

Midwest Energy Cooperative

February 2017

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES



## YOUTH TOUR

The Power Of Our Future

Transformational Year:  
Focus Of 2017 Meetings

Line Clearance  
Key To Reliability

Electric Bill More  
Than The Kilowatts





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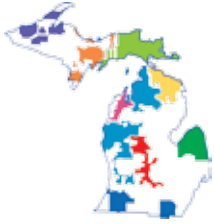
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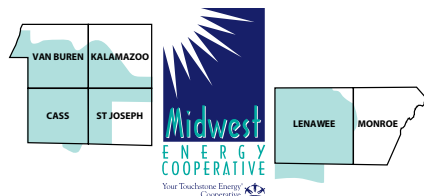
## **READER'S PAGE**

I Remember—The Wonder Of Michigan Always Pulls My Heart Back Home

*Kalico Casady, Great Lakes Energy*

Submit An 'I Remember' Story And Earn \$50!





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Midwest Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

# Your Opinion Matters Here



**Robert Hance**  
President/CEO

This month we will drop about 5,000 letters in the mail inviting members to join us for one of eight district meetings. Names are selected based on a purely random drawing from our billing system. Sadly, based on our 13-year history with these events, fewer than 200 members will respond.

I get it. If any of my utility providers invited me to a dinner meeting, I'd likely pitch the invitation before finishing the opening paragraph. But my providers don't extend that type of invitation because my opinion doesn't matter to them, and that's the difference.

You are an owner of Midwest Energy Cooperative based on the fact that you take electric service from us. That gives you a voice in the life of your utility and a stake in our success. Your opinion matters here.

In many ways, 2017 will be among the most transformational years in our history and an important time for you to understand what's going on. While most electric utilities take a very status quo approach to the customer service experience, Midwest Energy Cooperative is pushing the envelope to make sure that our members can access everything that the ever-evolving electric grid is making available.

We're continuing to make significant investments in our distribution system to improve your reliability and give you more options to manage your service experience. We're entering the third year of our fiber internet deployment, bringing the gold standard to areas that were previously unserved with any high-speed service. Later this year, we'll open a new headquarters that will represent everything your utility of the future is striving to be.

We're also taking steps to restructure rates so that all members pay an appropriate share of the fixed costs required to make electricity available. You can read more about that on page 17 of this issue.

Midwest Energy Cooperative is anything but status quo because our members need and deserve more. We will address these transformational changes and the impact on rates and your bill during our 2017 meetings. There has never been a more important time for you to be engaged.

Invitations for our meetings will be mailed early this month. If you do not receive an invitation and are interested in attending, we invite you to sign up on our waitlist at [TeamMidwest.com](https://TeamMidwest.com). We do limit attendance based on the size of each venue and will contact you if space allows. We're also adding a daytime session this year that will be live-streamed over Facebook. Follow us at [Facebook.com/TeamMidwest](https://Facebook.com/TeamMidwest) to learn more and participate.

Your opinion matters here. That's the co-op difference. ■

# Efforts Promote Safe And Reliable Electricity

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

## What We Do And Why

We have worked diligently over the last decade to reclaim our rights-of-way, which means a ground-to-sky clearance of 15 feet on each side of the power line. Recorded and prescriptive easements give us the right to access and use personal property to maintain our rights-of-way. Because of our diligent efforts, we are now in full maintenance mode, including re-grooming and spraying. Following is a description of each method, with specific plans for 2017.

