

A Service of **HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative**

April 2011

Michigan

COUNTRY LINES

10 *Experience*
Portland

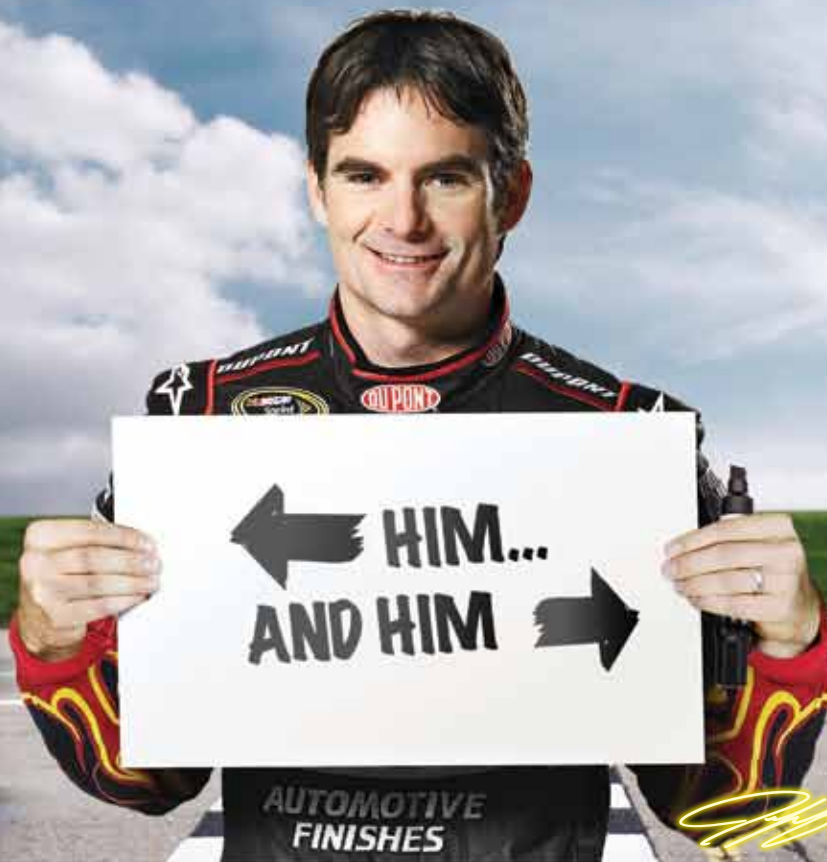


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TRAVEL
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Phil Conklin

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Farms Honored



A WATERFURNACE GEOTHERMAL UNIT IS LIKE TAKING TWO CARS OFF THE ROAD

(Sorry, you can't pick *which* two...)

Jeff Gordon's office is a bit more extreme than most. It's hot. It's loud. You don't want to know what he spends on gas. So when Jeff gets home, he wants to be **comfortable without spending a fortune on fuel**. That's why when it was time to decide how to condition his house, **Jeff chose a WaterFurnace geothermal heat pump**. A WaterFurnace geothermal system uses the **clean, renewable energy stored in your backyard to save up to 70% on heating, cooling and hot water**. It's the environmental equivalent to **planting an acre of trees or taking two cars off the road**. It's good for the environment, it's great for your budget and thanks to a **30% federal tax credit**, now is the best time to act. Visit waterfurnace.com for more information and to find a local dealer.

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Michigan

COUNTRY LINES



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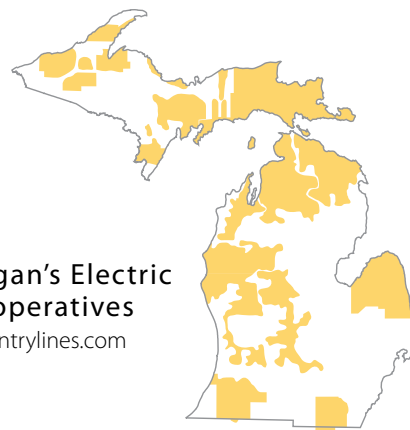
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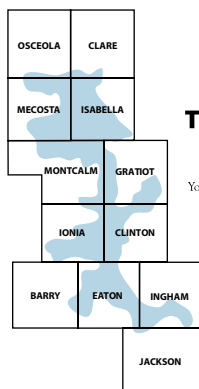


Michigan's Electric
Cooperatives
countrylines.com

On the Cover

A young guest enjoys old time music during an open jam session at the Portland farmer's market.

Photo - @perpetual-moments-photo.com



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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC

Your Capital Credits Help the Co-op Grow, Stay Strong

One of the seven cooperative principles is members' economic participation. What this usually means is that each member pays for their fair share of the cooperative's energy service, since cooperatives don't have stockholders to invest funds in hopes of a profitable return.

It also means that at the end of each year, once the books are closed and the bills paid, all margins (the cooperative word for profits) remaining are allocated back to the members who purchased energy during the year.

The HomeWorks Tri-County board of directors will authorize this allocation after the audit report is presented to them in late March, and you will find a notice of your share of the 2010 allocation on your May energy bill.

Once the margins are allocated, they're called capital credits. Each member has a capital credit account for their unrefunded allocations. However, these capital credits have no cash value until the board of directors authorizes a capital credit refund.

Cooperatives typically hold capital credits for a period of time before repaying them for two purposes:

- as working capital to keep the cooperative financially sound and allow for emergencies, such as a large storm which requires replacement of many poles and power lines.
- to reduce debt requirements for investment made in the cooperative's electric distribution system. This builds member equity in the co-op.

In the past 20 years, the board has authorized refunds totaling \$6,146,822. This is your money, coming back to you after being used to build a strong, reliable electric system for you and your neighbors.

During this past year, your board has participated in educational programs on rates and equity management to help them make the best decisions for the financial strength of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative. From these programs came a new board policy spelling out a long-range financial management plan.

One of the goals of that plan is to rotate, or refund, capital credits on a 25-year schedule, as long as the other financial indicators are strong enough to allow it. A 25-year rotation is a common goal among electric cooperatives like ours.

When refunds are made, a larger share of each refund will likely come from the oldest capital credits on our books, from the mid-80s, with some going to our newest members, too. Rotating capital credits this way lets current member-owners pay their fair share of the cost of providing service, just as the older members did.

If the board does in fact authorize a capital credit refund at the March board meeting, you should see it as a credit on your May energy bill. Be sure to look for it, and be proud of your economic participation in your electric cooperative.



Mark Kappler
General Manager



Join the conversation at
homeworks.org/blog

Meet your cooperative's board of directors

Phil Conklin: 'Get Co-op Information Firsthand'

Phil Conklin was born in Barry County, but as a child moved to an Eaton County farm, where he became familiar with Tri-County Electric Cooperative. After graduating from Charlotte High School in 1958, he served six years on active duty with Battery C, 119th Field Artillery, part of the National Guard based in Charlotte.

Phil and his wife Charlotte, married in 1963, co-farmed with his parents for several years before buying their Gresham Highway farm from his father in 1969. Phil now has a dairy operation milking 41 cows, but also farms 300 acres, rotating corn, soy and wheat, along with a few acres of hay for feed.

He and Charlotte have two children, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. They are members of Chester Gospel Church; Phil was on the Eaton Farm Bureau Co-op board, and also served several years on the membership board.

He also buys apples to make and sell cider as Conklin's Cider Mill. He does custom pressing for customers who bring in their own apples, and is the only one in several counties who offers this service.

How did you become involved with the co-op?

"I've been attending district meetings since I became a member when we bought this farm in 1969.

"I was district chair when Bob (Matheny, then general manager) suggested I put my name forward for the ballot in 1989—the bylaws required two candidates then. I wasn't quite ready to come on the board yet, so I was surprised to win against Jim Clarke.

"But it sometimes only takes a few votes to make a difference—in 1998 I lost by four



Phil Conklin is a dairy farmer, apple cider maker, family man, and a member of your board of directors.

votes to Frank Gauerke. In 2001 I made sure I went out and talked to people, asking for their votes, so I could be re-elected."

What does it mean to you to be on the board?

"Being on the board helps keep me informed of what's happening in the industry. Otherwise I would only know what I read in the news."

What are highlights you recall?

"Visiting the Harvest Wind Farm in the Thumb area was interesting, and seeing Wolverine's headquarters and Energy Control Center in Cadillac, back when they held annual meetings there.

"Also, seeing the new Clinton transmission

interconnection station on old Clinton Trail (M-50). I can remember my dad hauling one of the transformers to the original substation back in the early 1950s—he had a new truck at the time, and that transformer probably weighed 8 tons."

What do you think of member self-regulation?

"I'm hoping it will bring us freedom to adjust rates so we don't have to borrow more money to maintain the electric system.

"As a board, we're sensitive to costs—we have voted not to increase our per diem reimbursements. It's important to be careful with our members' money."

What challenges do you see ahead?

"Hopefully the (state and federal) administrations will lighten up on some regulatory requirements for emissions—in the past they've been going to an extreme, and it adds to our members' costs."

How can members get more involved?

"Members should attend our meetings to get information firsthand, so they understand what's really happening instead of what they hear in the media. There's nothing worse than second or third-hand information."

On your board of directors, Phil represents District 1, including Eaton, Ingham and Jackson counties. He was most recently re-elected to the board in 2010.

Watch the mail in late April for an invitation to your district's annual membership meeting.

People Fund Helps a Camp For Kids

You are helping disadvantaged youngsters enjoy summer camp activities this year with your Operation Round Up contributions to the Tri-County Electric People Fund.

Meeting March 2, the People Fund board made seven grants totaling \$7,407.88, including:

- \$350 to Odd Fellow & Rebekah Camp of Michigan, at Baldwin, to help provide under-

privileged, foster and other at-risk children, ages 7-15, with a week-long summer activity program;

- \$2,500 to EightCap, Inc., of Greenville, to help with expenses for Camp Wah-Wah-Tay-See, an overnight summer camp experience for at-risk or low-income people, ages 5-65;
- \$2,500 to Tamarack District Library in Lakeview to purchase an early literacy station;

- \$420 to a Montcalm County family to pay for one year of Lifeline service;
- \$502.31 to a Mecosta County family for medical expenses;
- \$964 to another Mecosta County family to help with housing expenses; and
- \$171.57 to an Eaton County family to help with housing expenses.



Magazine's New Look

I just wanted to drop you a line to say how much I like the new format for *Country Lines* magazine. We are not only a member of Great Lakes Energy, but also of Cloverland Electric Cooperative. The new format looks so clean and neat. I read the magazine from cover to cover when we get it. Tell everyone "Thank-you!" for the wonderful job they do.

— Cindy Miller

Editor's Note: Thanks for the good words—we're glad you like it!

Adoption Story

I just finished reading "Finding a 'Forever Family'" in the March issue. It was a great article.

My husband and I have been foster parents for eight years this month. We have had about 50 foster children in our home. So far, we have adopted two and are in the process of adopting another. We may adopt more yet, as we feel led.

