

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



## HOP HOP JINGLE BOO

Debra Schoch's Folk Art

**Plus!**

**5** Co-op Board Elections In Districts 3, 6

Manna's Market Receives \$10,000 Gift

**8b** Giving The Gift Of Life



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Unsolicited letters, photos and manuscripts are welcome. *Country Lines*, however, will not be responsible for their safe keeping or return.

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

**Change of Address:** Please notify your electric cooperative. See page 4 for contact information.



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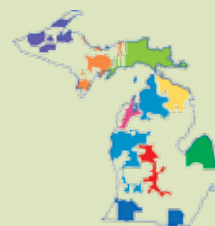
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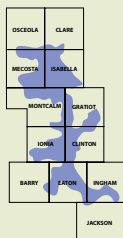
In a tiny U.P. town, Ontonagon County REA co-op member Debra Schoch is a self-taught artist who creates one-of-a-kind folk art from papier mâché.

Photo—Michael Galetto/Brockway Photography/brockwayphotography.com

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



Michigan's Electric  
Cooperatives  
[countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com)



## Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

### Blanchard office:

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

### Portland office:

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

### Electric bill/account questions:

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

### Pay by phone, anytime:

1-877-999-3395

### Service questions/outages:

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

### Tri-County Propane:

1-877-574-2740

### High Speed Internet

1-800-668-8413

[homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org)

E-mail: [tricoenergy@homeworks.org](mailto:tricoenergy@homeworks.org)

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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC



Join the conversation at  
[facebook.com/HomeWorks.org](https://www.facebook.com/HomeWorks.org)

# Prepaid Electricity Adds Value



**Tom Manting**

Finance/IT Manager

**A**t HomeWorks, we try to blend old-fashioned service with new technology to add greater value. Some recent examples are our automated metering program, combined with SmartHub™, the app and online service that gives our members control of their energy information. There's also an online outage map and a variety of bill payment options that take advantage of technology.

We understand that technology doesn't work the same way for every member, and not every member makes use of it. But for some, these are great solutions that offer convenience and save time and money.

We're now looking at adding a service that's been around awhile, and not only in the electric industry. You may already use a prepaid cell phone or credit card. These programs are like paying for gas as you put it in your car's tank, or for food at the grocery store—you "pay as you go" rather than waiting for one bill each month.

Oklahoma Electric Cooperative, as just one example, started its prepaid electric program in 2006 and now has about 4,500 of its 52,500 members participating. In recent surveys, 88 percent said they would recommend prepaid service to others, and 86 percent feel they are more aware and/or more conservative with their electric use by prepaying.

How can our members benefit? Individual members will:

- have better control of their energy budget,
- be able to make smaller, more frequent payments,
- choose their own payment schedule, when it's convenient for them,
- be able to take energy efficiency measures and see the results right away,
- have a low start-up cost, and
- in some cases, could save money on late fees, collection charges, etc.

All members will benefit from lower costs through the cooperative prepaid service because it:

- reduces unpaid account write-offs,
- cuts time and money spent on collection efforts,
- saves the co-op over \$6 per member/per year by eliminating a paper bill (plus it's good for the environment), and
- provides a new billing option we can offer.

Our plan is to get a pilot program started by mid-2015. Please watch *Country Lines* for updates later in the year.

We have a lot to learn about how prepaid metering can work here, but we think it's a great opportunity to provide a useful new service that adds value for many of our members. ■

*Tom Manting*



## Manna's Market Receives \$10,000 from HomeWorks and CoBank

Manna's Market board members and volunteers (L-R) Dan Hankins, Robin Michalski and Jayne Flanigan accept a \$10,000 check from HomeWorks Tri-County Electric general manager Mark Kappler and director Wayne Swiler, with his wife, Pam. Manna's Market is an all-volunteer non-profit food, clothing and baby pantry for residents of Barry County and the communities of the Lakewood School District, located near Lake Odessa.

