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# MICHIGAN

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# COUNTRY LINES

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative



HomeWorks Connect  
Is Underway

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Clearing Along  
Lines Keeps  
Your Power On

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Scholarships, D.C.  
Trip Available To  
Area Youth

**Silver Muzzle  
Cottage**

*A Rescue & Hospice For  
Homeless Senior Dogs*

## Both of these devices create hot air but which uses less power?



**Space Heater (high)**  
1,500 watts



**7 Series  
Geothermal Heat Pump**  
900 watts<sup>1</sup>

### WaterFurnace—The smartest way to heat and cool your home.

You may not realize it, but your home is sitting on a free and renewable supply of energy. A WaterFurnace geothermal heat pump taps into the stored solar energy in your yard to provide savings up to 70% on heating, cooling, and hot water. It uses less power than a typical space heater—and it won't singe the hair on your legs. Geothermal is a smart investment in your family's comfort. Contact your local WaterFurnace dealer today and find out how much you can save by switching to geothermal.

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Michigan's Electric Cooperatives  
countrylines.com

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**POSTMASTER:** SEND ALL UAA TO CFS.

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

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**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:**

Please notify your electric cooperative. See page 4 for contact information.

The appearance of advertising does not constitute an endorsement of the products or services advertised.

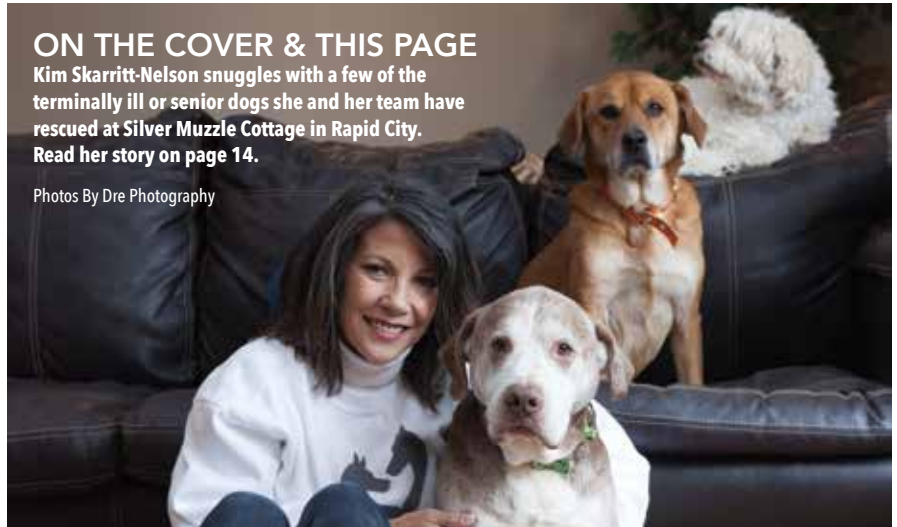
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Kim Skarritt-Nelson snuggles with a few of the terminally ill or senior dogs she and her team have rescued at Silver Muzzle Cottage in Rapid City. Read her story on page 14.

Photos By Dre Photography



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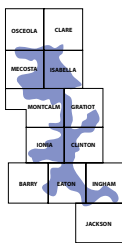
## *I Remember...*

We invite members to share their fondest memories.

**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 or email to cdorr@meca.coop

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



## Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

### Portland office/Mail payments to:

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

### Blanchard office:

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

Night deposit box available at both locations.

### Electric bill/account questions:

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

### Pay by phone, anytime:

1-877-999-3395

### Service questions/outages:

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

### Tri-County Propane:

1-877-574-2740

### HomeWorks Connect

1-800-668-8413

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

E-mail: [tricoenergy@homeworks.org](mailto:tricoenergy@homeworks.org)

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Editor: Jayne Graham, CCC



# Working With You Helps Highlight Value

Missy Robson, Manager of Customer Service

My team's job at HomeWorks Tri-County is to help you get the most value for your energy dollars. We have a number of low or no-cost tools that can make a difference for you.