I totally agreed with the article, and must say that we have seen the difficulties firsthand of not having enough caseworkers and foster homes to go around.

I hope your article will shine a light into the hearts of new families and they will consider becoming foster parents and maybe "forever families" for some needy kids!

Thanks for sharing.

— Diane N.

Glad to see more people are taking these children into their homes.

My husband and I just adopted six kids; we have six of our own, also. I have been speaking in

churches that if a family from every church in Michigan adopts one child there will be no more orphans in Michigan. There should be NO child who "ages-out" of the system. Those poor kids have nowhere to go as a "FAMILY" once they are out of the system.

Thank you for putting this in your issue.

— Sandi Rookus, Wayland

Who's Got Mail?

I just wanted to thank you for the article ("Who's Got Mail?", Mike Buda, March), which I enjoyed quite a bit. I too have been wondering just when I can dispense with Postal Service at all, as I'm the sole recipient still receiving my mail in a box on a postal stand that used to support four boxes. However, as a matter of familial pride, I should mention that the first constitutional U.S. Postmaster General was Samuel Osgood, although Ben Franklin did fill that role for about six months under the Continental Congress before heading overseas to become our ambassador to France. NBD, it's just that Samuel contributed quite a bit himself, and is seldom remembered for it. So, I felt compelled to mention it.

Chances are we're related to Samuel, but there isn't proof positive. If you look at his portrait, he looks like an Osgood. I've been 150 miles away from home, walked into a store, and been asked if Arnold was my father (he was my uncle). There is a strong familial resemblance among Osgood males. My aunt traced our family tree back quite some time ago, and my sister is continuing the effort today.

— Randal Osgood

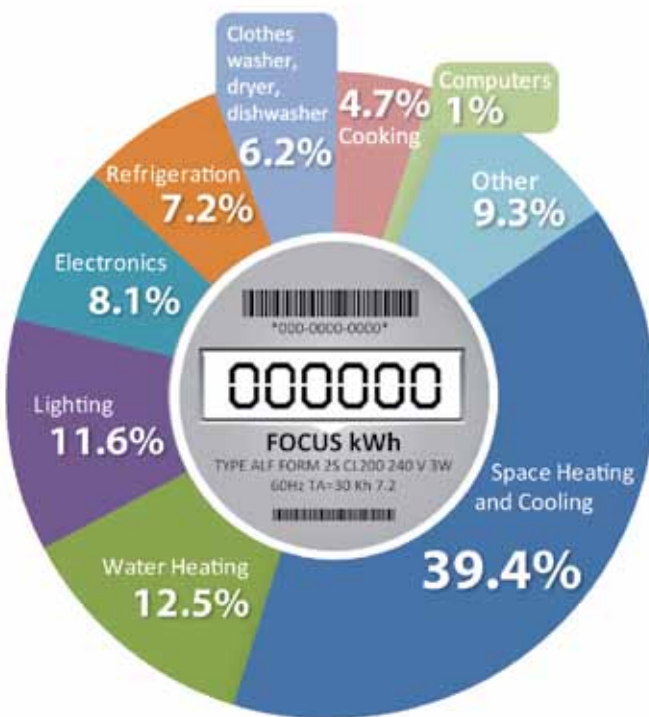
I was aware of Samuel Osgood, but cut that reference because of space issues. Cool if there really is a family connection!

— Mike Buda



FUTURE LEADERS McKenna Wolf (front row, third from left), a Constantine High School junior and Midwest Energy Cooperative member, represented Michigan electric cooperatives on the Youth Leadership Council at the National Rural Electric Cooperative (NRECA) Annual Meeting in Orlando, recently. The council provided assistance to the NRECA staff and co-op delegates at the Congressional Action Center. McKenna was elected to the council by her peers during the 2010 Rural Electric Youth Tour of Washington, D.C.

How Your Home Uses Electricity



Source: 2009 Buildings Energy Data Book, U.S. Department of Energy, Table 21.5. Represents an all-electric home. Updated February 2011.

Tell us about your favorite Michigan-made products!

See page 16 for details.

Better Rules for Broken Bulbs

As energy-savvy consumers know, equipping five of a home's most frequently used light fixtures with compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) can save a family \$70 a year in lighting costs. But what should you do when a CFL breaks?

CFLs are made of glass tubing containing about 4 milligrams of mercury. Although this isn't much—classic thermometers contain 500 milligrams—you should still take precautions if a CFL breaks, since mercury vapors may pose health risks. In December, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) updated the guidelines for cleaning up a broken CFL.

The revised guidelines break the process into three steps (see below) and into separate sections for hard surfaces and carpeting to aid consumers who only want the cleanup steps that address their particular situation.



Visit epa.gov/cflcleanup for more in-depth guidelines.

The recommended waiting time for cleaning up a broken CFL has been cut from 15 minutes to 5-10 minutes.

A 2008 study on mercury exposure from broken bulbs showed mercury release peaks within the first 5 minutes of the bulb breaking, explains EPA spokesperson, Richard Yost. "Five to 10 minutes is sufficient time to clear the room, ventilate, and gather the materials needed to clean up the broken bulb."

The EPA also removed recommendations on handling clothing, bedding, or other soft materials exposed to a broken CFL.

We want to keep the focus on the clean up steps, explains Yost. "Each broken bulb situation is unique. If a consumer has a particular concern they can contact EPA or their local/state environmental agency for assistance."

Guide to Cleaning Up a Broken CFL

The most important steps to reduce mercury vapor exposure from a broken bulb are:

Before cleanup:

- ▶ Have people and pets leave the room.
- ▶ Air out the room for 5-10 minutes by opening a window or door to the outdoor environment.
- ▶ Shut off the central forced air heating/air conditioning system, if you have one.
- ▶ Collect materials (stiff paper/cardboard, sticky tape, damp paper towels/wet wipes) needed to clean up a broken bulb.

During cleanup:

- ▶ Be thorough in collecting broken glass and visible powder.
- ▶ Place cleanup materials in a sealable container (plastic bag or glass jar).

After cleanup

- ▶ Promptly place all bulb debris and cleanup materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area until materials can be disposed of properly. Avoid leaving any bulb fragments or cleanup materials indoors. Not all recycling centers may accept broken CFLs and some states may have prohibitions on debris disposal. Check with your local and/or state household hazardous waste authority for disposal requirements in your area.
- ▶ For several hours, continue to air out the room where the bulb was broken and leave the heating or air conditioning off.

For more details on clean up and safety, visit epa.gov/cflcleanup.

GRILLS GONE WILD

LAST CHANCE! Enter Our Crazy BBQ Grill Contest!

Send us a photo of your home-made or custom BBQ grill—the crazier the better—along with a short description of your grilling tradition. If we print your entry in the May issue of *Michigan Country Lines* magazine, you'll receive a \$50 credit on your co-op electric bill.

- Entry deadline is *April 15*; one entry per co-op member. Special consideration will be given to photos with people in them.
- Complete the form below and attach a short description of your grilling tradition. Please identify anyone in your photo.
- **EMAIL** your photo as a high-resolution JPEG file (as an attachment) to photos@countrylines.com, or **MAIL** glossy prints, along with the form below, to: Crazy BBQ Grill Contest, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48879. (Prints will *not* be returned.)

We're looking forward to some grillarious entries!

CRAZY BBQ GRILL CONTEST ENTRY FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Electric Co-op: _____

GRILLS GONE WILD

Why Safety is Important to You and HomeWorks

Electricity and propane do wonderful things to keep us comfortable and productive. Most of the time they are safe and reliable sources of energy, but sometimes they can be dangerous.

That's why we have a co-op policy, reviewed and approved regularly by our board of directors, that makes the safety of our employees, our members and the general public a top priority for every one of us.

HomeWorks recently signed on in support of the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program. This program replaces the existing Safety Accreditation program, for which we last received certification in 2009.

While accreditation looked back at what we had accomplished in terms of safety training and performance, this new achievement program is more forward-looking. It calls for:

- creation of a safety improvement plan;
- an annual self-assessment process;
- redefined performance measures; and
- refinements to the formal assessment



This sign is painted on the wall in the Portland operations garage as a reminder.

that will still be completed every three years.

We also work with state and national propane organizations to make sure all employees who handle propane and the equipment that delivers it are certified to do their jobs correctly and safely.

Safety is more than preventing injuries, although that is a key goal of our program. We also train our employees on how to deal with hazardous materials, provide first aid,

safe driving, and other topics. Many of our training topics are also useful away from the job and help our employees keep their families and communities safe, too.

Safety is also taking good care of your investment in the trucks and other equipment we use, the power lines we build, and the propane tanks we set.

Our strong safety program also pays off in lower insurance and workers' compensation program costs, which helps to keep your costs stable.

A safe work crew is a productive crew—keeping the power lines maintained and the propane tanks filled so that your lights and other conveniences are ready when you are.

Chris O'Neill is
HomeWorks Tri-County
Electric Cooperative's
safety coordinator



Area Farms Honored for Historic Family Ownership

John Swagart and Jill Malusek, center, with their spouses Amy Swagart and John Malusek, are co-owners of a Clinton County farm that came into their family March 13, 1907.

Originally purchased from Philip and Alice Kress by Jill and John's great-great-grandparents, George and Elizabeth Diller Swagart, the 120-acre farm in Greenbush Township was later owned by Elmer and Mable Hulbert Swagart, and then by Jill and John's parents, Donald and Rosaline Dunn Swagart, before they took over in 2004.

The Maluseks restored the original 19th-century farmhouse where they now live, and John Swagart farms the current crops of soybeans, corn and wheat.

Two other Clinton County farms recently reached historic milestones. A Bengal Township farm originally purchased by Rosina and Joseph Schneider in 1910 was certified as a Centennial Farm. It is now owned by their grandson Donald Schmitt and his wife, Joan Keilen Schmitt.

And, the Essex Township farm purchased by Chauncey S. Wolcott in 1844, now owned by David and Jon Moss, has received its Sesquicentennial Farm designation.



Growing Pains

Building an affordable, reliable energy future will take time and money.

Tighter government regulations—and the high cost to comply with new rules—may signal lights-out for many of the nation's older coal-fired power plants at a time when forecasters predict energy demand will eventually outpace supply.

"Americans could see power shortages by the end of the decade if new generation sources don't materialize," cautions Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), an organization serving the nation's 900-plus electric co-ops.

To meet the challenge, electric co-ops are using energy efficiency measures and innovative technology to reduce electric demand. But these actions will only go so far. Eventually, the need to build new generation to "keep the lights on" will take center stage.

An investment of time, money

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the bulk power grid watchdog for the United States and most of Canada, estimates the country will need to build 135,000 megawatts (MW) of new generation by 2017 to meet demand. Facilities already on the drawing board, however, will only deliver 77,000 MW—leaving an energy gap.

Planning, building and launching a baseload power plant is no small feat. Even if the permitting process is non-controversial—meaning there are no significant objections to a facility—a coal-fired generating station takes six to seven years from start to finish, a combined cycle natural gas plant three to four years, and a nuclear plant requires 10 years at minimum, notes John Holt, NRECA senior manager for generation and fuels.