The gift was made possible by a \$5,000 matching grant from one of the cooperative's lenders, CoBank, as part of CoBank's "Sharing Success" program. This \$3 million charitable fund was designed to benefit cooperatives and the charitable groups they support throughout rural America. CoBank first launched the program in 2012, in conjunction with the International Year of Cooperatives.

"We were pleased to have this opportunity to support an organization like Manna's Market, where my wife, Pam, and I have volunteered our own time. Our rural communities need these services and this gift will help Manna's Market stock its pantry and serve our neighbors," said Swiler, who represents Barry and Ionia counties on the HomeWorks Tri-County Electric board.

## Pohl, Oplinger Seek Re-Election to Co-op Board

**Luke Pohl, of Westphalia, and Ed Oplinger, of Weidman,** have announced their intentions to seek re-election to HomeWorks Tri-County Electric's board of directors this year.

Pohl was appointed in September 2014 to represent District 3, and will be seeking election to the final year of the current term. District 3 includes members in Clinton County, except for Bingham, Duplain and Greenbush townships.

Oplinger has served District 6, comprised of members in Clare and

Isabella counties, since he was first elected in 2009.

The nominating committee in each district consists of the district's officers (listed on this page), elected by members at the district meeting in May. Each committee is required by the co-op's bylaws to nominate at least one candidate on or before March 15. Candidates may also be nominated with a petition signed by at least 25 members from within the district.

Petitions must be turned in by April 5.

Names of nominees will be posted at the cooperative's offices by April 10. ■



**Luke Pohl**



**Ed Oplinger**

### Who Makes Up District Nominating Committees?

Nominating committees are comprised of the district officers, elected by members at the previous year's district meeting.

#### **District 3: Clinton County, except Bingham, Duplain and Greenbush townships**

James Kus, *Chair*

13406 W. State Road  
Grand Ledge, MI 48837  
517-242-7111

email: kusassociates@aol.com

Floyd Messer (Fowler), *Vice Chair*

Helen Goodknecht (Fowler), *Secretary*

#### **District 6: Clare and Isabella counties**

Richard Donley, *Chair*

1037 Lincoln Drive  
Lake Isabella, MI 48893  
989-644-3551

Bob Thompson (Weidman), *Vice Chair*

Rose Nedry (Edmore), *Secretary*

### Interested in Seeking a Board Seat?

If you're interested in running for a HomeWorks board seat yourself, Article VII, Section 2, of the cooperative's bylaws states you must be an individual member of the cooperative in good standing, at least 21 years old, residing in the district which you are to represent, and a U.S. citizen.

To become or remain a director, the bylaws continue, the candidate must have the capacity to enter into legally binding contracts; comply with standards of conduct as laid out in the bylaws; and meet all reasonable conflict of interest qualifications found in Article VII, Section 3.

Also, within the 10 years immediately prior to becoming a director, a candidate shall not have been convicted of or pled guilty to a felony or misdemeanor crime involving issues of moral character.

Visit [homeworks.org/content/about-my-co-op](http://homeworks.org/content/about-my-co-op) for a copy of the bylaws.

If you meet these qualifications and would like to be nominated, contact your district nominating committee, listed on this page, or call HomeWorks Tri-County Electric at 517-647-1211 for a nominating petition.

Information about all candidates and district meeting dates, along with an absentee ballot request form, will be published in the May issue of *Country Lines*. ■



## 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



# OH-SO-TASTY SANDWICHES

More recipes from our readers.

## Saturday Night Sandwiches

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 c. corned beef<br>(less than a can) | 1 c. cut up cheese (Velveeta<br>works best)     |
| 1 T. diced onion                      | ketchup, enough to hold<br>ingredients together |
| 2 T. sweet pickle relish              |   |

Mix all ingredients and spoon onto hamburger buns.  
Wrap each in foil. Bake 15 minutes at 350°.

