

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES

A photograph of a smiling couple standing in front of a building with electrical equipment. The woman on the left is wearing a black jacket and a plaid scarf. The man on the right is wearing a black jacket and blue jeans. They are standing on a rocky surface. The building behind them has a blue roof and several electrical meters mounted on the wall.

## DR. POL

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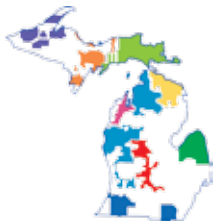
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Association officers are **Robert Kran**, Great Lakes Energy, chairman; **Mark Kappler**, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, vice chairman; and **Eric Baker**, Wolverine Power Cooperative, secretary-treasurer. **Craig Borr** is president and CEO.

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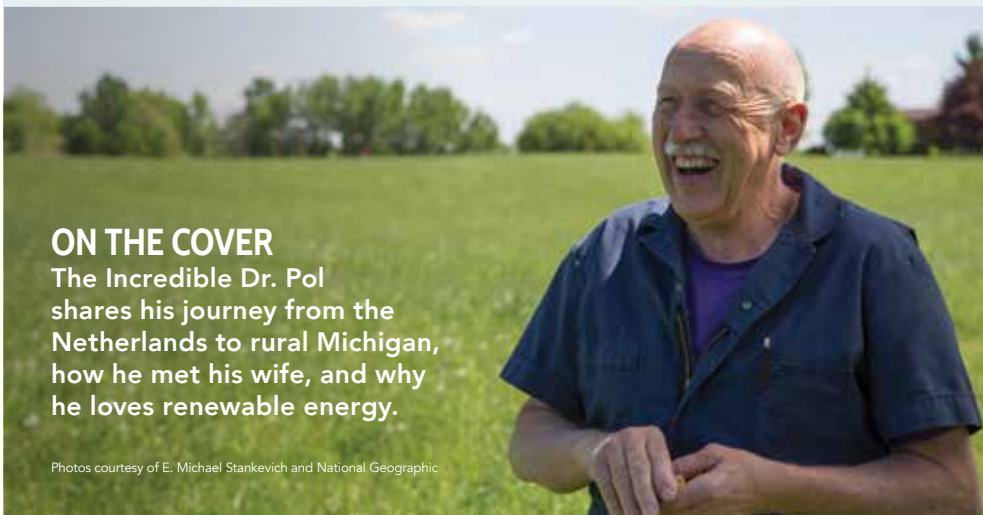
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# IN THIS ISSUE



## ON THE COVER

The Incredible Dr. Pol shares his journey from the Netherlands to rural Michigan, how he met his wife, and why he loves renewable energy.

Photos courtesy of E. Michael Stankevich and National Geographic

6

## GEOTHERMAL

Geothermal Systems—The Rumors Of Their Demise Are Greatly Exaggerated

*Larry Kaufman*

7

## OUR ENERGY

Michigan Legislature Approves Energy Package

*Craig Borr*

10

## COOKING COMMUNITY

Soups & Stews—Warm Up With These Hearty, Comforting Recipes

*Christin McKamey & Our Readers*

Enter Our Recipe Contest And Win A Bill Credit!

Special Guest Chef Recipe From Dr. Jan And Diane Pol: *Olie Bollen* (Dutch Fritters)

14

## FEATURE

Dr. Pol—America's Favorite TV Veterinarian And Local Legend

*Emily Haines Lloyd*

18

## READER'S PAGE

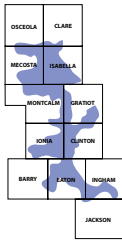
I Remember—Fond Memories Of Love During The Darkest Times

*Heather Homan, Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op Member*

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7973 E. Grand River Avenue  
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### Electric bill/account questions:

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

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# Fiber, Like Electricity, Could Be A Co-op Service

*Note: Electric cooperatives around the U.S. are looking for ways to serve their member-owners with high-speed internet, just as they brought electricity to rural areas in the 1930s. Tom Manting, Chief Information Officer for HomeWorks, explains the situation here.*



**Tom Manting**  
Chief Information  
Officer

**E**ighty years ago, a group of mid-Michigan farmers united as Tri-County Electric Cooperative to do something no one else was willing to do: provide safe, affordable, convenient central station electricity to rural Michigan.

It didn't take long for Tri-County Electric's board of directors and management to realize that building and maintaining the electric distribution plant (all the poles, wires, meters, and transformers that deliver your electric power) is a uniquely local endeavor.

However, the "central" part of central station power—generating the electricity and transmitting it to substations—is best performed by a larger organization, since a larger generator can produce more electrons at a lower cost.

So, Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative (a cooperative of cooperatives, also known as a Generation and Transmission (G&T) cooperative) was formed to help a number of Michigan's electric cooperatives gain economies of scale in procuring the electrons for its members. Today Wolverine, through its five member-distribution cooperatives, serves more than 268,000 electric co-op members in 41 counties.

This brings us to high-speed internet: HomeWorks is looking into the possibility of providing Fiber to the Home (FTTH). A key decision would be how to structure such a business. Our options include using a for-profit subsidiary or making it a division of the cooperative.

One key factor is the extent to which we could partner with other Michigan cooperatives. If three or more co-ops work together to provide FTTH, all involved will benefit. We could negotiate better programming contracts, buy bandwidth at better prices, and leverage each other's experiences to provide greater reliability and better service.

