

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



Tina's Triumph

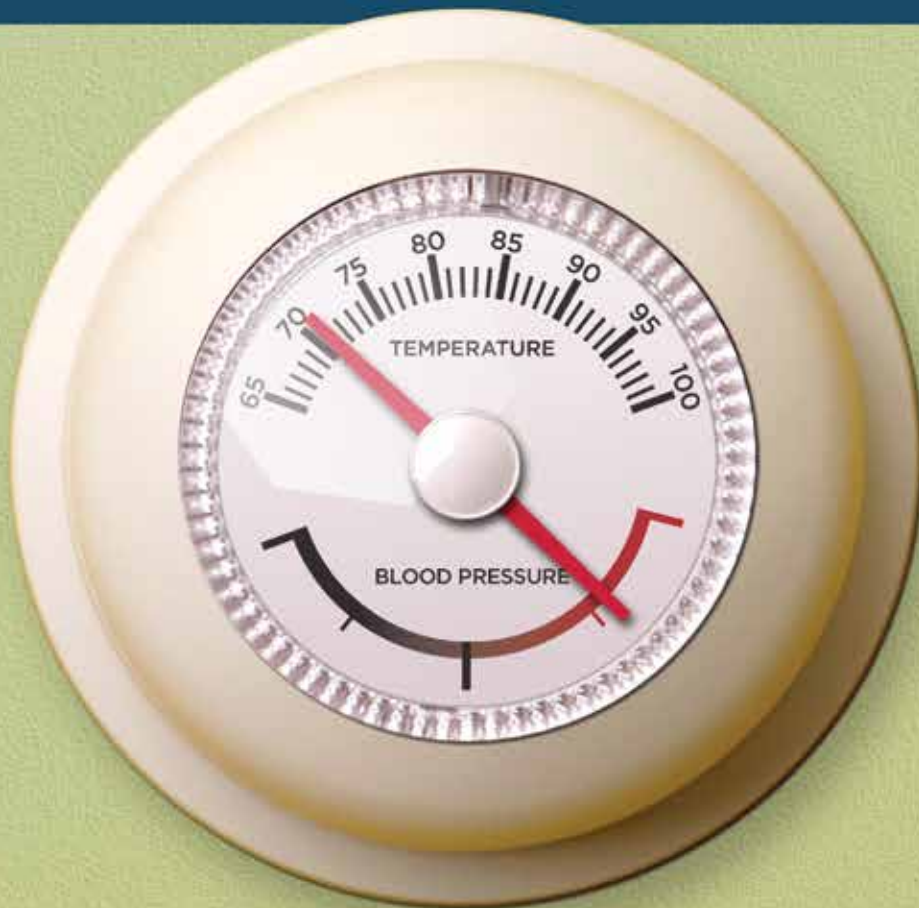
How the Swanson Family Survived and Thrived After Tragedy

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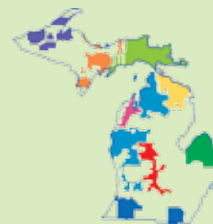
ON THE COVER*

"Trichromatic Spectra," created by Thomas Linder, was a past entry in the ArtPrize competition held annually in Grand Rapids, MI.

Linder's artwork is a kinetic inflatable installation involving thousands of LEDs that are controlled by computer animation.

Photo courtesy of Artprize.

*Some co-op editions have a different cover.



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Is the 'Powerwall' a Utility Game Changer?



Tony Anderson
General Manager

Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla Motors, recently unveiled the Tesla Powerwall in early May.

Almost immediately, my phone was inundated with emails touting words such as “game changer,” “new era” and my personal favorite, “utility demise.”

What is the Powerwall? It is a very stylish, wall mountable lithium ion battery that is approximately 51 inches tall by 34 inches wide by 7 inches thick. Musk announced a sale price of \$3,500 for a 10 kilowatt hour (kWh) unit that will have a 2 kW to 3.3 kW peak. The unit will weigh about 220 pounds and as many as nine of these cutting edge batteries can be stacked together.