*Judy Black, Hastings*

## Chicken Fajita Crescent Braid

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 8-oz. can Pillsbury®<br>Crescent Recipe Creations<br>refrigerated seamless, or | ¼ tsp. salt  |
| 1 8-oz. can refrigerated<br>crescent dinner rolls                                | 1 small onion, thinly sliced                         |
| 1 tbsp. vegetable oil  | ½ c. green or red<br>bell pepper strips              |
| 2 c. (approx.) chicken<br>fajita meat  | ¼ c. salsa   |
| 1 tsp. garlic  | 2 c. shredded cheddar-<br>Monterey jack cheese blend |
|  | 1 egg white, beaten                                  |

Heat oven to 375°. Coat a large cookie sheet with cooking spray. If using crescent rolls, unroll the dough and press into 12x8-inch rectangle, firmly pressing perforations to seal. If using the crescent dough sheet, unroll dough and press into a 12x8 rectangle.

In 10-inch skillet, heat 1 tbsp. oil over medium-high. Add the chicken strips and stir in garlic. Cook 3–5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned. Add onion and bell pepper strips, and cook 2–3 minutes longer or until vegetables are crisp-tender.

Spoon chicken mixture in 4-inch strip (lengthwise, down center) of rolled-out dough. Top with salsa and sprinkle with cheese. With scissors or knife, make cuts 1-inch apart on long sides of dough within ½-inch of filling. Alternately cross strips over the filling and press edges to seal. Brush with egg white. Bake 20–25 minutes or until dough is deep golden brown. Cool 5 minutes; cut crosswise into slices.

*Calvin & Melissa Foster, Blanchard*

## Hanky Panks

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 lb. hamburger                               | 1 tsp. oregano                |
| 1 lb. pork sausage<br>(i.e., Bob Evans® mild) | ½ tsp. garlic salt (optional) |
| 1 lb. Velveeta® cheese                        | ½ tsp. salt                   |
| 1 tsp. Worcestershire® sauce                  | ¼ tsp. pepper                 |
|   | cocktail rye bread            |

Brown the hamburger and sausage. Drain and add rest of ingredients. Turn burner on low until cheese melts, then spread on cocktail rye. Put under the broiler until cheese starts to bubble or is golden brown (watch closely so they don't burn!).

*Judy Huhn, Portland*

## COOKING FROM THE HEART

A cookbook produced by HomeWorks Tri-County member-consumers for the benefit of mid-Michigan families and organizations in need.



ON SALE IN AUGUST 2015

### Submit your recipe to

HomeWorks by May 31 in any of several ways:

- At our annual district meetings in May
- At the Blanchard or Portland office
- Mail to: People Fund Cookbook,  
7973 E. Grand River Ave., Portland, MI 48875
- Email to: tschneider@homeworks.org

Make sure the recipe is legible and complete, with full instructions. Include your name, town, and a daytime phone number where we can reach you if we have questions.

Categories include Appetizers; Soups, Salads, and Sauces; Casseroles; Meats and Main Dishes; Cakes, Cookies, and Desserts; Breads, Rolls, and Pastries; and Miscellaneous.

Visit [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com) for more reader recipes!

# Clearing Rights-of-Way Prevents Outages

**O**ur top priority is to provide you with safe, reliable electric service, and trees are a major obstacle. Trees and branches touching power lines are the biggest cause of outages and blinking lights, so tree and brush management along power line rights-of-way is essential to providing service.

