

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



HOP HOP JINGLE BOO

Debra Schoch's Folk Art

Plus!

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Energy Optimization Program

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Ways To Pay

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Executive Editor
Casey Clark

Communications Specialist
Christine Dorr

Editor
Gail Knudtson

Publisher
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Ciesa Design

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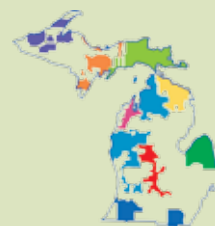
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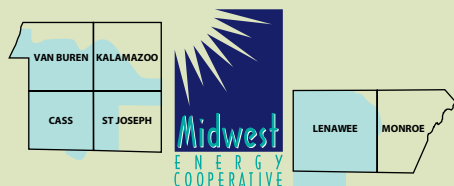
In a tiny U.P. town, Ontonagon County REA co-op member Debra Schoch is a self-taught artist who creates one-of-a-kind folk art from papier mâché.

Photo—Michael Galetto/Brockway Photography/brockwayphotography.com

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



Michigan's Electric
Cooperatives
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PRESIDENT & CEO

Robert Hance

CASSOPOLIS OFFICE

P.O. Box 127 (901 E. State Street)

Cassopolis, MI 49031-0127

M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Drive-up window: M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

TELEPHONE

269-445-1000 or 800-492-5989

Fax: 269-445-3792

PAW PAW OFFICE

59825 S. LaGrave

Paw Paw, MI 49079

M-F, 8 a.m.–1 p.m. and 1:30–4:30 p.m.

ADRIAN OFFICE

1610 E. Maumee St.

Adrian, MI 49221

M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

TELEPHONE

517-263-1808 or 800-492-5989

INTERNET TeamMidwest.com

E-MAIL info@teammidwest.com

EDITOR

Patty Nowlin

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Midwest Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Setting a Standard for Better Reliability



Robert Hance
President/CEO

One of Michigan's largest investor-owned utilities recently launched an aggressive line-clearance program called "Ground To Sky". In an effort to improve service reliability for over 2 million customers, the utility now plans to clear trees and branches from the ground to the sky roughly 15 feet around their power lines.

Gosh, we implemented this approach years ago to improve reliability for our 35,000 members.

In December 2013, a crippling ice storm blanketed much of northern Michigan, leaving more than 600,000 customers of Detroit Edison and Consumers Energy in the dark for as long as 10 days. After a yearlong investigation, the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) pointed a finger of blame at the two utility giants, finding that a large part of the storm damage was caused by falling limbs and trees. Specifically, the report found that 40 percent of the tree-related outages were caused by trees growing outside of the utilities' right-of-way corridors, meaning that tree-trimming crews had largely ignored them for years. Both utilities have since been ordered to trim trees more aggressively for better reliability.

I love hearing words of gratitude from our own members when they have power, while neighbors who are served by another utility are out. However, I'm also thankful that the state took notice and issued a directive. As noted earlier, your co-op has employed a very aggressive line clearance program for well over a decade. While it hasn't always been popular, it has improved service reliability and our members have noticed.

Our line clearance program didn't result from a public spanking by the MPSC; it resulted from our own desire to improve your service experience. The approach takes many forms, from massive cutting to gain a 30-foot ground-to-sky clearance on areas that haven't been addressed for many years, to re-grooming areas where we have previously cut. It's a never-ending cycle of proactive maintenance designed to ultimately reduce reactive outage restoration work when our system is attacked by storms.

Our line clearance approach and plans for 2015 are detailed on page 12. As always, members in areas where clearing work is scheduled will receive notification before we begin, and we encourage you to contact us with any questions or concerns. We thank you for understanding our approach and supporting our efforts to create the best possible service experience for all members. ■



North American Moulding Seizes the Opportunity

When a business has the desire to become more energy efficient and its local utility has a program to provide incentives and guidance to complete efficiency upgrades, that's the definition of a win-win situation.

