

Alger Delta Cooperative Electric Association

June 2017

MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES

*Explore Cherry Point
Farm & Market*

AND UNWIND AT MICHIGAN'S MOST BEAUTIFUL FLORAL MAZE

Annual Meeting June 10
Food, Fun And Prizes!

Directors Announced
For Districts 5, 7 And 8

Alger Delta Meets
With Rep. LaFave

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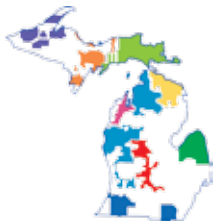
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IN THIS ISSUE



ON THE COVER

The Lavender Labyrinth at Cherry Point Farm and Market located in Shelby, Mich., draws both loyal locals and curious tourists to the farm every summer.

6

OUR ENERGY

Valerie Brader On Michigan's Energy Future
Cherryland Electric Cooperative

7

SAFETY

Perform An Annual Safety Inspection On Your Boat And Dock To Prevent Electric Shock

10

COOKING COMMUNITY

Step Up Your Grill Game With These Summer Recipes
Christin McKamey & Our Readers

Enter Our Recipe Contest And Win A \$50 Bill Credit!
Special Guest Chef Recipe From Barbara Bull Of Cherry Point Farm And Market

14

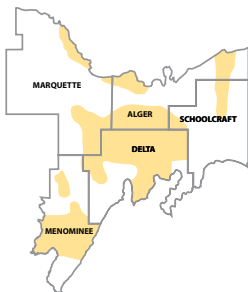
FEATURE

Explore Cherry Point Farm & Market And Unwind At Michigan's Most Beautiful Floral Maze
Emily Haines Lloyd

18

READER'S PAGE

I Remember—Sometimes You've Got To Get Lost To Find Your Way
Tom Rademacher, Great Lakes Energy
Submit An 'I Remember' Story And Earn \$50!



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The Cooperative Solution



Tom Harrell
Chief Executive
Officer

Alger Delta was founded in 1938. Back then, the rural U.P. had many problems and not having access to electricity was at the very top of the heap. In those days, many Americans lived and worked in the forests and farms, and the agricultural and natural resources segment of the nation's economy employed much more people than today. Most of them did not have access to electricity until neighbors banded together to solve the problem through the formation of an electric cooperative.

Since then, cooperatives of all kinds have sprung up. During the Great Depression, when banks did not have much interest in extending credit to people of modest means, people did the same thing as the founders of Alger Delta. They got together and formed more than 23,000 credit unions, solving their problem with a cooperative solution. Today, about 6,800 credit unions remain in the U.S. with nearly 100 million members.

Also today, there are more than 3,000 housing co-ops nationwide. While most are located in urban areas, they are a growing solution in rural areas, and a number of mobile home parks are being converted to cooperative ownership.

Is reliable child care a concern? There are more than 1,000 pre-school cooperatives operating in the U.S., and they offer a great solution for the vast majority of families when both parents need to work outside the home.

There are even co-ops covering funeral needs. By joining a co-op that has pre-negotiated rates, consumers can save up to 40 percent off the average cost of a funeral and burial.

So, what do all these businesses all have in common? They all showcase the power of community—local people coming together to solve problems with a cooperative, neighbor helping neighbor, kind of spirit. ■

Director Election Outcomes Announced

Alger Delta's board will have two incumbents and one new director seated at the cooperative's Annual Meeting in June.

In District 5 (Gourley, Cornell, LaBranche) incumbent Dave Anthony outpolled challenger Dennis Slaga to maintain his seat on the board. Anthony received 62 percent of the 306 ballots cast to challenger Slaga's 38 percent. June will mark the beginning of Anthony's second full term on the board. Anthony currently serves as board president.

District 7 (Stonington, Rapid River) was taken by Kirk Bruno with 71 percent of the vote. Bruno and Allison Warn ran for the open seat since the incumbent, Sue Alexander, did not run for reelection.