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric maintains over 2,900 miles of overhead lines in 13 counties and 96 townships. In 2015, we will start a new seven-year cycle of line clearing, with work planned in these townships:

**Barry** . . . . .Assyria, Maple Grove

**Eaton** . . . . .Benton, Chester, Eaton, Kalamo, Oneida

**Isabella** . . . . .Coldwater

**Montcalm** . . .Belvidere, Cato, Douglass, Maple Valley, Pine, Winfield

**Mecosta** . . . . .Chippewa, Fork, Sheridan, Martiny

Please give these crews room to work safely on your behalf. ■



## Helping Our Community

**G**iving back to our neighbors and communities is a priority through our Tri-County Electric People Fund. The Fund strengthens and supports the communities in which we live, work and serve. At their November and December meetings, the all-volunteer People Fund board made 16 grants that total \$21,056.55, including:

- \$3,000 – St. Michael Conference SVDP in Grand Ledge for the Housing & Utility Program;
- \$1,500 – Clinton County Senior Center in St. Johns for their Nutritional Food Program;
- \$1,500 – Hope House Free Medical Clinic in Big Rapids for the Medical Assistance Program;
- \$750 – Ionia County YMCA for the Child Swim Safety Program;
- \$1,207.98 – Lake Odessa Community Library for a projector;
- \$1,000 – East Montcalm Baby Pantry in Vestaburg for baby pantry items;
- \$500 – CASA – The Voice for Clinton County's Children, St. Johns, for children's fun bags;
- \$1,124 – Wheatland Township Library in Remus for a new computer & router;
- \$1,000 – First Congregational Church, Portland, for food pantry items;

- \$2,500 – Mecosta County family to help with medical bills;
- \$1,600 – Montcalm County family for roof repairs,
- \$1,500 – Isabella County family to help with housing expenses.
- \$989.91 – Mecosta County family for housing expenses;
- \$580.28 – Isabella County family for help with household bills;
- \$1,804.38 – Mecosta County family for housing expenses, and
- \$500 – Ionia County family for help with household bills. ■

### How to Apply for a Grant

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

Write to 7973 E. Grand River Avenue, Portland, MI 48875, for an application form and grant guidelines, or visit [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org).

**Note:** Applications must be received by Feb. 23 for the March meeting, and by April 13 for the April meeting.

# Working Together to Give the Gift of Life



## What does it mean to give the gift of life?

**A** HomeWorks Tri-County employee found out last fall, when her co-workers helped her donate one of her kidneys to an anonymous recipient.

"If it wasn't for everyone here, as a community, helping me out with time off, I couldn't have done it," says Angel McCliggott, a customer service representative since September 2012. "Everyone came together to give this person a second chance."

Angel is a regular blood donor, with the "organ donor" designation on her driver's license for years. On Oct. 31, 2014, at the University of Michigan Transplant Center, she willingly gave a kidney to a young woman she met only briefly, just before the operation began.

At her former job at Independent Bank, a nearby window overlooked the dialysis center in Ionia. "I could hear the ambulances arriving," she recalls. She's known some dialysis patients, too, and says dialysis can take up

to five hours daily, three times a week. "A donation gives them a better quality of life. And, statistics show that a kidney from a live donation could increase the patient's life span by up to 20 years," Angel points out.

Last May, she read a story online about a woman who donated her kidney to a little girl she did not know. Interested, she searched for more information, but only found links to registering as an organ donor. She tried again, and the internet took her straight to the U-M website, which gave her all the information she needed. On the first try, she reached the right person to talk to.

One of the first things she learned was that she would need six to eight weeks off work to recover from the surgery, and as a fairly new employee, she didn't have that much time accumulated. She spoke with her husband, Jim, about the prospect, then with her supervisors, Mary Jane Hoppes and Missy Robson.

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Above — Employee Prayer Circle: On Angel's last day at work before the surgery, employees from all departments gathered with her to pray for her health and success of the kidney transplant.

Since U-M covers all costs except time and travel, she asked, could the co-op help in any way? The word went out and within a short time, her fellow employees donated enough of their own banked sick time to keep Angel's paycheck coming while she recuperated.

Next, she underwent exhaustive testing. During one all-day appointment, she was X-rayed, had an MRI and CT scan, had the first of 42 vials of blood drawn, met with a social worker, spoke with two doctors, and was appointed her own transplant coordinator, who would work with the other patient's coordinator throughout the process. Once she passed the health workup, she met with a psychologist to review her reasons for donating to a stranger.

