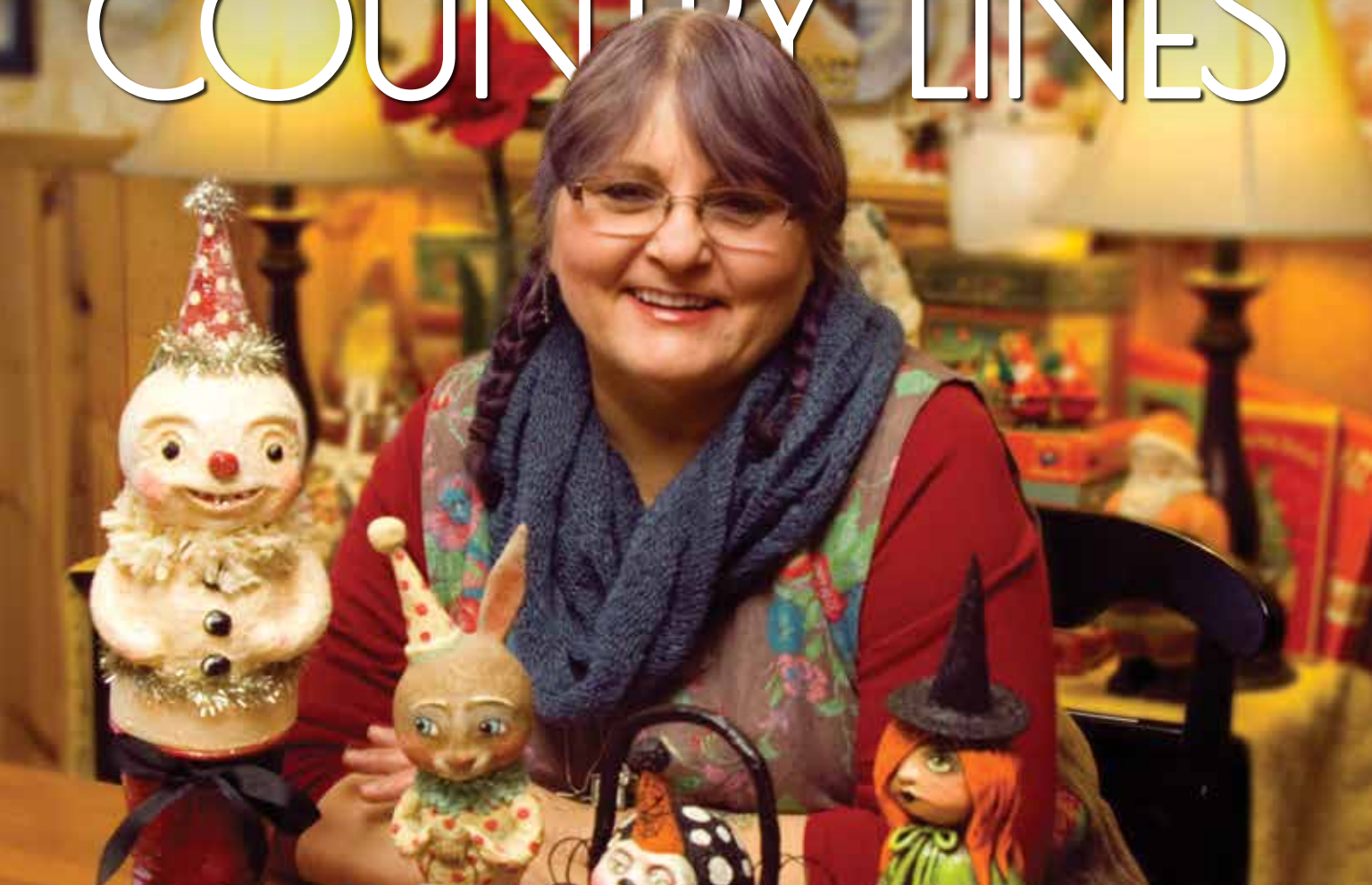


# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



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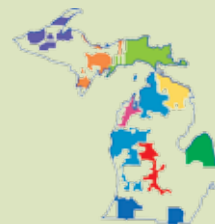
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In a tiny U.P. town, Ontonagon County REA co-op member Debra Schoch is a self-taught artist who creates one-of-a-kind folk art from papier mâché.

