is melted, about 5 minutes. Serve warm with your favorite soup or salad. Delicious any time of year.

Marie Danis, Pelkie

Deviled Egg Sandwiches



10 slices bread
 soft butter or margarine, optional
 5 hard-cooked eggs, finely chopped
 1 t. prepared mustard
 ¼ t. onion salt
 ⅛ t. bottled steak sauce
 1 T. chopped parsley
 2 T. chopped pimento
 2 t. cider vinegar
 ¼ c. mayonnaise

Spread bread lightly with butter. Combine eggs and rest of ingredients, tossing with fork until well-mixed. Use to fill 5 sandwiches. Even better chilled.

Dolly Jones, Ludington

SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE!

Thanks to all who send in recipes. Please send in your favorite **"Healthy Living"** recipes by **Feb. 10** and your favorite **"Pizza"** recipes by **Mar. 10**.

Enter your recipe online at countrylines.com or send to (handprinted or typed on one side, please): *Country Lines Recipes*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Please note the co-op from which you receive your electric service.

Contributors whose recipes we print in 2015 will be entered in a drawing and *Country Lines* will pay the winner's January 2016 electric bill (up to \$200)!

Visit countrylines.com for more reader recipes!

Photos—831 Creative

Rice Navigates Cherryland's Electric Rates

Jason Rice is Cherryland Electric Cooperative's rates expert.

He recently celebrated his first year at the cooperative and shared a bit of his background with us—from growing up in California, a passion for sailing, his work as a Third Mate navigating ships on the Great Lakes, and his current passion, navigating rates for Cherryland.

Here's his story...

Q: Tell us about your background growing up.

A: The most interesting thing about my background is that I grew up in southern California. Sailing has always been my passion and I took full advantage of the excellent recreational sailing program offered through the University of California-Irvine while earning an economics degree.

After graduating, I attended a maritime academy to continue to pursue my passion for sailing. In 2007, halfway through the maritime curriculum, I heard about the Great Lakes Maritime Academy. After a few hours visiting the campus and the Traverse City area, I made the decision to move to Michigan. Since then I have met



Jason Rice reviews Cherryland rates to make sure they match the costs associated with providing service to its members.

a wonderful girl, who happens to enjoy sailing, and even found a sailboat that is perfect to take out on East Grand Traverse Bay.

Q: What is your work background?

A: After graduating from the Maritime Academy, I worked for a season as a Third Mate, navigating ships up to 1,000 feet long through the Great Lakes. The ships carried iron ore and coal, with much of the coal being delivered to power plants.

While standing watch as the ship unloaded coal, I never could have imagined that someday I would look at power plants from an entirely different perspective. In the fall of 2010, I accepted a permanent position with the Army Corps of Engineers as a Third Mate aboard a sea-going hopper dredge working on the Mississippi River. For the next three years I helped remove sediment from one of the busiest shipping channels in the country, participated in the complete re-powering of the ship as new diesel engines were installed, and earned a Second Mate license as well as a Captain's license for smaller vessels.

Then, in the midst of the government shutdown of 2013, I learned about an opportunity at Cherryland Electric Cooperative. I have now been working at Cherryland for just over a year and enjoy my job very much.

Q: Tell us about your job responsibilities at Cherryland.

A: I am responsible for reviewing our residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial rates to ensure that they match the costs associated with providing service to each group of members.

I also maintain our advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) system from the office, working closely with our field service reps to keep track of the 35,000-plus meters that are sending in readings every day. I enjoy both the big picture and detail-oriented aspects of my job, looking at the energy usage for a single account, determining which rate would best fit that account, and if we should consider making changes to the rate or adding a new rate to provide the best value for the many different ways our members use electricity.

Q: What is it like working for a cooperative compared to other jobs you've held?

A: Something else unique is that I have certainly experienced the "cooperative difference." I always see my co-workers doing whatever it takes to provide the best service possible to Cherryland members—from restoring outages to tracking down unclaimed capital credits, and making a difference in the community. Another difference is that everyone at the co-op wears two or three different hats, contributing their experience and professionalism to keep the lights on. ■

A Valentine Reminder: 'Love is...'

