

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative

January 2016

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



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To Buena Vista, Guatemala



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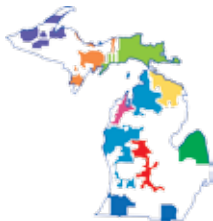
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Michigan's Electric Cooperatives
countrylines.com

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Executive Editor
Casey Clark

Editor
Christine Dorr

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POSTMASTER: SEND ALL UAA TO CFS.

Association officers are **Robert Kran**, Great Lakes Energy, chairman; **Mark Kappler**, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, vice chairman; and **Eric Baker**, Wolverine Power Cooperative, secretary-treasurer. **Craig Borr** is president and CEO.

CONTACT US:
Michigan Country Lines
201 Townsend St., Suite 900
Lansing, MI 48933
248-534-7358
cdorr@meca.coop

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

ON THE COVER*

Ofelia De Leon (far left), of Buena Vista, with his family and lineworkers when the lights came on in their home for the very first time. Ofelia had the honor of flipping the switch, and when the light came on the room radiated with happiness—lots of laughter, and tears. Linemen (L-R) Tom Ulatowski, Cherryland, Dan King, MECA, and Tony Reichle, Great Lakes Energy.

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

Cover photo by Garrett Hubbard



IN YOUR WORDS

Question of the Month—We Asked, You Answered.

Last month, we asked electric co-op members a question: If you could have a lifetime supply of anything, what would it be? Thank you for all the responses. Here are some answers from our members...

"Love, good health, happy family & friends, great weather and a very large pay check to share."

"Burgers and fries from Clyde's Restaurant in Manistique, MI."

"If I could have a lifetime supply of anything, it would be free electricity. I am 90 years old, a World War II Veteran, and have a bronze star (along with many other medals). I've been a member of Great Lakes Energy most of my life. My wife and I have been married 70 years this coming July. God Bless."

"Wisdom."

"Unwavering Faith."

Our new Question of the Month is:

If you could only have one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Please submit answers to countrylines.com by Feb. 1.

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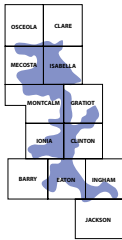
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READERS' PAGE

Michigan Quilt Maker

Jack O'Malley

Guess Our New Mystery Photo



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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

Portland office:

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

Electric bill/account questions:

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

Pay by phone, anytime:

1-877-999-3395

Service questions/outages:

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

Tri-County Propane:

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High Speed Internet

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homeworks.org

E-mail: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

Board of Directors

District 1 — Philip Conklin

5130 W. Gresham Hwy., Charlotte, MI 48813
517-726-0127
pconklin@homeworks.org

District 2 — Wayne Swiler

Vice-Chairman
11750 Ainsworth Rd., Lake Odessa, MI 48849
616-374-3141
wswiler@homeworks.org

District 3 — Luke Pohl

15560 W. Hanses Rd., Westphalia, MI 48894
989-292-0427
lpohl@homeworks.org

District 4 — Kimber Hansen

6535 N. Wyman Rd., Edmore, MI 48829
989-506-5849
khansen@homeworks.org

District 5 — Cara Evans

Secretary-Treasurer
10180 Roosevelt Rd., Bannister, MI 48807
989-862-5590
cevas@homeworks.org

District 6 — Ed Oplinger

Chairman
10890 W. Weidman Road, Weidman, MI 48893
989-644-3079
eoplinger@homeworks.org

District 7 — Dean Floria

1163 Taft Rd., Remus, MI 49340
989-382-5230
dfloria@homeworks.org

Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC



Join the conversation at
facebook.com/HomeWorks.org

Live And Learn



Mark Kappler
General Manager

We place a lot of importance on the fifth cooperative principle, "Education and Information."

In this issue of *Country Lines* alone, we recognize two employees who completed an advanced series of courses (page 16), and the skills they've learned will help us serve you better.

This issue also contains information about the annual scholarship program to support area students who seek higher education (page 13); Classroom Technology Grants to teachers who can use technology to guide their students (also page 13); and a three-day youth leadership camp in April (back cover).

Even this magazine is an educational tool, with energy efficiency and safety tips (page 6) mixed in with the recipes (page 10) and interesting feature stories (page 14).