Photo—Michael Galetto/Brockway Photography/brockwayphotography.com

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



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# Find Comfort in the Cold

**F**rigid temperatures, combined with the use of more lighting, can cause heating systems to work overtime and most people to have higher energy bills in the winter. The average electricity use of Great Lakes Energy members typically climbs as temperatures drop.

So, how do you ensure that you are managing your energy use wisely? There are many steps, large and small, you can take to make your home more energy efficient, and Great Lakes Energy can help.

Our Energy Optimization programs are designed to save you energy and money. To save on lighting use in your home, switch incandescent bulbs to energy efficient lighting options. You'll receive instant in-store savings on LEDs and CFLs at 131 stores throughout Michigan. Take our online audit and receive a free kit of energy-saving items, including CFLs, for your home. Receive up to \$450 when you install an energy efficient heat pump, plus you may qualify for a rate discount of 3 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). Install a new energy efficient heat pump water heater and receive \$100. Low-income residents can receive many energy efficiency measures for free. There are also many other rebates for appliances, TVs and even for your farm or business.

If you have a heating system in an unconditioned space, such as a crawl space, wrap your exposed pipes and water heater. Plus, make sure to change your air filter monthly. Even with the most efficient heating and cooling system, it works harder in winter as it cycles on-and-off more often, and therefore increases your energy use (and bill).

Log-on to your Great Lakes Energy account to keep up with your energy use. If we've had a few days of frigid temperatures, see how you can try to save on days that are milder.

Another small step to help you start saving is to stay educated. An easy way is to search for and download an app called "Together We Save." It's available for iPhones, iPads or Androids, and offers handy energy calculators and tips.

Last, but not least, dress for the cold. How many times have your kids complained about the house being cold, but they're walking around in shorts and t-shirts? It sounds obvious, but dressing in warm clothing or wrapping up in a blanket will prevent the urge to turn the thermostat up.

We can't avoid cold temperatures, but Great Lakes can help make your home more comfortable until spring arrives. ■



**Steve Boeckman**  
Great Lakes Energy  
President/CEO

## Interested in more energy-saving information?

Learn about Energy Optimization rebates at [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org) or call 877-296-4319 today.

## Need energy or living assistance?

Dial 2-1-1 or visit [211.org](http://211.org) for free, confidential referrals to agencies that can help.

# Who Are Your Directors?



**T**he directors of your electric cooperative are Great Lakes Energy members, just like you.

In this issue of *Country Lines*, we continue featuring GLE directors so you can get to know them even better. Paul Byl, of Shelby, is the GLE board's secretary, and operates a long-established family business—Byl's Lakeview Orchards—with his wife, Anne. They raise asparagus, cherries, peaches and apples as the main crops, along with blueberries and strawberries. Some of their fresh produce is sold at Bella Gardens, their family's farm market that also features baked goods and crafts.

Byl also serves on the board of the Michigan Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Association, an affiliate of the Michigan Farm Bureau, and is a member of the New Era Reformed Church.

As a business owner, he knows the importance of providing a quality, affordable product backed by good service. He feels the same way about his role as a Great Lakes Energy director. *That's the cooperative difference.* ■



## Money for Members

Great Lakes Energy members, both commercial and residential, received capital credit refunds in December, including some local schools served by the cooperative.

Michael Sweet (above), Walkerville Public Schools superintendent, accepts a check for \$2,258.82 from GLE's Cyndy Streasick. Refund amounts were given as bill credits or checks and were based on electricity purchases made by members in 2013 and 1989.

As a member of an electric cooperative, you're entitled to a share of the margins earned by Great Lakes Energy. Since 2003, your cooperative has issued nearly \$41.5 million in capital credit refunds to members. The returning of capital credits is just one part of the "cooperative difference."

Interested in more information? Contact us or visit our website at [gtlakes.com](http://gtlakes.com) and search "capital credits".