Finally, in September, she got the call that she was matched with someone on the transplant list. After more blood work, and meeting with another social worker, the only thing left was to wait for a surgery date.

Throughout the tests and waiting, Jim was supportive, though concerned about the safety of living with one kidney. But after attending the all-day appointment with her, he said, "We can do this." Their daughters also think the living donation is the "coolest thing ever."

"U-M staff asked me if I wanted to meet the person. I told them I would be more than happy to meet if they chose to, but the bottom line, there were no strings attached to my donation," Angel says.

As Angel checked in for surgery, she and Jim did meet the woman who would receive her kidney. "Her mother hugged me," and said, "We've been waiting for you a long time," Angel recalls. "I'll never forget that moment."

Surgery was over quickly, and the surgeon even texted Jim a photo of Angel's healthy kidney ready for its new owner. She came home two days later, once she'd



Angel McCliggott

recovered from the anesthesia and could eat, but not before the other patient's nurse stopped in briefly to say everything went well on her side of the transplant.

"Recovery was a lot rougher than I expected," she says. "I was exhausted, but I had a hard time sleeping because any movement was painful." Her family, and work family, helped her "power through" with prayers, cards, texts and phone calls, letting her know she was in their thoughts.

"This was really a gift from my family and my co-workers, not just me," Angel adds. "I hope that maybe one person will hear my story and say, 'I could do that, too.'" ■



The prayer circle was a surprise gift for Angel (center).

## The Need for Donors is Great

According to the National Kidney Foundation, over 100,000 Americans are waiting for a lifesaving kidney transplant right now.

In 2013, nearly 17,000 kidney transplants took place in the U.S.

Every 14 minutes someone is added to the kidney transplant list.

Visit [organdonor.gov](http://organdonor.gov) to learn more about how you can register as an organ, tissue or eye donor, and make sure your family and doctor know your wishes.

# SnapSHOT

## All About Family



1



2



3

## Capture your favorite moments and share!

**1.** Karen Beard, a customer service support clerk at Portland, shared this photo of her family and friends gathered on New Year's Eve, 2014. The group photo has been a family tradition since 2000.

**2.** Jon Karcher, Blanchard lineworker: "This is me and my son Kain hunting for the first time."

**3.** At the Ringling Brothers Circus, held at Grand Rapids' Van Andel Arena last fall, Christy, Tom and Michael Manting joined in the fun. Christy is a consumer accounting clerk, and Tom is manager of information technology, both at Portland.

**See more SnapShots at:**  
[facebook.com/HomeWorks.org](https://facebook.com/HomeWorks.org)

## Submit Your Photo!

Contributors whose photos we print in 2015 will be entered into a drawing and *Country Lines* will pay the winner's January 2016 electric bill (up to \$200.00)!

## Upcoming SnapShot contests

- "Kids at play", Deadline: Feb. 13 (April Issue)
- "Cars", Deadline: Mar. 16 (May Issue)