In future issues, watch for information about board of directors elections, capital credits and your equity in your electric cooperative, district member meetings, and even more of the safety, energy efficiency, and recipe features.

Country Lines is an inexpensive way to get information about HomeWorks products and services to every member-owner we serve. We use Facebook to post information, as well, and encourage conversation with our members.

It's said that education is the cornerstone of effective self-governance. Member-owners who stay informed are more likely to vote when board seats come open, helping guide their electric cooperative by carefully selecting the men and women who will set policies for years to come.

All member-owners are best served by elected leaders who understand the industry and how we can move forward to meet changing demands. And by employees who train every day on safety, use of technology, and other ways to serve you better.

Michael Josephson, a noted lecturer on ethics and the founder of CHARACTER COUNTS, is quoted as saying "Life never stops teaching. Be sure you never stop learning."

At your electric cooperative, learning is a way of life, every day. ■

On The Cover: Blanchard lineman Rick Warchuck, left, and Portland lineman Brad Parkhouse are shown on the job in Buena Vista, Guatemala. Rick and Brad were part of the 10-man Michigan crew who spent 16 days bringing electric power to the tiny mountain village. Read more on pages 7 and 14.

Mary Ellen Heffron Retires From People Fund Board

After 18 years of service to the Tri-County Electric People Fund, Mary Ellen Heffron has retired, as of Dec. 1, 2015.

"I had a birthday in March, and I've been thinking about retiring ever since," she says. "It's time for other people to have the chance to participate."

A native of Grand Rapids, she graduated from Mercy Central School of Nursing at St. Mary's Hospital, and worked for many years at St. Lawrence Hospital in Lansing after marrying veterinarian Ed Heffron.

Over the years, between raising four children together, and frequent travel with Ed to various conferences, board meetings, and seminars, she continued working as a nurse, even part-time, until she retired at the age of 70.

Ed Heffron was a founding member of the People Fund board, representing District 3 (most of Clinton County); after he succumbed to cancer, Mary Ellen was appointed to the board in December 1996, to fill the open seat.

"Mary Ellen always brings her nursing perspective—the medical background plus the compassion and nurturing from being a nurse," says board chairman



Mary Ellen Heffron at her Eagle-area home.

Richard Palermo. "We're going to miss her. She has the life experiences that helped her look past the numbers on the application forms. And she knows a lot of the service area that I don't know."

Mary Ellen doesn't have specific plans for her time now that she won't be reading the stacks of applications received every month, but she enjoys traveling, being involved in her Eagle-area neighborhood, and spending time with her family, which includes a son, two daughters, and four grandchildren nearby, and another son and his family in Guatemala. ■



The Tri-County Electric People Fund recently gave a \$3,000 grant to St. Vincent de Paul, St. Michael's Conference, in Grand Ledge. The funds will be used to assist families with rent and utilities. At the check presentation were, from left, Mary Platte, Joyce Kloeckner, Carol Cook, People Fund chair Rich Palermo, HomeWorks Tri-County customer service rep Becky Beard, Dick McDeon, Ron George, Judy Duchene and Jack Finn.

Photo—Tanya Schneider

Saving Energy In The Kitchen

By Brian Sloboda

Most of us spend a lot of time in the kitchen. Whether you are considering replacing an appliance or simply looking for ways to be more efficient, here are some tips to help you save energy—and money.

Most people don't think about their refrigerator that often—as long as it's working. Older refrigerators use more energy. Upgrading this appliance can bring a major return on your investment. Look for rebate programs, too!

Cooking also uses a lot of energy. To save energy while cooking, placing the lid on a pot of boiling water will trap heat and cause the water to boil faster. And there is no need to preheat the oven when cooking a large piece of meat, like a turkey or ham (you do need to preheat when baking, or cooking smaller dishes). If you are planning on using the oven for a long period of time, consider turning

down your home's thermostat. Cooking will add warmth to the home because the heat from the oven can raise the temperature in the kitchen and surrounding rooms.

Even after the meal is over, you can save energy. Make sure your dishwasher is full before it's started. Next, make sure you are using the right setting on your dishwasher. Newer models have sensors that detect how clean your dishes are. When these "auto" cycles are used, they will get dishes clean without wasting energy or water. The sanitize setting should rarely be used since it is energy intensive. It is also a good idea to make sure the filter at the bottom of the washtub is cleaned to help the washer work at its optimal level.