Wind farms and large solar projects, in many cases, need a shorter amount of time to complete—about two years total—but they are handicapped by intermittency issues. Even with good location and plenty of breezes, wind generation is available at most 40 percent of the time and seldom operates (due to a lack of wind) during periods of peak consumption on hot, humid summer weekday afternoons or cold weather below minus 22 degrees F.

Solar power systems operate only during daylight hours and are affected by cloud cover. Wind and solar resources must have

back-up generation, such as natural gas plants, ready to come on-line when the wind stops blowing or the sun stops shining, and that adds extra expense.

Federal rules affect prices

Rulemakings by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will impact electric bills and put affordability and reliability at risk.

A NERC-commissioned report, "Potential Resource Adequacy Impacts of U.S. Environmental Regulations," states that four pending EPA rules would place new and costly hurdles on power generators. In fact, regulations impacting cooling water intake, coal ash disposal, interstate transport of air pollutants, and using Maximum Achievable Control Technology (MACT) to curb emissions from power plants could force electric utilities to retire or retrofit 33,000 MW to 70,000 MW of generating capacity by 2015. A fifth hurdle, reducing power plant emissions of carbon dioxide, presents an even greater challenge since no viable, commercially tested solution exists.

The Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), a consortium that includes electric co-ops, contends if EPA designates coal ash, a residue produced by coal-fired power plants that is used as a Portland cement substitute, as hazardous, it could cost utilities—and consumer electric bills—between \$5.32 billion and \$7.62 billion annually.

"Because of these new rules, we're expecting a number of existing coal plants will be shut down," asserts Kirk Johnson, NRECA vice president of energy & environmental policy. "The cost of compliance will simply be too much."

Only two alternate baseload generation options are currently available to meet America's demand for safe, reliable and affordable electricity: natural gas, which is priced in a volatile commodities market, or nuclear power, which requires a long lead-time for construction and still bumps against ghosts of the Three Mile Island accident in 1979, as well as issues over the disposal of spent fuel.

Natural gas, at present, seems like an



attractive option to satisfy our nation's energy appetite because the fuel is relatively cheap, power plants that use it can be brought on-line more quickly, and burning gas produces less carbon dioxide than coal.

"But right now, we're in a natural gas price bubble," Holt cautions. "While economics today favor natural gas, my concern is that just two or three years ago natural gas was three

times as expensive. So, it could easily and rapidly go up in cost. Over the long term, I expect nuclear power—since it only emits water vapor into the atmosphere—will make a comeback. But there are a lot of 'ifs.'"

Working to keep bills affordable

To reduce the need for new power plants, electric co-ops are fashioning a variety of innovative solutions to reduce load during times of peak demand. This is the electric utility industry's equivalent of rush-hour traffic—when wholesale power costs skyrocket. Reduction efforts include direct control of electric water heaters, air conditioners, electric thermal storage units, and other appliances in the homes of volunteer consumers; interruptible contracts with commercial and industrial accounts, such as irrigation pumps, large retailers and factories that can temporarily shut down or run emergency generators; calling for the start-up of consumer-owned generation.

The newest load-reducing tactic is personal energy management. These in-home displays, web portals and smart thermostats inform consumers, in real-time, when load peaks are happening, allowing them to voluntarily decide when and how to curtail electric use.

Most co-ops are also ramping up energy efficiency programs. According to NRECA Market Research Services, nearly all electric co-ops offer efficiency educational resources, and 77 percent offer residential energy audits.

To learn about Michigan energy efficiency programs, visit michigan-energy.org or the Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency at dsireusa.org.

Megan McKoy-Noe contributed to this story.

5 ways to experience Portland

Nestled on the banks of two rivers, historic Portland, MI, is what you might call a point-and-click town. “Just point your camera anywhere” says Portland Main Street manager Patrick Reagan, “and you’ll end up with something that looks like a postcard.”

In addition to its natural beauty, Portland has a bustling downtown and an active community. The city was recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation for its sustainable redevelopment, cultural events and entrepreneurial growth.

Reagan also insists that the residents and shop owners in Portland, located about half-way between Grand Rapids and Lansing, are some of the most friendly people you’ll ever meet. “They want to welcome you to their town,” he says, “and they want you to share your story.”

Here are five unique ways to experience Portland for yourself:



Photo - Cperpetual-moments-photo.com

1 Treat Your Taste Buds

Stop by Cheeky Monkeys Coffeehouse (cheekymonkeyscoffeehouse.com) to sample from a selection of sandwiches and baked goods (including the infamous “happy crappy” bran muffin), complimented by specialty coffees named after local personalities. Authentic cajun dishes and Chicago-style deep-dish pizza are served down the street at Dukes Canoe Club (dukescajungrill.com).

2 Take In the Arts

For such a small city, Portland is busting at the seams with artistic talent. Catch a concert at Two Rivers Park any Thursday in the summer, or a local adaptation of a Broadway production at the Portland Playhouse (portlandcivicplayers.com). If you want to create your own art, the Portland Community Arts Council (portlandcommunityarts.com) holds classes at the Grand Dam Arts Center.

3 Navigate the Rivers

The Looking Glass and Grand rivers played a key role in the transport and distribution of lumber in the mid-1800s. Today you can navigate the rivers by canoe or kayak (Looking Grand Canoe Rental, 517-647-7402) or schedule a lazy river tube float (Portland Pedal Paddle, 517-647-6710). Don’t forget your tackle box—smallmouth bass, carp and even pike can be caught in the area.

Honor the Past ▶

Canoeist Verlen Kruger has traveled over 100,000 miles of river in his lifetime—and the Grand River was his favorite. Honor the past by visiting the Verlen Kruger memorial, sculpted by local artist Derek Rainey (Thompson Field, pictured); the Sept. 11 memorial, featuring a twisted beam recovered from the World Trade Center (Two Rivers Park); or various memorials honoring local wartime heroes.



Photo - verlenkrugermemorial.org





5 Take A Bridge Tour

Where there are rivers, there are bridges—Portland is home to four historic metal truss bridges. While the Veteran's Memorial Bridge still serves vehicular traffic in its original downtown location, the other three were relocated to be part of a nearly nine-mile network of paved pedestrian trails, known to locals simply as "the river trail." Take a bridge tour on foot, or rent a bike for the afternoon (Portland Pedal Paddle, 517-647-6710).

When To Visit

May 21

Downtown Block Party

Welcome warm weather with family activities, downtown shopping and a cruise-in with more than 200 classic cars. Refreshments and live entertainment are available at the "party pavilion."

May - September

Farmers Market

Purchase seasonal produce from local growers, Saturday mornings at the Red Mill. Foot-stompin' old time musicians jam (cover photo) on select Saturdays.

June 18

Portland Cruise-A-Thong

Grab your thongs (flip-flops, that is) and compete in this lazy-man triathlon (float, bike and walk) where the "most average" time wins. Bribing judges is encouraged.

June - August

Thursdays on the Grand

Pack a picnic dinner and enjoy the summer concert series on Thursday evenings at the Two Rivers Park bandshell. Elvis sightings are common.

June - October

Third Friday Artwalk

Enjoy the work of local artists on display at downtown businesses every third Friday of the month. Most pieces are available for purchase.

August 19-21

Portland RiverFest

Be a part of Portland's signature event, including family activities, canoe races, wine tasting on the boardwalk, a car show, juried art show, and much more.

October 15

Oktoberfest

Celebrate the area's strong German heritage with old-world food and adult beverages, live music, family fun, and the "Big Beer Run" 5k race.

November 18-19

HolidayFest on the Grand

Kick off the holiday season in mid-November with in-store activities and demonstrations, carriage rides, chili cook-offs, and a visit from Santa.

Visit portlandmainstreet.org and portlandcommunityarts.com for more event information.

Photo - ©perpetual-moments-photo.com

McCourtie Park: A Treasure of El Trabajo Rustico

It looks like wood ... but it's not. It's El Trabajo Rustico, which combines Mexican folk art and American rustic art traditions to create "faux bois," or fake wood. This art form uses cement to create garden benches, small bridges, gazebos and even trees. Southeastern Michigan's Irish Hills area has one of the largest collections in the Midwest, many of which were skillfully restored by local Hillsdale artisan, Melinda LoPresto.

LoPresto, who now has her daughter Megan as an apprentice, comes from a family with a history in cement. Her father was a mason, so growing up she was surrounded by stone and mortar.

"I have always loved McCourtie Park and their bridges," comments LoPresto. In 1993, while working at Davenport Masonry, she stopped to visit the park. Even though the bridges at that time were in a state of disrepair, they moved her to try her hand at creating "faux bois." "They were my inspiration to start working in cement," LoPresto explains.

Located on the northwest corner of U.S.-12 and Jackson Road in Somerset Center, McCourtie Park has an interesting history. The 42-acre park was originally part of an estate owned by Somerset Township native W.H.L. McCourtie. He made his fortune in Texas by speculating in oil and cement in the 1920s. Around the same time, Dionisio Rodriguez, who is considered the master of Trabajo Rustico, moved to Texas from Mexico. Rodriguez brought with him his perfected sculptural techniques in cement and was working on an estate in San Antonio. There he met Charles Bauberger, the president of the San Antonio Portland Cement Company, who became his patron. It is thought that McCourtie met Rodriguez through Bauberger.

It is believed that McCourtie commissioned Rodriguez to produce sculptures for his Michigan estate in the early 1930s. While

it is not certain that Rodriguez worked at the site, his two apprentices, Gabriel Cardosa and Raphael Corona, are credited with the work. The sculptures include a series of 17 whimsical bridges with intricate "faux bois" details using techniques learned from the master. There are also two hollow "trees" to serve as chimneys for an underground rathskeller. Driving along the road, it is easy to mistake these "trees" as real.

The property was sold in the 1970s to a dentist who used the underground building



The detail on these bridges made of cement is what makes them so fascinating.

for his dental practice and kept buffaloes in the adjoining field where the Trabajo Rustico bridges were located. Needless to say, the buffalo took their toll on these structures. "By the time the township had bought the property in 1985, it was a jungle," says Clinton Sneary, chairman of the McCourtie Park Committee. "You could hardly even see the creek. It took a prison crew from the Cotton Facility in Jackson five or six years to clear the property. The park was opened to the public in 1989."

In the 1990s, Clinton's wife, Joann, who was then head of McCourtie Parks and Recreation, started looking for someone to restore the bridges. "Just the look of the bridges, we knew they were special and worth preserving," comments Clinton.

After their search for a restorer proved more challenging and expensive than expected, the Snearys discovered LoPresto.



Which trees are real? The two lighter-colored trees are hollow and were made to cover the chimneys above the rathskeller in McCourtie Park.

After seeing McCourtie Park in the early '90s, LoPresto had begun experimenting with Trabajo Rustico in her own backyard, building several structures, including a gazebo. About her technique, LoPresto says, "I start with rebar wrapped with a wire mesh to get the shape. And then I use layers of cement and carve in the details. I don't use a cement mixer because I need a very thick texture, like clay. I use a tub and a hoe to mix the cement." Her chiseled biceps and fore-

arms attest to this.