The outcome in District 8 was never in doubt because Director Ray Young had no challenger.

Young currently serves as chair of Alger Delta's Policy Committee.

Elected directors will be seated on the board at the co-op's Annual Meeting on June 10 at the U.P. State Fairgrounds. The Annual Meeting is open to all members. ■



Newly elected
District 5 Director
Dave Anthony



Newly elected
District 7 Director
Kirk Bruno



Newly elected
District 8 Director
Ray Young

Alger Delta Discusses Energy Issues With Representative LaFave

Alger Delta staff and one board member recently sat down with 108th District Representative Beau LaFave for a discussion about energy issues. One of the youngest representatives currently serving, the 24-year-old says he has been very busy since taking office last November. This is in part due to his weekly commute from his home in the Upper Peninsula to his office in lower Michigan. Every Thursday afternoon LaFave leaves Lansing for his hometown of Kingsford and then retraces the route back to Lansing on Monday. "Each week I put at least 1,000 miles on my car," he says with a grin. When he's home in the U.P., his schedule stays packed as he juggles office hours and meetings in each of the three counties he represents.

At the state Capitol, Rep. LaFave sits on three committees, including the House Energy and Technology Committee. During his meeting with Alger Delta staff, the unique challenges that are inherent to the U.P. regarding power generation and electricity costs were discussed. "The issue that I am most concerned with is the high electric costs borne by the residents of the U.P.," LaFave said. "We need to investigate all viable options and see what can be done to increase reliability yet save rate payers money."

Alger Delta CEO Tom Harrell expanded on this stating, "One of the ways to reduce energy costs in the U.P. is through economic development. This typically drives costs down for the rate payers."



Alger Delta staff asked to meet with Rep. LaFave to talk about projects under development that are on the co-op's system and in the 108th district. One such project is the Aquila Mine in Menominee County. Alger Director and Board Vice President Paul Sederquist says that co-op members in his district are watching the development carefully. "People are concerned about how they can protect the pristine Menominee River," Sederquist commented. "They do not want any disturbances to the natural beauty of our area that they value so highly."

Alger Delta recognizes the importance of good governance both locally and at a state level. "Meetings like this help create an open and ongoing dialogue regarding local issues of importance related to energy matters and other topics," Harrell concluded. ■

Valerie Brader On Michigan's Energy Future

In the last few years, the state of Michigan has dealt with public concern over various energy issues. Cherryland Electric Cooperative recently sat down with the Executive Director for the Michigan Agency for Energy, Valerie Brader, to discuss the challenges and opportunities our state faces as Michigan's Electric Cooperatives continue to modernize their energy portfolio.



Q: How does the state view solar power production in Michigan?

Solar has gotten much cheaper. Even in 2012, it was much more expensive than other resources. Now, it is more cost competitive. The new energy legislation asks the Michigan Public Service Commission to look at the value of solar in a very specific way. Most utilities in our lower peninsula are summer peaking utilities. That means they have the highest demand at the height of the summer when everyone's air conditioning is turned on. Solar can be really valuable to summer peaking utilities. When it's coming in at a time when there is plenty of other power, it can be less valuable. How valuable solar really is needs to be evaluated on a utility-by-utility and state-by-state basis.

Q: What are our biggest opportunities for reducing waste in the state of Michigan?

Michigan has a huge amount of energy waste reduction opportunities. If you look around, Michigan's housing stock is a little older than our neighbors. Older typically means the insulation is not as good. Homeowners should make sure that the lights in their home have been swapped out to LED lightbulbs and make an effort to get insulation in the right spots. New furnaces are an opportunity, too. Just 15 years ago your furnace was probably 80 percent efficient; now there are 92 percent or 96 percent efficient furnaces for about the same amount of money. There are a lot of opportunities for people to improve their homes and to be more comfortable at a lower cost of energy.

