

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LIVES

A photograph of Valerie Brader, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and standing with her arms crossed. She is wearing a black jacket with white lace detailing over a yellow lace top. The background is a blurred interior with warm lighting and architectural details.

Valerie Brader is Michigan's New  
'First Lady of  
Energy'

Plus!

4 Linking Ownership  
With Value

5 Take Savings And  
Comfort To New Level

9 Feed The Need With Our  
Food Pantry Challenge

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<sup>1</sup> Rebate ends on June 19th, 2015.

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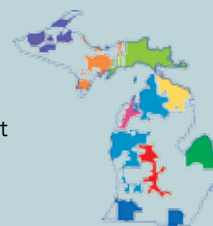
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## ON THE COVER\*

Chosen as the executive director of the new Michigan Agency for Energy, Valerie Brader says the state faces very serious energy issues but, "Big challenges offer the biggest opportunity to make a difference."

Photo—Matthew Mitchell

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



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## Prepaid Program Links Ownership With Value



**Robert Hance**  
President/CEO

**I remember fondly the day I plunked \$50 of my own hard-earned cash on the table** to purchase my very first car. I was just 18, right out of high school, and couldn't have been more pleased with myself or my purchase. It was a '64 red Pontiac Tempest with 120,000 miles, straight 6, automatic, and I used it on my daily commute to Ferris State and my job at O&A Electric Cooperative. It was also in that car that I proposed to my wife, Mary, over 40 years ago.

That car was the first item of value that I purchased as a young adult. I OWNED it, and took care of it like it was brand new and fresh off the line.

Isn't it funny how ownership causes us to value things differently? I was careful when borrowing my mom's car, but didn't take extra steps to vacuum the seats or check the oil regularly. I chuckle now as I recall the full regimen of care behind the upkeep of my own first vehicle.

When we choose to invest our own money, whether it's a car or a home or just the weekly trip to the grocery store, we tend to put an entirely different level of value or importance on it. We pay more attention to the details and look more closely at the outcome.

That's why Midwest Energy named its prepaid metering program OWN It. Studies show that many people dramatically change their energy use behaviors and habits when they pay for electricity prior to actually using it. It's easier to understand the real value behind \$50 worth of kilowatts when it's paid for on Monday and gone by the end of the week. You can more easily connect the money spent with the value gained. Users don't necessarily stop brewing that morning pot of coffee, enjoying the "Walking Dead" marathon or taking the long, luxurious bath, but most value those experiences a little bit more and may change other habits or behaviors to accommodate them.

We have more than 500 members regularly using our OWN IT prepaid metering program. One family recently shared how prepaid challenged them to be more mindful of their daily energy use, and how excited they were when they saw the graphs showing the lower consumption.

Prepaid metering is one of the many tools we provide to help our members understand and manage their own account and service experience. Some choose it because they can avoid a deposit, while others enroll because they truly want to understand how today's choices impact daily energy costs. Whatever your motivation to OWN It, you can learn more at [TeamMidwest.com](http://TeamMidwest.com) or by calling us at 800-492-5989. ■

# Discounted Home Energy Audits Now Available

**T**ake your energy savings and home comfort to the next level with Midwest Energy's new Home Performance Energy Audit, available through our Energy Optimization (EO) program.

An accredited Building Analyst will conduct a comprehensive review of your home and perform a series of tests to identify any health or safety hazards, as well as energy efficiency opportunities. Upon completion, you will review results together and develop an energy action plan. The analyst will also inform you about current Energy Optimization rebates available so you can choose the projects that give you the best bang for your buck. Specific tests include:

- **Blower door testing** to identify energy waste and poor air quality;
- **Carbon Monoxide and Gas Leak Testing** to keep you safe in your home;
- **Infrared Thermal Imaging** to pinpoint areas of heat loss;
- **Indoor Air Quality Testing** for mold, pollen, dust and other contaminants is available upon request.

Midwest residential members living in Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties are eligible to participate. Similar comprehensive home energy audits cost about \$400, but for a limited time, eligible members can take advantage of this special offer for just \$100. The initial investment should easily be recouped in energy savings by implementing some of the recommended changes.