One model we're considering would have HomeWorks building and maintaining the fiber, just like we build and maintain the electric lines. A separate operating company would provide the internet, telephone, and possibly TV services that travel over the fiber, just like Wolverine provides the electrons that travel over our lines.

Our preliminary analysis suggests HomeWorks can provide this much-needed service with or without the other co-ops, but we think creating a "fiber G&T" could benefit all the cooperative's members.

We're still studying the feasibility of each option, and we will report back when we're ready to make a decision. We welcome your thoughts. ■



# Happy Anniversary: 80 Years And Still Growing!

**F**or Michigan, 1937 was a big year. It was our state's Centennial year, the Detroit Red Wings won the Stanley Cup for the second straight year, and the U.S. Open golf tournament was held at Oakland Hills Country Club in Birmingham.

Closer to home, a handful of farmers in Eaton, Ingham, and Jackson counties were working together to bring the conveniences of electric power to their families. On March 26, they formed Tri-County Electric Cooperative to build distribution power lines, purchase surplus electricity from nearby dams and farmers, and borrow money from the U.S. government to make it all possible.

The cooperative quickly took off, responding to requests for service in a rapidly growing service footprint. Today, we serve 26,000 homes and businesses in parts of 13 counties, stretching as far north as Evart and Clare.

The original farmers' names are unrecorded unless they went on to hold a board position. Our first

board members were appointed on March 29, 1937: William V. Clegg, Lawton Heeney, Jasper L. Terry, Dorr L. Cady, and James E. Houston.

Our first general manager was Dolph Wolf, who was instrumental in forming the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. The NRECA served the growing number of electric cooperatives across the U.S. during the early 1940s, when electricity helped farmers support the war effort by increasing production with a smaller workforce.

We'll be doing a few things this year to mark our 80th anniversary, including updating our website with archival photos and memories from people who remember when the lights came on for the first time. ■

**If you have photos or documents to share or a story to tell, please let us know!**

## Stebbins Appointed To District 2 Board Seat



**Jim Stebbins**

**J**im Stebbins of Clarksville has been selected to represent District 2 on the HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative board of directors. He will serve for the remainder of the current term, left open by the passing of long-time director Wayne Swiler on Dec. 19.

Mr. Stebbins, a member of the cooperative since 1974, also says he plans to run for election to the board in May, seeking a full term which begins after the co-op's Annual Meeting in August.

"Being a member, I have experienced the quality of service and competitive rates at HomeWorks Tri-County Electric that are far superior to investor-owned utilities," Stebbins says. "I'm excited about the future changes and challenges and want to contribute my own experiences to the cooperative."

Stebbins graduated from Grand Valley State University in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in history. Since then, he has been an independent dairy farmer, worked for the National Farmers Organization as state livestock coordinator, and been a lab technician at Hastings Manufacturing Company. His experience also includes work as a line and shipment inspector for the Bradford White Corporation in Middleville.

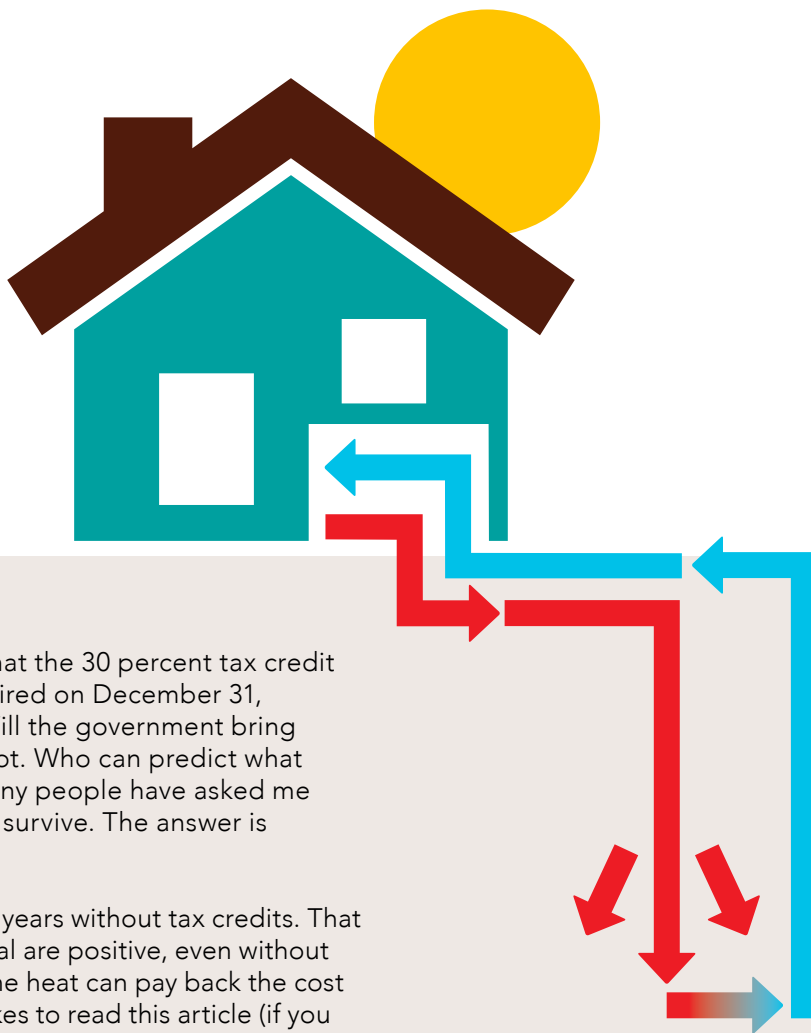
Stebbins was a member of the Campbell Township Board of Review for 10 years, served as president of the Woodland Fraternal Order of Eagles for three terms and also volunteers as treasurer. As a member of St. Edward's Church, Lake Odessa, Stebbins served on the parish building committee. He has five children and five grandchildren.