As you can see, there are many different ways to practice efficiency in the kitchen, and maybe even save enough money to have dinner out sometimes! ■

Be Prepared For Winter Storms

By Abby Berry

When winter temperatures drop and storms hit, it can be challenging to stay safe and warm. Your electric cooperative cares about your safety, and we want you to be prepared.



Heavy snow and ice can lead to downed power lines, leaving you without power. During a power outage, our crews will continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but there are a few things you can do to prepare yourself.

- **Stay warm** – Use a safe alternate heating source, such as a fireplace or wood-burning stove, during a power outage. Exercise caution when using, and never leave the heating source unattended.

If you are using gasoline, propane or natural gas-burning devices to stay warm, never use them indoors. Remember that fuel and wood-burning sources of heat should always be properly ventilated. Always read the manufacturer's directions before using.

- **Stay fed** – Be sure to have several days' supply of food on hand. Crackers, cereal, canned goods, bread, and other foods that do not need to be cooked, are good options. Five gallons of water per person should also be available in the event of an extended power outage.
- **Stay safe** – When an outage occurs, it usually means power lines are down. Try not to travel during winter storms, but if you must, bring a survival kit along, and do not travel alone. If you encounter downed lines, always assume they are live and stay as far away from them as possible.

Winter weather can be unpredictable and dangerous, and planning ahead is important. For more winter safety tips, visit ready.gov/winter-weather. ■



Photo: Garrett Hubbard

Electric Cooperatives Donate Suitcases Packed With A Purpose

The recent Partners for Power team reached their goal to build an electric line extension in Guatemala that changed the lives of about 54 families in the small community of Buena Vista. But our team's work did not end there. The 10-person team distributed over 450 pounds of donated items sent over with the Partners For Power project.

The suitcases were filled by a team effort of employees from Cherryland Electric Cooperative, Great Lakes Energy, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, Midwest Energy, Wolverine Power, and Cloverland Electric. The much needed items included school supplies, shoes, backpacks, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, mouthwash, stuffed animals, sweatshirts/t-shirts of all sizes, small sewing kits, stocking caps, baseball hats, soccer balls, a basketball, a football, air pumps, soccer nets, and basketball nets. The electric cooperatives were eager to help out and make a difference for the villagers in Buena Vista.

To distribute the supplies fairly, the team of linemen divided the items into three stations, grouped by age, so that everyone received something. "The villagers have worked so hard on this entire project with us," said Wolverine Power safety coordinator, Matt Monroe. "It was fun to be able to give their



families one more surprise before we headed back home."

Partners For Power also sent a basketball backboard, rim and hardware, along with individual pieces of plexiglass, glass cutters, and caulk to replace broken school windows in the village.

Read the full story about how Michigan electric cooperatives teamed up to "turn on the lights" in Buena Vista, Guatemala, on page 14. ■

New Year's Resolution—Peace Of Mind In 2016

You know the story. The clock strikes midnight and millions of people make resolutions to change. But, if something is working great, why fix it? Our thoughts exactly. HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative is keeping its most popular 2015 Energy Optimization (EO) rebates for 2016, and adding a few new options. Ring in the New Year with savings and peace of mind by participating in some top-rated rebates.

Make a resolution to manage your energy use in 2016 by taking advantage of these popular customer incentives, as well as a new option for smart occupancy-sensing thermostats.

Next Steps

For a complete list of EO rebates offered by HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative visit michigan-energy.org to see which solutions are right for you, or call us at 877-296-4319 if you have questions about applications or product eligibility. ■

Rebate Name	Incentive Amount
ENERGY STAR® television	31–40" = \$25 41–50" = \$25 51–60" = \$50
ENERGY STAR® dehumidifier	\$25
Efficient HVAC—furnaces with electric commutated motors (ECMs)	\$200
ENERGY STAR® refrigerator/freezer side-by-side	\$25
Programmable or Wi-Fi-enabled thermostat	\$20
Smart occupancy-sensing thermostat	\$50
Online home audit—Home Energy Optimizer	FREE energy-saving kit (\$30 value) and a list of energy efficient home improvement options

Peace of mind, comfort and savings

We provide the savings—you enjoy peace of mind while saving energy with our Energy Optimization program.