What does all this technical jargon mean to you, the average homeowner? It means one Powerwall battery at 100 percent efficiency is enough to run your home for 5 hours. Nothing is 100 percent efficient, so the average homeowner is more likely to see a 3 to 4 hour run time.

At \$3,500 and assuming 1,000 full-charge cycles over the life of the battery, the per kWh math is very simple. It is the equivalent of buying electricity at 35 cents per kWh.

Today, the average Cherryland residential account is paying about 13–15 cents per kWh with the availability charge and monthly power cost adjustments included.

Now, we must remember the fact that \$3,500 just gets you a battery. It doesn't get you installation OR an inverter to convert the battery's DC electricity to AC. This could drive your total cost into a range of \$6,000 to \$7,000. Thus, the per kWh price spikes to 60–70 cents per kWh.

How do you charge the battery? This part is easy. You can charge it from your regular electric grid or you can install wind or solar panels that directly charge the unit.

The addition of wind or solar will add yet another layer to the price. The number of panels or size of wind tower would be determined by how fast you want to recharge the battery. I will leave that calculation up to each reader.

What if you already have wind or solar on your home? I guess you could avoid one cost component. However, the renewable energy used to charge the battery might then need to be replaced with grid energy.

Is there a win-win partnership between such a battery and the utility? I believe one day that there just might be such a partnership. As the price of this technology drops, the day could come when the utility gives a low rate during off-peak times for charging the battery.

Then, in times of high demand, the utility could shut off the home for a few hours to save on expensive peak energy prices. Talk to me when the battery cost drops to \$1,000, the efficiency doubles, or some combination of both.

Globally, the energy storage industry is growing rapidly. Yes, I consider this a good thing. It will hasten improvements and encourage further development of other storage technologies.

So, I do believe the Powerwall to be a game changer but I also don't see the demise of the utility anywhere in my lifetime. ■

Wolf Lodge Benefits from Cherryland Programs

The Great Wolf Lodge is the poster child for two of Cherryland Electric Cooperative's most member-friendly programs.

The first is capital credits, where members receive credit toward their bill or money back from the cooperative after all the bills are paid. Last year, for instance, the Cherryland board voted to return a record \$4.3 million to members.

Members get their slice of capital credits depending on how much electricity they've used.

"And we use a lot," said Great Wolf engineer Tim Mikovitz, who oversees energy usage at the 280-room facility and waterpark. "So we want to make sure we get the most efficient use possible."

To that end, Mikovitz and general manager Chris Ballou have come up with game plans to benefit both the resort and their customers.

The Wolf Lodge has used a chunk of their capital credit money to re-invest in their facility, starting with LED lighting. That's part of another important Cherryland program—Energy Optimization.

"We haven't had an LED light burn out for a year," said Mikovitz. "And there is great savings because of that. Not only because we don't have to replace bulbs, there is a huge labor savings in not going around replacing bulbs, too."

When the Wolf Lodge uses its capital credits toward improvements, as it has done multiple times in the past four years, their customers notice it.

Cherryland's Energy Use Advisor Tammy Squires has worked with the Wolf Lodge on several projects.

"The projects ranged from lighting upgrades in the game room, shopping areas and waterpark to guest room energy management controls," said Squires. "On two of the projects they accessed additional funds through their capital credit account to help reduce the project cost and get a quicker return on investment."

Ballou agrees.

"The capital credits program from Cherryland has been helpful to us," he said. "Our customers don't walk around talking about the lighting improvements, of course. But we know it makes a difference when our lighting is first-class in the pool and restaurant areas and the customers can manage their energy controls in their individual rooms."

Mikovitz takes great pride in how the lighting and energy features help the customers.

"It's one of the things that sets us apart," he said. "I think at night when you're driving past the Wolf Lodge, we look like a beautiful cruise ship."

Ballou thinks that's part of the Wolf Lodge's attraction.

"We're pretty much booked solid all summer," he said. "So if people want to come stay with us, make sure you either call ahead and get a room or go online." ■



Kids—as well as their parents—flock to the Great Wolf Lodge during the summer.