"We were pleased to have several outstanding candidates to consider for this open seat," says Board Chairman Luke Pohl. "Jim brings to the board a good mix of experience and leadership, and we're looking forward to seating him at the March board meeting." ■

# Geothermal Systems

The rumors of their demise are greatly exaggerated.

By Larry Kaufman



Many of you have heard or read that the 30 percent tax credit for geothermal heat pumps expired on December 31, 2016. That is completely true. Will the government bring the tax credits back? Maybe...maybe not. Who can predict what the government will do? A question many people have asked me is whether the geothermal industry will survive. The answer is absolutely, positively, undeniably, YES!

The geothermal industry survived many years without tax credits. That is because the economics for geothermal are positive, even without the tax credit. Anyone with oil or propane heat can pay back the cost of a geothermal system in the time it takes to read this article (if you are a very slow reader). When coupled with the environmental benefits, comfort benefits, and that there is no outdoor unit—geothermal makes sense.

For 20 years I have had geothermal at my house. People tell me that they won't spend the extra money for geothermal. However, you are going to spend it—either on geothermal or by paying the utility. If you spend it on geothermal, you keep this extra money. Otherwise, you continue to pay this extra money forever. It's your choice.

The Michigan Geothermal Energy Association's annual conference is April 27 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Soaring Eagle Casino in Mt. Pleasant. This is a great place to learn more about geothermal. The fee is \$20 at the door or free if you request a quote on geothermal from any dealer at the conference. ■

*Larry Kaufman is the Executive Director for the Michigan Geothermal Energy Association.*

Visit [earthcomfort.com](http://earthcomfort.com) or [geoexchange.org](http://geoexchange.org) to learn more about geothermal.

# Michigan Legislature Approves Energy Package



**Craig Borr, CEO**  
Michigan Electric  
Cooperative  
Association

After nearly two years of discussion, dialogue, committee hearings and, at times, frustration, the Michigan Legislature passed an energy reform package as their last initiative prior to recess in late December. The two-bill package is 200-plus pages in length and is the first major piece of state energy legislation since 2008.

One of the principal goals of the legislative package was ensuring additional “marketplace certainty” so that additional generating capacity can be constructed in our state. Michigan’s generating capacity, particularly in the Lower Peninsula, has been declining significantly over the past few years due to the many plant retirements necessitated by new, more stringent federal environmental standards.

Thankfully, electric cooperatives in Michigan are in a much better position than many of their neighboring municipal and investor-owned utilities when it comes to generating capacity and the ability to meet member demands during peak load periods. The 430-megawatt Alpine Generating Plant built by Wolverine Power Cooperative near Gaylord last year is a prime example of how Michigan’s electric co-ops are preparing for their members’ future needs. The Alpine plant required an investment of nearly \$200 million and is fueled by natural gas.

What are some of the specifics included in the energy legislation signed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder in December, and how will they impact you and your electric cooperative?

- **Renewable Energy** – The new energy legislation increases the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) from the current 10 percent level to 15 percent in 2021. The majority of Michigan’s electric cooperatives already exceed the 15 percent renewable energy threshold required in 2021 from their extensive use of solar, wind and hydroelectric generating resources located in Michigan. Electric co-ops are Michigan’s renewable energy leaders.
- **Net Metering** – As member regulated utilities, Michigan’s electric cooperatives will continue



to set the parameters of their own net metering programs so that member-consumers can access their electric co-op’s net metering programs without regulatory involvement.

- **Electric Choice** – Like the state’s largest electric utilities, electric cooperatives will continue to offer “choice” to their large commercial and industrial members through Michigan’s electric customer choice program. However, electric choice suppliers will need to prove they have ample supplies of electric capacity to meet the energy requirements of “choice” customers. This is particularly important as much of Michigan’s electric generation fueled by coal continues to dwindle due to age and federal environmental requirements.
- **Energy Optimization** – Electric co-ops will continue to provide their members with energy optimization programs designed to reduce electric usage through LED lighting, installation of energy-efficient appliances and more extensive efficiency programs for commercial, industrial and agricultural members.

Michigan’s electric cooperatives were supportive of the new energy legislation and believe strongly that it will be good for our member-consumers throughout rural Michigan. We are hopeful that this package will result in the construction of new and cleaner forms of electric generation in Michigan, including new natural gas, wind and solar facilities. ■



# Recycle And Save!

Do you have an old refrigerator or chest freezer taking up valuable space in your basement or garage? While you may not think about these appliances often, they could be adding hundreds of dollars onto your utility bill each year.

Declutter your home and save money with our Energy Optimization program. You can earn \$50 for removing and recycling a secondary refrigerator or freezer!\*

## Free appliance pick up made easy:

The Energy Optimization team will pick up and recycle your old refrigerator(s) or freezer(s) for FREE. You can choose to send along an old window air conditioner or dehumidifier for recycling as well. NOTE: All items must be in working condition.