Q: What is the condition of the energy generating capacity in Michigan?

In the lower peninsula, about 90 percent of our demand must be met with in-state resources because of the physics of the grid. With all the coal plant closures, we are running a lot closer to our margins than usual. The concern is making sure that everyone, no matter who you are a customer of, is helping to pay for the new plants we need. Electricity is different from most products in that if we don't have enough supply for everybody, nobody gets any power. The grid will collapse if supply doesn't meet demand, causing widespread outages that take hours to fix. One of our goals is to make sure that we don't ever face those kinds of outages. The new legislation ensures that every supplier of electricity must meet their share of reliability requirements.

Q: How much capacity do you think will be built over the next 5–10 years?

That is one thing that the new legislation will help us answer. All rate-regulated utilities must file an integrated resource plan. They essentially show a prediction of what their demand is going to be and how they are going to meet it. ■

Listen to the entire interview
at <https://cherrylandelectric.coop/2017/03/valerie-brader-michigans-energy-future/>

Perform An Annual Safety Inspection On Your Boat And Dock To Prevent Electric Shock

For boating and water safety, there are items you must legally have on your watercraft—life vests, a fire extinguisher, throwable flotation devices, and properly working lights—but make sure the boat and the dock are safe, too. Sadly, there have been incidents of electric shock drownings. It happens when a current, often from a short circuit in the wiring of boats or in a dock, spreads through the water. As a result, those who are in the water will be electrocuted and end up drowning.

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

- All installations should be performed by a professional electrical contractor.
- All dock receptacles must comply with the National Electrical Code, which mandates a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). A GFCI measures a circuit's current and senses any imbalance (such as a discharge into the water), which trips the GFCI and cuts off the power.
- Test any GFCIs every month. Locate them along the ramp to the dock so they can be easily tested by local fire departments.
- Metal dock frames should have "bonding jumpers" that connect all metal parts to an on-shore grounding rod. This means any dock part that becomes energized by electrical malfunction will trip the GFCI or circuit breaker.
- Ask neighbors if their dock electrical systems have been inspected and are up to code.
- Household wire is not suitable for boats.
- Do not use wire nuts (these are for solid conductor wire, which should never be on a boat) or splice connectors which can cut wire strands!
- Fuses are rated to protect the wire, not the stereo. If a fuse blows continuously, something else is wrong.
- If you rent a dock or boat, notify the owner of safety violations immediately.
- Have your boat's system (especially with onboard generators) checked at least annually and when something is added or removed.
- Ropes, string, masts and rigging also conduct electricity—don't be the common ground between water and electricity! ■

See SafeElectricity.org for more tips.



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Did you know?

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Dishwasher	Uses 5% less energy and 15% less water	\$75
Chest Freezer	Uses at least 10% less energy	\$75
Refrigerator	Uses 9% less energy	\$200
Television	Uses at least 25% less energy	\$50–100
Room air conditioner	Uses 15% less energy	\$50

View all incentives at michigan-energy.org or call **877.296.4319** for details.

*All data according to energystar.gov.

**Incentive amounts are subject to change.

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- Dishwasher - **\$75**

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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.



Cool Savings

Farms & Barns



A Farm In Escanaba Township Early One Morning—By Kim Foos



Somewhere Over A Rainbow—By Amanda Wagner



Reflection—By Michael Birtles



Our Cows During An Evening Sunset—By Bonnie Fowler



Share Your Captured Moments!

Alger Delta invites members to share their amazing photos. Selected photos will be published in *Michigan Country Lines*. Upcoming topics and deadlines are: **Birds and Feathers** due **July 20** for the September issue and **Life's A Beach—Michigan Waters** due **August 20** for the October issue.

To submit photos go to
<http://bit.ly/countrylines>

We look forward to seeing your best photos!

ON THE GRILL

Step up your grill game with these summer recipes.