Learn more or sign up at [Michigan-Energy.org](http://Michigan-Energy.org) or call 877-296-4319.

If you live outside of the eligible service area, please contact one of our preferred energy auditors for information on available audits, or use the free Online Home Audit tool available at [Michigan-Energy.org](http://Michigan-Energy.org). ■

## Midwest Energy Preferred Energy Auditors

These days we're all looking for ways that we can maximize our energy dollars by increasing our home's efficiency, but knowing where to start and what to do can be overwhelming.

As a service to our members, we have compiled a list of Midwest Energy Cooperative preferred energy auditors. As part of the qualification process we researched, interviewed and checked references on a regional pool of contractors, and included on our final list only those that we feel confident will provide the level of service that you have come to know and expect from your co-op.

Please feel free to contact any of these contractors with confidence if you are interested in more information about their services.

**Thermal Inspection Services, LLC**  
27253 T Drive N., Springport, MI  
517-745-7100

**Energy Diagnostics**  
68597 Hill Street, Sturgis, MI or  
395 East 500 North, Valparaiso, IN  
800-390-8091

**Energy Saving Services, Inc.**  
3025 Emerald Drive, Kalamazoo, MI  
269-341-HEET (4338)

**Green Building Consulting Homes +**  
P.O. Box 43497, Cincinnati, OH  
513-272-2005

**Home Energy Insight, LLC**  
P.O. Box 1536, Portage, MI  
269-372-2496

**Superior Energy Solutions, LLC**  
819 N. Locust St., Ste. B, Ottawa, OH  
419-890-8067

**Think Green Midwest**  
3997 Reily Milville Road, Hamilton, OH  
513-477-0130



# Tips for Building a Strong, Efficient Home

**T**here are new home construction methods available that are much stronger and efficient than typical insulated, wood framing. Some of these methods could more than double the insulation value of typical framed walls.

For a wood-framed house, use staggered, double-stud walls on 24-inch centers. Staggering the wall studs minimizes thermal bridges (direct non-insulated heat flow paths from indoors to outdoors through the wood studs). Also, install rigid foam wall sheathing on the exterior so that all of the lumber's thermal mass is inside of the insulation envelope. This can be covered with any type of exterior finish.

The “stay-in-place” method uses concrete and rigid foam insulation. The insulation forms hold wet concrete and are not removed. They provide the insulation and substrate surface for installing the interior and exterior wall coverings.

A similar method uses hollow foam blocks made to fit your home's plans. The blocks have an open cavity throughout the inside. Concrete is pumped into the top of the walls, which creates a strong, efficient structure.

Structural insulated panel (SIP) systems have a thick foam core sandwiched between two sheets of various materials. The SIP panels are often used for the exterior walls to enclose post and beam-framed and steel-framed homes for the highest insulation levels possible.

SIP panels are made of oriented strand board (OSB), a strong, highly insulated panel. The panel is self-supporting, and once attached to the foundation and connected, the SIP panels support themselves, the floors, ceiling and roof.

Steel-framed construction is excellent if strength is the goal. Steel does not burn or change shape over time as lumber does, and each steel piece is nearly identical.

Steel allows for thinner studs and wider spacing to be used. This leaves room for additional insulation inside the walls and fewer thermal bridges.

Consider these choices when selecting construction methods that will affect the strength, efficiency and durability of the finished product. The time to learn more is before you make these decisions. ■



With “stay-in-place” construction, once the insulated forms are erected and reinforced steel installed, the concrete is pumped in from the top.

Photo – Eco-Block





# CAMPFIRE COOKING

Recipes for your outdoor kitchen.