## How to participate:

Contact the Energy Optimization team at 877-296-4319 to schedule an appointment. A representative from our team will come to your home for the pick up, and a cash incentive will be mailed to you. It's that simple!

## Cash incentives are available for the following:

Appliance Type	Pick up or Ride-Along Item	Incentive Amount
Refrigerator	Pick up	\$50
Chest Freezer	Pick up	\$50
Window Air Conditioner	Ride-Along	\$15
Dehumidifier	Ride-Along	\$15

*\*Limit two appliances per year, per residence.*

## More ways to save!

Are you working on a remodeling project? Your electric utility's Energy Optimization program offers cash incentives for qualifying ENERGY STAR® appliances, including refrigerators, washers and dryers, ceiling fans, room air conditioners, televisions, and more.

Please visit **michigan-energy.org** for more information, or call **877-296-4319** with any questions. ■



## Ready to upgrade or get rid of an old refrigerator or freezer?

**Recycle it and save!** Earn cash incentives for recycling your old, functioning appliances.

- **Refrigerator = \$50**
- **Freezer = \$50**
- **Dehumidifier (ride along item) = \$15**
- **Window Air Conditioner (ride along item) = \$15**

Contact the Energy Optimization team to schedule a free pick up.

## Shopping for new appliances?

Energy Optimization offers cash incentives for qualifying ENERGY STAR® appliances. Visit our website for a complete list of savings opportunities.

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

**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).





Shelby Olson of Lakeview says, "This picture is of our very first rollercoaster ride, when we took the kids on their first trip to Michigan's Adventure in the summer of 2016." Bottom row, from left: daughter Allison Davis and mom Shelby; top row, from left: stepdad Todd Olson and son Andrew Davis.



Laura Sage of Stanton shared this photo of "grand little people just hanging out with grandma at home on a lovely fall day." From left are Tylor Buxton, Tanner Buxton and Jaxen Bowyer; Laura Sage holds Jeremiah Bowyer.



Carrie Frick from Six Lakes sent in a Snap Shot from last fall when "My son, Ryan, and I took a trip up to the falls. It was a wonderful experience for just the two of us in Michigan's breathtaking scenery."



Mary Ellen Wynes from Mt. Pleasant captured this moment of "grandpa and grandsons enjoying baseball together."

### Upcoming Snap Shot Contest Topics And Deadlines

**"Planes, Trains, and Cars,"** Deadline: **March 15** (May issue)

**"Farms & Barns,"** Deadline: **April 17** (June issue)

**"The Art of Nature,"** Deadline: **May 15** (July–August issue)

Go to [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org) and select *Country Lines* under the Electric tab to submit your photos and see additional themes. It's fast and easy. To send by mail: include your name, address, phone number, photographer's name, and details about your photo. Mail to Attn: *Country Lines* Snap Shots, 7973 E. Grand River, Portland, MI 48875. Photos will not be returned. Do not send color laser prints or professional studio photos.

### Submit Your Photo!

Contributors whose photos we publish in 2017 will be entered into a drawing and *Country Lines* will choose two winners for a bill credit of \$100 each on their December electric bill, due in January 2018!



# SOUPS & STEWS

Warm up with these hearty, comforting recipes.

## Larry's Mushroom Soup

Larry Rospierski, Great Lakes Energy

- 1½ pounds mushrooms (larger ones are easier to clean and slice)
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 medium sweet onion
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced
- 3 teaspoons flour
- 1 cup half & half
- 1 quart chicken stock
- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon white cooking wine
- pepper, to taste
- 4–5 large leaves fresh basil, shredded or finely cut
- ½ cup chopped scallions or chives (fresh is best)

Begin by wiping clean (do not wash) the mushrooms and slicing thin (⅛" or so). Melt butter in a large stockpot and cook mushrooms covered for about 5 minutes on low heat. While mushrooms are cooking, dice the onions. Add salt to the stockpot and stir. Then reserve about ¼ of the mushrooms on the side. Add the onions and garlic. Cover and cook for another 5 minutes. Add the flour and mix well. Remove the pot from the heat. After the mixture is completed, add the half & half slowly and whisk on low heat. Add the stock slowly, whisking on low heat. Then add the yogurt, whisking on low heat. Add the basil, stirring (not whisking) in well. Then add the wine and stir in. Using an immersion blender (or mixer), combine and chop all ingredients thoroughly. The texture will not be smooth. Add most of the mushrooms that were set aside, saving about 2–3 slices for each serving. Cover and continue cooking slowly, bringing the soup to just below boiling. Serve with two or three of the sliced mushrooms in the middle and pepper to taste. Garnish with scallions or chives.



## Minestrone

Carolyn Davis, Midwest Energy

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 pound stew meat, cubed (can substitute with browned turkey or Italian sausage)
- 7 cups beef broth or beef stock
- 2 (15-ounce) cans tomato sauce
- 1 (14-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon thyme
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups shredded cabbage
- 1 cup zucchini, thinly sliced
- 1 cup carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 (15-ounce) can garbanzo beans, drained
- 1 cup macaroni, uncooked
- 3–4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese



In a 6–8 quart Dutch oven, melt butter over medium heat. Add stew meat and cook until browned. Stir in broth, tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, onion, celery, and seasonings. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to low.