Grilled Flatbread With Vegetables & Hummus

Randy Rippentrop, Cherryland

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons Greek seasoning (or Italian seasoning)
- 3–4 cups mixed vegetables (red onion, eggplant, red bell pepper, zucchini, mushrooms, etc.)—cubed into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup baby spinach
- 4 naan flatbreads
- 1 cup roasted red pepper hummus
- 4 tablespoons feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
- red pepper flakes
- balsamic glaze

Heat a gas grill to medium heat. In a mixing bowl, combine olive oil, garlic and Greek seasoning with the cubed vegetables. Place vegetables on the grill in either a mesh grill basket or onto aluminum foil. Grill until vegetables are soft. Remove vegetables from the grill and immediately mix in the baby spinach so that it will wilt. Place naan flatbread on the grill facing down for a couple of minutes until warm and lightly brown.

Remove naan breads and place on a baking sheet. On each naan, spread ¼ cup hummus and 1 cup of the grilled vegetables. Sprinkle feta and mozzarella cheese on top. Shake red pepper flakes on top to taste. Turn grill to low and place the assembled naan flatbreads on the grill for about 5 minutes or until cheese is melted. Remove from grill and drizzle with balsamic glaze.

As an option, two grilled chicken breasts can be cubed and added to the vegetable mixture before putting it on the naan.

Naan is a leavened, oven-baked flatbread found in the cuisines of India and other Central and Southeast Asia countries.



Watch a video of this recipe at
<https://goo.gl/Lfls7F>

Bacon Wrapped Chicken Jalapeño Delights

Deb Finedell, Great Lakes Energy

- 1 pound boneless chicken breast
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon pepper
- 2 teaspoons seasoned salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 small onion, cut into strips
- 15 jalapeños, halved and seeded
- 1 pound bacon



Photo—Deb Finedell

Cut chicken into strips, slicing breasts the length of a jalapeño and about a half inch thick. Place chicken and seasonings into baggie and coat. Place chicken strip and onion into a half jalapeño. Wrap with a piece of bacon and secure with a toothpick.

Grill about 20 minutes until bacon is crisp. Serve with blue cheese dressing.

Steak Pitas Topped With Grilled Mushrooms & Onions

Cathy Miller, Midwest Energy

- 1 flank steak, trimmed of excess fat
- 1 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ teaspoon Mrs. Dash
- 4 whole wheat pita pockets
- steak sauce



Photo—Cathy Miller

On a large piece of heavy duty foil, combine mushrooms and onions. Dot with butter and season. Bring edge of foil together to seal. Place on grill on low heat, and grill 15 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Place steak on preheated grill and

cook to desired doneness, about 6 to 7 minutes on each side for medium-rare. Remove from the grill to a cutting board and let rest for 10 to 15 minutes before slicing. Thinly slice the steak on an angle. Serve immediately. To assemble the sandwiches, fill pitas with meat and veggies. Top with steak sauce.



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

- “All About Apples” due July 1
- “Slow Cooker Favorites” due August 1

Go to micoopkitchen.com for more information and to register.

Gorgonzola And Dried Cherry Salad (pictured above)

Barbara Bull

If you get a chance to meet up with Barbara Bull at Cherry Point Farm and Market, be sure to grab some delicious dried cherries and make this light, satisfying salad.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons raspberry vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ⅛ teaspoon fine sea salt
- ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup toasted walnuts
- ¼ cup dried cherries
- 1 head leafy green lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
- 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled and thinly sliced
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese

Whisk together oil, vinegar, garlic, salt and pepper in a small bowl to make a dressing.

Toss walnuts, cherries, lettuce, apples and onions together in a large salad bowl.

Top with dressing and toss gently to coat. Garnish with cheese and serve.

Read the full story about Barbara Bull on page 14, and visit micoopkitchen.com for this recipe and others from our co-op members.



Branstrom's "Rusty's Ball" was constructed out of numerous cans saved from the Rapid River school's hot lunch program and fastened together with hundreds of screws.