There are many ways to save, from appliances to lighting and maintaining the comfort of your home with our efficient HVAC programs. Visit **michigan-energy.org** for a complete list of opportunities and rebates.

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

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.

A photograph of a man and a woman smiling and looking out a window. The woman is in the foreground, holding a white mug, and the man is behind her, looking out the window.

peace
of
MIND

SnapSHOT

Best Of Selfies



Capture Your Favorite Moments And Share

1. Richard Perry, of Troy, sent in this self-captioned series taken by granddaughter, Sophie. Richard, who receives Tri-County Electric service at Lake Isabella, called the grouping "Sophie and granddad chilling out."
2. Lindsay Uzarski, of Remus, shared this unusual selfie, taken while snorkeling in Lake Michigan at Beaver Island.
3. Jennifer McNicholl submitted a photo of her son, Dallas MacKersie, with Ronald McDonald.



See more amazing photos at facebook.com/HomeWorks.org



Our 2015 Winner: David Stevens, Of Bannister

David submitted this colorful photo near the Au Sable River for November's "Michigan Splendor" theme, and will have his December electric bill (due in January) paid up to \$200. His name was randomly drawn from all submissions during the year.

In all, 60 different photographers submitted 138 Snap Shots for eight issues of *Country Lines* in 2015. We're excited to see what comes in this year!

Submit Your Photo!

Contributors whose photos we publish in 2016 will be entered into a drawing and *Country Lines* will choose two winners for a bill credit of up to \$100 each on their December electric bill, due in January 2017!