Cover and simmer for 1 to 1¼ hours or until beef is tender, stirring occasionally. Add cabbage, zucchini, carrots, garbanzo beans and macaroni. Return soup to boil. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer for 20–25 minutes or until the vegetables are tender, stirring occasionally. Ladle soup into bowls and top with Parmesan cheese. Serve immediately.

## Up North Venison Stew

Deb Finedell, Great Lakes Energy

- 2 pounds venison, cubed
- ¼ cup butter
- 2 cups sliced celery
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 medium green pepper, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, cut up
- 3 medium potatoes, cut up
- ¼ teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon white vinegar
- 3 beef bouillon cubes
- 10 ounces spaghetti sauce
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley



Brown venison in butter (Dutch oven or large pot) over medium heat. Add remaining ingredients, mix, cover and simmer on low heat for 2–3 hours. Enjoy hot!

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



- “On The Grill” due April 4
- “Chicken Challenge” due May 4

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



## Olie Bollen (Dutch Fritters, pictured above)

Dr. Jan and Diane Pol

This Dutch pastry is similar to a doughnut-style fritter. A reminder from his childhood in the Netherlands, Dr. Pol says that big celebrations, especially on New Year's Eve, were never complete without this delicious treat.

- |                                  |                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • 1 package active dry yeast     | • 1 (1 pound) package raisins      |
| • 1 teaspoon sugar               | • 4 cups flour                     |
| • ¾ cup warm water               | • 1 tablespoon salt                |
| • 3 eggs, beaten                 | • 1 quart vegetable oil for frying |
| • 2 cups milk                    |                                    |
| • 3 tablespoons light corn syrup |                                    |

Dissolve yeast and sugar in water; let stand in a warm place for 30 minutes. Combine eggs, milk, corn syrup, raisins, and yeast mixture in a large pot. Sift flour and salt into the mixture and mix well for 2 to 3 minutes. Test a spoonful of dough to see if it will fall in a lump from the spoon. If not, add a little more water or milk. Let rise in warm place for 2 hours. Heat the oil for frying to 350 degrees in a heavy bottomed, deep skillet. Drop by tablespoon into the preheated oil; fry the fritters until golden brown, about 2 minutes per side. Remove them to a paper towel-lined plate and repeat with remaining dough. Dust with sugar while warm.

Read the full story about Dr. Pol, Michigan's TV reality star, on page 14 and visit [micoopkitchen.com](http://micoopkitchen.com) for this recipe and others.



# What IS The Big Green Box In Your Yard?

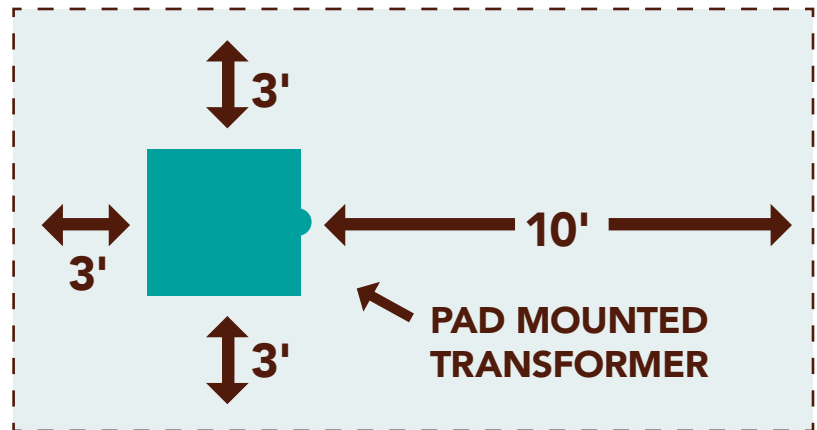
**P**admount transformers are green, metal utility boxes installed near many homes and businesses. The locked box sits on an easement that allows HomeWorks Tri-County Electric access to perform necessary maintenance work on it, and the equipment inside the box provides power for you and, most likely, several of your neighbors.

In the event of a storm or power situation, crews may need access to a padmount transformer to restore service due to a power outage.

To work safely, our crews need at least 10 feet of clearance in front of the transformer (the side that is padlocked), and three feet on the other sides.

## Landscaping Around Padmount Transformers

Fences, shrubs and trees located too close to the padmount transformers can slow restoration or create a serious safety hazard. If these items are in the way, crews may have to remove them to gain



access. Avoid that situation by taking time to plan before planting shrubs or installing a fence near a padmount. Also, be sure to call 811 at least three business days before digging anywhere, to make sure all underground utilities are marked.

By keeping this area free from debris, vegetation, fencing and building structures, you can help avoid outages, allow our crews to more quickly return service in emergency situations, and avoid unnecessary costs. ■

## Your Board In Action

### Meeting at Portland on January 16, your board of directors:

- Elected Director Corinna Batora to serve as board vice chairman.
- Elected Director Shirley Sprague to finish the current term of Wayne Swiler on the Wolverine Power Cooperative board, as well as to serve the coming two-year term.
- Elected Director Luke Pohl and General Manager Mark Kappler as Michigan Electric Cooperative Association directors, and elected Director John Lord as alternate.
- Reviewed results of the recent member satisfaction survey.
- Reviewed steps taken to date and possible options for progressing on a fiber to the home project, and learned staff will prepare a full business plan within the next three to four months.
- Reviewed the Emergency Response Plan for Major Storms, as updated by staff in late 2016.
- Went over board of director expenses for 2016, and reviewed and signed conflict of interest statements as required for federal tax filings.