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For more information on Traverse City's Great Wolf Lodge, go to greatwolf.com/traverse-city

Legislation Would Strengthen Tie Between Our Peninsulas



Craig Borr
Michigan Electric
Cooperative Association
President and CEO

The Mackinac Bridge opened to vehicle traffic between the upper and lower peninsulas nearly 60 years ago. To this day, it continues to be a vital commercial link, as well as a symbol of what Michiganders can do when we work together for our state's benefit.

Legislators in Lansing may soon have an opportunity to debate legislation that could be a similar “bridge” for enhanced

flows of electricity between our two peninsulas. But it will take a great deal of determination and willpower to move this legislation forward. There are likely to be many detractors—as there were when we built the “Mighty Mac”.

Legislation was recently introduced in the Michigan Legislature that could result in the development of an additional high-voltage transmission link between the peninsulas. The Senate version of SB 282 was introduced by Sen. Tom Casperson, while the House version, HB 4575, was introduced by Rep. Triston Cole.

Currently, our two peninsulas do not operate as one when it comes to electricity. Michigan policy, utilities and regulators control the Lower Peninsula, while Wisconsin interests and utilities dominate the Upper Peninsula. All too often these competing interests and policies do not align—and customers are caught in the middle.

In addition to creating a more robust electrical tie, the legislation would form one “resource adequacy zone” to include both peninsulas, as well as increase reliability by reducing electrical “congestion” costs involved in the flow of energy between the peninsulas.

These congestion costs are a hidden tax in the cost of electricity. Portions of the northern Lower Peninsula as well as the Upper Peninsula have some of the highest

congestion costs. Residents who live in these congested areas have higher electric costs because of this “hidden tax”. These costs could be dramatically reduced, and in some cases eliminated, if we as a state have the will to invest in a more robust transmission link between the peninsulas.

Since most of Michigan's electric cooperatives are net buyers of wholesale electricity, this legislation could create more competitive markets with additional buyers and sellers of wholesale energy, as well as renewable energy—and that should provide tangible long-term benefits for electric cooperative consumers.

This legislation could also expedite the development of newer, cleaner generating capacity for the Upper Peninsula—an area of our state that recognizes all too well what can happen when there is only one significant generation resource and no meaningful way to access bulk electricity from the Lower Peninsula, where most of Michigan's electrical generating capacity is currently located.

Further development of renewable energy, particularly wind, can also be enhanced with additional connectivity between the peninsulas. The Thumb region of Michigan's Lower Peninsula has been identified as the best region for developing wind energy. A more robust transmission link will allow us to export wind from the Thumb area to the Upper Peninsula—or perhaps export wind from the Great Plains and Upper Midwest to utilities throughout Michigan.

If Michigan legislators have the fortitude to enact this legislation and we eventually fund and construct a new, more robust transmission link between our peninsulas, I believe we will look back someday, like we often do when crossing the “Mighty Mac”, and feel a very real sense of accomplishment that we as Michiganders have done something to benefit many generations.

Time will tell. ■





ALL-AMERICAN FAVORITE BURGERS

Enjoy new twists on well-known favorites.

Bratburger Summertime Sliders



1 pkg. bratwurst
1 lb. 80/20 ground beef
2 pkg. pretzel dinner rolls

Onion Jam

3 T. butter
¼ c. olive oil
2½ lb. sweet onion, sliced thin
¼ c. balsamic vinegar
1 T. fresh thyme leaves (or 1 t. dried)
1 c. pure maple syrup
salt and pepper

Remove bratwurst from casing and mix bratwurst and burger until evenly combined. Make small patties to match the size of your rolls. Salt and pepper to taste and grill or pan fry burgers to taste. Slice rolls, add burgers and top with onion jam and arugula, if desired. To make onion jam, melt butter and olive oil in a dutch oven. Add onions and sauté on low, stirring occasionally for 15–20 minutes. There should not be any “color” or browning; this process will evaporate the extra water in the onions and concentrate the sweet onion flavors. “Low and slow” is the ticket here. When the onions are soft but not quite translucent, add balsamic vinegar, maple syrup and thyme, and cook until liquid is incorporated into onion mixture. Put into 2–3 jars and enjoy! May keep in refrigerator for up to three weeks. Hot water bath or freeze and keep 6 months. Great on grilled fare, pizzas, and omelettes.