- **Sign up for budget billing** and minimize monthly bill spikes by averaging your payments over 12 months. You can start any time of year, once you have established 12 months of usage history in your own name.
- **Pay As You Go** prepaid electric service lets you make smaller, more manageable payments throughout the month, rather than one large payment on a predetermined due date. You'll never pay late fees or reconnect charges, and prepaid service eliminates the need for a security deposit. People who use the service tell us they are more conscious of their energy use so they actually use less power, lowering their energy costs.
- **Use SmartHub**, online or with our free smartphone app, to keep an eye on your use. You can actually mark your account when something significant changes, such as family visits or new appliances, then compare use before and after. Or compare this month's use to the same month last year, with weather information to put the use in context. SmartHub will help you understand your energy bill.
- **Automatic bill payment through your bank or credit card**, paying by phone or paying online, eliminates checks and stamps or a trip to the office! With paperless billing, you'll receive an email alerting you to the bill amount, and you can see or download a copy of your bill at [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org).
- **If you're ready to upgrade** appliances, lights, or your heating system, our Energy Optimization rebates can help offset your costs so you'll save even more over the life of the item. You can learn more at [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org).
- **Finally, if your energy usage seems higher than usual** and using SmartHub's tracking doesn't help you figure out the reasons, call us! Our customer service reps will work with you to review your account as energy advisors. Part of recognizing the value of electricity is being aware of just what work it's doing for you.

Whether we're building stronger power lines, going out to make repairs at 2 a.m., answering your phone calls with a smile, or finding ways to use technology to keep our costs (and rates) stable, as the electric utility YOU own, we are always working for you.



Find us on Facebook.  
[facebook.com/HomeWorks.org](http://facebook.com/HomeWorks.org)



## Introducing HomeWorks Connect

HomeWorks Connect is our new fiber-to-the-home project intended to benefit all of the 26,000 mid-Michigan homes and businesses served by the Cooperative across 13 counties.

HomeWorks plans to install fiber optic cable along its electric system. This high-speed data line would serve two purposes 1) creating a network of system data that will help maintain and strengthen our system against animals, storms and load growth, and 2) providing member-consumers with state-of-the-art high-speed internet service.

“Most of us don’t remember when co-ops were formed in the late 1930s. Farmers worked together because none of the big utilities would bring power lines to their homes and families,” says general manager Mark Kappler. “But our history is being repeated now with high-speed internet access. Just as electricity was essential to improving lives 80 years ago, high-speed internet is needed for education, economic development, and overall quality of life here.”

The pilot project will extend to areas of Ionia, Eaton, and Clinton counties with plans to make the first service installations to members in September 2018. After the pilot is complete, service will be offered in phases to the surrounding areas as interest is generated and the infrastructure is built. Kappler estimates the project will take about five years after the first service installation.

To learn more, follow [facebook.com/homeworks.org](https://facebook.com/homeworks.org) or visit the [HomeworksConnect.org](https://HomeworksConnect.org) web page. HomeWorks Tri-County is creating a waiting list for members who are interested, and a crowd-sourcing web page will be set up soon to allow direct sign-ups for service.

HomeWorks Connect service will be made available to all of the co-op’s member-consumers before extending to non-members, but the general public is encouraged to show interest at the crowd-sourcing web page as well.

*“Just as electricity was essential to improving lives 80 years ago, high-speed internet is needed for education, economic development, and overall quality of life here.”*

# NO BARRIERS

ADVENTURES FOR RURAL VETERANS—APPLY BY FEB. 28

Michigan electric cooperatives believe there should be “No Barriers” for veterans with disabilities. That’s the name and idea behind CoBank’s No Barriers initiative. Michigan cooperatives are looking for qualified veterans\* from our local community to participate.