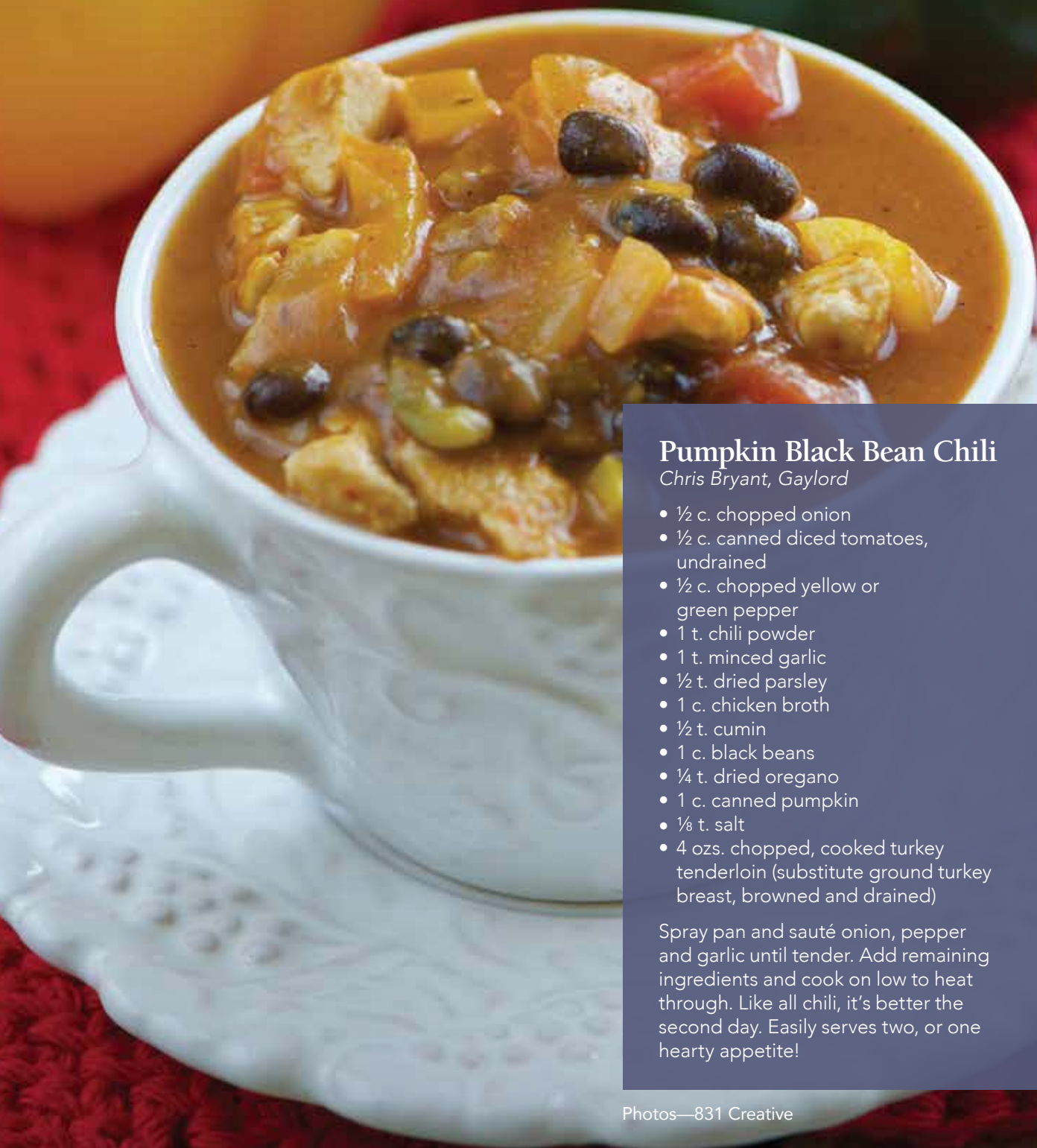
Upcoming Snap Shot Contests

Upcoming topics for 2016 include "Winter Fun," due **Jan. 15** for the March issue; "Beautiful Birds," due **Feb. 15** for the April issue; and "Saluting Armed Forces," due **March 15** for the May issue.

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

CHILI

Warm up this season with these comforting chili recipes.



Pumpkin Black Bean Chili

Chris Bryant, Gaylord

- ½ c. chopped onion
- ½ c. canned diced tomatoes, undrained
- ½ c. chopped yellow or green pepper
- 1 t. chili powder
- 1 t. minced garlic
- ½ t. dried parsley
- 1 c. chicken broth
- ½ t. cumin
- 1 c. black beans
- ¼ t. dried oregano
- 1 c. canned pumpkin
- ⅛ t. salt
- 4 ozs. chopped, cooked turkey tenderloin (substitute ground turkey breast, browned and drained)

Spray pan and sauté onion, pepper and garlic until tender. Add remaining ingredients and cook on low to heat through. Like all chili, it's better the second day. Easily serves two, or one hearty appetite!

Congratulations



to Ann Brown of Niles. Her name was drawn from all readers whose recipes we printed in 2015 and *Country Lines* will pay her January electric bill (up to \$200) as a prize.

Ann and her family have been Midwest Energy Cooperative members since her father built their home back in 1940. Her winning "Campfire Chicken" recipe was an original created by her mother. "My dad liked to grill and camp. When we couldn't go camping he would cook out in the backyard and this was a favorite recipe." Ann is a home healthcare nurse and enjoys cooking, sewing and knitting.



White Chicken Chili (pictured)

Donna Theriault, Petoskey

- 3 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 T. olive oil + extra for drizzling on chicken
- 2 lg. onions, sliced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 c. chicken broth
- 1 c. dry white wine
- 2 cans Navy or cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- ½ c. lime juice
- 1 small can green chilies
- 1 T. ground coriander
- 1 t. ground oregano
- ½ t. ground cumin
- ¼ t. cinnamon
- 1 c. Monterey Jack

Drizzle olive oil, and sprinkle salt and pepper on chicken. Roast seasoned chicken on cookie sheet at 350° for 40 minutes, or until cooked through. Cool chicken and shred with fingers. Put 1 T. oil in large pot. Add onions and garlic and stir until onions are golden, about 20 minutes. Add broth and remaining ingredients, except cheese. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add cheese to melt just before serving.

Angie's Chili

Mary Scodeller, Lansing

- 1 ½ lbs. 80/20 ground beef
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 28-oz. cans whole tomatoes
- 2 15.5-oz. cans kidney beans
- 15.5-oz. can mild chili beans in chili sauce
- Spartan chili mix envelope
- 1 pkg. French's original chili seasoning mix
- ¼ t. salt
- ¼ t. pepper
- ¼ t. seasoning salt
- ¼ t. garlic powder
- ¼ t. chili powder
- ¼ t. ground cumin

Brown meat with the chopped onion. Drain fat, crush tomatoes and add to meat. Add all beans, seasoning mix, and other seasonings. Simmer on medium to high heat for 20 minutes, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and simmer another 30 to 45 minutes. Very good and great for a crowd.