Over the years I've spoken to groups of people of all ages about writing and communicating.

It's interesting to note what they find important in their lives, according to their age.

With Valentine's Day falling in February, I always like to ask people what they hold near and dear.

For instance, one year I asked a bunch of kindergartners to complete the sentence—"Love is..."

Of course, they couldn't write it, so they just told me.

The best responses were...

"Love is going to bed at night knowing my family loves me."

"Love is my dog Fred, who's my friend no matter what."

"Love is having something good to eat."

As you can see, kindergartners still appreciate what I call 'the fundamentals of life.'

It's interesting that when they move into middle school and their teenage years that often changes.

The most consistent responses I got from teenagers were...

"Love is having a good iPhone."

"Love is having friends that don't tease you for having pimples."

"Love is fitting in at school."

So, by the teenage years—the social acceptance years—the definition of love has changed.

Then we get into high school and early college, and we start to see young adults...

"Love is getting good grades and getting into a good college."

"Love is finding someone who appreciates you for who you really are."

"Love is finding a good job, good pay, and a good boss."

Now, there is a premium placed on sprouting your wings and finding someone to help you fly.

So, from there we go to what I call the "middle years," and the worm is slowly starting to turn again...

"Love is finding happiness in your job and at home."

"Love is raising a family of responsible people."

"Love is saving up a big enough nest egg to retire comfortably."

Love has now come almost full circle, from social acceptance to sharing your life with someone special to setting yourself up for a good retirement.



And then comes the retired people—some of them in their early 60s (like myself) and some of them in their 80s.

When the older end of this age group talks, you tend to listen more intently because they have years of experience to draw from. When they tell you what "Love is..." you tend to listen more closely.

The most common answers shouldn't surprise us... but they do.

"Love is going to bed at night knowing my family loves me."

"Love is my dog Fred, who's my friend no matter what."

"Love is having something good to eat."

You see, it all ties back to those young kindergartners and the basics of what we really need.

The young kids just want the bare necessities. And after living through decades of finding spouses, working and trying to make a difference, the senior citizens realize that life still boils down to the basics.

Love can be very complex, of course, because we make it that way. But in listening to the perspective of the youngest and the oldest among us, you come to realize that love really is very simple.

Happy Valentine's Day! ■



Nick Edson



HOP HOP JINGLE BOO

Debra Schoch's Folk Art

On the Lake Superior shore, Debra Schoch creates whimsical papier mâché holiday folk art figurines from her home in the tiny U.P. town of Ontonagon. A self-taught artist, she began experimenting in the early '80s when she was looking for a craft project she could do with her daughter, Simone. Today, her initial "wet newspaper" creations are outstanding artworks in a successful business that reaches as far as the Philippines.

Debra named her business Hop Hop Jingle Boo after her three favorite holidays and does her artwork, "When the mood strikes," she says. "Some days I wake up and say to myself, 'This is a crafting day,' and on those days I will have a 'workathon' of about 16 hours." The process begins with an 80-pound bale of papier mâché (sometimes called "poor man's pottery"). "I put some mâché into a large Tupperware® bowl and as corny as it sounds, I wait for it to talk to me and tell me what it wants to be and that is how I come up with the creation."

Using common household items as forms, such as lightbulbs and empty dish soap bottles, she applies and works the mâché into the desired design. The figurine then goes into a special drying box that her husband, John, created. Three days later, she begins working her magic by hand-painting each figurine with acrylic paint. The collars adorning many of her figurines are hand-stitched from 3 yards of crepe paper. The final touch is affixing the figurine to a painted wooden base that John creates. Each original takes about one week to produce.

Like many artists, Debra started by selling her work at local craft shows, but in 2004 her clientele became global when the national firm Bethany Lowe Designs asked her to join their team of artists. Debra's designs are a perfect fit for



This figure, and more of Debra Schoch's holiday artwork, can be found at hophopjingleboo.etsy.com and is featured in the national Bethany Lowe folk art magazine (bethanylowedesigns.com) or call 800-944-6213.