No Barriers is a five-day, all-expenses-paid, expedition in Colorado, designed to help veterans with disabilities transform their lives through curriculum-based experience in challenging environments (climbing, rafting and hiking).

If you are a disabled veteran, or you know of a disabled veteran in our community who would like to participate in the No Barriers program, please complete the form on our website:

[countrylines.com/nobarriers](http://countrylines.com/nobarriers)

*\*Must have VA disability rating to be eligible.*



ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE  
**YOUTH TOUR**

Michigan Co-ops Inspire  
Tomorrow’s Leaders This Summer

**June 9–14, 2018**

Youth Tour applications accepted  
between now and Feb. 28.

Encourage your favorite high school  
sophomore or junior to apply!



# YOUTH TOUR 2018

Learn more at [CooperativeYouthTour.com](http://CooperativeYouthTour.com).

# 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 as a substitute for reading 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

- Do not overfill the fuel tank. Always allow room for fuel expansion.
- If the tank is over-filled, fuel can overflow onto a hot engine and cause fire or explosion.
- 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

- Do not connect your generator directly to your home's wiring or into a regular household outlet.
- 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.
- 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.

# 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 lightbulbs, electronics, major appliances, and even certified homes and buildings.

For an 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 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.



Look for the  
**ENERGY STAR®**

## All LED bulbs are not created equal.

Choose ENERGY STAR LEDs for a world of benefits:

- Highest quality and performance
- Exceptional color quality and light output
- Tested and verified to back up claims
- Three-year minimum warranty

**ENERGY TIP:** In-store cash incentives available NOW for LED bulbs and fixtures!

Phone: 877.296.4319 Online: [michigan-energy.org](http://michigan-energy.org)



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).





# Snap Shot

## Winter Sports

1. Donna Simmon from Fowler looked at winter from a different angle. "A foot of snow, a best friend, and a great time resulted in this upside down snowman," she says.
2. Sharon Wittkopp of Portland snapped Blaine Wittkopp going down the luge course at the Muskegon Winter Sports Complex.
3. Glenn Clawson of Onondaga shared this snap. "On a snowy day last winter outside Onondaga, my girlfriend Christine Darling and our beautiful dog Cuervo were out cross-country skiing in our front yard."
4. Penny Palmer of Vestaburg sent in a photo of herself taken by friends while kayaking on the Chippewa River west of Mt. Pleasant. "Most may not think of kayaking as a winter sport, but I think it's just as beautiful as any other time of year. You just have to dress warmer, be more alert and be prepared for anything!"
5. Theresa Miller from Nashville shared this photo of Matt and Jake Miller with a giant bluegill, "caught during one of our favorite winter sports—ice fishing!"



1



2



3



4



5

### Upcoming Snap Shot Contest Topics And Deadlines

- "Heroes," Deadline: February 15 (April issue)
- "Show Us Your Garden," Deadline: March 15 (May issue)

Enter to win a  
**\$100**  
energy bill  
credit!

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 "Heroes" Photo!

Contributors whose photos we publish in 2018 will be entered into a drawing. *Country Lines* will choose two winners for a bill credit of \$100 each on their December electric bill, due in January 2019!



Photos—Robert Bruce Photography

# Pizza! Pizza!

**Take out? No way! Make perfect pizza at home with these simple recipes.**



## Farmhouse Pizza (pictured in top photo)

Deb Finedell, Great Lakes Energy

- one pre-made pizza crust (or make your own from scratch)
- Creamy Caesar dressing (amount depends on size of crust)
- smoked gouda cheese, ham and sun dried tomatoes (or any toppings you like)

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Spread Creamy Caesar dressing on the crust. Add toppings. Bake for 20–25 minutes or until golden brown. Let sit for 5 minutes before serving. Enjoy!