LoPresto was so enthusiastic about working on the project that she offered to do the first bridge free. If the Snearys liked her work, they would go from there. In 1999, LoPresto started on the first bridge and had restored seven by 2005. Just a few years ago, the town installed a cell phone tower in the park to pay for the remaining restoration, and LoPresto has completed restoration of all 17 bridges.

While you are in the area, don't miss the other Trabajo Rustico structures: outdoor stations of the cross about eight miles east of Somerset City at St. Joseph's church, and the gazebos and fountains at nearby Hillsdale College's Slayton Arboretum.

Rita Henehan, a freelance writer and photographer from White Pigeon, is a member of Midwest Energy Cooperative.



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America's Real National Treasures

Exploring the Black Hills of South Dakota.

As happens on virtually every summer day, nearly 1,000 visitors from around the globe stand in reverence in the shadows of America's Shrine of Democracy, speaking in hushed tones as if in a church as they gaze at the granite sculptures of four of the nation's legendary leaders.

They have come to salute one of America's most enduring icons—Mount Rushmore National Memorial—and four of our founding fathers—Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.

Whether they are movie stars, moguls or manual laborers, few who visit this colossal carving on a pine-clad cliff in the middle of America leave unaffected.

"These sculptures represent America and their backdrop is the sacred Black Hills," said former Mount Rushmore Superintendent Gerard Baker, one of the few Native Americans to serve as a park superintendent in the country. "Visitors are affected by this place, this solitude, which cannot be found in the halls of Congress or the many monuments of Washington, D.C. You find it here because of this beautiful, natural cathedral and this powerful monument."

America's Story in Stone

Carved from the ageless granite of the Black Hills between 1927 and 1941, sculptor Gutzon Borglum sought to preserve in stone the attributes of four presidents who contributed so much to the birth, growth, preservation and development of the United States.

Even 70 years after Borglum died and the drilling and blasting stopped at Mount Rushmore, the memorial is a place where many tales are told. Its nighttime lighting ceremony, coupled with a ranger talk and patriotic film, is among the most popular Park Service programs anywhere.

"Mount Rushmore has many stories," Baker said. "This is the story of America."

Beyond the iconic Mount Rushmore, the Black Hills are home to the highest concentration of parks, monuments and memorials in the U.S., and they're not all above-ground.

An Underground Wilderness

Far below the ponderosa pine forests and



Photo — Chad Coppes/S.D. Tourism

grassy mountain meadows of the Black Hills lies an underground wilderness so vast that contemporary explorers are only now beginning to understand its scope and complexity.

In an age when orbiting satellites have mapped the topography of the earth's surface, from the tallest mountain peaks to its deepest watery recesses, the subterranean labyrinths of the Black Hills have become one of the last bastions of mystery in an uncharted terrain.

The first cave ever protected by the federal government—Wind Cave National Park—is located in the southern Black Hills. Its companion, Jewel Cave National Monument, is just 19 miles north, near the town of Custer. Both National Park Service units offer visitors a variety of caving tours for all skill levels.

With 150 miles of explored passageways, Jewel Cave ranks as second longest in the world. Wind Cave, with 131 miles of explored corridor, ranks fourth longest. But, in reality, no one truly knows where their passages end. In fact, studies indicate that mapped passageways constitute less than 5 percent of what actually exists in these two caves.

"Caves are one of the last frontiers on the planet," says Merrith Baughman, assistant chief of interpretation at Jewel Cave. "We've mapped the ocean floor, but we probably have thousands of miles of cave passages that we have not yet found. Caves are a whole other world. Rarely do we get to explore

the underground wilderness—a world that is always under our feet."

Badlands. Good Tours.

Flanking the eastern slope of the Black Hills stands Badlands National Park, a 244,000-acre moonscape that the native Lakota called "mako sica" or "land bad" a couple of centuries before white men first gazed upon it.

With ragged ridgelines, chiseled spires and deep canyons ravaged by eons of wind and rain, this may be the most unusual terrain in the world, and it is among the cleanest. This vast tract is still yielding clues to the region's rich and storied past.

In the summer of 2010, during one of the park's Junior Ranger programs, seven-year-old Kylie Ferguson of Georgia discovered the 33 million-year-old fossilized skull of a saber tooth cat. The discovery of the extremely rare skull with intact canines and bite marks still has park rangers and paleontologists shaking their heads.

The Tower

On the opposite side of the Black Hills, which spill over into extreme northeastern Wyoming, stands Devils Tower National Monument. This core of an ancient volcano exposed by millions of years of erosion was designated America's first National Monument by President Theodore Roosevelt in

1906. Native American legends tell of a giant bear that chased some young maidens up a rock, leaving its claw marks in the ancient stone tower. Today, the tower is a favorite among experienced rock climbers.

The Spirit of the Lakota

Six decades after sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski began carving the massive tribute to the legendary Lakota warrior known as Crazy Horse, his widow, Ruth, and seven of their 10 children carry on the work.

In 1948, Chief Henry Standing Bear asked Ziolkowski to create Crazy Horse Memorial because, “My fellow chiefs and I would like the white man to know that the red man has great heroes, too.” When completed, the colossal 641-foot-long, 563-foot-tall statue will rank as the largest work of art in the world and depict Crazy Horse pointing over the head of his stallion to the sacred Black Hills. Mount Rushmore would fit in the rider’s head.

The mission of the memorial, which honors the culture, tradition and living heritage of all American Indians, has been bolstered in recent years by millions of dollars in private contributions.

Thundering Hooves

Just 20 minutes south of Crazy Horse, east of the town of Custer, is the “crown jewel” of South Dakota and home to one of the largest buffalo herds on earth. Scenic drives within the 110-square-mile Custer State Park, including Iron Mountain Road and the Needles Highway, wind through ponderosa pine forests and pass giant finger-like granite spires that rise like sentinels from the forest floor. Along the routes, motorists encounter gurgling streams, alpine lakes and mountain tunnels that perfectly frame the faces on Mount Rushmore. The park is home to an estimated 1,500 American bison, as well as elk, antelope, deer, mountain goat, Big Horn sheep, mountain lion, wild turkey and prairie dogs.

Tom Griffith is a member of the Society of American Travel Writers and Western Writers of America. He lives and writes in the Black Hills of South Dakota.



Photo - Jenna Nagel

Kid-Friendly Michigan Museums

If your summer travels will be within the Great Lakes State, there are plenty of exciting kid-friendly museums to add to your itinerary. Here are just a few options that await young explorers:

Detroit Science Center

Detroit

Get ready to explore a larger-than-life, moving, roaring, prehistoric experience at the Detroit Science Center. The dinosaur exhibit includes more than 20 animatronics dinosaurs, five full-size skeletons, and nearly 40 fossil replicas and eggs. Visit detroitsciencecenter.org or call 313-577-8400.

Impression 5 Science Center

Lansing

Located in a historic wagon works factory on the Grand River, Impression 5 challenges visitors with its unique hands-on learning environment, including the bubble room, giant eyeball and the popular “throwing things” exhibit. Visit impression5.org or call 517-485-8116.

Air Zoo

Kalamazoo

The Air Zoo is a highly-charged, multi-sensory aviation history museum. In addition to the historical and rare aircraft, the facility features amusement park-style rides, full-motion flight simulators, and a 4-D missions theater. Visit airzoo.org or call 269-382-6555.

Mid-Michigan Children’s Museum

Saginaw, midmicm.org

Curious Kids’ Museum

St. Joseph, curiouskidsmuseum.org

Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum

Ann Arbor, aahom.org

Grand Rapids Children’s Museum

Grand Rapids, grcm.org

Kids N Stuff Children’s Museum

Albion, kidsnstuff.org

Upper Peninsula Children’s Museum

Marquette, upcmkids.org

Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Kalamazoo, kvm.kvcc.edu

The Children’s Museum of Fennville

Fennville, fennvillechildren.org

Great Lakes Children’s Museum

Traverse City, greatlakeskids.org

Michigan Historical Museum

Lansing, michigan.gov/museum

New Inventor Makes Life EZer



Photo - Chris Engle/Gaylord HeraldTimes

What Jeff Borowiak could've simply brushed off as a close call with a semi truck while repairing his mailbox turned into an "a-ha" moment for the local inventor and Great Lakes Energy Cooperative member. It spawned his creation of the "EZ Mailbox Mount."

Borowiak, a lifelong Gaylord resident whom friends call "Digger," recounted that winter day where he stood on the shoulder of M-32 repairing his snowplow-damaged mailbox until a semi-truck passed too close for comfort. "It literally came within 2 feet of me," Borowiak stressed. "I knew there had to be a better way—a safer way."

His ideas led to wooden prototypes built in his friend's garage, then to a working model of his design.

The EZ Mailbox Mount is a plastic base which is screwed onto the bottom of a mailbox indoors, away from the hazards of the roadway. The mailbox

and mount can then be seated onto the end of a standard 4-by-4 wooden post, no screws needed, thanks to special ribs which apply enough force that it takes a couple of hammer swings to release their grip.

Inventor Jeff "Digger" Borowiak shows off his EZ Mailbox Mount. The mount is designed to fit a standard mailbox, but can be modified to accommodate newspaper tubes or larger mailboxes (see "How It Works," right).

Along with getting the mailbox owner off the shoulder of the road, Borowiak says seasonal residents can use his device as a handy way to remove their mailbox before heading south for the winter, sparing it from plow damage.

For the design-and-build process, Borowiak exclusively enlisted the help of Gaylord businesses. H&S Mold made the prototype as well as the injection mold die for the plastic product; Mayfair Plastics does production; Cooper Standard built the extrusion die for mounting strips and makes plastic brackets; Russell Peters Co. does product packaging; mounting screws are made by Mid-State Bolt & Screw; Crossroads Industries packages the screws; Image Factory prints mounting instructions; and Alpine Web built his website. "I wanted to keep my business local," Borowiak explains, "and there's so much talent here in Michigan, so 'why not?'"

Borowiak encourages aspiring inventors and entrepreneurs to follow their dreams. "It seems like everyone has an idea," he remarks, "but they just don't know how to get started."

Borowiak recommends visiting a patent attorney to protect your idea, and asking others how they got started.

Visit ezmailboxmount.com to learn more, or to ask Jeff how to get started with your own idea.

How It Works

Just screw your mailbox onto the EZ Mount, then firmly press the mailbox and EZ Mount onto a standard 4x4 post—no screws necessary—special ribs inside the EZ Mount apply enough force to keep it securely in place. To remove, gently tap the EZ Mount with a hammer on each side until loose, then pull off by hand.



REGULAR: EZ Mount is designed to fit a standard size mailbox.



LARGE: With a simple 180-degree twist, the EZ Mount holds larger mailboxes, up to 18 inches wide.



EXTRA LARGE: Specially-designed brackets are included to accommodate newspaper and advertiser tubes.