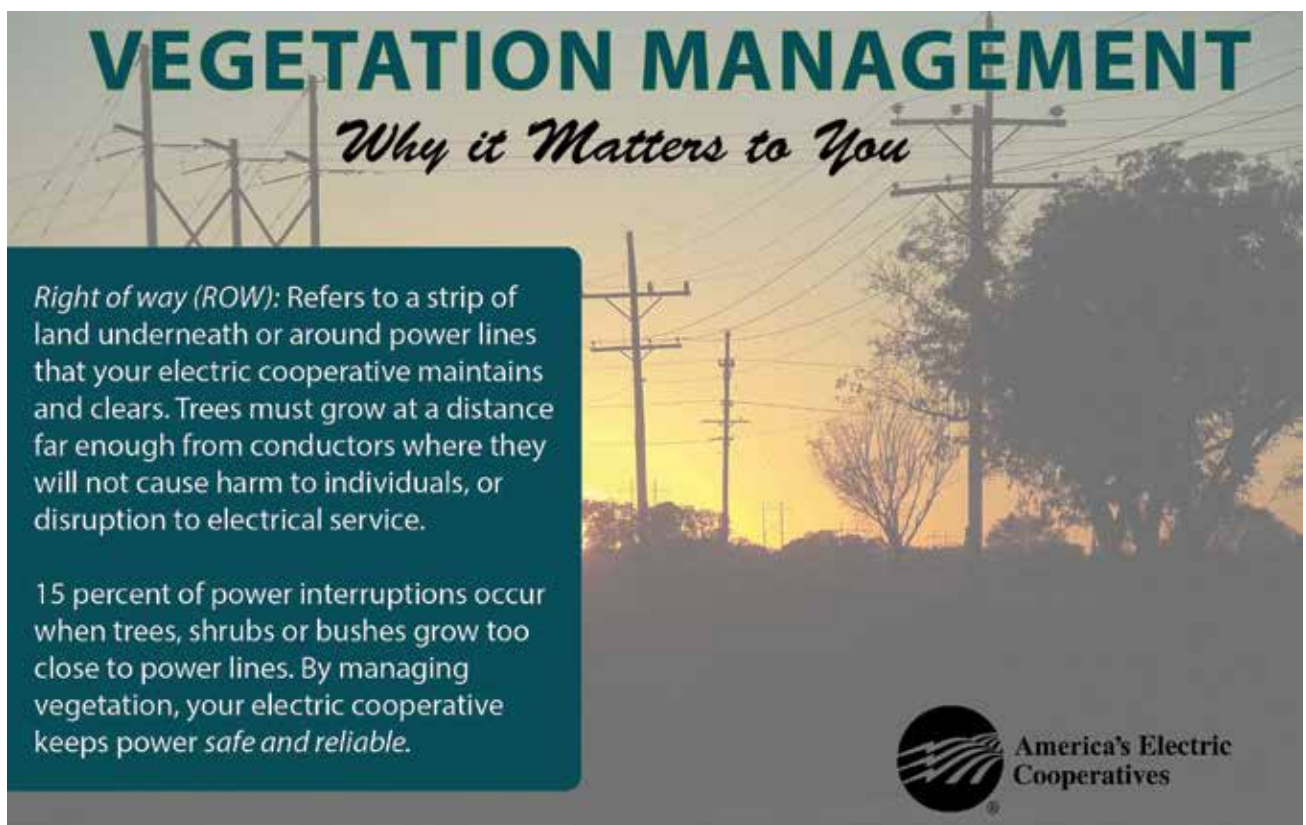
**Re-grooming:** Once the line is clear, we return to trim and mow for any new growth. We will groom the following areas in 2017: **Twin Lakes Substation:** Wayne, Volinia, Silver Creek, Hamilton, Decatur, LaGrange, Pipestone and Keeler townships; **Marcellus Substation:** Marcellus, Flowerfield, Van Buren Porter, Prairie Ronde, Decatur, Volinia,

Newberg and Penn townships; **Jones Substation:** Calvin, North Porter, Constantine, Penn, Fabius and Newberg townships; and **Palmyra Substation:** Madison, Palmyra, Blissfield, Fairfield, Ogden, Riga, Deerfield, Raisin, and Adrian townships.

**Spraying:** We employ a long-term spraying strategy to manage continued regrowth in newly-cut areas. It effectively controls tall-growing trees and bushes while promoting low-growing plants that are beneficial to wildlife. It offers cost-effective, longer-term results, and is endorsed by a number of environmental, forestry and wildlife providers. We will spray in the following areas in 2017: Almena, Antwerp, Brady, Calvin, Constantine, Florence, Howard, Leonidas, Mason, Mendon, Milton, Mottville, North Porter, Ontwa, Oshtemo, South Porter, Texas, Van Buren, Wakeshma, White Pigeon and York townships in southwest Michigan; and Hudson and Medina townships in southeast Michigan.

## For More Information


For more information about our line clearance procedures, please contact our Customer Care Department at 800-492-5989 or visit [TeamMidwest.com](http://TeamMidwest.com). ■



**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT**  
*Why it Matters to You*

**Right of way (ROW):** Refers to a strip of land underneath or around power lines that your electric cooperative maintains and clears. Trees must grow at a distance far enough from conductors where they will not cause harm to individuals, or disruption to electrical service.

15 percent of power interruptions occur when trees, shrubs or bushes grow too close to power lines. By managing vegetation, your electric cooperative keeps power *safe and reliable*.

 **America's Electric Cooperatives**

# PORTABLE GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS

**Always read the Owner's Manual  
and instructions for your generator.  
Do NOT cut corners when it comes to safety.**

These tips are merely supplemental and are not intended to substitute the reading of the Owner's Manual.



## Carbon Monoxide And Ventilation

- Using a generator indoors **can kill you in minutes**. Exhaust contains carbon monoxide, a deadly, poisonous gas you cannot see or smell.
- NEVER run a generator indoors or in partly-enclosed areas, such as garages.
- ONLY use outdoors and far from windows, doors, vents, and crawl spaces and in an area where adequate ventilation is available and deadly exhaust gas cannot accumulate.
- Using a fan or opening doors and windows will not provide sufficient ventilation.
- It is recommended that you install battery operated carbon monoxide alarms/detectors indoors according to manufacturer's instructions/recommendations.