- Learned that staff is continuing to attend township board meetings, successfully seeking service franchise renewals.
- Reviewed and approved revisions to Board Policy 107 – Director Attendance at Meetings, Training, & Other Events.
- Learned there were 89 new members in December.
- Acknowledged the January safety report, listing employee training, and employee and public incidents. ■

### Time Set Aside For Members To Comment Before Cooperative Board Meetings

The first 15 minutes of each board meeting is available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. The next meetings are scheduled for 9 a.m. on March 27 at Portland, and April 24 at Blanchard Members who need directions to the meeting, or wish to have items considered on the board agenda, should call 517-647-7554.

# People Fund Helps With Housing, Food Needs

Meeting January 25, the Tri-County Electric People Fund board of directors made seven grants totaling \$8,716.66, including:

- \$3,000 to Housing Services of Mid-Michigan in Charlotte, for their housing assistance program;
- \$2,000 to Clinton County Senior Center in St. Johns, to support their nutritional bingo program;
- \$200 to First Congregational Church in Portland, to purchase food pantry items;
- \$419.49 to a Gratiot County family, to help with housing expenses;
- \$1,700 to an Ionia County family, to help with housing expenses;
- \$749.36 to a Montcalm County family, for assistance with medical bills; and
- \$647.81 to a Montcalm County family, to help with housing expenses. ■

## How To Apply For A Grant

The Tri-County Electric People Fund provides grants to individuals and organizations in the co-op's service area for food, shelter, clothing, health, and other humane needs, or for programs or services that benefit a significant segment of a community.

Write to 7973 E. Grand River Avenue, Portland, MI. 48875, for an application form and grant guidelines, or visit the People Fund tab at [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org).

**Note:** Applications must be received by April 10 for the April board meeting, and by May 22 for the May board meeting.

## Fuel Mix Report

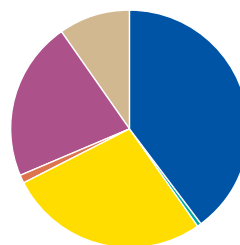
The fuel mix characteristics of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative as required by Public Act 141 of 2000 for the 12-month period ending 12/31/16.

### COMPARISON OF FUEL SOURCES USED

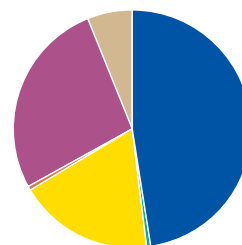
Regional average fuel mix used		
Your co-op's fuel mix		
FUEL SOURCE		
Coal	39.8%	47.7%
Oil	0.5%	0.6%
Gas	27.2%	18.1%
Hydroelectric	1.3%	0.8%
Nuclear	21.5%	26.7%
Renewable Fuels	9.7%	6.1%
Biofuel	0.6%	0.8%
Biomass	0.4%	0.5%
Solar	0.1%	0.1%
Solid Waste Incineration	0.1%	0.1%
Wind	8.1%	4.1%
Wood	0.4%	0.5%

NOTE: Biomass above excludes wood; solid waste incineration includes landfill gas; and wind includes a long-term renewable purchase power contract in Wolverine's mix, but does not include banked Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) that bring the total for renewable fuels to 10%. The 2016 Fuel Mix numbers reflected here do not reflect current and ongoing renewable percentages of fuel mix.

Your Co-op's Fuel Mix



Regional Average Fuel Mix



### EMISSIONS AND WASTE COMPARISON

TYPE OF EMISSION/WASTE	lbs/MWh	
	Your Co-op	Regional Average*
Sulfur Dioxide	5.4	7.6
Carbon Dioxide	1,578	2,170
Oxides of Nitrogen	1.5	2.0
High-level Nuclear Waste	0.0068	0.0083

\*Regional average information was obtained from MPSC website and is for the 12-month period ending 12/31/16.

HomeWorks purchases 100% of its electricity from Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative, Inc. which provided this fuel mix and environmental data.



## AMERICA'S FAVORITE TV VETERINARIAN & LOCAL LEGEND



### Renewable Energy

Dr. Pol, his wife, Diane, and their team care for countless animals, but they also care about renewable energy. The Pols have a long history with renewable energy, installing solar panels on their farm as early as the 1970s.

"I grew up in the Netherlands," said Dr. Pol. "With the windmills all around, renewable energy has always been a part of my life."

The Pols have invested in two additional solar projects, including their most recent which included installing approximately 5,000 square feet of high-efficiency monocrystalline panels to the barn on their property. They worked closely with their local co-op, HomeWorks Tri-County Electric, as well as Ecojiva and CNR Electric.

The system is equipped to generate up to 57 kW. By incorporating solar panels on their property, the Pols hope to take full advantage of the renewable energy generated in order to offset their residential usage. The Pols plan to sell their excess energy back to the utility for the benefit of their fellow co-op members.

"It's great watching how much energy is being generated, just since October," noted Dr. Pol. "Even on overcast days power gets generated. I'm looking forward to watching the meter this summer!"

By Emily Haines Lloyd

Photos courtesy of E. Michael Stankevich and National Geographic

Don't let his frank demeanor fool you. Dr. Jan Pol, also known as *The Incredible Dr. Pol* on National Geographic's WILD channel, is all heart.

Even his journey from his native country, the Netherlands, to rural Michigan was an act of love. Pol was an exchange student, staying with a family in Mayville, Mich. That's where he met his future wife, Diane. After he returned to the Netherlands, Diane traveled to Europe where they eventually fell in love.