MADE IN MICHIGAN

Tell us about *your* favorite Michigan-made product and we may write about it. Please share why you like it, and if you have a unique story to go with it, please include that by **April 20** to czuker@countrylines.com or send to *Michigan Country Lines*, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864. Thanks to Joseph Duff for telling us about the EZ Mailbox Mount.

Save Money With Electric Yard Tools

Using electric or cordless tools makes more sense than using gasoline-powered ones for many reasons. Since the United States has to import huge amounts of oil to make gasoline, anything a homeowner can do to use less is good. If you have access to an electric outlet, plug-in tools offer lighter weight and more power than cordless models.

Electric or cordless tools also cost much less to use than gas tools. For example, a cordless lawn mower can cut a one-third acre lot for about 10 cents' worth of electricity to charge the battery—usually an overnight charge at a rate of 45 to 90 watts, depending on the battery voltage. Also, there are no maintenance costs associated with a cordless or electric tool.

There are differences in the life, weight, cost and effectiveness of various types of rechargeable batteries for cordless tools, and four basic types (see “Know Your Battery,” below).

Don't necessarily look for the highest voltage tool with the most power. No matter what type of battery a tool uses, higher voltage means more battery weight. If you primarily do light shrub trimming or drill small holes in soft wood, lower-voltage is



Get 'Er Done! This 36-volt electric lawn mower has a removable battery, cuts a 19-inch path and weighs just 72 pounds.



With the 36-volt battery removed from the lawn mower, it can be placed anywhere near an electric outlet for charging.

your best choice.

Of your outdoor power tools, you'll use a lawn mower most often. Most of the newer rechargeable cordless lawn mowers have enough electric charge to cut the typical one-third-acre lot. This is assuming a medium length grass—perhaps one-week growth

maximum. With no maintenance, cordless mowers are very easy and quick to use. The only drawback is they are somewhat heavier than a gas-powered mower.

I have used a 24-volt cordless mower for many years, and still do sometimes. The 36-volt models provide additional power to cut a wider path, which reduces cutting time. For convenience, select a model with a removable battery so the mower can be stored in a shed while keeping the battery in the

garage for charging and wintertime storage.

Black and Decker® has just introduced a self-propelled, 36-volt cordless mower. It has a variable-speed motor to drive the wheels so you can set a comfortable walking speed. The electric motor that drives the wheels is a soft-start design, so it will not jerk the mower each time you start.

Another new handy cordless tool is a 12-volt pruning saw with a lithium-ion battery to reduce weight, which is important because a pruning saw is often used overhead and can tire shoulder muscles quickly. This lithium-ion battery also holds its charge longer when not in use, an advantage for tools like this that are not frequently used.

The following companies offer cordless lawn mowers/tools: Black & Decker, 800-544-6986, blackanddecker.com; Homelite, 800-242-4672, homelite.com; Husqvarna, 800-438-7297, husqvarna.com; Neuton, 800-798-2921, neutonpower.com; and Toro, 888-384-9939, toro.com.

Have a question for Jim? Send inquiries to James Dulley, Michigan Country Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit dulley.com.

Know Your Battery

Lead-acid batteries are used in cordless lawn mowers because they store the most charge. They are relatively inexpensive for the amount of power they store, but are also very heavy. This is not a problem for a tool such as a lawn mower that rests on wheels, but having a lead-acid battery hanging on a hand-held yard tool could quickly wear out your arm.

Nickel-cadmium (Ni-Cd) batteries were used on the earliest cordless tools and most still use them. They are relatively inexpensive and maintain their performance at cooler temperatures—an important feature for outdoor tools. Ni-Cd batteries are relatively heavy, so they are not often used on the highest voltage cordless tools.

Nickel metal-hydrate (Ni-Mh) was the next generation of rechargeable batteries. They can store more electricity for the weight, but are more expensive to make. They are ideal for indoor use, but tend to lose run-time in colder temperatures and have a shorter run/recharge cycle.

Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries are the newest type of battery. They are the most expensive, but are also the lightest for the power they can store and operate very well in cold temperatures. Some take longer to charge than Ni-Cd or Ni-Mh batteries, so they may not be the best choice if you are constantly running them down and need to recharge quickly.

James Dulley is a nationally recognized mechanical engineer writing about home energy issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



Marshmallows



Marshmallows are a confection that's been around since the mid-1800s when the recipe called for sap from the root of the marshmallow plant. Find hundreds more recipes at countrylines.com.

Chocolate Crunch Brownies

- 1 c. butter or margarine, softened
- 2 c. sugar
- 4 eggs
- 6 T. baking cocoa
- 1 c. all-purpose flour
- 1/2 t. salt
- 2 t. vanilla extract
- 1 7-oz. jar marshmallow crème
- 1 c. creamy peanut butter
- 12 ozs. semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3 c. crispy rice cereal

In a mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar; add eggs and mix well. Stir in cocoa, flour, salt and vanilla. Spread into a greased 9x13-inch pan. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes or until brownies test done; cool. Spread marshmallow crème over cooled brownies. In a small saucepan, melt peanut butter and chocolate chips over low heat; stirring constantly. Remove from heat; stir in cereal; spread over marshmallow layer. Chill before cutting. Store in refrigerator. Makes 3 dozen.

Judy Lindsey, Adrian

Chocolate Chip Pie

- 30 lg. marshmallows
- 1/2 c. milk
- 1/2 pt. whipping cream
- 1 t. vanilla
- 1 square baking chocolate
- 1 baked and cooled 9-inch pie shell or graham cracker crust

Melt marshmallows and milk in a double boiler or 1-2 minutes in the microwave; cool. Grate chocolate; set aside. When marshmallow mixture is cool, whip cream until thick. Add chocolate to marshmallow mixture, then add marshmallow mixture to whipped cream; gently blend. Stir in vanilla. Spread in pie shell. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Brenda Shoebottom, Curtis

Orange Pineapple Salad

Pictured

- 1 3-oz. orange flavored or orange-pineapple flavored gelatin
- 1 c. boiling water
- 1 8 1/2-oz. can crushed pineapple, do not drain
- 1 c. diced orange sections
- 1 11-oz. can mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 c. miniature marshmallows
- 2 T. mayonnaise

- 1 c. dairy sour cream
- 2 T. grated cheddar cheese

Dissolve gelatin in the hot water. Add pineapple; chill until slightly thickened. Fold in orange sections, mandarin oranges and marshmallows. Pour into a 7x11-inch or 8x8-inch pan; chill until firm. Combine sour cream and mayonnaise; spread on salad. Sprinkle with cheese.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

Marshmallows

- 2 egg whites
- 1 c. water, divided
- dash salt
- 1/2 c. corn syrup
- 3 envelopes unflavored gelatin
- 2 c. sugar
- 1 T. vanilla or flavoring of choice
- 1/3 c. corn starch
- 1/3 c. powdered sugar

Place parchment paper in a 9x13-inch pan. Spray with non-stick spray. In a heavy duty mixer, beat egg whites until stiff; let stand in mixer. Combine unflavored gelatin in 1/2 cup cool water; set aside. In a saucepan, combine 1/2 cup warm water, sugar, corn syrup and salt. Bring to a boil

and cook until mixture reaches 240°. Remove from heat and add vanilla and gelatin; stir well. Very slowly, pour hot sugar mixture down the side of mixing bowl containing beaten egg whites. Blend until all is incorporated. Beat on highest speed for 10 minutes, scraping bowl twice. Pour mixture onto sprayed paper in pan. Cover with waxed paper or parchment paper; let sit for 24 hours at room temperature. Combine corn starch and powdered sugar, sprinkle on your work surface. Transfer mixture onto work surface. Cut into squares with a pizza cutter. Store in Ziploc® bags or freeze with powdered sugar/corn starch mixture for later use.

Marge Bagnell, Mancelona

Marshmallow Caramel Balls

- 1/2 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 14-oz. bag caramels
- 1 stick butter or margarine
- 1 16-oz. bag lg. marshmallows
- 4+ c. Rice Krispies®

In a saucepan, combine milk, caramels and butter; bring to a boil; cool. With a fork, dip marshmallows in caramel mixture, then roll in cereal. Place on waxed paper; refrigerate 1 hour.

Renee Butkonen, Lake Linden

Send in your recipes! If published, you'll receive a kitchen gadget. Send in: **BBQ recipes by April 15**, **CASSEROLE & POT PIE recipes by May 15**, and **EGGPLANT recipes by June 15**. Mail to: Country Lines Recipes, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864; or email jhansen@countrylines.com.

Rocky Road Chiffon Pie

2 t. unflavored gelatin
3 T. cold water
2 squares unsweetened chocolate
1/2 c. milk, divided
3/4 c. sugar, divided
3 eggs, separated
1 t. vanilla
1/4 t. salt
6-8 large marshmallows, quartered
1/2 c. chopped nuts, optional
1 baked 9-inch pie shell, cooled

Soften gelatin in water; set aside. In a double boiler, melt chocolate with 1/4 cup milk; add 1/4 cup sugar. Beat egg yolks with remaining milk. Add gradually to melted chocolate; stir until thickened. Add vanilla and softened gelatin; remove from heat. Add salt to egg whites, beat stiffly. Gradually beat in 1/2 cup sugar. Fold hot mixture lightly, but thoroughly into egg whites. Add marshmallows and nuts. Heap into pie shell; cool before serving.

Ellen Yoder, Scottville

Peanut Butter Apple Salad

1 1/2 c. Cool Whip®
1/2 c. marshmallow crème
2 T. mayonnaise
2 T. salad dressing
3 T. peanut butter
1/2 c. sliced almonds
1/2 c. raisins
1 c. mini marshmallows
4 med. apples, unpeeled and diced

In a mixing bowl, combine Cool Whip, marshmallow crème, mayonnaise, salad dressing and peanut butter. Beat on high speed until thoroughly combined. Fold in almonds, raisins, marshmallows and diced apples. Refrigerate until serving.

Arlene Yoder, Scottville

Ambrosia Waldorf Salad

2 c. fresh or frozen cranberry halves
1/2 c. sugar
3 c. miniature marshmallows
2 c. diced, unpeeled apples
1 c. seedless green grape halves
3/4 c. chopped pecans
1 20-oz. can pineapple tidbits, drained
1 c. heavy whipping cream, whipped

flaked coconut

Combine cranberries and sugar. In a large bowl, combine marshmallows, apples, grapes, pecans and pineapple. Add cranberries; mix well. Fold in whipped cream. Cover and chill. Sprinkle with coconut just before serving.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

Indoor S'Mores

2 c. semi-sweet chocolate chips
2 T. peanut butter
2 c. mini marshmallows
6 whole graham crackers

Break grahams into stamp-sized pieces; set aside. In a saucepan, over medium heat,

melt chocolate chips and peanut butter. When melted, remove from heat; add marshmallows and graham pieces. Mix until well coated. Spread into a greased 9x13-inch pan. Refrigerate 1 hour; cut and enjoy.