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

# Member Satisfaction Surveyed

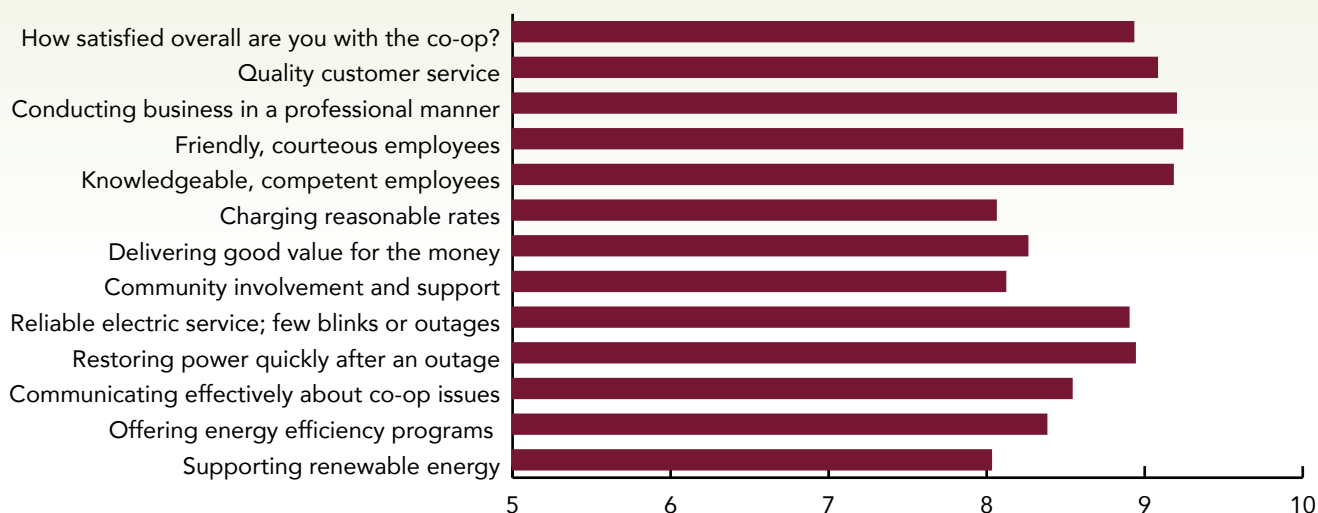
**H**ow do you feel about the way we do business?

An independent research firm, Inside Information, Inc., asked 300 randomly-selected residential members of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric a number of questions about their service, expectations, and opinions on related subjects.

“We try to do these surveys every few years,” says

Missy Robson, manager of customer service. “It’s one way to track opinions and trends in how we’re meeting our members’ needs.”

We’ll reveal more of the results in future issues of *Country Lines*; this month, we’ll take a closer look at the service attributes you find important, from reliability to professional customer service. ■



## NEED HELP WITH COLLEGE COSTS?

Click on [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org) for information on winning your share of \$2,500 in HomeWorks Touchstone Energy Scholarships offered to members.

Seniors are eligible for one of two \$1,000 Touchstone Energy scholarships, awarded to students served by HomeWorks Tri-County and based on a combination of merit and need. We also offer two adult education scholarships of \$500 each.

Scholarship applications are due March 16. Look for application forms and complete rules online at [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org), call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252 or email [jgraham@homeworks.org](mailto:jgraham@homeworks.org).





# 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 Ghoultime Gathering festival in Chelsea, Mich. Ghoultime 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." ■

# Your Board In Action

## Meeting at Portland Nov. 24, your board of directors:

- Reviewed and accepted the 2015 capital and operating budgets, and the 2015 Touchstone Energy marketing budget.
- Accepted the 2015-2017 Collective Bargaining Agreement as negotiated and ratified by IBEW Local 876.
- Authorized accounts receivable write-offs totaling \$105,809.67 as of Dec. 21, 2013.
- Amended the Retirement Security Plan to set all non-union employees at the same benefit level, effective Jan. 1, 2015.
- Authorized a 1 percent increase in the co-op 401(k) program match, as negotiated in the Collective Bargaining Agreement.
- Renewed general liability and umbrella insurance coverage for 2015.

- Discussed the October-November safety report, listing employee training and several public and employee incidents.
- Learned there were 141 new member applications in October.