## Mountain Man Breakfast

- 12" cast iron dutch oven
- ½ lb. chopped bacon or bulk pork sausage (not links)
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 32-oz. bag frozen, shredded hash brown potatoes
- 12 eggs, beaten in a separate bowl
- ½ lb. shredded cheddar cheese
- 8 oz. jar salsa



You will need a nice bed of coals or briquettes, NOT a roaring fire. Preheat the dutch oven bottom on the coals/briquettes. Off to the side, heat the lid on the coals. Brown the bacon/sausage, stirring often, then add the chopped onion and stir until the onion is

translucent. Remove the bacon/sausage and onion from the dutch oven and drain on paper towels. Wipe out the excess grease from the dutch oven. Stir in the shredded hash browns and cook until golden brown. Add the bacon and onion back into the oven. Pour the beaten eggs over the potatoes, stir and cover the oven with the preheated lid. Place a layer of hot coals or briquettes (about 15–18 coals) on top of the oven and bake until the eggs are soft set, not too wet, checking after 5 minutes (timing will depend on how hot your fire is). Sprinkle with the cheese and continue cooking until the eggs are set and cheese is melted.

Serve salsa on the side. Recipe serves 8 generously and can be easily converted for a smaller dutch oven.

This was a favorite for my husband's Boy Scout troop!

*Peg Peppler, Empire*

## Campfire Chicken Package Meal *(pictured)*

- 1 roll heavy duty foil
- 5 peeled carrots, cut into ½-inch slices
- 1 can peas, drained
- 1 can whole sweet corn, drained
- 1 lb. bacon, sliced into 1-inch pieces
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut in ½-inch strips
- 3 large, peeled potatoes, cut into 1-inch pieces
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 t. garlic powder
- 1 t. onion powder
- 1 t. chicken broth, dissolved into 1 c. hot water

Cook bacon in skillet until done; drain and set aside. Tear off pieces of foil, 18 inches long (8 pieces total, you will use double layers of foil). Add vegetables, dividing between each pack. Add in the following order: potatoes on the bottom, carrots, and then peas and corn on top. Divide the chicken equally between the packs and top with bacon. Stir seasonings into cup of broth. Fold foil to make a pouch; pour ¼ c. broth into pouch and seal tightly. Place into campfire and cook for 30 minutes. Remove from fire, open and enjoy. Makes 4 servings.

*Ann Brown, Niles*

## SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE!

Thanks to all who send in recipes. Please send in your favorite "Fresh Seafood" recipes by **July 1**.

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)!

Photos—831 Creative

# High Efficiency Water Heater Just \$125 Out-of-Pocket

**B**uying a new appliance can be an overwhelming proposition. Which brand is best? What features do I need? What will this do to my energy bills?

When it comes to your next water heater purchase, Midwest Energy Cooperative wants to take the confusion out of your hands.

We offer a program that puts a 50-gallon, high-efficiency water heater in your home for only \$125 out-of-pocket. Comparable units are \$400 and above at most hardware stores and retail outlets. We also throw in a hot water savings kit, available through our Energy Optimization (EO) program. This includes pipe wrap, a low-flow showerhead and low-flow faucet aerators.

The Rheem High Efficiency residential electric water heater offers a .95 efficiency rating. The unit comes with a full one-year in-home warranty through Home Depot, and a six-year limited warranty on tank and functional parts. It features dual 4,500 watt heating elements and a factory-installed temperature and pressure relief valve. Special porcelain lining provides tank protection.

Co-op members who are homeowners and use a minimum of 400 kilowatt-hours (kWh) a month can take advantage of this great offer when they participate in our load management program. Load management allows us to remotely control the electricity to your water heater. As a utility, we have periods of peak usage, meaning our collective customer base is using a lot of power at one time. Because energy supply charges from our power supplier are based on monthly peak demand, all co-op members ultimately benefit when we can reduce peak load. We then pass those savings back to those participating in the load management program with a credit on your electric bill.

With this program, your \$4 monthly water heater load management credit will be applied to the cost of your water heater for 66 months. After that time, you will receive the full monthly credit under the terms of the load management program.

Water heater control does not exceed five hours a day, and occurs predominately between the hours of 3–9 p.m. when the system is at its peak. The hot water stored within your insulated tank will remain hot for a long time.

Water heaters are available for pick-up from 8 a.m.–5 p.m. in the Cassopolis and Adrian offices, and from 8 a.m.–1 p.m. and 1:30–4 p.m. in Paw Paw. For more information about this program or to see if you qualify, please call the cooperative at 800-492-5989, or visit one of our offices. ■



**Energy  
Optimization**

## More Great Deals At EO Store

Want some great deals on energy efficient lighting and power strips? Our Energy Optimization (EO) program provides two quick and convenient ways for Michigan residential members to purchase the products you want and need for your home and save up to 75 percent with instant rebates!