Ashlynn and Melissa Sytek, Lake Isabella

Blackberry Cake

1 qt. blackberries
3/4 c. sugar
3 c. marshmallows, about 20 large
1 3-oz. pkg. berry gelatin mix
1 18.5-oz. white or yellow cake mix

Prepare cake mix batter according to package directions but do not bake. Pour berries into

a buttered 9x13-inch pan. Sprinkle sugar, marshmallows and gelatin over berries. Pour cake batter evenly over this. Bake at 350° for 50-55 minutes or until top is browned and toothpick comes out clean. Cool completely before cutting. Invert cake pieces when serving so berries are on top of each piece. Top with ice cream or whipped cream.

Bonnie Bourn, Constantine

Marshmallow Fruit Salad

1 20-oz. can chunk pineapple, drained
1 15-oz. can mandarin oranges, drained
1 1/2 c. flaked coconut
2 c. miniature marshmallows
2+ c. sour cream

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Refrigerate several hours or overnight. If necessary, add more sour cream before serving so salad is creamy.

Carole Sutton, Stockbridge

Snappies

1 bag large marshmallows
1 bag ginger snap cookies

Toast marshmallows on a stick over a fire. Sandwich between two ginger snaps.

Bonnie Bourn, Constantine

Sweet Potato Puffs

6-8 yams
1/2 c. light brown sugar
1/4 c. butter
2 T. vanilla
dash of salt
1 16-oz. bag lg. marshmallows
butter or vegetable spray
1 14-oz. bag unsweetened coconut
finely chopped, toasted pecans, optional

Boil, peel and mash yams. Whip mashed yams with brown sugar, vanilla, butter

and dash of salt. Add pecans, if using. Using whatever method works best, place a layer of mashed yam mixture around one large marshmallow. Try to keep mixture even and cover the entire marshmallow. Add some dry tapioca to yams if mixture becomes too thin. Roll yam-covered marshmallows in coconut. Line a 9x13-inch pan with parchment paper. Butter or spray sides and bottom of pan. Bake at 325-350° for about 20 minutes until nicely toasted.

Debbie Coombs, Wayland

Study Abroad Challenges Ideas, Changes Lives

In just a few weeks, whether I'm ready or not, I'll put my 21-year-old daughter on a plane to Brussels where she'll spend six weeks studying European issues at Vesalius College and interning for a nonprofit organization there.

Emily's booked her tickets, filed paperwork, written essays, and applied for financial aid. I've downloaded travel alerts and printed five pages of tips for "Staying Safe While Studying Abroad" from DUMMIES.com.

While I swing from enthusiasm to trepidation, Emily is simply enthused.

On the way to Brussels, she'll stop off to visit her German friend Carolin, with whom she and her childhood buddy Dan Kuhlman have traded visits twice since a high school exchange program introduced them in 2006. She and Dan will cross paths in mid-air as he wings his way home from a semester-long program in Bielefeld, Germany, that started in January.

Not bad for two country kids whose travels used to be limited to a five-driveway distance between our homes.

Rising Trend, Despite Economy

More than 260,000 U.S. college students participate in study abroad programs each year. It's a number that has risen dramatically, dropping for the first time in decades in 2008-09 in response to the global economic crisis. The trend is on the rise again, but with a few twists. Now students are increasingly choosing shorter stays, less expensive destinations, and programs in which their financial aid can be used.

The philosophy behind the programs is changing rapidly, too. No longer are such trips viewed as excuses for wealthy students to explore the old world. Study abroad now takes a more democratic approach in which students of all socio-economic levels take part in travel to strategic destinations for tomorrow's global citizens.

"In today's society, we are connected globally through technology, so it's important to make an effort to understand those with other ideologies or cultures," says Lauren Hearit of Portage, MI. She has taken advantage of two study abroad options since starting her

undergraduate studies at Western Michigan University in 2008. The most recent program took her for five months to Besançon, France, approximately 2 ½ hours southeast of Paris.

There, she mastered an unfamiliar public transportation system and polished her ability to speak French.

"I think that learning a foreign language is an important life skill," she says.

Dan agrees. While his German major at Central Michigan University doesn't require studying abroad, he says it has been essential.

"I'm gaining at least twice as much knowledge of the language and culture daily than I would had I stayed in the U.S. this semester," he writes via Facebook. "It's such a great feeling being able to understand someone whose native language is German and being able to contribute to the conversation."

Dan plans to return to Germany for a year-long program before he graduates. Lauren's making plans, too, although this time she's headed to new places.

"I would study abroad again in a heartbeat," Lauren says. "I learned so much about myself, met so many wonderful people, and I really enjoyed the pace of life in Europe. I now want to try to explore Eastern Europe more, as well as Asia and South America."

She joins a growing number of students who are choosing nontraditional destinations—like China, the Middle East and North Africa—over traditional study abroad destinations. It's another way study abroad is evolving to prepare a new generation for the world that awaits them.

Benefits Are Rich

Despite the costs and potential risks inherent in living in unfamiliar settings, almost everyone, agrees that studying abroad helps expand students thinking, prepares them to succeed in the global workforce, and leads to improved relationships around the world. Surveys of participants themselves indicate that regardless of where students study and for how long, studying abroad was a defining moment—one that continues to impact lives for years after the experience.

Which is why Emily remains undaunted by my safety tips and travel alerts. She's



Before You Go

Consider these important pre-departure items before leaving for your program abroad:

DOCUMENTS: Apply early for your passport and student visa—these documents can take a long time to process. Make three copies of any important documents you'll be taking with you (passport, credit cards, etc.). Give one to your parents, one to your study abroad leaders, and keep one on your travels.

HEALTH: Get any immunizations you might need and be sure to fill any necessary prescriptions before you go. Make sure anything you transport isn't considered a controlled substance by your host country—certain allergy medicines are illegal in Japan, for example.

ACADEMICS: Schedule a pre-departure meeting with your academic counselor to take care of all academic matters, including financial aid and scholarship applications.

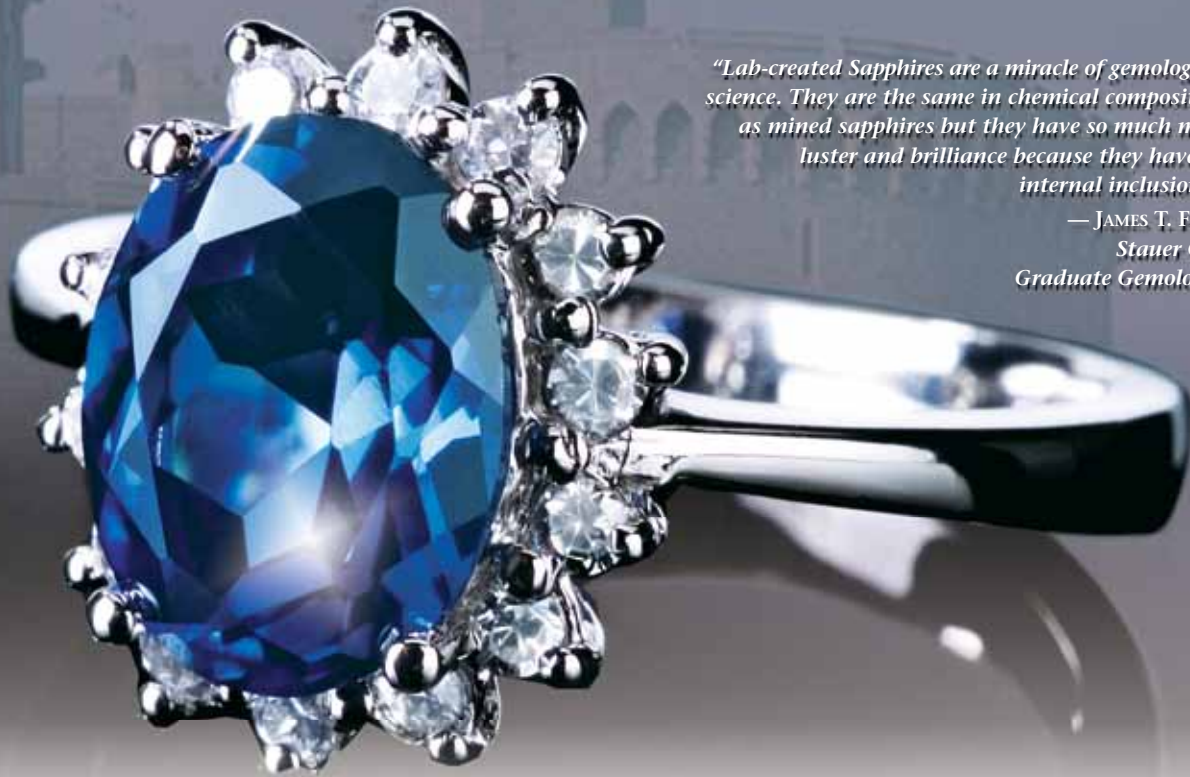
MONEY: Convert enough currency to sustain you until you're settled in your new surroundings. If you'll be gone from January to April, don't overlook filing your taxes.

COMMUNICATION: Compile a list of important contact information and research international phone cards or cell phone options.

been there, done that, and knows how life-changing her trip to Brussels will be.

"Speaking another language, or learning about another culture is one thing," she says. "There is nothing like living in another country—actually navigating life day by day—to help you understand the experiences of people in other places."

Linda Wacyk contributes regularly to Country Lines magazine.



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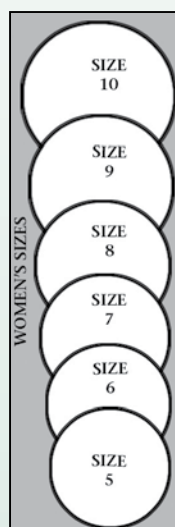
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10 Ways to Curb Your Backyard Carbon Footprint

Just how “green” are your lawn and garden? Are you concerned about curbing your carbon footprint when doing outdoor chores? If you answered yes, you are not alone. The National Gardening Association (NGA) finds that nine in 10 Americans believe it’s important to maintain their landscapes in a way that benefits the environment.

It’s true that smart landscaping can save energy, save you money, and reduce your household’s greenhouse gas emissions. But most folks are almost clueless when it comes to caring for their lawns and gardens in an environmentally friendly manner.

The NGA’s recent Environmental Lawn and Garden Survey asked a representative sample of U.S. households, “How environmentally friendly do you think are the practices currently used to maintain residential, commercial and municipal lawns and landscapes?”

Only one of five respondents in the NGA survey give current lawn and landscape maintenance practices a passing “green” grade.

Homeowners can’t control how commercial and public lawns are maintained, but they do have control over their own backyards. To measure how “green” homeowners are in caring for their lawns and landscapes, NGA asked respondents with a yard or garden which environmentally friendly lawn, garden and landscape practices they follow.

The result? Most homeowners follow only one-sixth of these NGA practices.

While most homeowners answered that they water their lawn and plants only when needed and keep yards well-maintained to add beauty to their homes and neighborhoods, only about one-half say they follow pesticide and fertilizer labels carefully. Fewer than one-half follow the recommended practices of leaving grass clippings on their lawns and keeping fertilizer, pesticide, yard and pet waste out of water sources and off pavement.