Ritch with his bluebird sculpture. The bird's breast is fashioned from a Volkswagen hood. The bird will soon be on its way to the Elk Rapids Walk of Art Sculpture Park.

A LIFETIME OF EVOLUTiON

By Yvonne Whitman

Finding random items on his workshop doorstep is an everyday occurrence for Rapid River "found object artist" Ritch Branstrom. "People leave me things. Lots of things," the 50-year-old says with a wide grin. And from his doorstep many of the items find themselves transformed into something quite different via Branstrom's artistic vision. Old cans, license plates and fenders become metal sculptures of fish, canoes and even heavy metal bands.

Branstrom received his Fine Arts degree from Northern Michigan University, but his parents

were not on board with his artistic inclinations, telling him, "You'll never make a living as an artist." Branstrom says, "I listened to them for a while, but after about five years I decided to figure out my own future," and it led him back to his artistic roots and to the U.P. "This is one of the best places to live," he confidently states.

At about the same time, his father fell ill with brain cancer. "It was a life-changing experience," he recalls. "It made me realize that it's important to make the most out of life every day and to do what your passion is." His passion turned out to be found



Many of the clever creations of Ritch Branstrom, a "found object artist."

object art and he initially began creating pieces from rusty items that were scattered around the family homestead. "I would work in my folk's garage and make dinosaurs in the driveway from old farm equipment," and soon the adage of, "If you build it they will come" occurred. "People began to show up and drive by very slowly," he remarks with a smile.

Eventually Branstrom opened a workshop studio in a defunct service station on U.S. Highway 2 that drew people in. "I used to joke that when I opened the old garage door it was the vortex to the universe because so many people from around the world would walk through that door." His current workshop on the main street of Rapid River was once a grocery store and some of his creations are cleverly showcased in old produce display coolers. The top floor functions as his warehouse, storing the vast collection of found metal objects waiting to be transformed into a future piece of Branstrom's artwork. "I repurpose them and give them a new life, he remarks. And, from where does he draw his inspiration? "A lifetime of evolution," he notes.

While the doorstep deliveries provide most of his raw material, he does sometimes need to go out looking for a certain item. But, according to

Branstrom, things have changed quite a bit during the years he has been working. "The countryside has been cleaned up in the last 20 years. In my youth, there were old farmsteads and junkyards with rusted farm equipment and automobiles, but those days are gone. The things I really like to find and use are rare now."

Starting out he sold his work on the art show circuit, and eventually in galleries and soon his work began to get recognized with numerous Best of Show awards. Branstrom has participated in the Grand Rapids-based ArtPrize three times. In 2011, his 3,000-pound dog sculpture, "Rusty," finished 5th place out of 1,582 entries. Getting the sculpture there was quite an escapade due to the size of the piece. "It was like a traveling performance piece going down the interstate. Everyone had their cameras out." His successful work as an artist has also led to a seat on the Governor's Board of the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.

"Everything has a story," Branstrom concludes. "It's been traveling through time and space and interacting with people. It fascinates me when I can create a piece that changes the way I view life." ■

Branstrom's work can be found at the Michigan Artists Gallery in Traverse City. Visit his website at adhocworkshop.com to learn more.



Explore Cherry Point Farm & Market

AND UNWIND AT MICHIGAN'S MOST BEAUTIFUL FLORAL MAZE

By Emily Haines Lloyd



Pictured above is Barbara Bull, owner of Cherry Point Farm and author of several books based on her farm life experiences.

Cherry Point Farm and Market in Oceana County is as deliciously tart and sweet as the cherries it produces, as imaginative and welcoming as its lavender labyrinth, and as chock full of history and stories like its owner delights in telling. A fourth-generation farmer, Cherry Point owner Barbara Bull began her career selling cherries and pies as a young girl at a card table stand her older sister set up.