## Gasoline, Fueling And Burn Safety

- If the tank is over-filled, fuel can overflow onto a hot engine and cause fire or explosion.
- Do not overfill the fuel tank. Always allow room for fuel expansion.
- Never add fuel while the unit is running or hot. Allow the generator and engine to cool entirely before adding fuel.
- Never store a generator with fuel in the tank where gasoline vapors might reach an open flame, spark or pilot light.
- Many generator parts are hot enough to burn you during operation and while the generator is cooling after turning off. Avoid coming into contact with a hot generator.

## Electrocution Hazard And Electrical Shock Hazards

- Connecting a portable electric generator directly to your household wiring can be deadly to you and others. A generator that is directly connected to your home's wiring can "back feed" onto the power lines connected to your home and injure neighbors or utility workers.
- Do not connect your generator directly to your home's wiring or into a regular household outlet.

- Only start or stop the generator when no electrical loads are connected.
- Overloading your generator can seriously damage your valuable appliances and electronics. Do not overload the generator. Prioritize your needs; do not operate more appliances and equipment than the output rating of the generator. A portable electric generator should be used only when necessary and only to power essential equipment.
- Use the proper power cords. Plug individual appliances into the generator using heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords with a wire gauge adequate for the appliance load. Overloaded cords can cause fires or equipment damage. Do not use extension cords with exposed wires or worn shielding.
- Do not operate the generator in wet conditions such as rain or snow.
- The generator must be properly grounded. If the generator is not grounded, you run the risk of electrocution. Check and adhere to all applicable federal, state and local regulations related to grounding.

## Generator Placement And Operation

- Allow at least five feet of clearance on all sides of the generator when operating.
- Generators can be used during a wide variety of weather temperatures, but should be protected from the elements when not in use to prevent shorting and rusting.
- Operate the generator only on level surfaces and where it will not be exposed to excessive moisture, dirt, dust or corrosive vapors.
- Inspect the generator regularly.
- Always disconnect the spark plug wire and place the wire where it cannot contact the spark plug to prevent accidental starting when setting up, transporting, adjusting or making repairs to the generator. ■

*Source: American Red Cross with technical advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Fire Protection Association (publisher of the National Electric Code®) and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.*





# Wind Energy Is Full Of Wins For Michigan

By Kelley Welf,  
Communications Manager,  
Wind On The Wires

**M**ichigan farmers, business owners and taxpayers have a lot to gain by embracing wind energy. It offers a drought-resistant cash crop, requires very little land, creates family-supporting jobs in rural areas, and injects much-needed revenue sources into rural communities at a time when many are struggling—all while generating low-cost, clean energy. Everybody wins with wind power!

For generations, farmers have harnessed the power of the wind, but it wasn't until the 1980s that the industry was able to accomplish it on a utility scale. Since then, technological advancements and the growth of domestic manufacturing have driven the cost of wind projects down considerably. The price consumers pay for wind power has dropped 66 percent over six years.

Currently, wind provides more than four percent of Michigan's electricity needs, with 1,531 megawatts (MW) of installed capacity and another 330 MW under construction. The Department of Energy projects that Michigan could produce enough wind energy by 2030 to power the equivalent of 710,000 American homes.

Wind farms ensure farmland is protected over the long term. The average wind farm leaves 98 percent of land undisturbed, so they don't significantly impact crops or livestock production. Many farmers have found access roads built or improved for wind projects to be convenient during harvest time. Plus, wind developers make annual land-lease payments to farming families and other rural landowners. In 2014, wind developers paid \$4.6 million to Michigan landowners. This extra income goes a long way toward helping families meet their household budgets, send their kids to college, or keep the family farm. It is also reinvested in the community through spending at local businesses, restaurants and other establishments.

Wind developments increase the tax base, which helps keep more money in the pockets of citizens. From 2011–2015 the counties with the most wind farms—Gratiot, Huron and Tuscola—saw the largest increase to their tax base. This new source of tax revenue paid by wind developers brings in millions of dollars every year, and is often used to help pay for schools, county and township services, police and fire departments, and programs for seniors and veterans.

The economic impact of wind development ripples through local economies. With 26 wind manufacturing facilities, Michigan ranks fourth in the nation in wind manufacturing and enjoys about 2,000 wind energy jobs. Businesses also benefit from wind projects, as developers use local service stations, hardware stores, restaurants and hotels in their day-to-day operations.

Harvesting the wind and investing energy dollars locally is a winning strategy. Wind developments offer the opportunity to capitalize on jobs and economic development while ensuring Michigan's farm families and rural lifestyle stay economically viable. ■

*Wind On The Wires is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in St. Paul, MN, that works to advance renewable energy in the Midwest.*

[windonthewires.org](http://windonthewires.org)

# Look For The ENERGY STAR® Label

Making the switch to LED bulbs is a smart way to save energy. But, just like all other products, some LEDs meet a higher standard of quality and performance than others. To ensure you are selecting the best LEDs, always look for the ENERGY STAR®!