Denise Chapel, Gaylord

Bacon Blue Cheeseburger *(pictured)*

½ lb. bacon, cut into ¼ inch slices
2 lb. 90% lean ground hamburger
½ t. garlic powder
½ t. onion powder
salt and pepper, to taste
1½ c. crumbled blue cheese
8 burger buns
lettuce
sliced tomatoes
sliced onions
your choice of condiments

In a large skillet, cook sliced bacon until crispy. Remove from skillet and drain on paper towel; discard fat or save for other use. Mix bacon with the hamburger and add the garlic powder, onion powder, salt and pepper. Divide the burger mixture into 8 portions. Divide each portion in half and flatten into patties ¼-inch thick, using waxed paper. Place 2 T. blue cheese in center of 4 patties and top with another patty. Seal by pressing edges together. Cook in large skillet or grill until medium well, or your choice of doneness. Remove from heat and place onto bottom half of buns, and top with more blue cheese and favorite toppings. Serves 4.

Ann Brown, Niles

SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE!

Thanks to all who send in recipes. Please send in your favorite “Candy” recipes by **Aug. 1** and “Easy Chicken” recipes by **Sept. 1**.

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)!

Photos—831 Creative



Tina's Triumph

How the Swanson family survived and thrived after tragedy.

Life is full of twists and turns, mountains and valleys, tragedies and triumphs. For my first 32 years, life was going along smoothly—pretty much according to my plans.

I was blessed to have been brought up in a Christian home with a loving, supportive family. I had graduated from college with high honors, was married to my best friend and had three beautiful, healthy children. I'm not sure anything can prepare you, though, for that moment when tragedy strikes and your life is immediately and permanently turned upside down.

For my children and me, that moment came on Jan. 9, 2003. It was the day after I turned 32. My husband went out for a ride on the snowmobile that he had been fixing all evening. He and his friend rode out onto the ice on Long Lake and fell through into open water.

They never came home.

Suddenly, our ideal existence became something terrifying and unknown. I was suddenly a widow and a single mom faced with the daunting task of telling my 7-year-old, who was his father's shadow, my son waking up on his 4th birthday, and eventually my baby daughter, then 7 months, that their daddy was gone and was now living in heaven.

During those first few days and weeks, it was not about how to get through the day, but how to get through each minute.

Although fiercely independent by nature, I instinctively knew that I couldn't make it through if I tried to go it alone. I leaned on my faith, my family, my friends and my

church family to carry me when I couldn't stand alone.

By learning to accept help and advice when offered in love, I gained valuable insight about trust and friendship. We're not designed to handle everything on our own and when people genuinely wanted to be supportive, it blessed them as much as it did our family.

I have often thought that if I were to write a book about the struggle to continue on in the face of extreme heartbreak, I would call it "Lessons from the Top Bunk." That is where we all would gather at bedtime.

We climbed up there and we laughed and cried, remembered and dreamed.

It was there that we began to carve out our "new normal." Obviously, our lives changed in many ways on that cold January day, but everything that could stay constant, I tried to keep the same.

I still tucked the kids into bed every night. I was able to stay home with them and not go back to work right away, as hard as it was, and we still had blueberry pancakes on Christmas morning as was daddy's tradition. (Yes, mommy *can* make them, too!)

There in the top bunk, we defined who we were, shared treasured family time, and grieved together. There we learned that we could never go back and we couldn't stay where we were—we had to move forward, even though it was difficult and lonely and frightening at times.

We moved forward together. There in the top bunk I discovered that as much as I was there to help my children navigate this tough road, they were a help and a blessing to me. There's nothing like childlike faith



and hope to encourage you to face each day and to not just get through it, but to find joy and laughter in every day.

It was also in that top bunk that the idea was born for one of our greatest family adventures to date.