Visit any of our district service centers, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., to view the various options available, or visit the new online store at [Michigan-Energy.org](http://Michigan-Energy.org) for a quick and convenient purchase. Items vary between the on-site and online stores. Visit the website for details, or contact us at 877-296-4319.



# Be Creative and Earn \$1,000 For Your Favorite Food Pantry

**M**idwest Energy Cooperative invites you to help Feed The Need with our summer food drive contest.

During the month of June, we invite you to organize a food drive for your favorite pantry. The food pantry must have a physical presence and serve individuals within our co-op service territory. Be creative in your approach, then share that plan and the name of your charity partner in a 2-minute video posted to our Facebook page. Your food pantry partner will benefit from your generous efforts to bring in much-needed donations, but it gets better! Midwest Energy Cooperative will donate an additional \$1,000 to the two videos with the most votes. The more you engage and share your efforts in the social space, the better chance of extra cash for your favorite pantry!

Summer is a time of significant need for food pantries all across the country. School breakfast and lunch programs are largely curtailed, meaning more meals are needed. Donations tend to be high during the winter and holiday seasons when the need is most evident, but those needs don't necessarily go away with warmer weather.



Working together, we can help Feed the Need for many food pantries across the Midwest Energy Cooperative service territory, with extra special awards to the two winners. The contest runs June 1 through June 30, and awards will be presented in July. Visit [Facebook.com/TeamMidwest](https://Facebook.com/TeamMidwest) for full contest details and requirements. If you have questions or need more information, contact Nicole Barfell at 269-445-1112 or [pr@teammidwest.com](mailto:pr@teammidwest.com). ■



From our family to yours, have a happy and safe Independence Day weekend.

Cooperative offices will be closed for the Independence Day holiday on Friday, July 3. Payments may be made at the drop box and will be posted on the next open business day.

# Meet Michigan's 'First Lady of Energy'

**O**ften referred to as Michigan's "Energy Czar," Valerie Brader chuckles at that moniker. She appreciates the respect, but prefers the title that Gov. Rick Snyder gave her, executive director of the Michigan Agency for Energy.

Brader, 38, is the first boss of a brand-new agency—an acknowledgment by Snyder that keeping the lights on for Michiganders deserves the undivided attention of a high-powered executive. Brader will spearhead, among other things, the effort to keep the juice flowing while Michigan, facing federal mandates on emissions standards, finds cleaner energy sources than its coal-fired power plants.

"That's our first big challenge," Brader says. "That's the issue that will have the greatest impact."

Because of EPA air-quality requirements and the aging of conventional facilities, the state must close 10 coal-fired plants (nine in the Lower Peninsula and one in the Upper Peninsula) within the next few years. Combined, these plants currently supply electricity to more than 1 million customers. Snyder plans to wean Michigan's electric plants off coal and onto cleaner fuels, such as natural gas.

Meanwhile, the state's two largest energy suppliers—Consumers Energy and DTE Energy—see a looming crisis. They predict that, absent proper management of the

transition and careful attention to other energy challenges, rolling blackouts and electrical shortages could become a routine part of life in the state.

Averting that crisis, Brader says, will require a multi-pronged approach involving reducing energy waste, finding the right place for renewable energy in the mix, and balancing the pros and cons of utility regulation versus commercial customer choice.

Brader has been with the Snyder administration since 2011, most recently as a deputy legal counsel and senior policy adviser. Before that, she was the chief energy policy officer at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Brader also practiced environmental and corporate law, and was an adviser to former Idaho Gov. Phil Batt.

Snyder has described the new agency, which will become part of the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, as one that "responds to the energy challenges that we know are before us." Choosing Brader to head the Agency is a recognition of both her energy policy expertise and legal skills, he said.

Brader and her husband, Ted, have a 2-year-old son, Finn. She commutes to Lansing from Ann Arbor every day. The high-powered job, the family, the commute...It's no wonder that when asked what she does in her spare time, Brader offers her signature laugh and a "spare *what?*" look.