What is ENERGY STAR? ENERGY STAR is a trusted brand for quality products that use significantly less energy than required by minimum federal standards. The ENERGY STAR label can be found on hundreds of items, including light bulbs, electronics, major appliances, and even certified homes and buildings.

For a LED to bear the ENERGY STAR label, it must pass rigorous testing to ensure maximum energy savings, while also proving it will display the following characteristics:

- Brightness equal to or greater than that of other existing technologies
- Well-distributed light
- Excellent color quality
- Light output that remains constant over time
- Light that comes on instantly when turned on

- No flicker when dimmed
- Does not use power when turned off

## Other tips for choosing the right LED bulb:

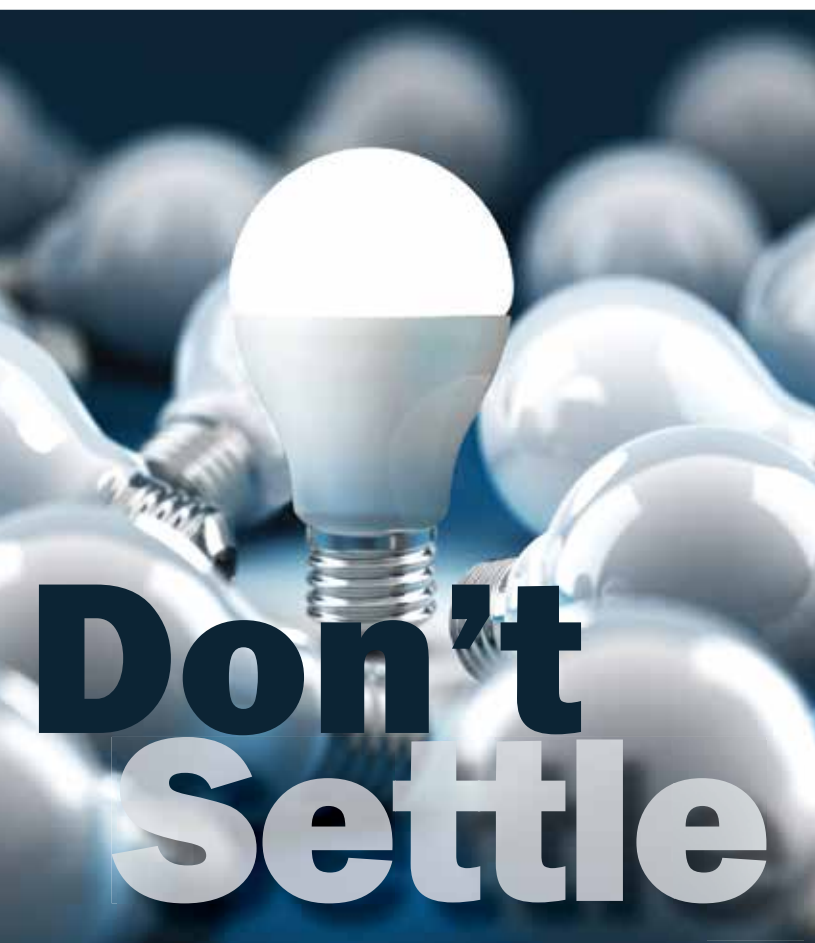
Choose the right brightness. Instead of watts, look for lumens when purchasing LEDs to gauge the brightness of the bulb.

Choose the appropriate color. LEDs come in a broad range of colors, which are measured by temperature on the Kelvin scale (K). Lower K emits a warmer, yellowish light, while higher K produces cooler, bluer light. ■

By replacing your home's five most frequently used light fixtures or bulbs with ENERGY STAR® LEDs, you can save up to \$75 each year.

## REBATES NOW AVAILABLE

Visit [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org) or call 877-296-4319 for additional energy-saving information and incentives.



# Don't Settle

## All LEDs are not created equal!

You know LED bulbs are the most efficient lighting solution for your home. To save as much energy as possible, look for the ENERGY STAR® label!

### Why ENERGY STAR LEDs?

- Highest quality and performance
- Exceptional color quality and light output
- Thoroughly tested and verified to back up claims

**ENERGY TIP:** Visit a participating retailer near you to receive instant in-store savings on LED bulbs and fixtures!

ONLINE: [michigan-energy.org/RetailersSearch](http://michigan-energy.org/RetailersSearch)  
PHONE: 877.296.4319



Energy Optimization programs and incentives are applicable to Michigan electric service locations only. Other restrictions may apply. For a complete list of participating utilities, visit [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org).



# Holiday Fun

## Photo Contest Winner

The votes are in, and we're happy to share the winning photo and a great runner-up from our December photo contest. Thanks to everyone who submitted a photo, voted and spread the word by sharing the post on Facebook.