Barbara's early start as a pint-sized entrepreneur paved the way to what is now Cherry Point Farm and Market. From around the country and world, families visit Cherry Point Farm and Market—not only to snatch a gorgeous quart of cherries on their travels, but also to visit the buildings, lavender labyrinth and herb garden. Tourists and locals sometimes are fortunate to catch a fish boil, watching Barbara and her team go through the almost-scientific steps and listening for stories peppered into this timeless event. Visitors can also enjoy Tuesday Teas or Sunday's Flapjacks and Fruit. No matter what the event, in the midst of it all is Cherry Point's owner, Barbara, telling stories, listening to stories and quietly taking mental notes.

"I've always loved history and storytelling," Barbara explained. "I would listen to my grandfather tell his stories about our family history, and his stories made those people real to me."

On the occasion of Bull's fifth decade on the farm, she got an idea.





Fish boils are an event, a gathering and a tradition with taste!

"I had spent 50 consecutive years working at the farm market—listening to people's stories and telling my stories. I knew I wasn't retiring or getting a gold watch," Bull jokes. "So, I decided to tell the story of my first 50 years on the farm."

And that's what she did. Armed with a love of reading and writing and a snowy off-season, Bull wrote the love story of herself and Cherry Point Farm—"A Point in Time."

With each season after that, as she puts on a picking bucket, prunes trees or braids strudels in the market, Bull is either dreaming up improvements for the farm or new stories. Her second book, "Blackberry Ridge," was a collection of newspaper articles by a local writer, Charles W. Jay, who was one of the original settlers in the area. The book combines stories from Jay and townspeople that together capture life in the late 1800s.

"It was amazing to research Jay, read his articles in the paper and get a glimpse at life in that time," Bull said. "[He gave me] such wonderful insights—thoughts and concerns on health, weather, community development. The most amazing thing was how little has changed. We're having these same conversations today."

One particularly snowy January, Bull had another idea. "I looked out the window and it was still snowing, and I thought, 'Okay, I'll do another book.'"

That book became her first fiction novel, a cozy mystery called "Cloud Cottage" that, given Bull's mental note-taking, takes place on the shore of Lake Michigan in the lush fruit belt and is unsurprisingly full of long-time family connections and traditions. It's the first of three in the series.

For locals and travelers not familiar with Cherry Point Market, it's well worth the visit to Oceana County.

The sweet cherries or mouthwatering pastries are not quickly forgotten. An experience at the farm generates repeat customers and even encourages strangers to become friends.

Bull encourages visitors to take their time while wandering through the maze like a meditative experience. Some lucky farm-goers who make a lasting impression may find their way into Bull's next novel. Of course, the most compelling character Barbara has created is the one she is in real life.

"You can only hope you have enough time to accomplish all the dreams you've dreamed up," said Bull. "All you can do is follow your instincts, listen to where you need to be and what you need to be doing and you'll get there." ■

Barbara Bull, owner of Cherry Point Farm and Market, is a member of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative.

To learn more, visit cherrypointmarket.net or call 231-861-2029. Cherry Point Farm and Market is located at 9600 West Buchanan Road, Shelby, MI 49455.

The Beautiful Lavender Labyrinth

Cherry Point Farm and Market allows visitors to indulge in delicious treats, including cherries, sweet jams, and baked goods. But the highlight is the lavender labyrinth.

Be sure to wander through the massive and stunning lavender labyrinth filled with calming aroma and colorful hues.

Bull teamed up with local artist and architect Conrad Heiderer in 2001 to create the flower-shaped design, allowing visitors to walk through rows and rows of perfectly arranged flowers with an herb garden at its center.

The lavender peaks in the springtime and continues to bloom throughout the summer and then dries out and is picked once fall arrives.

Bull encourages visitors to take their time while wandering through the garden, slowing down to breathe in the lavender-scented air and enjoy a meditative experience.



