

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES

Midwest Energy & Communications

## PETOSKEY *Stands Up* FOR LITTLE BAY BOARDS

Plug Into The Sun With  
Community Solar

Strengthening Schools,  
Strengthening Communities

Battling Alzheimer's,  
One Family's Story



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1. 7 Series unit uses approximately 900 watts while running in speeds 1-2.





Michigan's Electric Cooperatives  
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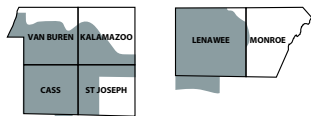
We invite members to share their fondest memories.

### 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
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# Another Heating Season For The Records

**Robert Hance**, President/CEO

Today is a snow-globe kind of day. The snow is gently falling to the ground, creating a beautiful view from my second story window. I was mesmerized by the scene, then jolted back to reality as a huge transport truck drove through the gate and pulled up to our three 30,000 gallon propane bulk tanks. It was a good jolt as the delivery means we can keep our customers well served for another day. That isn't necessarily the reality for many other propane retailers.

The 2017-18 winter heating season will go down as another volatile period in the propane industry. Mother Nature hit hard and fast and sent much of the country into a deep freeze, increasing the demand for propane. Most wholesale propane is trucked through a national transport delivery system, and the increased demand strained that already fragile system. Fortunately, most of our supply is stored right here in Michigan, a great advantage of our approach to service.

You probably remember those days right after Christmas and into the new year, when we were lucky to see temperatures above zero. From November and through the early part of January, we delivered about 500,000 more gallons of propane than we planned. I have great respect for our hard-working operations team, who faced these brutal conditions and worked long days and many Saturdays to make sure our customers stayed cozy and comfortable.

Supply is one important factor that differentiates us from the competition. Capped-rate pricing is another.

We started to see the slow and steady increase in competitor pricing way back in October, long before the temperatures took their seasonal nosedive. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports the average retail price of propane in Michigan was \$1.88 per gallon in early October. That quickly escalated to \$2.19 per gallon by mid-January. It's a predictable pattern among most propane retailers: as temperatures decrease, gas prices increase.

We established our 2017-2018 capped rate of \$1.599 per gallon back in May 2017 and will hold that price until May 31, 2018. That rate is provided without additional fees or charges; it's the way we've done business for nearly 20 years and the reason we are now 6,400 customers strong.

We don't sell just a commodity; we provide peace of mind and stability in the midst of volatility. Heating bills were higher this winter because it was just really cold and people burned through a lot more gas, not because we took advantage of conditions and raised our prices. We provide a reliable and affordable experience, and it's one of the many reasons our customers stick around and trust us as their propane partner. And we appreciate that!

# BE PREPARED FOR AN OUTAGE

Before Mother Nature rears her ugly head with spring and summer storms, prepare for the possibility of an extended power outage. The following are suggested items to keep on hand, but consider your own unique individual and family circumstances as you create your emergency kit.

- **Water:** At least one gallon per person, per day for drinking and sanitation. Don't forget the pets.
- **Food:** Non-perishable, especially items that don't require cooking. A hand-operated can opener is helpful.
- **Lighting:** Flashlights, candles and matches.
- **Telephone:** Cordless phones won't work during an outage, so have a corded phone available. Make sure cell phones are fully charged if outages are possible.
- **Communications:** Have your mobile devices fully charged if outages are imminent so you can stay in the know. A battery-powered radio is also helpful.
- **Medical:** First-aid kit ready with any needed medical supplies, and filled prescriptions.
- **Personal Sanitation:** Moist wipes, hand sanitizer and garbage bags.
- **Tools:** Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities.
- **Battery-powered or wind-up clock.**
- **Extra blankets.**

## Safety Tips:

- Stay away from downed power lines, and call us immediately to report one.
- Don't touch a person or object in contact with a power line; the electric current could flow through you.
- Stay inside your car if it comes in contact with a power line.
- Turn off all appliances during an outage to avoid a circuit overload when power is restored. Leave on one lamp to alert you to restoration.
- Never leave burning candles unattended.
- Keep freezer and refrigerator doors closed. Food will stay frozen for 36 to 48 hours in a fully-loaded freezer, and about 24 hours in a partially-filled freezer.

## Outage Reporting At Your Fingertips

When you're in the dark and trying to report your power outage, there's nothing more frustrating than sitting in a crowded phone queue waiting for the next available rep. We offer easy and convenient ways to report your outage.