Similarly, fewer than one-half surveyed said they apply mulches; go to the trouble of choosing the right plants for their climate, sun/shade, soil and rainfall; or cut their lawns at the highest recommended mower setting.

Less than one-third answered that they recycle yard waste by composting or check



Photo – The Scotts Company

Do the Right Thing. Only about one-half of surveyed homeowners say they follow pesticide and fertilizer labels carefully.

to ensure they are using the most appropriate method before applying insect or weed control products. Only about one-quarter use only well-adapted or native plants in their landscaping and remove poorly adapted, exotic or invasive plants. Fewer—just a fifth of survey respondents—said they take time to learn about ways to care for their lawn, specific plants, soil or wildlife at home.

Most troubling, the survey findings suggest the majority of households with a yard or garden follow only a small fraction of the environmentally friendly lawn, garden and landscape practices the NGA recommends.

“There’s a real need for improvement in people’s appreciation for the impact each of us can have on the environment in our own backyards. Most homeowners have a lot to learn about ‘green’ lawn and landscape practices,” says Mike Metallo, NGA president.

The NGA survey also asked respondents, “How knowledgeable would you say you are about how to maintain your home lawn, garden and landscape in an environmentally friendly way?” Most homeowners replied that they aren’t very knowledgeable.

Keep America Beautiful is a nonprofit group that has partnered with garden product producers, such as the Scotts Miracle-Gro

Company, to educate homeowners across the country about how watering, feeding, and lawns and gardens can work together to maximize the environmental benefits of green spaces. They’re learning easy ways to maintain a healthy lawn and beautiful garden, but still conserve water.

Following are 10 ways homeowners can be environmentally friendly when caring for their lawns and gardens.

1. Feed regularly.

Maintaining a healthy lawn or beautiful garden involves regular feedings. A healthy lawn is able to absorb and use water more efficiently and recover from drought quickly once water becomes available. Plants must receive nutrients to produce foliage, flowers and fruit.

2. Water wisely.

Remember, pumping water requires power. Rely on rainfall for watering lawns and gardens as much as possible. Before watering, watch for signs of lack of water such as dry soil or wilting. For your lawn, the time between needed irrigation is up to 20 days for heavy, clay soils and about five days for light, sandy soils.

3. Mow high.

Set your mower to its highest appropriate setting. Longer grass blades promote deeper roots that help retain moisture. Mow St. Augustine and buffalo grass at 3 inches, 1 inch for Bermuda grass, and 2 inches for centipede and Zoysia grass.

4. Leave grass clippings on lawn.

Recycled grass clippings return organic matter and nutrients to the soil. It's an easy way to save clean-up time and improve your soil quality. Leaving clippings on the lawn doesn't cause thatch build up, but it does make it healthier. Soil organisms recycle the clippings into free fertilizer.

5. Keep fertilizer on the lawn.

Sweep fertilizer and grass clippings off driveways, sidewalks and curbs and back onto your lawn. Making it a habit protects rivers, lakes and streams by keeping nutrients on the lawn.

6. Choose the right plants.

Pick easy-to-grow plants and lawn types that are well adapted or native to your region. Avoid plants with known pest problems.

Also, the Pew Center for Global Climate Change (pewclimate.org) provides a number of ideas on how to reduce your lawn and garden greenhouse gas emissions, including:

7. Be green in your yard.

Consider using a push mower, which, unlike a gas or electric mower, consumes no fossil fuels and emits no greenhouse gases. If you use a power mower, a mulching mower helps further reduce grass clippings.

8. Compost food and yard waste.

Doing so reduces the amount of garbage sent to landfills and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Lawn and garden improvement tips that benefit the environment are available from the Environmental Protection Agency's GreenScapes program (epa.gov/greenscapes).

9. Apply mulch.

Use mulch to help moderate soil temperature and retain moisture during dry weather, reducing the need for watering. Learn all about mulch, plus free sources of mulch, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture at nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard/mulching.html.

10. Plan your landscape wisely.

Choose low-maintenance plants that require

less water and fewer pesticides. In areas of the country, lawns use between two and three times as much water as other plants and can result in 50 percent more water waste from evaporation, runoff, over-spray and over-watering. Learn more from the Regional Water Providers Consortium at conserveh2o.org/outdoors/landscapes/plants or call 503-823-7528.

Midwestern and Northeastern lawns typically do not require supplemental irrigation, using less supplemental irrigation than ornamental plantings. The statistic is more the result of practice than an agronomic requirement.

The NGA is a national non-profit leader in plant-based education, grants and curricula for youth gardens and research for the lawn and garden industry. To learn more, visit garden.org.



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Clear Right-of-way is Key to Safe, Reliable Transmission



A Wolverine lineworker uses an insulated pole to measure the distance between an elevated hunting blind and the co-op's transmission line. The structure, less than 10 feet from the center of the right-of-way, is then removed by co-op employees.



Wolverine Power Cooperative will focus again this spring and summer on the removal of encroachments from its rights-of-way. The cooperative has identified more than 800 structures with varying degrees of safety risks on its 1,600 miles of transmission line.

"Each year, we conduct annual inspections of our transmission system for new encroachments," says Adam Helminiak, a utility forester for Wolverine. "Problem areas are documented and assigned a safety risk rating of high, intermediate or low."

High-risk encroachments include structures or materials that are 15 feet or less from an electrical conductor or attached to a power pole, such as an elevated hunting blind. Structures placed under electric lines in the center of a right-of-way also jeopardize public safety and operation of the transmission system.

"We call the center 30 feet of the right-of-way the 'wire zone,'" Helminiak explains. "Encroachments in the 'wire zone' pose the greatest threat to public safety."

High-risk encroachments make up about one-third of the problem areas identified. Intermediate-risk encroachments, found 15 to 40 feet from the center of the right-of-way, account for almost two-thirds of the total documented. The remainder are located between 40 and 50 feet from the center and classified as low-risk. Wolverine maintains its rights-of-way in accordance with the National Electrical Safety Code.

"Our plan is to contact landowners who have high-risk encroachments on our rights-of-way in 2011 and those with intermediate-risk encroachments in 2012," Helminiak says. "As we work with owners to remove encroachments, it's an opportunity to increase awareness of electrical hazards and promote safety, not to mention improving the reliability of our transmission system."

Landowners who are considering building or placing a structure on a Wolverine right-of-way are encouraged to first contact the cooperative's land management department. Wolverine may also be able to help move an existing structure from its right-of-way. Call the cooperative at 800-283-1250 for more information.

Budget Program Evens Out Energy Bills

If you'd like to smooth out some of the seasonal ups and downs of your energy bills, now is the time to contact HomeWorks Tri-County to see if you qualify for our annual budget plan.

Budget billing for both electric and propane starts May 1 so that we can include the final winter season billings in our calculations. Your payment is reviewed during the year, and sometimes adjusted to avoid a large bal-

ance the following May.

There is no charge to take advantage of the budget program. It works very well with our Auto-Pay program; use the form below to sign up anytime during the year.

Simplify Your Life Set up your convenient, automatic payments in 3 easy steps!

STEP 1: Choose which HomeWorks bill(s) you'd like to have paid automatically:

- ☐ ELECTRIC account #:
- ☐ PROPANE account #:
- ☐ DIRECTV account #:

STEP 2: Select your payment option:

- ☐ **Option 1:** I'd like my bill(s) to be automatically deducted from my **bank account**.

Financial Institution:

To ensure the correct account number is used for this electronic payment and to obtain the ABA/routing number, please contact your financial institution for assistance.

ABA/routing #:

Account Number:

☐ Checking ☐ Savings

IMPORTANT: Please include a voided check with this completed form - automatic checking deduction cannot be processed without it.

- ☐ **Option 2:** I'd like my bill(s) to be automatically charged to my **credit card**.

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☐ Home ☐ Work ☐ Mobile

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- ☐ I no longer wish to receive a paper bill.

I authorize HomeWorks to deduct my payment from the listed bank or credit card for my bill each month. I understand that I control my payments and if at any time I decide to discontinue this payment service I will notify HomeWorks. I also understand that all information provided will remain confidential.

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Our Capped Price Stops the Roller Coaster

Nobody likes watching the price signs change at the gas station because these days it seems like they only change *up*. Heating fuels do the same each winter as demand rises over the colder months.

HomeWorks Tri-County Propane has a way to stop that “up” cycle—our heating season price cap, offered at no charge to every customer.

For instance, as you can see on the chart

below, HomeWorks set the heating season price for auto-fill customers at \$1.959 back in September, and it has stayed steady all winter long.

Meanwhile, the average residential price per gallon of propane started out higher than our capped price, at \$2.07 in Michigan and \$2.359 nationally. Since October, those prices have risen nearly every week, so that as I write this on March 9, the national average price

is \$2.88 and the state average is \$2.40 per gallon. (This data comes from the Michigan Public Service Commission, and the U.S. Energy Information Administration.)

And those are the averages. We have heard that prices at other companies in this area have been as high as \$3.50 per gallon this winter.

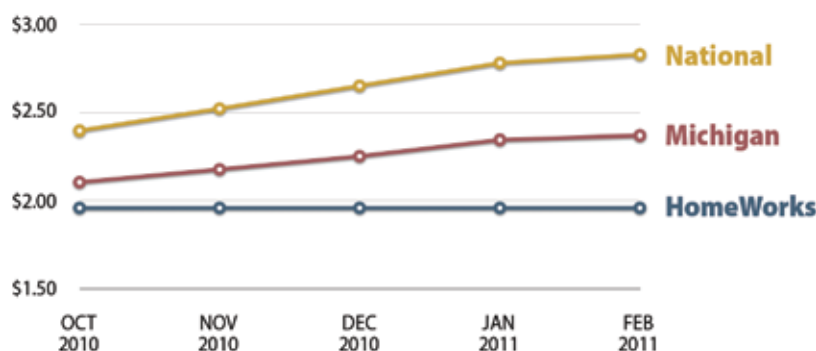
It makes sense to do business with a company that makes your needs a priority. We know you need a reliable source of reasonably priced fuel, and you can count on us to keep doing just that for you.

As always, if you're happy with your service from HomeWorks Tri-County Propane, tell your friends. When they start taking service from us, we'll give you \$50 for each new customer who signs up for our auto-fill or metered service.

Randy Halstead is the propane manager at HomeWorks Tri-County Propane, a subsidiary of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative



**Average Residential Propane Prices
2010-2011 Heating Season**



Co-op Pays \$917,000 in 2010 Property Taxes

Rural electric cooperatives like HomeWorks Tri-County Electric are subject to the same taxes as any other business—including property taxes, sales tax, Michigan Business Tax, fuel taxes, etc. We are also required by the Internal Revenue Service to pay tax on income from any unrelated business activity.

However, because we operate on a non-profit status, as described by Mark Kappler on page 4, we do not pay state and federal income taxes.