Photos—Yvonne Whitman



Photo—Michael Galetto/Brockway Photography

the catalog and showroom company that provides vintage folk art and holiday designs for the wholesale industry. The popularity of Debra's designs earned her the prestigious designation of "Best Seller for 2012" for the Lowe company.

Each holiday season, Debra creates about 15 original samples that Bethany chooses from, which are then made into samples for showrooms, such as the Atlanta AmericasMart Gift Mall, where buyers order their desired products from Bethany Lowe. An order is then sent to a factory in the Philippines, where Debra's designs are mass-produced in resin and hand-painted, eventually making their way to retail shops around the world.

In Michigan, Debra also has a loyal fan base that is never more evident than at the annual Ghoultide Gathering festival in Chelsea, Mich. Ghoultide is a by-invitation-only Halloween art show, where she is often asked to autograph her pieces. Lisa Brown, who for the last four years has traveled from Dublin, Ohio, to attend, says, "I just love Debra's work. It's whimsical and fun and reminds me of my childhood. It brings me back to that time." In turn, Debra says, "I couldn't do what I do if it weren't for my customers." ■

Co-op News

Annual Meeting is June 11 at Incredible Mo's

The 2015 Cherryland Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting will be held June 11 at Incredible Mo's in Grawn. The gates will open at 4 p.m., the business meeting will be from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., and festivities will wrap up at 8 p.m.

There will be pizza, salad and a soft drink for everyone, plus inside games such as bowling, arcade and laser tag. Outside, there will be live entertainment and tables set up to talk about Cherryland's services.

"Last year was the first time we've held the annual meeting at Incredible Mo's and our members raved about the experience," says Cherryland general manager, Tony Anderson. "We had four solid hours of interacting with members. And they also enjoyed the fun Incredible Mo's had to offer inside and outside."

You Can Serve On Cherryland's Board

Any qualified Cherryland Electric Cooperative member can be elected to serve on the co-op's board of directors.

To be nominated in 2015, candidates can file a petition with the co-op's human resources administrator starting the first day of March until 4 p.m. on the last business day of March.

Nominating petitions shall be signed by at least 25 active co-op members, in good standing, and all signatures must be obtained within 60 days before the date the petition is filed.

Nominating petitions shall be in the form prescribed by the board and are available at Cherryland's office in Grawn. The petition must specify the geographic service area for which the candidate is being nominated.

The term of office is three years. Two directors will be elected at this year's annual meeting, which will be held June 11, at Incredible Mo's near Grawn. This year's directors will represent Grand Traverse/Kalkaska counties and one at-large position.

Nominees must meet the director qualifications set forth in the bylaws under Section 2 of Article III. Any member interested in becoming a candidate is invited to visit Cherryland's office and learn about a director's duties.

In the event no qualified candidate is nominated to fill the vacancy of a director whose term has expired, the newly elected board will appoint sufficient directors to fill the vacancies. The election will be by majority vote of the board within 60 days of its first meeting.

Directors elected in this way will serve until the next annual meeting, when members will be given an opportunity to fill the balance of the regular three-year term.

Cherryland Offers Scholarships

Cherryland offers five scholarships each year—three worth \$4,000 (\$1,000 for four years) for high school seniors and two \$1,000 adult scholarships (post high school).



High school seniors whose parents or guardians currently receive electric service from Cherryland and live in our service area may apply for the \$4,000 scholarship. Selections are based on GPA, extracurricular activities, community involvement and/or after school employment. A minimum required GPA is 2.75 on a 4.0 system.

To continue receiving the scholarship, a student must maintain a minimum college course load of 12 credits per term or semester and receive a 2.5 GPA or higher. Students may apply by contacting their high school guidance counselor or Nick Edson, communications coordinator at Cherryland, as noted below.

Adults applying for one of the \$1,000 Adult Education Scholarships must also be Cherryland members. The scholarship goes toward covering the cost of a course or courses taken in a calendar year and are awarded on the basis of need, grades and community service. It is a one-time award.

Members may request either scholarship application by emailing Nick Edson at nicke@cecelec.com (please include your name and address), calling 486-9222, or writing him at Cherryland Electric Cooperative, 5930 U.S.-31 South, Grawn, MI 49637.