Enter Brett Lamont, CFO of North American Moulding LLC—a supplier of profile wraps, custom mouldings and laminated panels to the recreational vehicle, manufactured housing, mobile office, kitchen, and retail industries. He knows the value of investing in energy efficient equipment in his facilities and is a key link between North American Moulding and its electric utility, Midwest Energy Cooperative. “We have a great product line and my job is to mainstream and analyze every dollar that comes in and out of this business. When we do a capital project, it is always in my mind to check with Midwest Energy before signing up for the project. My eyes light up when I see the great return on investment that energy efficiency provides,” Lamont explains.

Community-Based Growth

Midwest Energy, with its Energy Optimization (EO) program, has partnered with businesses and residents since 2009 to expand energy efficiency efforts with the goal of achieving greater control over electricity usage. Midwest Energy and North American Moulding have worked together for a number of years to identify potential high-impact upgrades to the manufacturing facility.

“Occasionally I am asked by our commercial and industrial member base why we are helping them buy less of the very thing we are trying to sell them. My answer is always the same: by helping our members become more energy efficient, we are helping them make an easier

decision to reinvest in and even expand their business right where they and their employees work and live. I see it as neighbors helping neighbors,” shares Roger Bowser, energy programs and services manager at Midwest Energy.

Energy Savings, Rebates for All

Find out how saving electricity can benefit your business. Call 877-296-4319 or visit michigan-energy.org to learn about the energy-saving options that are available for your business, farm or home. ■

Customer Spotlight

North American Moulding LLC

Energy Saving Actions:

To-date, North American Moulding has upgraded and installed the following energy efficient measures:

- Upgraded two industrial laminator machines for energy efficiency
- Installed energy efficient refrigerated cycling compressed air dryer
- Installed new variable speed air compressor
- Installed 100 fluorescent high bay light fixtures

Results:

- 583,000 kilowatt-hour/year savings
- Received nearly \$34,000 in Energy Optimization (EO) program rebates

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; aprilair.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 c. balsamic vinegar
½ t. salt	6 T. firmly packed dark brown sugar
¼ c. whole wheat flour	6 ciabatta rolls
3 T. olive oil	6 large slices tomato
½ t. pepper	½ c. grated part-skim mozzarella
3 cloves garlic, minced	fresh basil, optional
1 c. lowfat, reduced sodium chicken broth	

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	2 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
¼ c. finely chopped celery	⅔ c. mayo or salad dressing
¼ c. chopped onion	2 T. chopped jalapeños
¼ c. sweet relish	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

Midwest in the Community



Giving back to our communities is one of the core values of Team Midwest. We believe in doing what we can, individually and as a family of employees, to strengthen and support the communities in which we live, work and serve. Following are some of the ways we've impacted our communities and members in recent months.



Owl Be Home for Christmas

Thanks to some creative students at the Lenawee Boys & Girls Club, Midwest provided a uniquely themed and decorated Christmas tree for the inaugural Comstock Park Christmas Tree Riverwalk. Students decorated owl wood cutouts for the "Owl Be Home For Christmas" tree. In total, 34 businesses and organizations decorated trees for the special community presentation.

Thanksgiving Dinner

There was much to be thankful for on Nov. 22, 2014, as 124 local families were provided a warm Thanksgiving meal at "St. Paul's Saturday," a free community lunch and food pantry program in Dowagiac. A group of Team Midwest volunteers, including their families and friends hosted the guests and served over 160 meals.



RACK Attack (Random Acts of Kindness)

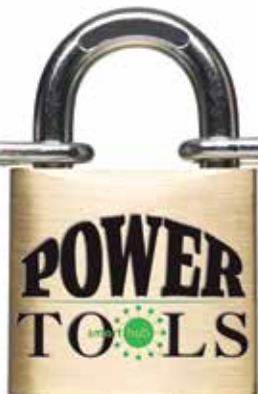
In celebrating the spirit of Christmas, a team of Midwest employees set out on a Friday in December to deliver Random Acts of Community Kindness (RACK). The team, which included (1) Marty Smego, Josh Hance, Kathy Tucker and Casey Hilligoss traveled around the southwest Michigan service area, spreading kindness to individuals, organizations and businesses, asking in return that recipients pay it forward and deliver their own random acts of kindness to other unsuspecting strangers.