Growing up on a dairy farm in the Netherlands, Dr. Pol's love of animals led him to veterinary school. After graduation, the Pols were married, and Dr. Pol joined a veterinary practice in Harbor Beach, Mich. "It was a great place to start," said Dr. Pol. "But I also knew I wanted to start my own practice one day."

After 10 years in Harbor Beach, the Pols sought out a more centrally-located area to open their practice. They settled on Isabella County, in the





**Check out Dr. Pol's book, *Never Turn Your Back on an Angus Cow*, which is full of amusing and poignant tales from his four decades as a vet in rural Michigan.**

heart of Michigan. It was there that the Pols built their practice and their lives.

The life of a country vet is anything but redundant. Dr. Pol has treated everything from large farm animals to beloved family pets. "I've castrated 16 different species of animals," he jokes with a laugh.

It's these offhanded, hilarious and all-too-true comments that likely landed Dr. Pol his own television show. When his son, Charles, now a producer on the show, pitched the idea to some friends in the television business, he described his father as "a real character."

"I'm just a stubborn Dutch boy," said Dr. Pol. "I go around, do my work, and the camera follows. I think people are looking for reality TV that is real."

People certainly are—*The Incredible Dr. Pol* had more than 1 million viewers for its Season 7 premier, making it National Geographic WILD's most-watched telecast in its network history.

Even with his recognizable face, Dr. Pol still sees himself as the local vet.

"I love what I do. I try to help animals the best I can and make their owners happy," he said. "I'd love to see every kid grow up with animals. Kids who are taught to treat animals well become compassionate adults."

Compassion is the hallmark of Dr. Pol's practice and his life—a life that is full of love, adventure and all things incredible. ●

*The Pols are members of HomeWorks Tri-Country Electric Cooperative.*



# Paying At A Third Party Website? Here's Why You Shouldn't

By Lesa Barker

**P**aying your HomeWorks bill is fast, easy, and best of all, free! Whether you use our website at [homeworks.org](https://homeworks.org) or use the Smarthub app, you are assured that your payment will make it to us quickly and with no fees.

With so many online payment options available, you should know the difference between paying HomeWorks directly or paying through a third party payment website. Please beware of third party payment websites.

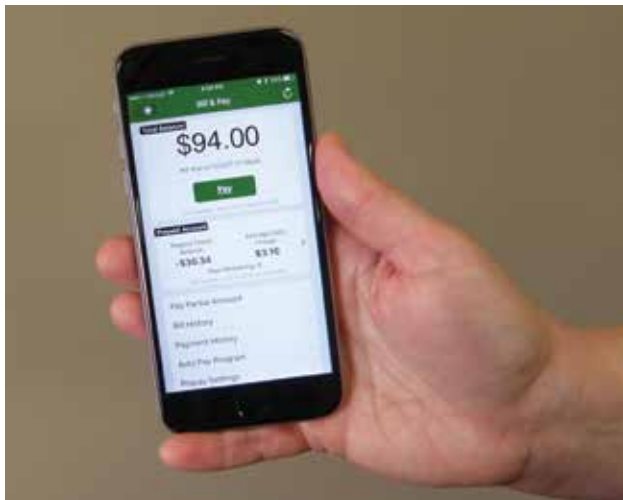
Some websites offer the option to pay your local utility bill; however, many of these websites charge you a fee for the service. HomeWorks is not affiliated with third party sites. If you pay your HomeWorks bill on a third party website, you risk:

- Additional fees or charges for using their website, and
- A delay in your payment being applied to your account.

It could take at least three business days from the time you make your payment online at a third party website before it is applied to your account (not counting weekends or holidays). This kind of delay could result in late fees added to your account and a late notice being sent.

As a member of HomeWorks, you can avoid the risks of third party payments by using one of our free payment options.

- **Auto Pay:** Have your monthly payment automatically deducted each month from either your checking or savings account or a debit or credit card.
- **SmartHub:** Log onto HomeWorks.org or use the SmartHub app.
- **Call a representative:** Call a HomeWorks representative during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
- **Call our dedicated payment number:** You can make a payment any time of day or night by calling 877-999-3395.
- **Stop by one of our offices:** Both Blanchard and Portland offices offer a convenient drive-up window, walk-in lobby, and a secure drop box for after hours.



Using our free SmartHub app on your phone or tablet is easy, whether you want to pay a bill, check your energy use history, or report an outage.

Whether you're paying your HomeWorks bill or any other payment online, it's always important to make sure the website is secure and there are no surprise fees for making your payment. For more information on payment options, contact customer service today at 800-562-8232. ■

# Save the Date

For Your District Membership Meeting:

**May 15 – District 5 . . . . .**Fulton Middle School Gym

**May 16 – District 1 . . . St. Mary's Church Hall, Charlotte**

**May 17 – District 6** . . . . . Beal City High School

**May 18 – District 7 . . . . .** St. Michael's School, Remus

**May 22 – District 4 (Election)** . . . . . Montabella Jr.-Sr.

High Cafeteria

**May 23 – District 3**.....Eagle Park Hall


**May 24 – District 2 (Election)** . . . . . St. Edward's

Church Hall, Lake Odessa

Doors open and a light supper is served at 5:30 p.m., followed by a business meeting at 6 p.m.