This past year, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric paid \$917,035.57 in property taxes to local governments in the 13 mid-Michigan counties where we serve. Those taxes will help pay for such things as schools, roads and law enforcement.

Property taxes are paid on our two operations centers, at Blanchard and Portland, and on the 3,339 miles of distribution lines and related equipment such as transformers and meters.

County	# Meters	Summer Taxes	Winter Taxes
Barry	204	\$ 2,902.24	\$ 8,615.27
Clare	201	1,115.87	2,582.41
Clinton	2,189	26,027.21	67,480.91
Eaton	2,270	19,867.33	54,151.40
Gratiot	585	7,558.97	21,059.87
Ingham	887	11,467.59	22,669.11
Ionia*	2,742	34,021.83	105,767.34
Isabella	5,699	88,526.54	80,980.91
Jackson	134	1,269.46	2,017.47
Mecosta*	6,089	134,717.67	74,802.06
Montcalm	4,423	63,597.28	83,700.51
Osceola	63	533.42	1,339.66
Saginaw	13	60.29	202.95
Total	25,499	\$ 391,665.70	\$ 525,369.87
Total paid in 2010		\$ 917,035.57	

*The cooperative has operations centers in Ionia and Mecosta counties

Energy Optimization a Success, Thanks to You

We want to thank all of our member-customers who participated in our Energy Optimization programs so far, and hope many more will do the same in 2011.

What's in it for you? Short-term savings in the form of rebates for a number of measures, including upgrading your electric water heater, ceiling fan, dishwasher, clothes washer, or heating system motor.

You'll also benefit from long-term energy savings from these high-efficiency units, keeping your energy bills stable and living a little greener.

You can read more details about this year's programs by visiting homeworks.org and clicking on the Energy Optimization tab.

For now, though, it's time to give you a report on our energy performance in the first 18 months of the state-mandated Energy Optimization program. All these rebates are funded through a surcharge on your energy bill; residential customers pay \$0.00149 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) of energy purchased, while customers using larger amounts generally pay a flat monthly EO surcharge.

Since the program began in 2009, HomeWorks has collected \$682,284 from our 25,000 active accounts through these surcharges. To date, we have spent \$493,669 of the money collected to set up the EO programs and reward members who participate.

Our EO program is set up as a three-year program, after which we'll develop a new version to file with the state. So, the money that has been collected to date, but not yet spent,

Successful Residential Energy Optimization Programs

Program	Target Achieved	kWh Saved	Participating Members
ENERGY STAR	160%	1,665,193	4,237
On-line audit	858%	130,770	177
Appliance recycling	90%	269,005	152
Income-qualified	51%	51,844	61
HVAC	63%	224,252	86
Total Residential	125%	2,341,064	4,713

will likely be used this year to help us meet the legislation's annually-increasing goals.

To date, the most popular residential measures were:

- the Energy Star® program, including CFLs and clothes washers;
- the online energy audit, which provided a free energy kit to members who completed the survey; and
- appliance recycling.

Because of you, HomeWorks was among the leaders in most of these programs. You can see by the chart above that nearly 25 percent of our members took advantage of at least one EO program.

We also had excellent participation from our commercial and industrial members, hitting 199 percent of our goal with total savings of 1,572,210 kWh.

Participating commercial and industrial members included:

- Lakewood Middle School, Lake Odessa
- Tri-County Collision, Portland

- Bandit Industries, Remus
- Maple Valley Schools, Vermontville
- Pewamo Westphalia Schools, Westphalia
- Unified Brands, Weidman
- Sackett Ranch, Stanton, and
- Sackett Potatoes, Mecosta

As with the residential program, we'll be able to apply some of the savings we achieved last year toward this year's goals, so we have a good head start. We need your support to make it the rest of the way.

Remember, it's your money that funds the EO programs. You might just as well be the member who benefits by getting all the rebates—and energy savings—that you can.

Nick Rusnell is
HomeWorks Tri-County
Electric Cooperative's
energy advisor



A Flock of Potential Power Blinks



Portland Operations Supervisor Chris Reed reports this sight is a frequent cause of blinking lights at your home.

"The top wires are energized, and the lowest wire is the neutral. You can see how close they are from the weight of the birds—when they all fly off at once, the wires can bounce and slap together," Reed says.

Wires touching will cause a "blink" if the line is protected with an oil circuit recloser, or a full outage if the line is equipped with a one-time fuse.

Reed says Tri-County Electric has been able to greatly reduce bird-caused blinks by using offset neutral brackets, which space the wires far enough apart so they shouldn't contact each other while bouncing.

Photo - Chris O'Neill

A Sure Sign of Spring

I love to drive, especially on open roads in the country. (Most of us do, which is one reason NASCAR is so popular: We can identify easier with a driver than a goalie or a pitcher.) These days, though, you have to pick your roads carefully.

I take the road less traveled, not because of Robert Frost's observation on life's choices, but because I want to avoid potholes, which are more likely found on roads more traveled.

The road in front of our house is a lot like other Michigan country roads: two-lane blacktop with a 2-foot shoulder. It was refinished about five years ago and holding up well until last summer, when stimulus-funded construction projects sent trucks full of gravel barreling over the pavement night and day for months. We didn't sleep well, and it didn't do the road any good.

The road had to be refinished last fall, this time with gravel, which has since compacted, but not before letting tires fling prodigious amounts of pebbles to pockmark a good number of local cars. It was a quick fix, and it's already falling apart.

Good roads do exist. Our friend Sue recently visited Toronto and later commented on the condition of their roads. Just pass over the Blue Water Bridge, she said, and the roads through Ontario are smooth and clear. Another friend, Jill, said her car went airborne when she met battered pavement on the Michigan side of the Indiana border.

I get that climate and traffic affect roads, but Ontario and Indiana aren't distant locales. They have the same weather and similar traffic.

And, I know potholes form as a result of alternate cycles of freezing and thawing: Water seeps beneath the road and freezes, pushing up the roadbed as it expands and collapsing when it thaws, like bread dough left too long to rise. The weakened roadbed then succumbs to the onslaught of traffic, yielding cracks, divots and, finally, fully-formed potholes. You can't fight Mother Nature, but maybe you can keep her at bay a little longer.

Wouldn't you think that the state that built the first highway 100 years ago and once led the nation in paved roads would have finally learned how to build roads that last?

Watching the horrific aftermath of the

earthquake-tsunami-nuclear disaster that befell Japan, I was struck by the condition of their roads. Even after all that, they looked better than ours. Some Roman roads are still serviceable after 2,000 years.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) says it rates road conditions as good, fair or poor. MDOT says it takes five times more money to upgrade a road from poor to good condition than it would have taken if it had been repaired while still rated fair. They also say roads are upgraded in stages to prevent them from continued deterioration. The goal is to have 95 percent of state freeways in fair or good condition within 10 years, and 85 percent of our non-freeway roads in fair or good condition.

I must do most of my driving on that other 15 percent.

In the *Overdrive Magazine* 2010 survey of truck owner-operators' opinions on the best, worst and most improved U.S. highways, Michigan ranked second behind Pennsylvania for worst roads overall. How does this help our tourism promotion?

MDOT has considered requiring warranties on road repair and construction. Several projects completed in 1998 in the Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and metro Detroit areas included five-year warranties from the contractor. MDOT says it is weighing the additional cost of warranties against the cost of repairing the roadways. Really? You have to pay more to have a contractor guarantee the work? Isn't that the point of getting a professional to do the work: it's done right and they stand behind it? Are roads built to last only five years?

Like many others, I am guilty of blaming our beat-up roads on heavy tandem trucks. But MDOT says their tandem policy is better for roads than the policies of other states in the region. Those states are evaluating our system.

MDOT engineers say their research shows that heavier trucks do not cause more damage as long as the weight is evenly distributed over an appropriate number of axles.

As for fix-it money, MDOT acknowledges they don't have enough now that federal stimulus dollars are no longer flowing to the



states for roads, and our gas tax can't raise all the funds we need.

MDOT says a mile of freeway through an urban area costs about \$39 million, and the same through a rural area about \$8 million.

It seems to me that if we want good roads, we should be willing to pay a gas tax that will cover the work we want done. Decent roads will cut down on our car repairs. Would you rather pay \$500 to fix a suspension or a higher gas tax that would cost you \$7 annually for every penny of tax if you drive 15,000 miles a year and get 22 miles to the gallon?

Don Ness, the mayor of Duluth, MN, down the road apiece in severe pothole country from where I grew up in Ironwood, recently noted that penny-pinching on our roads is not wise.

"As a nation and as a community, we have bought into a convenient lie which promotes the idea that infrastructure does not require ongoing maintenance and investment," Ness said. "Decades of pinching pennies on infrastructure now forces us to spend massive amounts of tax dollars to do nothing more than provide an emergency patch. After decades of neglect, we are now paying the price."

The MDOT website, michigan.gov/mdot, has helpful information and even a form you can use to report potholes. As far as getting reimbursed for damage to your car is concerned, don't expect much. You'll have to fill out lots of paper and prove that MDOT knew about the pothole for 30 days or more before your vehicle bottomed-out.

NASCAR drivers don't have to do this.

Mike Buda is editor emeritus of Country Lines. His road is now being undermined by groundhogs, and his views are not necessarily those of Michigan's electric co-ops. Comment on Mike's columns at countrylines.com/column/ramblings/ or email mbuda@countrylines.com



Found! The Last Morgan Silver Dollars

Amazing Discovery from Montana Silver Collector

Montana. A old-time silver collector recently liquidated a hoard of Morgan Silver Dollars he'd acquired that were part of an estate sale. They'd been hidden away for decades—originally purchased from the U.S. Treasury.

Now these glittering chunks of nearly uncirculated silver history have been added to our inventory and are being released to the public by GovMint.com. While they last, you can acquire these brilliant, lustrous silver coins for as low as \$42.45 apiece. Twenty-coin Bankers rolls and 10-coin Half Rolls are available.

Survival Against All Odds

By all rights these silver dollars should have been destroyed decades ago. Government silver melt-downs, including the 1918 Pittman Act, which alone destroyed 270 million Morgans, have decimated supplies. Millions more were called in by the government and melted for their silver content between 1921 and 1965. Today private hoards account for virtually all the surviving coins. And of those, only a fraction survive in the Virtually Uncirculated condition so coveted by collectors.

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These last year 90% pure silver beauties still dazzle with their Mint luster and heft. Weighing in at 26.73 grams and a diameter of 38.1 mm, they are the largest American silver coins ever to circulate. Struck from silver mined from the western Mother Lode, they are the legendary coins that built the West. Master engraver George T. Morgan fashioned a radiant profile of Lady Liberty and a majestic eagle as symbols of our nation's strength and prosperity. Today, the long-gone Morgan silver dollars are among the most sought-after coins in America.

Hot Silver Market, Hot Silver Value

Silver prices have jumped over 140% in the last two years fueling the frenzy among avid collectors, investors, and the 130 million new collectors created by the U.S. Mint's highly successful state quarters program.

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