After working to learn all of the state capitals, Jared, my second son (then 8), announced that what he really wanted to do that summer was to visit each of the state capitals.

At first, I laughed it off a bit and let him know that it was a little ambitious to hit all 50 states in one summer, even for our crazy family! But I started to rethink that and imagine what it might look like if we set off on that adventure—not in one summer, but over time.

We did start our adventure that summer and we made it to 12 state capitals. My brave mom, who was still missing my dad, who had died the year after my husband, ventured out with us. It really gave us a positive focus and united us as a family in ways we couldn't explain.

Besides, it was just plain fun to explore our country, learn about history and geography and spend good quality time together. We have continued our quest over the past eight years and have now managed to reach 47 state capitals, including our most recent trip to Hawaii this past spring.

With just the Alaska trip left ahead of us, it is fun to see the completion of Jared's vision within our grasp. It has been a great adventure as we have navigated not only the roads of the United States, but as we discovered inner strength and determination and courage we never knew we had.

We learned to value each and every day and to be thankful for each moment we have together because our family knows all too well that we can never predict what the path of life holds and that time is truly a precious thing.

It's interesting to note as we near the end of our journey around the country, that although there is great beauty and so many exciting places to discover, from San Francisco to Boston, and Dallas to Minneapolis and



Tina Swanson and her family started their 50-state quest by going whale watching near Boston in 2007. This past March, Tina and her family went to Hawaii. They've now been to 47 states.

everywhere in between, northern Michigan is still our favorite place to be.

Time continues to march on and it is amazing to look back more than 12 years later and see all of the ways that we have grown in wisdom and experience both individually and as a family.

I have gone from the mom who was nervous and a bit embarrassed to bring my children to a restaurant by myself to one who can confidently venture out all over the country, knowing that there's nothing that I can't overcome.

Each of my children, although grieving in their own time and their own way, have learned that they have inner strength and hope that will never leave them as they make their way through life.

My oldest son is getting married this summer to the love of his life and will start out on his own life adventure. My prayer for him and for his brother and sister after him is that they would always remember the lessons learned along life's journey—lessons from the top bunk, from along the highways of the U.S., and along the sometimes bumpy road of life.

We have gained so much wisdom about love and laughter, faith and friendship, tragedy and triumph.

We took one of the toughest trials that life had to offer at very young ages and can be encouraged that we found the inner strength to face each day with hope and joy, and to face whatever trials may lie ahead and not only survive, but to thrive.

Tina Swanson is a member service representative with Cherryland Electric Cooperative. ■





Acrylic on canvas of a factory ceiling by John Dempsey.

Home is Where the Art Is

Local Co-op Artists on ArtPrize

Coined the largest open art competition in the world—Grand Rapid’s ArtPrize has made its mark on the art world. It has been covered by the likes of *The New York Times* and *GQ* and lauded as both a great art experiment and lambasted as the art equivalent of a reality TV show.

The art competition opens up to any adult artist with the \$50 entry fee and a venue willing to act as its pop-up gallery for the event. When it launched in 2009, no one knew what to expect, but after the first week local restaurants had run out of food, hotels were booked solid and over 200,000 people came from around the country to check out the phenomenon. The big twist is the two \$200,000 grand prizes and eight category awards, resulting in more than \$500,000 awarded by both the public and a jury of art experts.

Whether you love the artful canvas that Grand Rapids becomes once a year or prefer your art in a climate-controlled museum amongst whispered commentary—ArtPrize has some very real rewards for Michigan artists.

“A large number of people see my work at ArtPrize. It is a large-scale event by any measure,” says John Dempsey, who lives on the Ocqueoc River and is a member of Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op. “The number of people who come to see ArtPrize is extremely large



Colleen Whittaker’s Michigan map is made from authentic license plates fitted together like a puzzle.



Craig Snook's artwork, created with shredded paper, makes a kaleidoscope of colors that represents the beauty of a Michigan woodland landscape.



Lily Lihting Li Kostrzewa's "urban interweave" artwork is acrylic and mixed media on canvas.

compared to all of the other exhibition opportunities available to the vast majority of contemporary artists."