**SmartHub:** SmartHub is our secure online and mobile platform and is the quickest and easiest way to report your outage from the comfort and convenience of your computer or mobile device. Access SmartHub via [teammidwest.com](http://teammidwest.com) or download the free SmartHub mobile app.

You can also text your outage. A short registration process is required for new users of these convenient platforms. Learn more by visiting [teammidwest.com/electric](http://teammidwest.com/electric) and then clicking Outage Central.

**Telephone:** Our telephone system is equipped with an automatic outage reporting system; just dial 800-492-5989 and follow the prompts. We must have a current telephone number on your account. Update your account information using SmartHub or by calling our office.

We have limited incoming telephone lines that are adequate for regular business operations, but may become taxed in a major outage situation. If you call and receive a fast busy signal, please use one of the alternate methods, or hang up and try again.

**Please do not use email or social media to report your outage as these platforms are not staffed 24/7.**





Photo courtesy of Michigan State Capitol Commission and Strategic Energy Solutions

# Michigan Capitol Goes Green With Geothermal

The Michigan Capitol is going “green and clean” with a new geothermal heating and cooling system. It is projected to be the largest geothermal system at a state capitol in the country at this time.

Michigan has a long track record of geothermal system installations. The state’s climate and geology make it perfectly suited for the technology. Over the past 10 years, more than 17,000 geothermal systems have been installed in homes, businesses, and institutional facilities. Geothermal systems have become very popular in government and education sectors with many colleges upgrading their heating and cooling systems to geothermal including Lansing Community College, Saginaw Valley University, and Ferris State University. Recent studies indicate that the geothermal market is expected to grow at a rate of 8 percent per year.

“It’s impressive that state legislators recognize the benefits of the

technology and its impact on the environment,” said Art Thayer, director of energy efficiency at the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association. “Michigan’s electric co-ops have long supported geothermal systems, and it’s great to see a project with such high visibility.”

Drilling for the 500-foot-deep geothermal field is part of a larger \$70 million infrastructure upgrade already underway at the 139-year-old Capitol. While it will cost nearly \$4 million upfront, officials estimate the geothermal system will save the state \$300,000 a year on heating and cooling costs and pay for itself in roughly a decade.

With Michigan’s electric utilities investing more in renewable energy production such as solar and wind, it makes geothermal systems even more attractive. The net greenhouse gas emissions of a geothermal heating and cooling system utilizing electricity from wind, solar or a hydro-electric

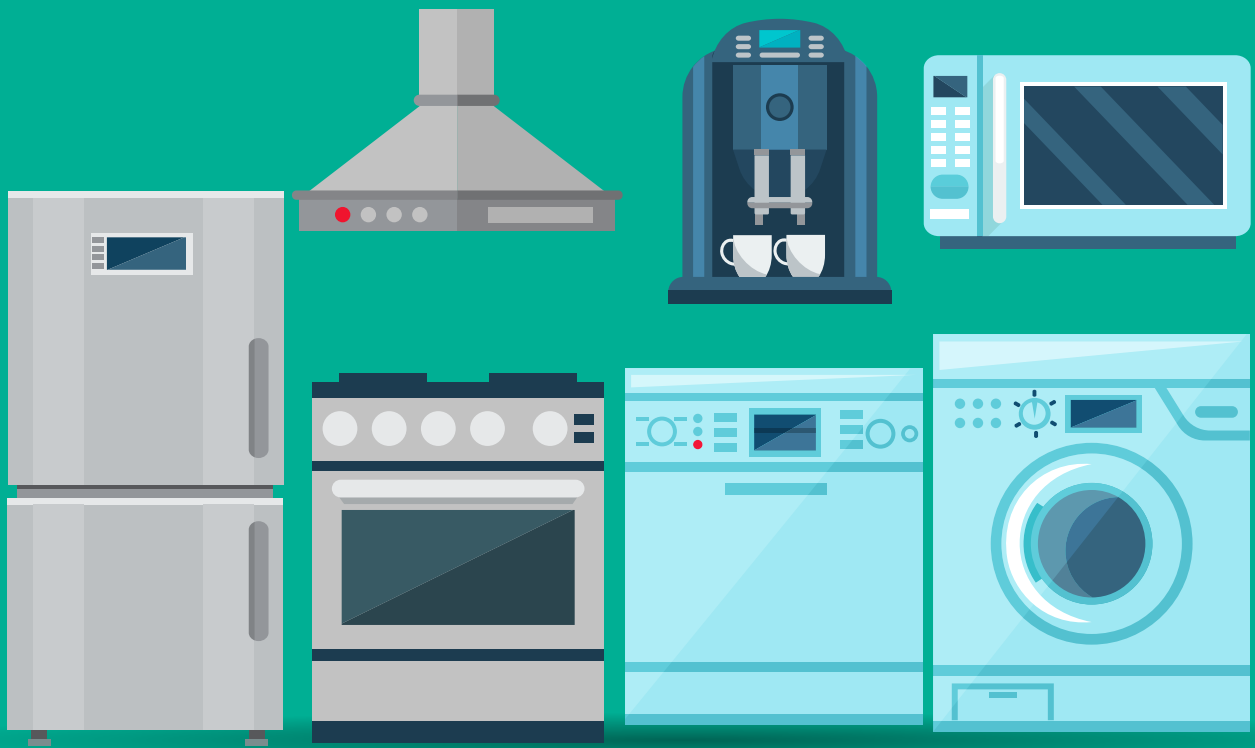
plant is zero as there is no combustion or emissions. Since there is no combustion of fossil fuels, geothermal systems can be four to six times more efficient than fossil fuel furnaces, and more than twice as efficient as a standard outdoor air conditioner.