Watch a video of this recipe at  
<https://goo.gl/5bWmPE>

## Homemade Pizza

Elizabeth Coates, Cherryland

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 cup warm water at 105–115 degrees    | 1 teaspoon sugar              |
| 1 standard packet yeast (2¼ teaspoons) | 1 teaspoon salt               |
| 2½ cups flour                          | • mozzarella cheese           |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil                | • tomato sauce                |
|  | • favorite toppings of choice |

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Dissolve yeast in warm water in a medium-sized bowl; let stand for 5 minutes. Add flour, olive oil, sugar and salt. Stir vigorously for 2 minutes, then let rest for 5 minutes. Grease two cookie sheets or two 12-inch pizza pans. Place the oven rack in lowest position. Divide dough in half. Pat each half into an 11-inch circle on a cookie sheet with floured hands. Sprinkle crust with mozzarella cheese, then spoon tomato sauce mixture over the cheese then add your favorite toppings. Bake one pizza at a time for 15–20 minutes or until crust is golden brown.



## Pizza/Flatbread With No Knead Dough

Annie Barnes, Great Lakes Energy

- 3 cups lukewarm water**
- 6-7 cups all purpose flour (I use King Arthur)**
- 1½ tablespoons instant or active dry yeast**
- 1 tablespoon salt**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine all dough ingredients in an ungreased large mixing bowl, at least 6-quart capacity; stir to make a very sticky, rough dough. If you have a stand mixer, beat at medium speed for 30 to 60 seconds, or just stir with a big spoon until everything is combined.

Cover bowl and let rise at room temperature for 2 hours. Refrigerate at least 2 hours or for up to about seven days. If you're pressed for time, skip the room-temperature rise and stick it right into the fridge. The longer you keep it in the fridge, the tangier it will get. When ready, take out as much dough as you need (1/3 of the dough makes a large half sheet pan of pizza), oil your hands and lightly oil baking sheet and spread the dough out. If it springs back, let it rest for 5 minutes, then spread it more. If you're using a pizza stone or a grill, flour your surface and then spread the dough out.

Add your favorite toppings. Don't pile on the toppings too thick or the pizza will be soggy in the middle. Use a pizza peel to transfer your pizza to the oven/grill. Bake for 20-30 minutes, depending on pizza size, until the crust is nicely browned on the bottom. Let sit 5 minutes and then cut into serving pieces.



**Entertaining & Potluck** ... due March 1

**Spice It Up** ... due April 1

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

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

Enter to win a  
**\$50**  
energy bill  
credit!

## Featured Guest Chef

If you love a good hotdog and you're as busy as the folks at Silver Muzzle Cottage, this classic and easy Coney Dog Sauce is perfect for parties, picnics or a plain old Wednesday night.



## Coney Dog Sauce

- 2 pounds ground beef**
- ½ cup chopped onion**
- 1½ cups ketchup**
- ¼ cup granulated sugar**
- ¼ cup white vinegar**
- ¼ cup yellow mustard**
- ½ teaspoon celery seed**
- ¾ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- ¾ teaspoon salt**

Cook ground beef and onion in a skillet on medium-high heat until beef is browned. Drain. Transfer the beef and onion to a slow cooker and stir in remaining ingredients. Cover and simmer on low setting for 2-3 hours. To serve up a classic Coney dog, top a hotdog and bun with the simmered sauce, raw onion and yellow mustard.

Read the full story about Silver Muzzle Cottage on page 14, and find this recipe and others at [micoopkitchen.com](http://micoopkitchen.com).

# Your Board In Action

Meeting at Blanchard on December 27, your board of directors:

- Reviewed and approved proposed changes to the Cooperative's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, authorizing entry into the fiber communications business (HomeWorks Connect) and making needed changes to allow mail balloting for directors.
- Adopted the 2018 HomeWorks Connect operating and capital budgets, as presented.
- Heard an update on communicating the rate increase approved in November.
- Reviewed and approved 118 – Director Internet Access, with minor revisions.
- Learned there were 104 new members in November.
- Acknowledged the November safety report, listing employee and public incidents and employee training.