A Traverse City artist and member of Cherryland Electric Cooperative, Royce Deans says that with the sheer volume of people having exposure to his artwork, the feedback is immediate and thrilling. "ArtPrize is a good place to try out some new ideas in front of people. It can be a little dangerous."

The opportunities that ArtPrize exposes participating artists to can be anything from potential buyers, connections with fellow artists and even future employers. Grand Rapids artist and member of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative, Lily Lihting Li Kostrzewa credits her current teaching position at Kendall College of Art and Design to her participation in ArtPrize. Lily's daughter, Isabella Kostrzewa, entered the ArtPrize young filmmaker awards and won second place. Her prize allowed her to purchase video equipment to continue her passion.

While exposure to a massive audience and opportunities is rewarding, many artists have also benefited on a very personal level.



Royce Deans' "kitsch 2 kunst" is a matrix of 36 panels with original paintings.

"I gained a lot of confidence as an artist," says Craig Snook, an artist who splits his time between Saginaw and Lakeview, and is a member of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative. "It was a great learning experience and it is fun being known as an 'ArtPrize artist'."

Colleen Whittaker, a Traverse City artist and member of Cherryland Electric Cooperative, says overhearing people comment on her artwork allowed her to capture uncensored opinions from the public. "The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, but the ones I remember are the critical comments—which I keep in mind while creating new work. Feedback from such a wide variety of people is invaluable in my quest to create art that appeals to a wide range of people while still being true to my artistic vision." ■

**ArtPrize 2015 will take place
Sept. 23–Oct. 11. Visit Artprize.org
for more information.**

Co-op News

Our Payment Options are Changing

In an effort to keep your personal credit card information safe and comply with new federal regulations, Cherryland is updating our credit card payment procedures.

Effective Sept. 1, members will only be able to make credit card payments using our automated phone payment system or online using our SmartHub® program.

Member service representatives will no longer take credit card payments over the phone. If you have questions about how to use these programs, give us a call at 231-486-9200 and we are happy to walk you through them.

Cherryland Cares Seeks Grant Applications

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

Cherryland Cares is a five-member board, made up of Cherryland Electric Cooperative members, who distribute money from Operation Round Up to area nonprofits. The next quarterly meeting of Cherryland Cares is Monday, Sept. 21. The deadline for applications is Friday, Sept. 11.

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

To receive a Cherryland Cares grant application or to join Operation Round Up, contact Nick Edson at Cherryland. His direct line is 231-486-9222 or e-mail him at nedson@cherrylandelectric.coop.

Next Member Input Session Is September

The board of directors at Cherryland Electric Cooperative is offering another opportunity for members to provide direct input to the board on a quarterly basis. Members will be able to talk to the board next on Monday, Sept. 21, at 9 a.m. at the company office in Grawn.

Members are asked to come to the lobby and request to speak to the board. Members are asked to keep their comments to 5 minutes. Member attendance at the board meeting is allowed for the public input portion of the meeting only.

Cherryland members are afforded a chance to meet with the board on a quarterly basis during meetings in March, June, September and December.

Cherryland Students Earn Free Trips

Cherryland Electric Cooperative sponsored four student members this year to attend the Youth Leadership Summit at SpringHill Camp near Evart.

Those that were chosen were Nolan Wurm from Glen Lake, Ben Dierking from TC West, Grace Olson from TBA ISD Career-Tech Center, and Nicole Jarvis with Elk Rapids High School.

Nolan and Ben represented Cherryland at the 2015 Washington, D.C., Youth Tour in June and have the possible opportunity of representing Michigan on the national Youth Leadership Council.



From left to right: Grace Olson, Nicole Jarvis, Ben Dierking and Nolan Wurm.

Rebates Available to Members Buying Energy Star Appliances

Cherryland Electric Cooperative members are urged to look for the Energy Star® logo on the yellow energy guide when purchasing new appliances and LED bulbs for your home and business.

By buying Energy Star qualified appliances, members can save on energy usage over standard appliances, along with improved quality and durability. Another benefit when purchasing new Energy Star appliances such as refrigerators, clothes washers, TVs and LED bulbs, is that you may be entitled to a rebate from us.