Visit [teammidwest.com/photo-contest/](http://teammidwest.com/photo-contest/) to view photos.



Tammy West, Jones—Merry Christmas



Shawna Borman, Cassopolis—Moved In On Thursday, Snow Storm On Friday



## Enter Our Facebook Photo Contest And Win A Bill Credit!

### A winner every month!

Submit your best shot and encourage your friends to vote! The photo receiving the most votes from our Facebook contest will be printed in an issue of *Country Lines* along with some of our other favorites.

Visit [facebook.com/TeamMidwest](https://facebook.com/TeamMidwest) and click on "Photo Contest" from the menu tabs to submit your high-resolution photos. Not on Facebook? You can also enter at [TeamMidwest.com/photocontest](http://TeamMidwest.com/photocontest). Make sure to vote, and encourage others to vote for you, too!

Our **February** theme is **Animals Near Me**. Photos can be submitted from **February 1** to **February 20** to be featured in our April issue.

**The photo with the most votes will win a \$50 bill credit on their April bill.**



# CHIP DIPS

These dips are a slam dunk for your next gathering.

## Philly Tomato Basil Dip

Nancy Popa,  
Cherryland Electric  
Cooperative

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 2 plum tomatoes, chopped
- 2 tablespoons zesty Italian dressing
- 2 tablespoons shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped basil

Spread cream cheese in a 9-inch pie plate. Mix tomatoes and Italian dressing, then spoon over cream cheese. Sprinkle Parmesan and basil on top. Serve with thick chips or crackers!







## Southern Pimiento Cheese

Annie, Great Lakes Energy

- 2 cups shredded extra-sharp Cheddar cheese
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper (optional)
- ¼ teaspoon onion powder
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced (optional)
- 1 (4 ounces) jar diced pimiento, drained
- salt and black pepper, to taste

Place the Cheddar cheese, cream cheese, mayonnaise, garlic powder, cayenne pepper, onion powder, minced jalapeno, and pimiento into the large bowl of a mixer. Beat at medium speed, with a paddle if possible, until thoroughly combined. Season to taste with salt and black pepper. Serve cold with crackers or toasted baguette slices, at room temperature as a dip with tortilla chips, or as a spread for a grilled cheese sandwich.



## Cheesy Hot Crab Dip

Janice Harvey, Great Lakes Energy

- 8 ounces imitation crab meat
- 2 cups mayonnaise
- ½ medium onion, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups shredded mild cheddar cheese
- assorted crackers or chips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a medium bowl, shred imitation crab meat. Stir in mayonnaise, onion, parsley and pepper. Stir in cheese. Spoon into shallow 1-½ quart baking dish. Bake, uncovered, for 20–25 minutes or until heated through. Serve with crackers or chips.

MI  
co-op  
KITCHEN

Submit your favorite recipe for a chance to win a \$50 bill credit and have your recipe featured in *Country Lines*:

- “Breakfast & Brunch” due March 4
- “On The Grill” due April 4

Go to [micoopkitchen.com](http://micoopkitchen.com) for more information and to register.

## U.S. SENATE BEAN SOUP

*In honor of the annual Youth Tour Washington, D.C. trip application deadline, we share this favorite recipe. Since the 1940s, the traditional U.S. Senate Bean Soup, pictured above, has been on the Senate's menu every day.*

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| • 1 pound dry navy beans                                | • ¼ cup chopped parsley    |
| • 1 meaty ham bone                                      | • 1½ teaspoons pepper      |
| • 1 cup chopped onion                                   | • 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg |
| • 2 garlic cloves, minced                               | • 1 teaspoon oregano       |
| • 1 cup chopped celery                                  | • 1 teaspoon basil         |
| • ¾ cup mashed potato flakes or 1½ cups mashed potatoes | • 1 bay leaf               |
|   | • salt, to taste           |

Wash and sort beans; in a large kettle, cover beans with 6–8 cups hot water. Bring to a boil and boil 2 minutes; remove from heat, cover, and let stand for 1 hour. Add another 2 quarts of cold water and ham bone, then bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer 1½ hours. Stir in remaining ingredients; simmer 20–30 minutes until beans are tender. Remove ham bone, trim off meat and return meat to soup; remove bay leaf. Serve hot, or freeze for later.

See Youth Tour cover story on page 14 and visit [micoopkitchen.com](http://micoopkitchen.com) for this recipe and others.

# Midwest *in the* Community

Neighbor helping neighbor—that's how your Team Midwest family approaches daily work and efforts to give back. We live, work and serve right here in your local community, and we strive to actively live out our community values in meaningful and impacting ways. Here is one great new way we gave back over the Christmas season.



## Operation Christmas Cheer

The Christmas spirit was alive and well throughout southwest Michigan as Team Midwest blessed 12 member families through our inaugural Operation Christmas Cheer project. Employees visited homes to deliver a good dose of Christmas kindness, including a pre-lit artificial Christmas tree, decorations and a holiday food basket. The day was filled with much emotion, many tears and heartfelt thanks. The Midwest elves felt as blessed as the recipient families!