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

The first 15 minutes of every board meeting are available for members who wish to address the board of directors on any subject. The next meetings are scheduled for 9 a.m. on Feb. 20 and March 26, both at Portland. 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 Aging, Youth Ranch, And Families

Meeting Dec. 20, the Tri-County Electric People Fund made seven grants totaling \$11,987, including:

- \$2,100 to Gratiot County Commission on Aging, to provide mobile ramps for senior homes;
- \$1,500 to Ionia County YMCA, to purchase water safety equipment for the third grade, senior, and special needs water safety programs;
- \$1,000 to Sunny Crest Youth Ranch in Sunfield as a matching grant toward a wood shop dust collection system;
- \$2,500 to an Isabella County family, for housing expenses;
- \$600 to an Isabella County family, to help with housing expenses;
- \$2,500 to a Montcalm County family, to help put in a new well; and
- \$1,787 to another Isabella County family, to assist with furnace repairs.

## How to Apply For A Tri-County Electric People Fund 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 Feb. 26 for the March board meeting, and by April 9 for the April board meeting.



## *In Memory: Mike Fender*

Mike Fender, an employee of HomeWorks Tri-County Propane from 2001 until he retired in 2013, died Dec. 15. Mike enjoyed fishing trips and playing Santa at HomeWorks and other holiday events. We extend our deepest condolences to Mike's family and friends. He will be missed.

# Need Help With College Costs?

Visit [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org) for information on winning your share of \$8,000 in HomeWorks Touchstone Energy scholarships offered to members.

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

Scholarship applications are due March 15. Look for application forms and complete rules online at [homeworks.org](http://homeworks.org), call Jayne Graham at 517-647-1252, or email [jgraham@homeworks.org](mailto:jgraham@homeworks.org).

# Travel To Washington, D.C., This June

Visit [cooperativeyouthtour.com](http://cooperativeyouthtour.com) to learn more about a once-in-a-lifetime travel opportunity for high school sophomores and juniors, sponsored by HomeWorks Tri-County and Michigan's electric cooperatives.

From the battlefields of Gettysburg to the halls of Congress in Washington, D.C. Youth Tour explores the leadership lessons of our nation's history and immerses participants in the cooperative spirit. Apply online at [cooperativeyouthtour.com](http://cooperativeyouthtour.com) by February 28 for the June 2018 trip!

## Pay Your Bill 24/7

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- Wait for Payment Confirmation (Note your confirmation number)

Ave time:  
2 minutes,  
45 sec



*\*SmartHub is your online and mobile gateway to managing your HomeWorks account. The mobile app is available through Google Play or iTunes.*





**Captain**  
13 years old;  
sweet, gentle,  
slow mover

# Silver Muzzle Cottage

*A Rescue & Hospice For Homeless Senior Dogs*

By Emily Haines Lloyd // Photos By Dre Photography

"The truth is, I'm selfish."

Those words don't quite ring true when you're speaking to Kim Skarritt-Nelson, owner of Bowers By The Bay, and founder and program director for Silver Muzzle Cottage Rescue & Hospice in Rapid City. Skarritt-Nelson is the heart and soul of this organization that looks to place or care for senior dogs that have been surrendered or abandoned by their previous owners.



**Parker**  
12 years old;  
recently adopted

"You see," Skarritt-Nelson explains, "I get as much out of the time spent with these amazing animals as they do."

Skarritt-Nelson's "selfishness" began when she left corporate America in 2004 and opened Bowers By The Bay in Elk Rapids in 2011. This cage-free boarding home, grooming center and behavior therapy clinic for dogs offers everyday encounters with a variety of beloved breeds.

However, as Skarritt-Nelson became more involved in the community, she saw a disturbing trend.