## TAKE ONE AND SHOW IT TO YOUR PHARMACIST.

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## Try Zone Heating and Cooling for Home Comfort

**F**amily 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](http://aprilaire.com)); Arzel Zoning Technology (800-611-8312; [arzel.com](http://arzel.com)); Durodyne (800-899-3876; [durodyne.com](http://durodyne.com)); EWC Controls (800-446-3110; [ewccontrols.com](http://ewccontrols.com)); and Zonex Systems (800-228-2966; [zonexsystems.com](http://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](http://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](http://countrylines.com) for more reader recipes!

Photos—831 Creative



## Great Lakes Energy's 'Commitment to Community'

**F**or the third year in a row, Great Lakes Energy showed support for local communities through its Touchstone Energy Classroom Grant Program. Grants totaling just over \$20,200 were awarded to 13 school districts in the cooperative's service area to promote learning, innovation and technology in the classroom. Many of the projects will benefit students for several years.

Classroom grants awarded for the 2014–15 school year include:

- Beaver Island Community School – \$1,992 for “Students Making Sense of Algebra Using Technology”
- Bellaire High School – \$600 to buy stations for language lab equipment for learning Spanish
- St. Mary School (Big Rapids) – \$2,000 for robotics kits to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)
- Cadillac High School – \$1,859.46 for Chromebooks for secondary social studies education
- Grayling High School – \$1,657.94 for video production equipment to support a student-led broadcasting club
- Oceana Christian School, Hart – \$1,371.90 for a LEGO Robotics Math/Science Enrichment Program
- Holton Elementary – \$1,900 for iPad technology for a Language Arts classroom program
- Johannesburg Middle School – \$1,995 for laptops for CNN Student News, history exploration and computer projects
- Kent City Middle/High School – \$1,371 for video and sound equipment for multimedia classes
- Mancelona Middle School – \$1,725 for three digital microscopes
- Northern Michigan Christian School, McBain – \$953.73 for wireless handheld student response units
- Lincoln Elementary School, Petoskey – \$1,500 for iPads for a “Making Math Thinking Visible” initiative
- Wolverine Elementary School – \$1,343.95 for MobyMax Curriculum Online Resource



Students from teacher Jeremy Smith's eighth grade Kent City Middle School media class were all smiles when they received \$1,371 from Great Lakes Energy's Classroom Grant Program. The grant paid for equipment students will use in video and broadcast projects.

An impartial panel of judges reviewed the grant applications. Preference was given to projects and programs involving use of technology or tangible equipment that enhance learning and are not currently being funded through the school's budget.

Based on the high number of grant applications received and quality of the projects, Great Lakes Energy plans to again offer the Touchstone Energy Technology Grant Program for the 2015–16 school year.

A total of 749 Touchstone Energy cooperatives serve members in 46 states with a commitment to integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to communities. Great Lakes Energy and its members also support local communities through the cooperative's People Fund program. More information about these programs can be found at [gtlakes.com](http://gtlakes.com) in the “Your Community” section. ■



### Learn More at the Home Show

Mark your calendar and plan to visit the Great Lakes Energy booth at the home show nearest you.

Stop by and speak to a representative to learn more about Energy Optimization programs designed to save you energy and money.

We'll also be at the Boyne Business Expo in late April—watch *Country Lines* for updates.

### Northern Michigan Regional Home Show

March 13–14

North Central Michigan College, Petoskey



# Helping Young Students Learn



**W**hen the **Bellaire Public Library** lost the use of their children's computer, a \$1,300 People Fund grant helped pay for a new children's literacy station computer. "It will help children from ages three to eight attain early literacy skills which are fundamental to their success in school and life," says Jane Gyulveszi, library director.

The People Fund is supported by participating Great Lakes Energy members who allow their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar. The rounded-up amounts provide the funds for the People Fund grants that are awarded to local community groups and charities.

If you'd like to help your community by allowing your monthly bill to be rounded to the next dollar for a People Fund contribution, please visit [gtlakes.com](http://gtlakes.com) under the "Your Community" tab or call 888-485-2537. If you already support this effort, thanks for your help! ■



## Your Electric Co-op Meets 2014 Reliability Goal

**S**AIDI (pronounced SAY-DEE) says **Great Lakes Energy** met its 2014 reliability goal, which was to not exceed 182.1 average outage minutes.

Average outage minutes last year totaled 135.47.

The cooperative met its annual reliability goal in seven of the last nine years.