Photo: Matt Thompson and Cindy Rohdy finish tree assembly as a young member of the home assists Glenyce Bentzer with decorating.

## Employees Recognized At Annual Event

Darby Bucher was recognized as the 2016 Employee of the Year at Midwest Energy Cooperative's employee appreciation event. The select technician and four-year co-op employee, Bucher was nominated for his selfless commitment to serving members and supporting colleagues through quiet and humble service and leadership. "Darby is not the kind of guy who waits around for something to be done; he just rolls up his sleeves and does it. He sets an exemplary standard of servant leadership," says Bob Hance, President/CEO.

Midwest made a \$125 contribution to Cass County Toys for Tots in honor of Bucher's award.

During the festivities, 10 employees were recognized for a combined 105 years of service, including Kirk Sander and Mark Vantine (5 years); Robin Albrecht, Betsy Kephart, Lori Ruff, Marty Smego, Cathy Teeter, and Frank Walker (10 years), Glenyce Bentzer (15 years) and Jennifer Gilliam (20 years). Mike Roush was also recognized as a new retiree following a 42-year career with Midwest.



Darby Bucher (center) and Bob Hance (right) present a check and a box of toys donated by Midwest Energy Cooperative employees to Ken Lebeda, retired Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant and Cass County Toys for Tots coordinator.



(Left to right) Frank Walker, Jennifer Gilliam, Betsy Kephart, Glenyce Bentzer, Cathy Teeter and Marty Smego were six of the employees recognized with years of service awards at the employee appreciation event.



# Many Options Available For Convenient Bill Pay

**M**idwest Energy offers several quick, convenient and free methods of paying your monthly bill.

**SmartHub:** Visit TeamMidwest.com to view and pay your bill online. It's a safe and secure way to manage your account and service experience. You can also pay through your mobile device. Just download the free SmartHub app from your app store and search for Midwest Energy Cooperative.

**Autopay:** Your payment is automatically deducted each month from your designated bank or credit card account. Sign up on SmartHub or by using our automated phone system at 800-492-5989.

**MoneyGram Community Pay Stations:** With a simple zip code search, locate a retailer in your community where you can make a cash payment. This option guarantees your funds and posts your payment immediately. Visit MoneyGram.com to learn more.

**District Service Centers:** Make a payment or speak with a customer care representative at any of our three district service centers. Drop boxes are also available for after-hours use. Payments left after-hours are posted during the next business day.

**Phone:** Make a one-time payment by credit card or check using our Automated Phone System at 800-492-5989. Please have your account number ready.

**Mail:** Send your payment to: Midwest Energy Cooperative, P.O. Box 127, Cassopolis, MI 49031. Do not send cash through the mail, and allow adequate time for the payment to reach our office by the due date.

**Beware of other websites that include the Midwest name and logo and allow you to make payment online.** Midwest Energy Cooperative is



not affiliated with any third-party website that offers utility payment service. If you pay your Midwest bill through a third-party website, you risk:

- Extra charges imposed by the vendor for each transaction on their website.
- Delays of two days or more before the payment is actually posted to your Midwest account. This may result in disconnect for nonpayment or late payment fees.

Avoid these risks by using one of the payment methods shared above. ■

## Access To Rules & Rates

Please be advised that the following information is available to Midwest Energy Cooperative members:

1. Complete rate schedules;
2. Clear and concise explanation of all rates that the member may be eligible to receive;
3. Assistance from the cooperative in determining the most appropriate rate for a member when the member is eligible to receive service under more than one rate;
4. Clear and concise explanation of the members' actual energy use for each billing period during the last 12 months.

**The information can be obtained by contacting Midwest Energy Cooperative at 800-492-5989.**



# YOUTH TOUR

## The Power Of Our Future

By Emily Haines Lloyd

"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." – Franklin D. Roosevelt



Arjun Vorster, shown rock climbing, says Youth Tour had an impact on how he wants to make a difference in the world and his own life.

Energy is more than the ability to do work. Energy powers our imaginations and fuels positive change. That is why, for the last 50 years, approximately 1,800 students from at least 45 states have participated in the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour program each year. This five-day trip is a high-energy, interactive experience designed to help young people grow as leaders and takes place June 10–15.

Through an application and interview process, rising juniors and seniors are selected and sponsored by their local co-ops to travel to Washington, D.C., for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Together with students from all across the country, the selected Michigan students learn about co-ops, leadership, history and the importance of civic engagement.

"The experience changed me quite a bit," said Arjun Vorster, a junior at Mendon High School and 2016 Youth Tour participant sponsored by his electric co-op Midwest Energy.