The one person, Brader says, who doesn't acknowledge that she is juggling a lot of balls in the air is Finn. "He's sure the most important thing in my life is him."

Considering the energy issues Michigan must confront in the immediate future—power plant closings, pressure to deregulate the utilities, etc.—one might wonder why Brader took the job in such a tumultuous time.

"Because it's also the most exciting time....," she says. "Big challenges offer the biggest opportunity to make a difference." ■



“Big challenges  
offer the biggest  
opportunity  
to make a  
difference.”





# Upgrade and Save with ENERGY STAR® Appliances

**T**ake a look around your home—are outdated appliances wasting money and energy? Wish you could replace that old, malfunctioning refrigerator or dishwasher, but don't know where to start—or if you can afford it? If so, a smart way to begin your search is to look for appliances with the ENERGY STAR® label. Midwest Energy Cooperative's Energy Optimization program offers dozens of rebates to help offset the purchase price.

## Look for the ENERGY STAR label

ENERGY STAR is a trusted brand for quality products that use significantly less energy than required by minimum federal standards. ENERGY STAR products provide the same features that you're already used to, but can use up to 75 percent less energy than standard models.

## Rebates

While ENERGY STAR qualified products can cost a bit more up front compared to standard versions, the initial investment is almost always recouped by the long-term savings that result. To encourage the purchase of ENERGY STAR products and appliances, Midwest Energy Cooperative's Energy Optimization program offers rebates (see chart).

Purchase your new ENERGY STAR appliances at the store of your choice, then apply for a rebate from the Energy Optimization program. Simply fill out the rebate form online at [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org) and mail, fax, or email it to the Energy Optimization program to receive your check. Please visit [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org) for more information, or call 877.296.4319. ■

ENERGY STAR Product/Appliance	Rebate Amount
Compact Fluorescent Light (CFL) bulbs	Varies by retailer via in-store mark-down
LED light bulbs	Varies by retailer via in-store mark-down
Outdoor LED (1 or 2 bulb) fixtures	\$10
Ceiling fan (with light kit)	\$15
CFL fixture	\$10
Smart power strip	\$10
Room air conditioner	\$25
Dehumidifier	\$25
Dishwasher	\$25
Clothes washer	\$25
Clothes dryer	\$25
Refrigerator	\$25
Chest freezer	\$25
TV (21"–50")	\$25
TV (51" +)	\$50

## Cool down with summer rebates

Summer is here! Are you in the market for a new ceiling fan, room air conditioner, or dehumidifier? What about a more energy-efficient refrigerator or freezer?

Shop for ENERGY STAR® appliances and save with rebates offered by the Energy Optimization program. Visit [michigan-energy.org/midwest](http://michigan-energy.org/midwest) for a full list of available rebates.

**ENERGY TIP: Receive your rebate faster by using the online application.**



ONLINE: [michigan-energy.org](http://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](http://michigan-energy.org).



# CHILL OUT

# Where Does My Power Come From?

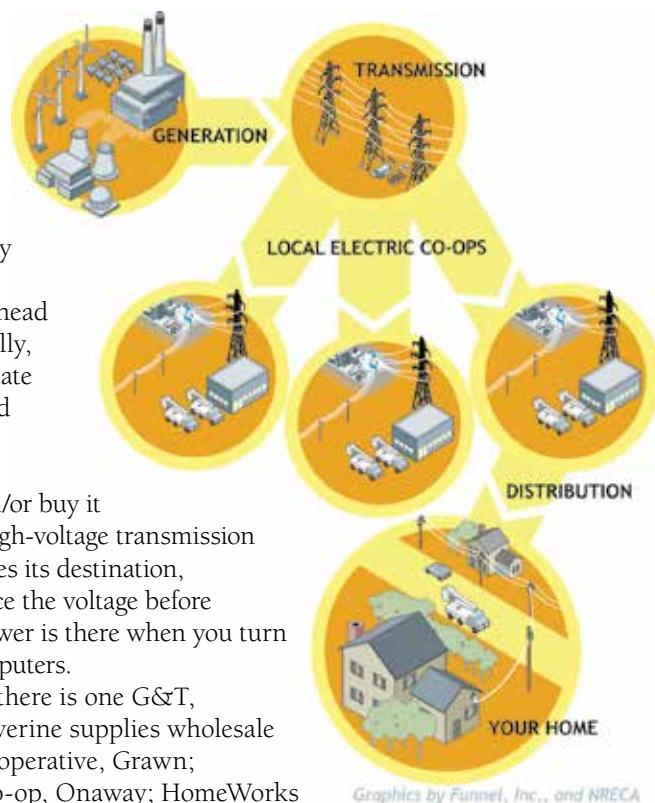
**E**very month you pay your power bill to your electric distribution cooperative. But have you ever wondered where that electricity comes from?