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

SAIDI is an industry standard index used by GLE to determine the average amount of time a GLE member could be without power in a given year. Since it represents an average, some members actually experience no outage times while others experience more than the SAIDI number.

Weather-related outage events are factored into the SAIDI calculations, with the exception of major event days (MEDs). Storms that create MEDs occur infrequently, but are the most damaging.

Great Lakes Energy will continue working to limit the weather's damaging impact on its distribution system. The addition of more line protection devices, use of new technologies, improvements to major power line circuits, and ongoing vegetation management to limit tree damage to power lines are all helping to get the lights back on safely and more quickly for members during storms.

Watch for SAIDI goal updates in future issues of *Michigan Country Lines*. ■

## Your Feedback is Important

Each year, an independent survey company conducts the member survey by phone for Great Lakes Energy (GLE). We like to think we're doing a great job, but we want to know what our members think. Ninety-one percent of members participating in our **2014** member survey rated us above average or excellent in terms of their overall satisfaction with Great Lakes Energy, but we still have areas to improve on.

Members rated reliability, courteous employees and cost of service as the three most important service characteristics that GLE provides. We use the survey results to develop our corporate goals for 2015, as well as make service improvements.

Thanks to those members who took time to participate in the survey—your feedback is important. If you have a comment, we'd love to hear from you, too. Email us at [glenergy@glenergy.com](mailto:glenergy@glenergy.com) or write to us at P.O. Box 70, Boyne City, MI 49712.



# HOP HOP JINGLE BOO

Debra Schoch's Folk Art



**O**n 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](http://hophopjingleboo.etsy.com) and is featured in the national Bethany Lowe folk art magazine ([bethanylowedesigns.com](http://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." ■

# Tree Clearing Begins for Reliability, Safety

**C**ontracted tree-trimming crews will begin removing trees and limbs near power lines throughout the Great Lakes Energy service area this winter.

The work is part of the cooperative's annual vegetation management program to improve electric service reliability and safety. About \$3.8 million will be invested in 2015 to re-clear trees along 1,294 miles of power line rights-of-way (ROW) in 17 counties and 77 townships.

Great Lakes Energy members will be notified by post card and phone if ROW re-clearing work is scheduled in their area. Please be sure we have your current billing address and primary phone number for your service location. This will help ensure we are able to reach you.

Tree-related power line damage is a major cause of outages. Re-clearing of the co-op's entire power line distribution system is performed on six- to seven-year cycles. The amount of trimming to maintain adequate power line clearance depends on the tree type, location and growth, and line voltage size. In addition to weak and dying trees, healthy trees may need to be trimmed or removed if they pose a threat to your electric service.

Please see the list on this page of areas where contracted crews will work this year.

Have questions? Contact our Vegetation Management Department at 888-485-2537, ext. 8221 (central and south counties) or ext. 1295 (north counties). ■

## Areas Scheduled for Re-clearing

Re-clearing of vegetation along Great Lakes Energy power lines is scheduled in the following counties and townships:

**Allegan:** Fillmore, Hopkins, Martin, Overisel, Salem, Wayland

**Antrim:** Banks, Jordan, Echo

**Barry:** Thornapple, Yankee Springs

**Charlevoix:** St. James, Peaine, Marion, Norwood, South Arm

**Crawford:** Frederic, Grayling, Maple Forest

**Kalkaska:** Bear Lake, Excelsior, Blue Lake, Garfield

**Lake:** Elk

**Manistee:** Stronach, Norman

**Mason:** Amber, Branch, Custer, Eden, Logan, Meade, Pere Marquette, Riverton, Summit

**Mecosta:** Grant

**Montmorency:** Montmorency, Briley, Vienna

**Muskegon:** Casnovia, Egelston, Moorland, Ravenna, Sullivan

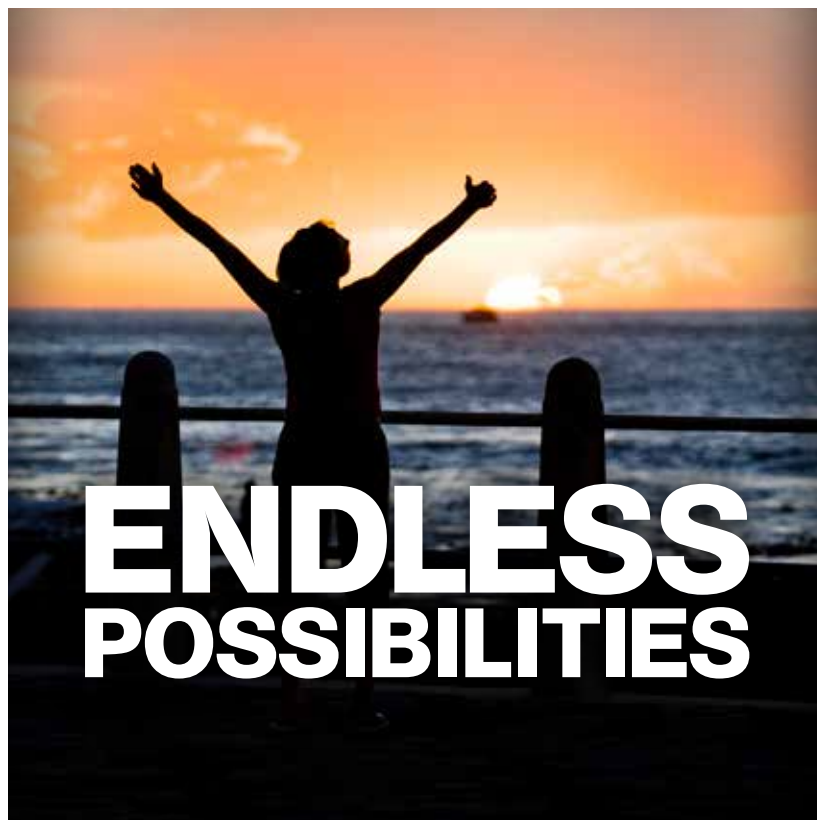
**Newwaygo:** Beaver, Everett, Lincoln, Sherman, Troy, Wilcox

**Oceana:** Benona, Colfax, Ferry, Golden, Hart, Leavitt, Newfield, Shelby

**Osceola:** Evert, Hersey, Highland, Lincoln, Orient, Richmond, Rose Lake, Sherman, Sylvan

**Otsego:** Charlton, Chester, Dover, Corwith, Hayes

**Ottawa:** Blendon, Holland, Jamestown, Olive, Zeeland



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# 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 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

Great Lakes Energy 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

## 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

heating sources should always be vented, and used with caution—make sure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working.

If you use a portable generator, make sure it is placed outside the home for proper ventilation. Be careful not to overload it, and use a proper outdoor extension cord that can handle the electric load.

Visit [ready.gov](http://ready.gov) (or call 800-621-3362) for more tips on preparing for winter storms. ■

# People Fund Donors Are Winners!



**D**id you know we award \$100 billing credits to Great Lakes Energy members who support the People Fund? Six winners are randomly selected each June and December.

Several generous People Fund supporters recently became winners (see list on this page).

## You Can be a Winner, Too

Current People Fund supporters and any member who becomes a People Fund contributor before the next drawing on June 1 are eligible to win.

People Fund contributors allow Great Lakes Energy to round up their electric bills to the nearest dollar each month. The rounded-up amounts, which average less than 50 cents a month, are used to award grants to local charities and community groups, such as food pantries, senior citizen centers and youth programs.

Great Lakes Energy relies solely on your voluntary

contributions to support the People Fund. In 2014, People Fund directors awarded \$168,457 in grants to charitable and community groups throughout our 26-county service area.

Choose the “Your Community” section on [gtlakes.com](http://gtlakes.com) for a complete list of 2014 grant recipients.

Winners' gifts are provided by Great Lakes Energy and do not involve the use of any People Fund round-up money.

**Don't miss your chance to be the next winner! Call our office or visit [gtlakes.com](http://gtlakes.com) to sign up today. ■**

*Congratulations to our winners!*

**Thanks for your ongoing support of the People Fund.**

Robert Dean, Marion  
Dave & Robin Bricker,  
Boyne City  
Henry Kessler & Son,  
Montague

M. R. Larsen, Ludington  
Martin Babich, Atlanta  
Mario Franks, Morley



## Songbirds of Wood

**E**ven 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](http://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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