"Over and over again, I would see senior or terminal dogs in shelters," said Skarritt-Nelson. "They were either dropped off by their owners who could no longer care for them or, even more heartbreaking, these animals were abandoned and left to fend for themselves."

Silver Muzzle Cottage, to date, has rescued more than 110 senior dogs.

**Gracie**  
10 year old Lab mix;  
sweet and gentle



**Kim**  
Founder, Silver Muzzle Cottage

**“Our rescue takes dogs of all breeds and sizes.”**

—Kim Skarritt-Nelson



**Reese**  
12 years old;  
a gentle giant



**Emily**  
13 years old and blind;  
a permanent resident of  
the Cottage, truly an angel

In a typical shelter older dogs are often overlooked for more energetic puppies, while the terminally ill dogs are often euthanized. Over 2,000 senior dogs are without homes within 500 miles of Traverse City, she learned. Skarritt-Nelson’s heart couldn’t take it.

That’s when she created Silver Muzzle Cottage—a unique rescue mission for senior dogs and hospice care for terminally ill dogs. Unlike overcrowded shelters, Silver Muzzle provides a home-like environment where dogs roam freely during the day and sleep on large pillow beds or sofas at night, often curled up with their new pack family.

“These dogs once were loved by an individual or a family,” said Skarritt-Nelson. “We believe that they should feel that same love at the end of their life as well.”

As big as Skarritt-Nelson’s heart is, even she can’t attend to all the needs of each dog in her care, which is why a dedicated team of volunteers are critical to Silver Muzzle’s success. Volunteers take the shelter’s beloved pack on trips to the beach, walks in the woods, drives into town for ice cream, or even just long, lazy naps on Skarritt-Nelson’s newly-acquired 15 acres in Rapid City. The new location is undergoing constant renovations to provide an amazing quality of life for its canine residents and accommodate even more needy dogs in the future.

Volunteers even gather together when it’s finally time for some of their hospice pets to say goodbye. Surrounded by loving words, lots of animals and heartfelt farewells, Silver Muzzle’s team sends beloved friends off with all the love and companionship each dog deserves.

With heartwarming touches and thoughtful experiences like that, it’s easy to say that the world could do with a little more selfishness like Skarritt-Nelson and the team at Silver Muzzle Cottage. 🐾



**Mongo**  
8 year old  
Dane/Mastiff mix;  
has no idea he  
weighs 130 lbs

**With 12–20 dogs onsite on a daily basis, there’s always plenty to do! If you are interested in helping Silver Muzzle Cottage, volunteers can take dogs out on adventures, lend a hand with custodial work that allows the residents a clean home, or assist with administrative work like writing thank you notes or stuffing envelopes.**

**Visit [silvermuzzlecottage.com](http://silvermuzzlecottage.com) to see how you can help.**



# Clearing The Way To More Reliable Power

Rights-of-way program is crucial in maintenance of electric system

By Charly Markwart and Jayne Graham

On the frigid nights of a Michigan winter, when the thermometer is stuck in the single digits and all you and your family want to do is cozy up in the warmth of your own home, one thing becomes clear: the dependability of your electricity is crucially important. But, did you know the biggest factor that interferes with the reliability of your power is trees and other vegetation touching the power lines? That's why HomeWorks invests so much in our vegetation management program, in order to meet our commitment to provide safe and reliable electric service to our members.

"Trees are the number one cause of outages, so over the last several years we have been more aggressive about proactively clearing the right-of-way area around our lines," says HomeWorks Manager of Electric Operations Chris Reed. "It's paying off in a big way with fewer outages and shorter outage times when there is an issue. Clearing the rights-of-way around our lines is the single most effective thing we can do to maintain and improve the reliability of our electric system."

While maintaining our electric distribution system has always been a priority at HomeWorks, the past five years have seen our board of directors and staff working on a long-range plan to improve reliability by upgrading our entire system and reclaiming rights-of-way along existing lines. During this time, we have invested over \$3 million to clear more than 1,500 miles of line. It's a long-term project, as our system includes a total of nearly 3,000 miles



Clearing a right-of-way (15 feet on each side of power lines) helps make power more reliable for our community.

of overhead lines in 13 counties, mainly in rural, highly vegetated areas.