SUBMIT YOUR RECIPE!

Thanks to all our readers who send in recipes. Please send in your favorite "Side Dish" recipes by **Feb. 1** and "Snacks and Appetizers" recipes by **March 1**.

A RECIPE WINNER EACH MONTH IN 2016!

Contributors whose recipes we print each month will be entered in a drawing and *Country Lines* will pay the winner's electric bill with a \$50 bill credit! A winner will be selected every month!

Enter your recipe online at countrylines.com or send to (handprinted or typed on one side, please): *Country Lines* Recipes, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Please note the co-op from which you receive your electric service.

Your Board In Action

Meeting at Portland, Oct. 26, your board of directors:

- Read and discussed Board Policy 102 – “Functions of the Board of Directors” and approved it as read.
- Met with district officers to review the board election process in preparation for the 2016 elections.
- Learned several directors toured the site where the Alpine Power Plant, a natural-gas combined cycle generator, is being built west of Gaylord.
- Discussed the 2016-2019 Energy Optimization program, and viewed a presentation from Wolverine Power Cooperative staff on the EPA’s Clean Power Plan.
- Authorized the annual Touchstone Energy budget for community and school projects.
- Learned there were 113 new members in September.
- Acknowledged the September–October safety report, listing employee training and several employee and public incidents.

Meeting at Portland, Nov. 23, your board of directors:

- Met with lineman Brad Parkhouse, one of two HomeWorks Tri-County Electric linemen who traveled to Buena Vista, Guatemala, recently to help bring electricity to the remote mountain village.
- Recognized Missy Robson and Chris O’Neill for earning Management Essentials certification

through advanced courses offered by the national association.

- Read and discussed Board Policy 103 – “Compensation and Benefits for Directors” and Board Policy 201 – “Safety,” approving them as read.
- Reviewed and authorized the 2016 capital and operating budgets.
- Approved the annual accounts receivable write-off, totaling \$150,711.44.
- Learned the annual inventory was completed in late October with minimal variances.
- Adopted a resolution honoring Mary Ellen Heffron for her service to the Tri-County Electric People Fund board since she was appointed in 1997.
- Learned there were 117 new members in October.
- Acknowledged the October–November safety report, listing employee training and several employee and public incidents.

Time Set Aside For Members To Comment Before Board Meetings

The first 15 minutes of every board meeting are available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. The next meetings are scheduled for Jan. 18 and March 28, both at Portland. Members who need directions to the office, or wish to have items considered on the board agenda, should call 517-647-7554. ■

People Fund Helps Local Groups Serve Families

Meeting Nov. 11, the Tri-County Electric People Fund board made five grants, totaling \$8,500, including:

- \$1,000 to Lakeview Ministerial Association for their food, utilities and rent assistance program;
- \$1,000 to Montabella Ministerial Association for their food and personal care items program;
- \$3,000 to St. Vincent dePaul, St. Michael Conference, in Grand Ledge, for their housing and utility assistance program;
- \$1,000 to an Isabella County family for housing expenses; and
- \$2,500 to another Isabella County family, also for housing expenses.

“What is spare change for most of us—50 cents a month—adds up to really make a difference to our neighbors who are in need,” says board chairman

Richard Palermo. “We really appreciate all those members who continue to support the People Fund by rounding up their electric bills every month.” ■

Notice To Members Of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Tariff and Rule Changes Effective Jan. 1, 2016

The HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors adopted the following change to the Cooperative’s tariffs and fees at a Special Open Meeting held October 26, 2015, in accordance with P.A. 167.

- Revised the cooperative’s Requirements for Pole Attachments tariff sheet from \$16.50 per attachment point per year to \$19.00 for 2016.

For specific details of any HomeWorks tariffs or fees, please call us at 1-800-562-8232 or visit our website at homeworks.org.



Brandon Trierweiler clears some early season snow from the Phase 1 solar array.

Community Solar Garden To Expand In 2016

The Community Solar Garden at HomeWorks Tri-County Electric's Portland headquarters is set to double in size this year.