## Meeting at Blanchard Dec. 18, your board of directors:

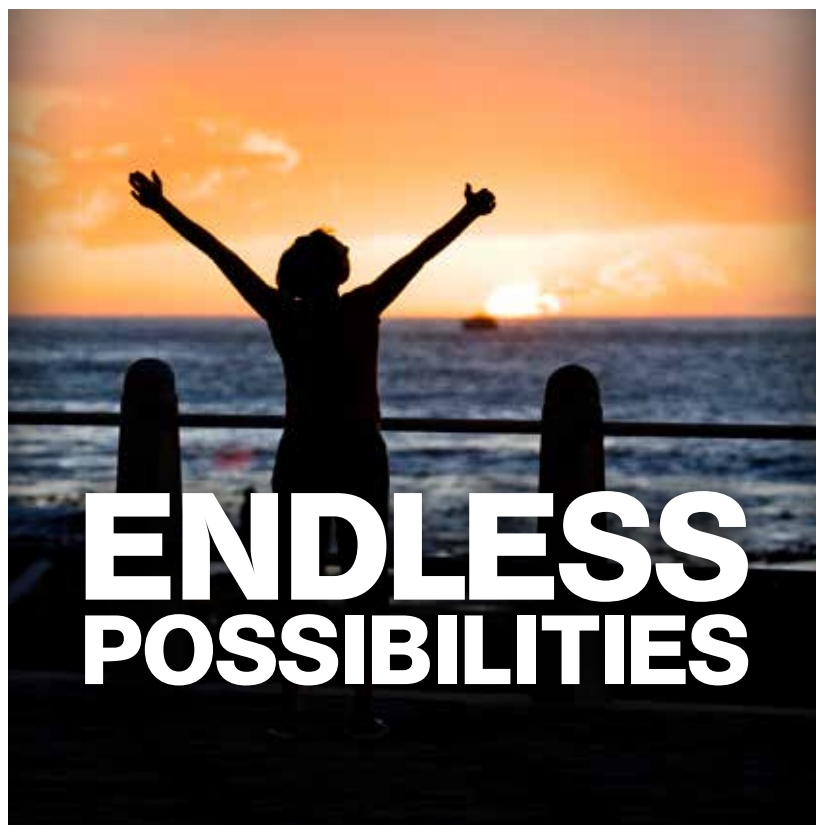
- Reviewed the cooperative's vegetation management plan.
- Reviewed results of the recently completed member satisfaction survey.
- Approved a 12-month extension of a special contract rate for large power member Carbon Green Bio-Energy, based on current market rates.
- Heard a legislative and regulatory update from MECA CEO Craig Borr.
- Discussed the November-December safety report, listing employee

training and several public and employee incidents.

- Reviewed board policies "112 – Strategic Planning" and "209 – Business Ethics, Conduct and Conflict of Interest". Learned there have been no incidents of identity theft reported in the past three months.
- Learned there were 91 new member applications in November.

## Time Set Aside for Members to Comment Before Board Meetings

The first 15 minutes of every board meeting are available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. The next meeting will be March 23 at Portland. Members who need directions to the office or wish to have items considered on the board agenda should call 517-647-7554. ■



## Don't be left out.

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PHONE: 877.296.4319

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

# 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

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric 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](http://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

## HOW TO REPORT A POWER OUTAGE

### Call 1-800-848-9333

After business hours, you may hear a recording.

Listen to the prompt carefully; you'll be given a chance to enter your 10-digit phone number (the one on your account); once matched, you'll be invited to report your outage immediately using the automated system.

If you have specific information to report, please stay on the line to speak with a dispatcher.

(All calls are monitored or recorded.)



### Use SmartHub at [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org)

or get the FREE app for iOS or Android:

[http://www.smarthubapp.com/how\\_do\\_i\\_get\\_it.htm](http://www.smarthubapp.com/how_do_i_get_it.htm)

First time users will need to register with your account number, email address, and last name on the account

Use SmartHub on your phone or tablet, or from any PC to report an outage without waiting



Once you've reported the outage to us, follow our progress on the online outage map at [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org).



If a major storm has caused widespread outages, check our Facebook page ([facebook.com/homeworks.org](https://facebook.com/homeworks.org)) for regular updates.



## 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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