Cherryland Cares Seeks Grant Applications

Area nonprofit agencies seeking financial help can apply for a grant through Cherryland Cares.

Cherryland Cares is a five-member board, made up of Cherryland Electric Cooperative members who distribute money from the Operation Round Up program to area nonprofits. The next quarterly Cherryland Cares meeting is March 16. The application deadline is March 6.

Operation Round Up money comes from Cherryland members who elect to round up their bills to the nearest dollar every month. This amount averages \$6 per year.

To receive a Cherryland Cares grant application or join Operation Round Up, contact Nick Edson by e-mail to NEdson@cherrylandelectric.coop or call 486-9222. ■

Storm Watch: Plan Ahead for Outages

A winter storm can lead to a major power outage, but these get-ready tips can help you ride it out.

Winterize Your Home

- Maintain/inspect 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 in uninsulated locations 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.

Prepare a Survival Kit

Cherryland Electric Cooperative line crews will work hard to restore power quickly, but having a two-week survival kit and plan is wise (see list).

Stay Warm and Safe

Plan ahead for alternate heating or other places you can go. A fireplace, propane space heater or wood-burning 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 for more tips on preparing for winter storms. ■

Storm Supply Kit

- Drinking water (5 gallons/person)
- Food (canned/dried/crackers)
- Baby food/diapers/supplies
- Pet food
- Manual can opener
- Medicines, glasses/contact lenses
- Cooler (with ice)
- Grill or camp stove (outdoors only)
- Lantern with extra fuel/flashlights
- Matches/butane lighters
- Extra batteries
- Battery-operated radio
- Phone numbers of places you can go
- Personal IDs
- Bank/insurance policy information
- Sleeping bags/pillows/blankets
- Books, magazines, cards & games
- Plastic trash bags
- Cash & credit cards
- Cell phone & car keys
- Non-electric clock
- Fire extinguisher
- Toilet paper & towelettes
- First Aid kit





Songbirds of Wood

Even as the crow flies, it's a long way between the Chrysler automotive design studio in the Detroit area and Newberry, in the Upper Peninsula. But that's the route Michael Van Houzen chose in 1976 when, after losing his styling job, he headed to the U.P. and turned his talent to becoming a wildlife artist. Countless hand-carved feathers later, he continues to create Songbirds of Wood from his home studio, now in Holland.

Van Houzen learned woodworking from his father, whose hobby was carving duck decoys. They crafted birdhouses, fish and even totem poles in the workshop of their home on Detroit's east side. The artist, who earned his bachelor of fine arts degree from Eastern Michigan University, discovered that he enjoyed studying and sculpting songbirds. He added shorebirds and seabirds to his repertoire when he and his wife Mary Ann, who assists him with the company's business side, became snowbirds by spending winters in Florida.

Each bird takes Van Houzen about three days to hand-sculpt of basswood, detail with a wood burning pen, and paint with acrylics. By adding leaves, flowers and berries, "It becomes a composition," he explains. "I try to be unique in the way I mount the birds." The realistic pieces do have a following, as one collector owns 90 of his songbirds.

Van Houzen, who shows his work at art fairs and wildlife festivals in both states, creates a mix of well-known and more unusual birds. "For the art shows I have to have wrens, nuthatches, chickadees and cardinals, but what I like to do are the odd birds. I do a slew of different warblers for birding festivals." The sculptures cost hundreds of dollars—a pair of Northern Cardinals sold for \$1,500—but he also carves miniatures that are cast in resin, hand-painted and crafted into \$25 lapel pins. While most of his birds are life-size, for practical reasons he scales down larger species, like the blue heron. "Not many people want a bird that size taking up that much space in their living room," he laughs. ■



Michael Van Houzen hand carves and paints life-size popular songbirds, and a variety of unusual species. Many of his creations are realistically posed in their natural settings, such as these northern cardinals.



Small bird lapel pins, cast in resin and hand painted, are also part of Van Houzen's artistry. Visit the Songbirds of Wood website at vanhouzen.com (or call 616-786-9229) to see more of his work and a show schedule.



Songbirds of Wood artist, Michael Van Houzen.

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