"We've leased 55 of the 76 panels in the first phase, and member interest continues to grow," says Brandon Trierweiler, the cooperative's energy adviser. "With the federal tax credit possibly ending in December, it seems like a good time to make sure Phase 2 is built and in service sometime this year."

Trierweiler says the new panels will be even more energy-efficient, at 285 watts each compared to 275 watts per Phase 1 panel. "Solar technology keeps improving all the time," he notes.

Phase 1 continues to outperform expectations, producing over 49,000 kilowatt-hours in the first 18 months.

For more information on leasing a solar panel in the Community Solar Garden, call Trierweiler at 517-647-1213. ■

Need Help With College Costs?

Click on homeworks.org for information on winning your share of \$4,000 in HomeWorks Touchstone Energy Scholarships offered to members.

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

Scholarship applications are due March 16. Look for application forms and complete rules online at homeworks.org, call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252 or email jgraham@homeworks.org.

Teachers: Apply By Jan. 15!

Applications are due Jan. 15 for the 2015 Touchstone Energy Classroom Technology Grant program.

Public or private school districts in our 13-county mid-Michigan service area that serve children of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric members can receive a grant of up to \$2,500 to fund innovative programs that enrich student education.

For an application form with grant guidelines, visit homeworks.org or call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252.



It Really Does Take A Village

Partners For Power

By Emily Haines Lloyd

Photo: Garrett Hubbard



In rural Guatemala, not far from the border with Mexico, is a tiny village called Buena Vista and it is just that—a “good view.” Set amongst the mountains, with peaks poking through the clouds—it’s a magical sight. At least during the day.

At night, the small town disappears into the fog banks and darkness due to a simple reality—Buena Vista did not have electricity.

Which is why in early 2015, Michigan electric co-ops partnered with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) International, an organization that helps developing countries gain access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity, to bring power to approximately 54 families in Buena Vista. Lineworkers from five electric co-ops in Michigan packed over 1,500 pounds of luggage, equipment and tools and traveled to Buena Vista to do just that.

“On the day we arrived, we realized that all of the villagers—men, women and children—had gathered there to greet us. It was humbling to see so many smiling faces, all filled with such joy and gratitude, because they knew we had come to help bring them electricity,” said Brad Parkhouse, HomeWorks



Photo: Garrett Hubbard

Tri-County lineworker. "They expressed how grateful they were to us for coming, and we told them how happy we were to be there. It was emotional, really."

The Michigan lineworkers discovered that local residents had already hand-dug and set all of the electric poles. With the mountainous terrain, the lineworkers remarked how difficult that task was, particularly without the power tools that would have been used stateside for such an undertaking.

Over 12 days, the Michigan lineworkers and their unofficial team of about 40 local residents prepared poles (by climbing them the old fashioned way, no bucket trucks here) and hanging wire.

"I thought I was a hard worker until I met these people," said Trevor Stratton, Wolverine Power lineworker. "They're pulling wire into the valleys where the elevation drop is incredible...I don't know how we could ever do this job without them."

While electric power is taken for granted by those in the United States, it is seen as nothing short of a lifeline to this community—which is likely why the local people were so committed to making it happen

in their small town. It promises improvement in health care, safety, education and economic growth. Power is the spark that changes communities, provides opportunities, and ignites imaginations. While the social and economic impact is nothing short of staggering—the experience for the team of 10 linemen did not lie in the metrics, but the experience itself.

"One of the locals, Ofelia De Leon, invited several of us to be with his family when the lights came on in their house for the very first time," said Dan King, Michigan Electric Cooperative Association safety instructor. "You could feel the anticipation in the air as we all gathered together inside their small mountain home. Ofelia had the honor of flipping the switch, and when the light came on everyone began clapping. The room radiated with happiness—there was plenty of smiling, laughter, and even some tears. It was a very emotional experience, and by far my proudest moment in 26 years of linework." ■

For more information about Partners for Power and to see more amazing photos please visit partnersforpower.org.

Robson, O'Neill Complete Courses

Board chairman Ed Oplinger (far left) congratulates Missy Robson, manager of customer service, and Chris O'Neill, safety coordinator, on earning their Management Essentials certification through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Building on the core skills introduced in the Supervisory Certificate Program, the Management Essentials program further develops critical business and leadership skills, with independent study bookended by two on-site sessions, a total of seven courses. O'Neill also recently completed his associate's degree in business administration through HomeWorks Tri-County Electric's tuition reimbursement program. ■



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What Is An Availability Charge?