For a complete listing of rebates available on Energy Star qualified appliances go to our website at cherrylandelectric.coop. To learn more about Energy Star visit energystar.gov.

Check Your Boat, Dock, and the Neighbor's, Too!

Almost one-half of Michigan is comprised of water, so it's easy to see why Michigan boasts a thriving recreational industry and leads the nation with approximately 1 million registered pleasure boats. For boating and water safety, there are items you must legally have on your watercraft—life vests, fire extinguisher, throwable flotation device, and properly working lights—but make sure the boat and the dock are safe, too.

To help prevent accidents, the National Electrical Contractors Association says:

- All installations should be performed by a professional electrical contractor.
- All dock receptacles must comply with the National Electrical Code, which mandates a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). A GFCI measures a circuit's current and senses any imbalance (such as a discharge into the water), which trips the GFCI and cuts off the power.
- Test a GFCI at least monthly. Locate it along the ramp to the dock so it can be easily tested by local fire departments.
- Metal dock frames should have "bonding jumpers" that connect all metal parts to an on-shore

grounding rod. This means any dock part that becomes energized by electrical malfunction will trip the GFCI or circuit breaker.

- Ask neighbors if their dock electrical systems have been inspected and are up to Code.
- Household wire is not suitable for boats.
- *Do not* use wire nuts (these are for solid conductor wire, which should never be on a boat) or splice connectors (can cut wire strands)!
- Fuses are rated to protect the wire, not the stereo. If a fuse blows continuously, something else is wrong.
- If you rent a dock or boat, notify the owner of safety violations immediately.
- Have your boat's system (especially with onboard generators) checked at least annually, and when something is added or removed.
- Ropes, string, masts and rigging also conduct electricity—don't be the common ground between water and electricity! ■

See SafeElectricity.org for more tips.

Summer May "Peak" Your Power

The demand for electrical power rises and falls throughout a typical day based on how we use our electricity each day. With summer months upon us, we typically increase our "peaking" usage.

Peaking plants are a category of power plants that operate primarily during times when the demand for power is at its peak. Now imagine a 90 degree summer day and your air-conditioning is running constantly. This causes electricity usage to reach its highest levels. Peaking plants are often powered by natural gas, but they can also be powered by water at hydroelectric dams or by fuel oil.

Peaking plants can be turned on quickly to begin generating additional electricity to satisfy the rapidly increasing demand for power on hot summer days, and can be turned off quickly as demand lowers in the evening.

One Last Mission

World War II seems like ancient history to a lot of folks. After all, it ended nearly 70 years ago! Never mind that 16 million Americans served, and over 400,000 lost their lives in a war spanning 61 countries. Despite the staggering statistics, school history books dedicate little more than a page or two to what many today call “The Greatest Generation.”

Recently, I was privileged to join 150 WWII veterans and volunteers as they set off to rewrite a page in history during a “Tour of Honor” thanks to Mid-Michigan Honor Flight. Embarking on a one-day tour of Washington, D.C., that included stops to Arlington National Cemetery, Iwo Jima and of course, the National World War II Memorial, veterans learned first-hand the scope of this country’s gratitude.

Dedicated in 2004, the WWII Memorial serves as a fitting tribute to the magnitude of this global conflict. Set between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, stone architecture, bronze sculptures and water features pay homage to both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters. More impressive, though, were the tourists who stopped to salute or shake hands with members of the Honor Flight as they walked by. Hearing young and old alike say “thank you” reminded me that in an era when history might be lost to the archives, there are still many who care.

Averaging 92 years old, many veterans pass before having an opportunity to see the monument built in their honor. Honor Flights transport WWII and terminally ill veterans to Washington, D.C., where they can visit the memorials dedicated to their service and sacrifice. Paired with an attentive guardian, each vet was personally escorted from one memorial to the next with a volunteer staff of medics on-call in case of emergency. Every effort is made to make this a once-in-a-lifetime experience. From the corridor of flags lining a path to the departure gate at Cherry Capital Airport to the Pin Curl Girls singing us off at Reagan International Airport to the welcome home celebration at the U.S. Coast Guard Base in Traverse City, no detail was overlooked.