They started their day serving breakfast treats to teachers and staff at Sam Adams Elementary in Cass (2), and continued with purchasing and donating supplies (3) to two local food pantry programs.

After delivering a surprise lunch to employees of two co-op member businesses and buying lunch for unsuspecting patrons at a local restaurant, the team ended the day preparing meals for families staying at the regional Ronald McDonald House.

We look forward to continuing our Team Midwest community involvement in 2015. ■





Midwest Energy Protects Your Personal Information

Electricity is dangerous. That's why we spend a lot of time and effort training our employees, educating our members, and practicing due diligence in everything we do to keep your lights on. But your safety goes beyond the distribution of kilowatts. We are also working very hard to protect the privacy of your personal information.

Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear about a breach of information within a retail environment. Credit card numbers and other information are at risk with every financial transaction. While we have complete trust in our Customer Care team, making your payment over the phone is not the most secure method of conducting your business. For that reason, we will no longer take payments through our call center beginning April 1, 2015.

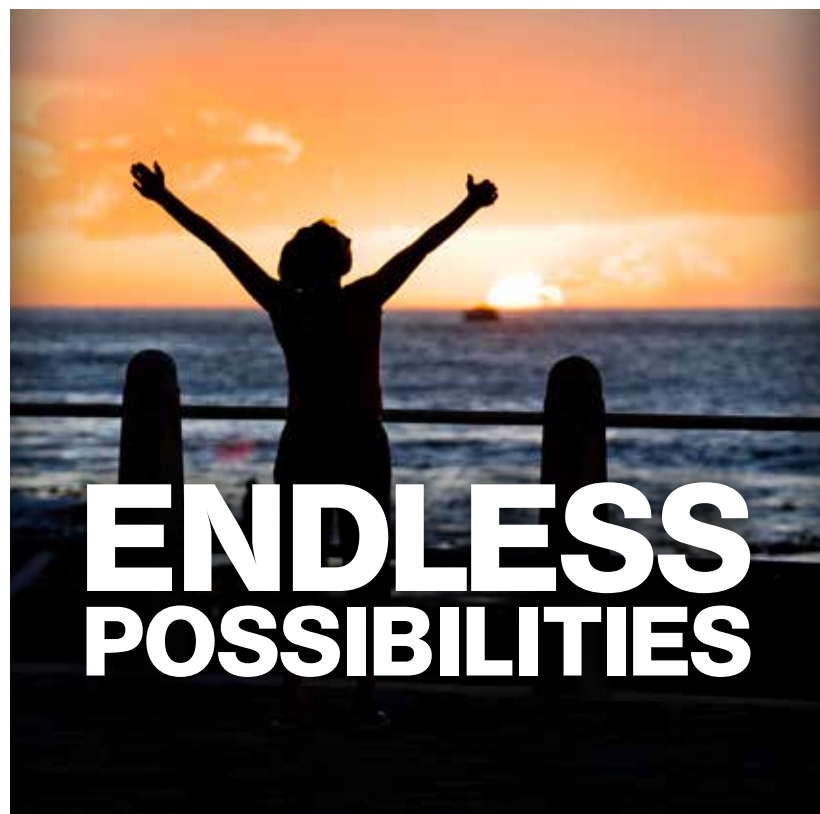
Following are the best ways for you to conduct financial transactions with Team Midwest while ensuring the safety and security of your personal information:

- **SmartHub (teammidwest.smarthub.coop):** This is our online and mobile platform through which you can safely and securely manage your account and service

experience. A one-time registration is required. Please contact our customer care department if you need assistance.