"It's an ongoing challenge, because the trees continue to grow, but clearing the areas around our lines is the very best way we can spend our members' money," says Reed.

Nick Rusnell, HomeWorks' Vegetation Management Coordinator, agrees.

"It's crucial to keep the lines clear for reliability and for safety, as well," he says. "A clear right-of-way is much safer and easier for our linemen to work on and get the lights back on efficiently. It helps with member costs, too, since usually when a tree causes an outage, there is equipment damage that can end up being very expensive to our members."

The amount of right-of-way required around an overhead electric line is decided by the USDA Rural Utilities Service. For our lines, which are 7,200 volt, just 15 feet of clearance



on each side of the line is required. To achieve that 30 feet of clearance in developed areas, our professionally trained contractors evaluate each tree to determine if it needs to be removed completely or if it can be pruned with directional cutting methods that will allow it to re-grow away from the lines.

“The contracted crews we are working with currently are extremely skilled and reliable,” says Rusnell. “They are the most efficient crews we have had to date.”

That expert work does come with a cost and, unfortunately, it is increasing. The cost to accomplish our tree-clearing goals in 2018 has nearly doubled. Tree-clearing is hard, dangerous work, and the large companies we contract with are seeing the need to pay more to attract the kind of trained and skilled workers it takes to do the job right. Like other co-ops across the state and the nation, we are seeing those wage raises and other increases trickle down into our right-of-way clearing costs. Still, contracting the work remains far less expensive than hiring our own tree crews. And, according to Reed, despite the increase, the benefits of right-of-way clearing far outweigh the costs.

“Clearing our right-of-way is a necessity for the reliability of the power we provide to our members,” he says. “Less trees and branches touching the lines means less outages, and that’s a great thing for the people we serve.”

Currently, our routine rights-of-way clearing activities are completed on a regular cycle of approximately every seven years. Prior to an area being cleared, we notify members in that region via postcard or phone message that tree-clearing will be occurring. One to two years after a circuit is cleared, the area is spot sprayed with herbicide to prevent the trees from growing back, and to avoid heavy brush around the lines.

And, while we continue to work hard to clear and maintain the rights-of-way around our lines, there are steps that you, the member, can take to help, as well. They include:

- Don’t attempt to cut a tree yourself if it is under or near an overhead line. Always call us if you think a tree is too close or touching a line.
- Plant only trees with a mature height of 25 feet or less in areas within 20 feet of overhead power lines. Trees with a mature height of 25–40 feet should be planted closer to 50 feet from the lines. Tall-growing trees, with a mature height of 40-feet-plus, should be planted well away from the lines.
- Before you dig, always call 811 at least three business days before the planned work so utility personnel can come to your property to flag the ground where underground wires and other utilities run. This service is free of charge and it is the only way to ensure your safety when digging.

If you have any questions about our right-of-way clearance program, or if you have an issue with a tree near your power line, please call us at 800-562-8232.

## Working Together To Prevent The Spread Of Oak Wilt

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When it comes to maintaining a strong and effective vegetation management program, one constant challenge that arises is tree disease. Currently, we are responding to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ confirmation of oak wilt in our service area. Oak wilt is a fungus transferred by beetles attracted to the scent of an open wound of an oak tree. The disease is most likely to be transmitted between April 15 and July 15, when the beetles are most active. As such, the DNR recommends avoiding the pruning or cutting of oaks in affected regions during that time.

“As soon as the DNR maps indicated that oak wilt was a problem in our area, we developed a plan to address it in our right-of-way strategy,” says HomeWorks Vegetation Management Coordinator Nick Rusnell. “Going forward, we plan to avoid any trimming of oaks during the DNR’s recommended period.”