Watch your mailbox in late April for information, a map, and your registration card.



 Like us on Facebook to keep up with these events!

# Survey Shows High Satisfaction, Areas For Improvement

In late 2016, an independent polling company surveyed HomeWorks Tri-County Electric members and propane customers to determine satisfaction levels, perceptions about specific co-op attributes, and attitudes regarding energy efficiency, use of technology, communications, and the cooperative business model.

Over the next few months, we'll share the key results of the surveys with you here in *Country Lines* and other media.

First, we were pleased that the members surveyed gave us a very high score on the four American Customer Satisfaction Index questions, giving us an overall ACSI score of 87, up from 86 in our 2014 survey. We are well above the national co-op average, as well as Consumers Energy and other investor-owned utilities, and other well-known companies. (see chart 1)

We also measured the response to 12 specific co-op attributes, from "friendly, courteous employees" to "communicating effectively" to "charging reasonable rates." Our employees were rated between 90-95 percent in the top five categories, and even the lowest scoring category, "charging reasonable rates," was up 2 percent to 75 percent in this year's survey. (see chart 2)

Finally, most members showed little knowledge of our renewable energy programs. Almost two-thirds said they don't know what types of renewable energy we deliver, and even more (81 percent) said they don't how much of the co-op's electricity comes from renewable sources. Clearly, we have more communicating to do! And we will continue to improve our communication. We appreciate and value the feedback from members. ■

Chart 1

Comparison of ACSI Scores	
HomeWorks Tri-County	87
Apple	84
Southwest Airlines	80
Cadillac	79
Touchstone Energy co-op average	77
Investor-owned utility average	72
Consumers Energy	71
Blue Cross/Blue Shield	71
Facebook	68
Wal-Mart	66

Chart 2

Satisfaction with Specific Co-op Attributes	
Friendly, courteous employees	95
Professional business manner	95
Knowledgeable employees	93
Quality customer service	92
Prompt outage response	90
Community involvement	88
Communicating effectively	88
Reliable electric service	86
Good value for the money	81
Energy efficiency programs	77
Supporting renewable energy	73
Charging reasonable rates	72

## Terri Larsen Retires, Larry Bowling Hired

Terri Larsen retired in January, after 11 years as a meter reader out of our Blanchard office. Terri says she is open to new challenges in service.

Her retirement was celebrated with cake and ice cream with her fellow employees and many family members.

Taking over Terri's reading routes, Larry Bowling joined the HomeWorks family as a part-time meter reader for the Blanchard area on Nov. 29. Larry is a HomeWorks member from Six Lakes.



Terri Larsen



Larry Bowling



# I Remember...

Thinking back to my fondest Michigan memories, some of them came during the darkest days of my life.

I am not only a member of Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op, but also an employee for the past 25 years. To me, it is much more than just a place to work; it is like family. We sometimes disagree and squabble—just like family. We tend to get on each other's nerves—just like family. And then we come together when a brother or sister is in need—much like family. When tragedy strikes, we come together in many ways. Whether it be in one another's offices to talk, at a funeral, or as a group meeting with counselors on hand.

I felt like part of the PIE&G family in 2000 when I lost my 2 ½-year-old son, Jordan, suddenly after a very short illness. My co-op family rallied together for my family. They literally delivered a truck load of food to my house. I only remember the pan of chocolate covered cookie bars that I hid in my walk-in closet under a stack of clothes. (Yes, I ate the entire pan of cookies myself.) At the funeral, bucket trucks lined up in front of the church. It was a breathtaking sight for my family. They still talk about it today. As a result of my son's death, I heard positive stories of marriages reconciling, family feuds being settled, and an attitude among many friends and family that life is just too short to not live in harmony with others.

When I returned to work, my PIE&G family was there for me and ready to listen at any moment I needed. And, exactly one year later, my family was able to meet a very sweet little girl that received my son's liver. These were truly some of my fondest memories.

*Heather Homan*  
*Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op*

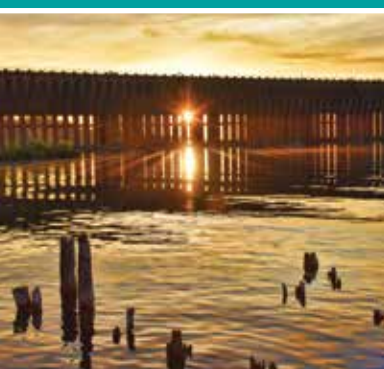


*We invite members to share their fondest memories.*

**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)



## «« Where In Michigan Is This?

Identify the correct location of the photo on the left by April 10 and be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 electric bill credit. Enter your guess at [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com) or send by mail to: *Country Lines* Mystery Photo, 201 Townsend St., Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933. Include the name on your account, address, phone number, and the name of your co-op.

Our Mystery Photo Contest winner from the January 2017 issue is James Pelkey, a Thumb Electric member who correctly identified the photo as the Emergency Ark (Boat Barn) near Caseville on Oak Beach Road.

Winners are announced in the following issues of *Country Lines*: January, March, May, July/August, September and November/December.



**Jan. Photo**



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# Building a brighter tomorrow, together.



## Go Solar With No Panels On Your Property

As a co-op, we know the value of working together. Find out how working together is making access to renewable solar energy **easy** and **affordable** for our members at [spartansolar.com](http://spartansolar.com). Michigan co-ops are proud to be Michigan's renewable energy leaders.