And while attention to detail is obviously critical to the enjoyment and safety of those participating in an Honor Flight, the unplanned displays of gratitude were often the most touching. A man walking through Arlington National Cemetery dropping his bags to salute our three-bus motorcade. A group of middle school students stopping to give thanks. A tour guide inviting a veteran to share his story. A veteran commenting softly in front of the Freedom Wall, “I never thought I’d see this.”

Reporting for WTCM Radio, I wasn’t paired with a veteran like most others traveling that day. Still, I had a few sentimental moments of my own. As I silently thanked my dad for his service in the Pacific Theatre as a member of the Fifth Air Force in New Guinea, I had the undeniable feeling he was with me while I paid reverence to a monument he didn’t live to see.

Harry Truman once said, “Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices.” Within the next five years, most, if not all of our WWII veterans will be gone, and with them, a living piece of history. So the next time you see one, say ‘thanks’. Because we all know freedom isn’t free. And it’s never too late to thank a veteran. ■



Jack O'Malley



May Photo

Mystery Photo Contest Winner

The May 2015 Mystery Photo contest winner is Michael Mattox, a Midwest Energy Cooperative member who correctly identified the photo as “Turnip Rock” in Port Austin, MI, just off the shore in Lake Huron. The unique shape of the rock-island is the result of thousands of years of erosion by storm waves.

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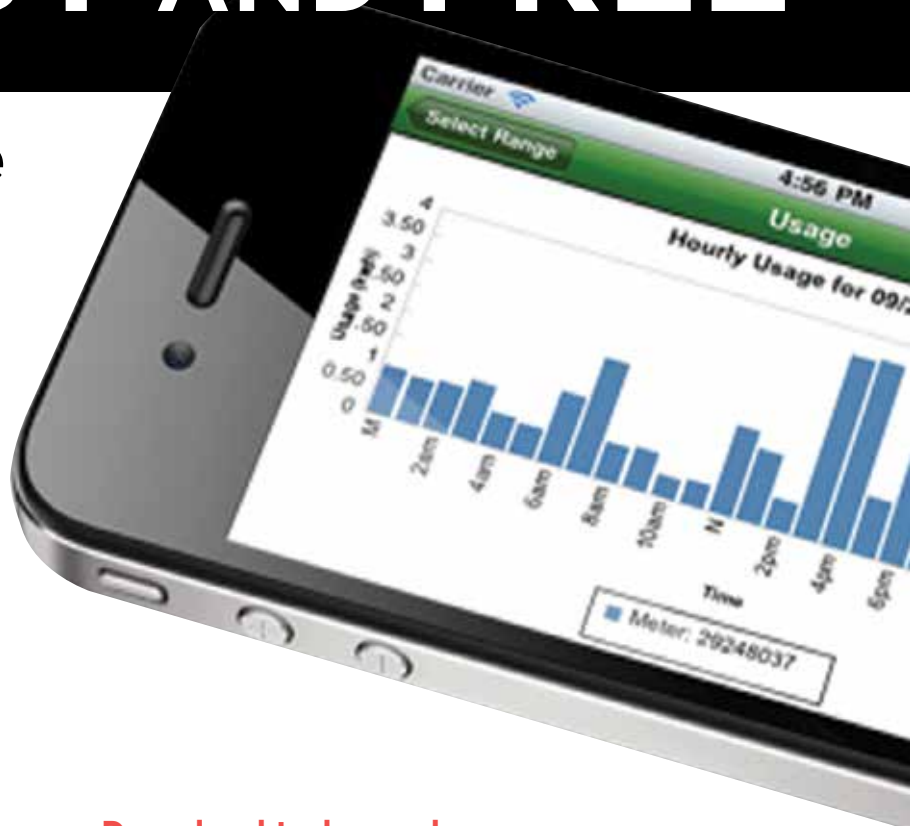


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