It wasn't the travel that impressed Vorster, who was born in South Africa and has traveled around the





Brad Whitney, who participated in Youth Tour eight years ago, is shown with fellow students from Great Lakes Energy at a Michigan Rural Electric Teen Days event.



Today, using some of those same principles he learned as a young man, Brad serves his community as a Great Lakes Energy Cooperative Lineman.

world, including living in seven different countries before moving to the United States.

"Washington, D.C., is a really impressive place," said Vorster. "You are surrounded by so much history, and you and your fellow students are right in the middle of it all. It's pretty amazing."

Vorster, who wants to study environmental engineering in college, noted that having the opportunity to see the historical monuments, visit various museums and interact with the other student participants were some of the most impactful moments of his trip.

"I met so many interesting people," said Vorster. "I was surrounded by people who wanted to make a difference, and it made me more resolved to make a difference in my own life too."

Youth Tour can have long-lasting effects on attendees. The impact of leadership training, a unique experience of living history at our nation's capital, and significant information on the future of electric power, makes quite an impact on the students.

Brad Whitney was a participant at Youth Tour in 2009 and the influence it had on him has been long lasting.

Whitney is currently a lineman at Great Lakes Energy Cooperative. He attended Youth Tour and followed up his trip with a summer job related to line work. Eventually, Brad became the recipient of a GLE scholarship, earning his lineman certification from Alpena Community College and Great Lakes Energy.

"It was a great experience that I'll never forget," said Whitney. "I hope this program is available when my kids grow up—I'd want them to go and have an experience as amazing as mine." ■

Visit [CooperativeYouthTour.com](http://CooperativeYouthTour.com) for applications. Applications are due February 28.



While holiday lights and decorations are long put away, Team Fiber continues to offer a gift that keeps on giving. Here is what new subscribers have to say:

*"I'm extremely happy with Team Fiber! I no longer have to worry about data caps and paying overage charges for internet services that didn't work well at all to begin with. With Team Fiber we can now do everything with ease. Thanks for bringing this great service to my area." (Matthew, Vicksburg)*

*"We were very excited to finally have internet in a rural area and all four of our family members can be on it at the same time. We no longer feel like we're out in the middle of nowhere unable to contact anybody. The service is fast! Thank you." (Ernest, White Pigeon)*

*"I have been upgraded from dial-up service again! I absolutely love the unlimited data, the speed of the service, and the ability to always have the service! The competitive pricing actually will be saving me money, and I won't have to visit the local library to avoid overage charges!" (Connie, Vicksburg)*

Fiber-speed internet with unlimited data is changing opportunities and experiences for families all over southwest Michigan, and Team Fiber continues to build the system that will ultimately bring service to all of our southwest Michigan electric customers.

More and more incumbent providers are taking away from your service experience by imposing data limits with stiff penalties for overages. While others are taking away, Team Fiber is offering even more by moving all customers to the comparable symmetrical service plan at the non-symmetrical prices!

Effective Feb. 1, customers who previously paid \$49.95/month for 25 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload will enjoy 25 Mbps down and up for the same price. And those who previously paid \$79.95/month for 25 Mbps down and up will keep those amazing

speeds at the reduced price of \$49.95/month. This change is for customers in all four plans!

Symmetrical service means you get the same speeds for both downloading and uploading. Downloading, which represents the majority of our internet use, is receiving data from the internet to your device. When you put in a website or stream a movie, you're pulling data down from the internet.

Uploading is sending data from your device to the internet. When you post your fabulous family photos on social media, send email, play online games, or work from home using a remote network, you're uploading data to the internet.

Symmetrical packages, fiber-speed experiences, and unlimited data. Team Fiber is the gift that keeps on giving. Learn more or sign up today at [TeamFiber.com](http://TeamFiber.com). ■

# Electric Bill Is More Than The Energy

**T**he lowly electric outlet is perhaps the most used and least appreciated and understood item in your home.

Take a quick stroll and see how many of your outlets are in use, some many times over with the help of power strips. Outlets are coveted as family members compete for the precious space to power everything from refrigerators and coffee makers to televisions and tablets. In fact, the U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that appliances and electronics comprise about 60 percent of our electricity consumption.

We tend to think of our electric experience just in terms of the appliances powered by the kilowatts, but the outlet that brings immediate gratification is otherwise useless without the many behind-the-scenes elements that must be in place for you to access service when you need it.

Behind your energy consumption is a huge and costly delivery infrastructure that offers power at the flip of a switch. These are the fixed costs that exist, regardless of whether or not your meter ever turns in a given billing cycle, and include items like substations, poles and wires, labor, equipment, vehicles and offices. It's also daily expenses like maintaining and improving system reliability, processing bill payments and having people available 24/7. Fixed costs are currently represented on your bill in the \$18 Monthly Service Charge and the Distribution Charge.