- **Automated Phone System:** You can make payment through our automated phone system by calling 800-492-5989 and choosing option 1. Please have your account number ready. The automated system processes your payment and maintains no record of credit card or banking information.
- **Autopay:** With a one-time set up, you can have your bill automatically paid monthly through a designated credit card or bank account. Sign up for autopay through SmartHub, or contact our customer care department for an enrollment form that you can complete and return.

We understand and appreciate that you may prefer the traditional method of making your payment through our call center, but we implement these measures to protect you and all members from the very real risk of identity theft. Thank you for understanding. ■



Don't be left out.

Your local electric co-op is looking out for you. When you save energy, you deserve to be rewarded. That's why your electric utility offers Energy Optimization programs with hundreds of ways to save for your home or business.

CLAIM YOUR SAVINGS. Check out your electric utility's energy saving solutions. **Start saving today!**



ONLINE: michigan-energy.org
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.



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 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." ■

Tree Clearing Promotes Safe, Reliable Electricity

Reliable electricity is not just a luxury; it's an expectation. Our top priority as your cooperative is to provide a reliable and safe electric distribution system, and trees are a major obstacle. To improve your service experience, we employ an aggressive, proactive line clearance program proven to significantly reduce outage hours related to our distribution system.

What We Do and Why

Our line clearance standard is to obtain and maintain a ground-to-sky clearance of 15 feet, free from all obstructions, on each side of the power line. Where our facilities cross personal property, easement gives us the right to access and use that property to maintain our right-of-way. An easement can be recorded, meaning it is signed and on file at the Register of Deeds office in the county of service, or prescriptive, meaning the land has been used in a continuous and open manner for the statutory period of 15 years for utility purposes.

We employ a three-prong approach to right-of-way maintenance. Following is a description of each method, with specific plans for 2015.

Cutting: In areas that have not been addressed for at least 15–20 years, we must first reclaim our rights-of-way using the 30 foot ground-to-sky approach described above. This is an aggressive approach, but an important first step in providing safe, reliable electricity.

2015 Plan: Between January and June we will cut 64 miles of line in Fabius, Constantine, Marcellus and Porter townships. We will mail notification to members in areas scheduled for cutting and attempt at least two telephone contacts prior to beginning any work. We may be able to offer alternatives, such as burying or relocating the line at member cost. If you receive a mailing



The ground-to-sky approach to line clearance helps to make sure that trees don't form a canopy over the lines.



Before and after shots of a line circuit in Dowagiac. A newly cleared right-of-way can look extreme at first, but as the growth returns the landscape regains its natural beauty.

and are interested in alternatives, please return the "Request for Contact" form.

Re-grooming: Once we have cleared the line, we periodically return to trim and mow for any new growth. Maintaining cleared rights-of-way is critical.

2015 Plan: Throughout the year, we will re-groom 161 miles of line in Howard, Jefferson, Lagrange, Pokagon and Calvin townships. We will attempt telephone contact prior to beginning any work.

Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM): This is a long-term spraying and mowing strategy to manage continued regrowth in newly cut areas. It effectively controls tall-growing trees and bushes while promoting low-growing plants such as grasses, wildflowers and shrubs that are beneficial to wildlife. It offers longer term results in a more cost-effective way, and is endorsed by a number of environmental, forestry and wildlife providers as offering benefits to many wildlife species.

2015 Plan: Between April and September we will spray and mow 130 miles of line in Penn, Porter and Decatur townships. An informational letter will be sent to all homeowners in areas where we use IVM prior to beginning any work.

For More Information

For more information about our line clearance procedures, please visit TeamMidwest.com or call our Customer Care Department at 800-492-5989. ■

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

Midwest 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 (or call 800-621-3362) for more tips on preparing for winter storms. ■



Vantine Earns Journeyman Title

Terry Rubenthaler (left), vice president of operations and engineering Midwest Energy, presents Mark Vantine with his Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship. Vantine, who began his Midwest Energy Cooperative career in 2011 as an apprentice lineman, completed the necessary 7,000 hours and the required course material in 2014 to earn the title of journeyman lineman.



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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