Once a tree is infected with oak wilt, there is no treatment to save it, and it will die. It mainly affects red oaks, but white oaks can also be infected. Like other tree fungi, oak wilt is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Tree disease tends to be cyclical in nature, and in recent years other outbreaks in our service area have affected ash and elm trees, among others.

“It’s an ongoing issue, because as soon as you deal with one disease, a different one is likely to come up, but we are continually researching and strategizing in order to stay ahead of it in terms of our response,” says Rusnell.

According to the DNR, oak wilt moves slowly on its own through root systems of neighboring trees, and travels short distances over land when new spores are moved by beetles from an infected tree to a freshly pruned or injured tree. Oak wilt can also be moved long distances when people move infected firewood from one location to another.

If you see an oak tree on your property with major damage that potentially took place during or near the danger period of April 15–July 15, Rusnell recommends you contact a tree professional to treat the damaged tree and implement preventative measures, which typically includes trenching. If you cause a small wound to an oak tree at any time (e.g., a nick caused by a lawnmower), you should paint the wound with latex paint or tree wound dressing as soon as possible to prevent infection.

# I Remember...



## Michigan Memories

It was 1942, and I was four years old when my parents moved about six miles to a different farm home. There had been a storm that blew down our barn and killed some cows, and my mother had found a rattlesnake in the kitchen of our farmhouse. My dad, Amos, purchased a different farm west of Edmore near Six Lakes. He tied all of our cattle together and led them right down M-46 to our new farm. My mother, Nellie, drove a team of horses pulling a steel-wheel wagon that was carrying my sister, two brothers and me. Three more sisters would be added to the family at the new farm. I do not believe that move would be possible today with all of the hundreds of different vehicles that now travel that same highway.

It was so exciting to explore our new home, but the thing that I most remember is that it had electric lights. That was a new experience for us. There was a single lightbulb in the middle of the ceiling with a pull string, and we pulled the string turning the light on and off until the bulb broke.

The yard had a tall pine tree that stood in front of the house, and we would climb it. Since that time the barn and the house have both burned, but the huge, 100-year-old pine tree is still proudly standing and can be seen for a mile. I served in the U.S. Navy and then returned to Six Lakes and now live in view of my old farm home and that beautiful, old pine tree.

*Nile Pool, HomeWorks Tri-County*

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## Catch And Release

Catch and Release has had a strong meaning throughout my life.

As a young girl, we lived down the street from the owners of camp—a beautiful place on Walloon Lake where I got to spend a good part of my childhood summers riding horses and making lifelong friends. Those gentle horses would let us catch, saddle, and ride them in the corral and were happy upon release to return to their stable for food and rest.

A few years later my parents created a lovely retreat on the banks of the South Branch of the Au Sable River. It was an easy rustic landing where we learned to fly fish and relax as the elusive trout were caught and released.

Many loved ones have shared our river house and have caught our love of the north woods of Michigan. Over the years we have released some mighty important friends and family, but they are still in our hearts and thoughts as we head back up to our beloved spot along the river in the evergreen Michigan forest.

*Sally Binard, Great Lakes Energy Cooperative*



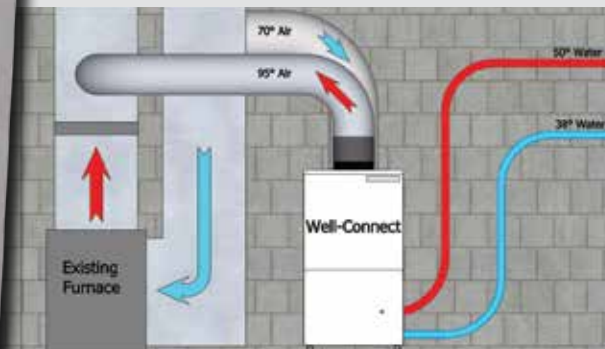
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