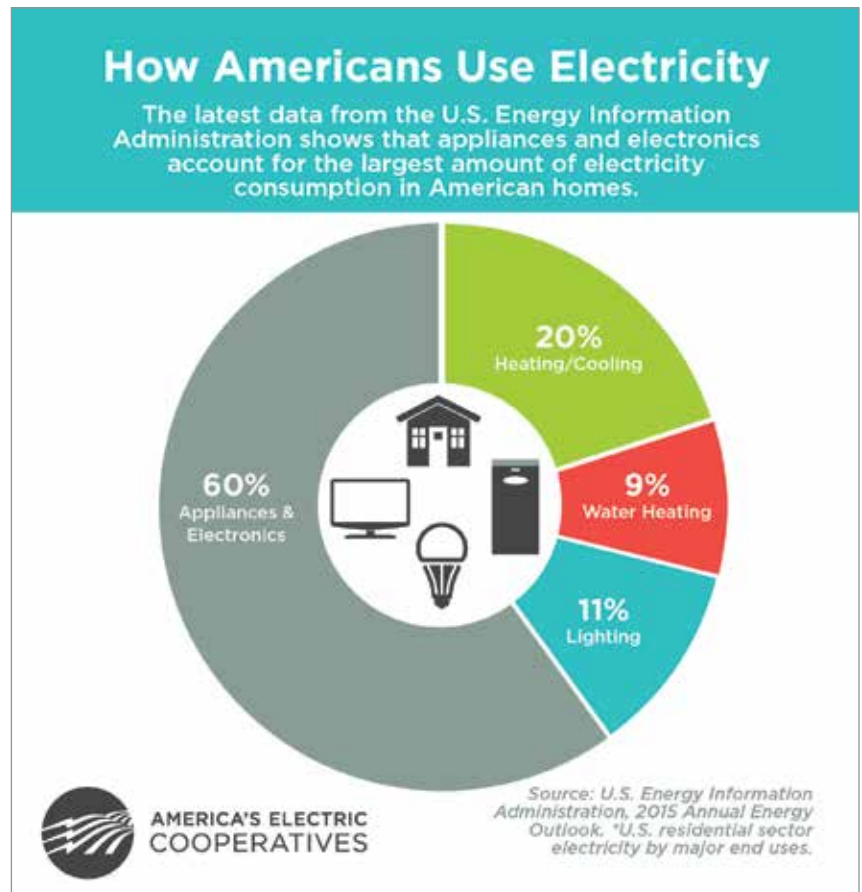
The problem with the way fixed costs are currently billed is that the Distribution Charge is variable, meaning it's based on how many kilowatts run through your meter. That means members using more energy are paying more for fixed costs.

In 2016, Midwest commissioned a cost of service study which revealed that the cost of making electricity available to every residential member is \$39.19 per

month. That represents the fixed costs required to ensure that electricity is there whenever you need it, regardless of whether or not you ever use it.

There have been many tough conversations around the board table as your directors wrestle with how to right-size the monthly service charge so that everyone pays a fair and appropriate share of fixed costs. In April, they will vote on a proposed four-year plan to shift all fixed costs to the Monthly Service Charge. Details of the open meeting will be shared in the April issue of *Country Lines*.

If the proposed plan is approved, the residential Monthly Service Charge will move from \$18 to \$39 over a four-year period, increasing by \$5.25 each year. Members using the system average of about 1,000 kilowatt-hours a month will see no impact to the bottom line. Those using significantly less energy will see some increase, and those using significantly more will see some decrease as fixed costs will no longer be tied to usage. ■





# *I Remember...*

## *The Wonder Of Michigan Always Brings Us Home.*

The eldest of five siblings, I was the only one born in Michigan while my father was in boot camp. We were stationed in Alaska until I was nine and my youngest brother was almost two when my father decided to end his military career and move us all back home to Michigan. Picture two vehicles, a blue and white van and a tiny Isuzu truck, packed to the gills with two adults, five children, snacks in bulk, and a potty training toilet. What a sight we must have been!

It is a credit to both my parents and chocolate animal crackers that I fondly remember the 3,000-mile trek.

The best trips I remember as a child were to Sleeping Bear Dunes, Tahquamenon Falls, the Iron Mountain Iron Mine, Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island, Fort Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City, and hiking on various trails.

In 2009, I moved to Arkansas with my husband, and there we had two children of our own.

In 2015, we could not resist the magnetic pull of the 45th parallel and moved back home to Michigan.

Since then my children have experienced the wonderland that is Michigan and have made memories of their own—their first snow angels, local farms and orchards, and the magic of the Great Lakes.

Home.

*Kalico Casady, Great Lakes Energy*



*We invite members to share their fondest memories.*

**Country Lines will pay \$50 for stories we publish.**

### **Guidelines**

1. Approximately 200 words
2. Digital photos must be at least 600 KB
3. Only one entry per household, per month
4. *Country Lines* retains reprint rights
5. Please include your name, address, email, phone number and the name of your electric co-op
6. Submit your memories online: [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com)





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