Generally, it's not produced in your neighborhood—most electricity travels quite a distance from where it's actually generated across high-voltage transmission lines to reach the local distribution system and, finally, your home.

Your home or business receives electricity from one of roughly 840 electric distribution cooperatives in America. These local, member-owned, not-for-profit utilities build and maintain overhead and underground lines and equipment to deliver power. Typically, distribution co-ops do not generate electricity or directly negotiate with power providers. That role usually lies with generation and transmission cooperatives (G&Ts).

G&Ts are wholesale power suppliers owned and governed by electric distribution co-ops. They produce electricity directly and/or buy it in bulk from other power suppliers, then ship that power over high-voltage transmission lines to local distribution co-ops' equipment. When power reaches its destination, distribution co-ops must use transformers at substations to reduce the voltage before sending it over their lines to your home or business. Now the power is there when you turn on the lights, heat and cool your homes, and power up your computers.

Today, there are 65 G&Ts in the United States. In Michigan, there is one G&T, Wolverine Power Cooperative. Headquartered in Cadillac, Wolverine supplies wholesale power to five distribution cooperatives: Cherryland Electric Cooperative, Grawn; Great Lakes Energy, Boyne City; Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op, Onaway; HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Portland; and Midwest Energy Cooperative, Cassopolis. Wolverine also has two licensed alternative electric supplier members: Spartan Renewable Energy and Wolverine Power Marketing Cooperative, both in Cadillac. ■



## Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place

For safety, plant taller trees away from overhead utility lines

Power line right-of-way





# There's More To Cuba Than Cars, Cigars

**wanted to see Cuba before corporate interests prevail**, and the mysterious country 100 miles from Key West, FL, becomes South Beach South. As U.S.-Cuba hostility softens, the island nation is poised to become an American tourist mecca.

Around Christmas, I received a brochure from the Michigan State University Alumni Association. "Cuba," it said. "A People-to-People Educational Exchange." The offer: an eight-day exploration of a place few Americans have seen; 27 people, including my wife and I, accepted. Our group claimed 17 Michiganders, including Ross and Brenda Biederman. Biederman is president of the Midwestern Broadcasting Co., which includes radio station WTCM in Traverse City.

Despite the recent thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations, U.S. tourism is not yet allowed. The Alumni Association holds a federal license, which demands strict adherence to the educational mission. Reflecting that, our agenda included scholarly lectures and visits to a school, an agricultural commune, and other non-tourist places.

Yet, we found time for salsa dancing, cruising Havana in vintage convertibles and sampling local mojitos and Cuba Libres (rum, coke and lime juice).

Havana's iconic image—1940s and '50s American cars—are the most conspicuous evidence of Cuba's arrested development, a result of the 53-year-old U.S. trade embargo. Nearly everything there suggests a bygone era.

Our group stayed in Havana for five nights, then in Ciefuegos, on the southern coast, for two nights. In eight days we immersed ourselves in Havana's street life and explored Cuba's lush mountain forests and pristine Caribbean seaside.

One disappointment: mediocre cuisine. If you're traveling for the cuisine, go to France—not to a country known for rice and beans. Also, shoppers will encounter a paucity of possibilities. There's little to buy, except cigars and rum; U.S. citizens can bring back \$100 worth of each.