If you look at your electric bill, beyond seeing the total on the bottom line to make the payment, you'll see a line item called "Availability Charge." And, once you see that line, you probably wonder what it is.

There is a cost to having a service available to you whenever you want to use it, whether you use it or not. Some co-ops call it a delivery charge, or a grid access charge. It's similar to the monthly fee you pay to have access to phone, cable or other utility services.

The availability charge is a fixed charge, paid every month, which helps cover the costs of maintaining the electric distribution system that delivers power to your home. It's different from the energy charge, which varies month to month based on the amount of energy you purchase.

Costs for operating and maintaining the electric system include our buildings and trucks, repaying interest and debt on the high capital cost of building and updating 3,300 miles of power lines with wire, poles, transformers, and meters, plus storm repairs and other maintenance.

Also included in this list of distribution costs are the call center and 24-hour dispatch service, computer



and telephone systems, sending out bills, property taxes paid to the 99 townships in which we serve, and many, many more behind-the-scenes activities necessary to provide reliable electricity for your family.

The current availability charge is \$14 per month for residential service. Based on past cost-of-service studies, \$14 is less than half of the actual cost of delivering power to you. The remainder is collected as a small add-on to the per-kilowatt-hour energy charge, which is meant to cover the cost of generating or purchasing power and transmitting it from the generating plant to a substation in your neighborhood.

Your board of directors has authorized a cost-of-service study for 2016 to see if these costs for reliable power are fairly allocated between the energy charge and the fixed monthly availability charge.

In the meantime, we work hard every day to make sure we are getting the best use out of every piece of equipment or technology we invest in, controlling the rising costs of materials and labor as far as possible to keep your rates stable. ■



The Quilt Lady

By Jack O'Malley

Eleanor Howard's story began when she was eight years old and asked her mother how to quilt. As a team, they pieced together Eleanor's first quilt and 87 years later, she still has it. "I've used that quilt on all my children's beds. I pert near wore it out!"

Speaking of children, Eleanor has five. And 15 grandchildren, along with 20 great-grandchildren. Each one has a quilt lovingly stitched by grandma. In addition, Eleanor donates many of her quilts to charity. How many has she made? "Oh, too many to



count!" Of the dozens of quilts assembled in her 95 years, one in particular stands out.

She made the quilt for her son, Albert, carefully patching each piece over two years. The result? A quilt depicting the state of Michigan, including all 83 counties, each painstakingly cut to its exact shape and featuring the product or service it's



Jack O'Malley

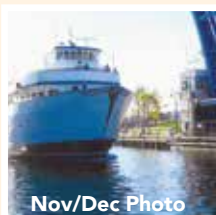
known for. Using appliques, stenciling, embroidery and hand painting, Eleanor had no pattern. She bought the biggest map she could find and went to work on figuring scale. The detail of Eleanor's Michigan quilt catches everyone's eye and has won multiple medals and ribbons. ■



<<< Where In Michigan Is This?

Every co-op member who identifies the correct location of the photo at left by **Feb. 10** will be entered in a drawing to win a \$50 electricity bill credit from their electric co-op.

We do not accept Mystery Photo guesses by phone. Enter your guess at countrylines.com or send by mail to: *Country Lines Mystery Photo*, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Include the name on your account, address, phone number, and name of your co-op.



Nov/Dec Photo

Our Mystery Photo Contest Winner from the November/December 2015 issue is Brian Thompson, an Alger Delta co-op member who correctly identified the photo as "U.S.-31 Outlet Bridge in Charlevoix with the Emerald Isle boat."

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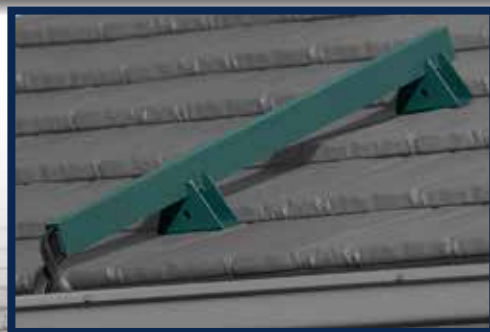


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