CLEAN SNOWMOBILE CHALLENGE

By Yvonne Whitman

The Clean Snowmobile Challenge is a collegiate design competition of the Society of Automotive Engineers. Michigan Technological University has hosted the annual event each March for the past 15 years at the Keweenaw Research Center, just north of Houghton. Engineering students from participating schools throughout the United States and Canada take a stock snowmobile and reengineer it. Their aim: to reduce emissions and noise and increase fuel efficiency while preserving the riding excitement demanded by snowmobile enthusiasts.

The event began in 1999 and, for the first three years, was held in and around Yellowstone National Park, sparked by discussions of excluding recreational snowmobile access from the park. The snowmobile industry responded by working with the Environmental Protection Agency to develop standards that require snowmobiles to be clean and quiet. Laws were passed in 2006 that define emissions and noise standards for snowmobiles. With these laws and more strict regulations

required for snowmobiles in national parks like Yellowstone and Grand Teton, the educational opportunity now had a real-world connection. Creating environmentally-friendly sleds is of the utmost importance to the students. "It's highly important not to just snowmobilers, but on all vehicles to make them cleaner and to help the environment," said James Gerdes, a student competitor from Madison, Wis.

Teams work all year and invest thousands of dollars in their snowmobile, so the competition is fierce. During the six-day competition, their modified snowmobiles compete in a variety of events including emissions, noise, fuel economy/endurance, acceleration, handling, static display, cold start and design. "Not only does this event help develop students to become better leaders, better communicators and better engineers, but it also promotes snowmobiling and keeps the sport alive by protecting the environment," said William Bryant, internal combustion and clean snowmobile captain of the University of Wisconsin—Platteville team.



The 2017 competition proved to be even more challenging than usual due to very adverse weather conditions. Students had to battle ice, wind gusts greater than 50 miles per hour and single digit temperatures. According to Event Coordinator Jay Meldrum, "The weather in the Keweenaw was consistently lousy during the Clean Snowmobile Challenge, but we adjusted and made it through the evaluation of the 24 teams representing 16 different universities and declared winners. Since this is an education program first, everyone was a winner. Thanks to all the local sponsors and volunteers who help make this event possible for 15 years running. Thanks to Ontonagon County Rural Electrification Association for keeping the lights on throughout the wind storms."

This event highlights the ingenuity of students working collaboratively as teams to bring environmentally conscious ideas to fruition. These ideas will allow future generations of outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy a hobby inherent to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. ■

Next year's event is slated for March 5–10, 2018. Visit mtu.edu/snowmobile/ to learn more.



Photos courtesy of Michigan Technological University

"It's highly important not to just snowmobilers, but on all vehicles to make them cleaner and to help the environment."
—James Gerdes

I Remember...

Sometimes You've Got to Get Lost to Find Your Way

I decided to make Michigan my permanent home in an unlikely spot—while bodysurfing waves in Lake Worth, Florida. I'd hitchhiked from my hometown of Grand Rapids out to Colorado, then meandered my way back east and down along the seaboard. I thought I'd found Nirvana in "The Sunshine State."

I was in my 20s, lost, confused and unsure about my life's compass; after thumbing this way and that, Florida seemed a good fit. But faced with the prospect of whether to take a job as a carpenter's apprentice to an old salt remodeling waterfront homes, my mind wandered back to my precious land of four seasons—Michigan.

How could I leave in my rear-view mirror the northwest wind that whipped waves on Lake Michigan into a pandemonium? Or the inland lakes and rivers that abounded with fish and the promise of canoeing adventures? Where else would I find the romance of so many lighthouses, the lull of crickets and cicadas and fireflies?

So I thumbed my way back to Michigan, married a girl who abandoned a future in Maine for life with me, and we put down stakes. In a year or two, we hope to retire to the small cottage I hand-built 30 years ago near the "Big Lake" in the beautiful confines of Oceana County and continue staying put.

Tom Rademacher, Great Lakes Energy

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