Those are trivial complaints. If you go to Cuba, you'll find the people welcoming, the music irresistible, street life stimulating, and the scenery breathtaking. It's a fascinating country. ■

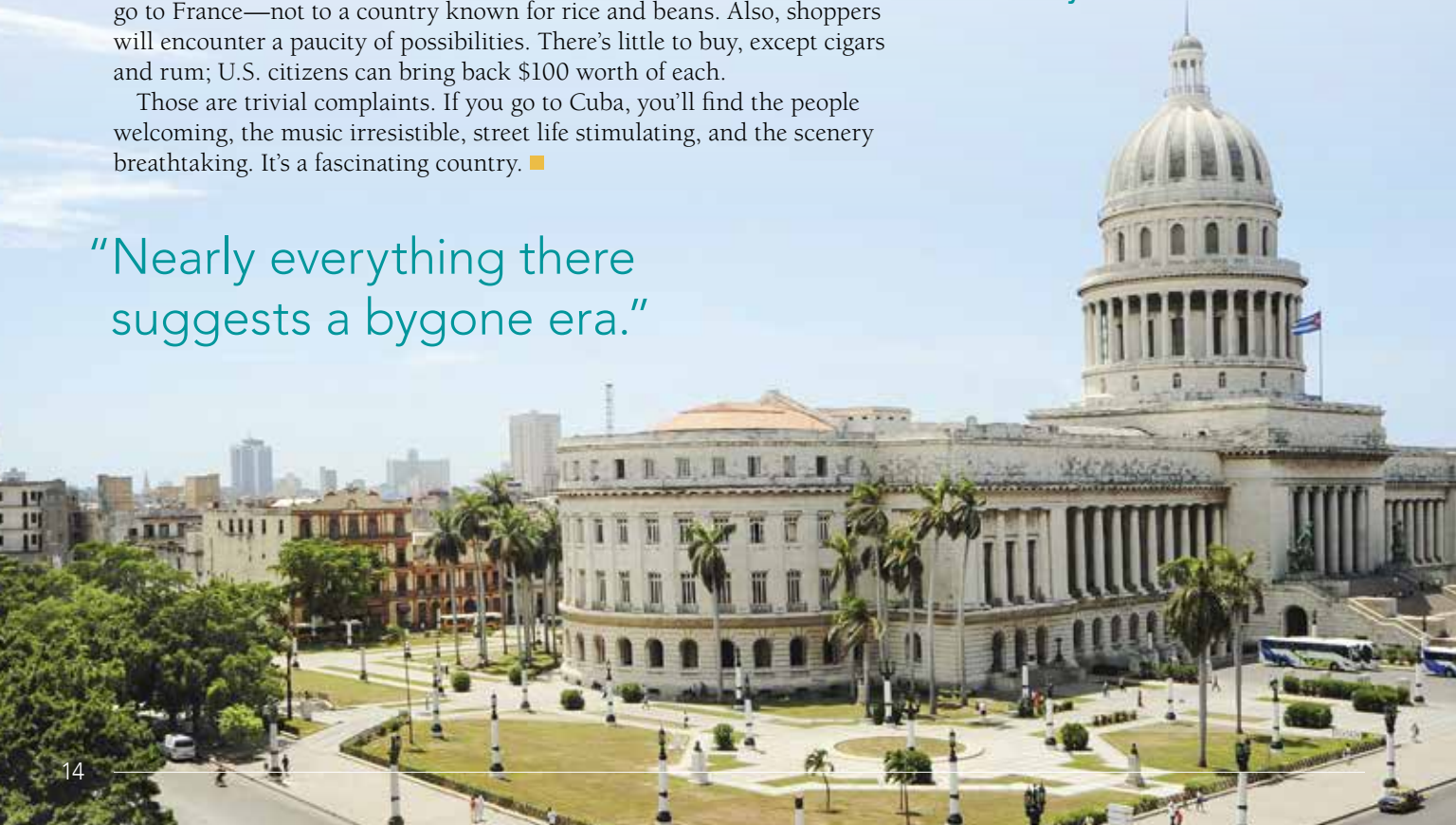
"Nearly everything there suggests a bygone era."



At the Partagas cigar factory in Havana, each employee gets four cigars a day to smoke while he (or she) works.



Cuba is known for vintage cars. Shown is a '56 Chevy.





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