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

Thinking of installing a geothermal system at your home? You may be eligible for co-op rebates and a

▶▶▶▶▶ **30%** ▶▶▶▶▶  
**federal tax credit.**

To learn more, consult your contractor.



# How To Choose Efficient Appliances

By TJ Kirk, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

It's never a good day when you realize you need to replace a large appliance in your home. However, when the unfortunate time comes, be sure to take a moment and consider what you will purchase—especially for appliances that haven't been replaced in a number of years, as the technology may have changed substantially. Instead of rushing out to buy the same make and model of appliance you had, consider this an opportunity to assess the market and make a smart purchase that will save you money in the long run.

According to the Department of Energy, appliances account for about 13 percent of the average household's energy use. Clothes dryers, refrigerators/freezers, computers, microwaves, dishwashers and washing machines are the appliances that tend to use the most energy in a typical American home. Every appliance you buy has an operating cost, which is the cost of the energy needed to power the appliance. To facilitate more informed comparison shopping, the federal government requires

some appliances to have an Energy Guide label stating the approximate energy consumption and operating cost of the appliance. Appliances with an ENERGY STAR label use 10 to 50 percent less energy than standard appliances and are generally more expensive than their standard counterparts. So, it's important to compare the lifetime costs of each (up-front cost plus operating costs) to ensure that purchasing the efficient appliance is the best choice.

As you begin your search for a new appliance, check with your electric cooperative to see if they offer incentives for energy efficient appliances, and remember to use the ENERGY STAR website as an additional resource.

Dramatic advancements in the efficiency of many electric appliances now can provide the same level of end-user comfort with substantially less electric input. With a little research and forethought up-front, you can save money over the life of your appliance without sacrificing any benefits. Good luck, and happy shopping!

# Recycle Old Appliances, Save Energy And Money!

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 to 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 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!

Working on a remodeling project? Your electric utility's Energy Optimization program provides cash incentives toward qualifying new 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.

## Get \$50 for your old refrigerator or freezer.

Stop wasting energy and money! Recycle old, functioning appliances and earn cash incentives:

- **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 pickup.

## Shopping for new appliances?

Receive cash incentives when you purchase ENERGY STAR® appliances. Visit the EO 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).





# Battling Alzheimer's, One Family's Story

By Amy Pales

Nikki Dodson is well aware of the truths of Alzheimer's Disease. It's the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. There is no cure, and treatments can't slow its progression.

This MEC member also knows, contrary to a commonly-held belief, that it's not a disease limited to the elderly.

Nikki's husband, Ken, was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's nine years ago, just before his 30th birthday. Nikki immediately started looking for resources to help her family navigate this massive life change. Unfortunately, her efforts to receive help for her family were often blocked due to his age. "Many doors were closed to us," she said. In fact, one social worker actually suggested that the couple divorce so they'd be more eligible to receive benefits.

"That was not an option. We are a family, and we are going to fight as a family," Nikki explained. And fight they have.

"When he was first diagnosed, most of the support materials were for seniors. There were many programs designed to teach kids about grandma or grandpa having the disease, not mom or dad."

Instead of sinking into anger and frustration, Nikki shares her experience to help others and make a difference. The Dodson's story is featured in, "This is Alzheimer's," a documentary currently in production and produced by Lauren Miller Rogen. Rogen and her husband, actor, comedian and writer Seth Rogen, started Hilarity for Charity® (HFC), an organization "dedicated to raising awareness, inspiring change, and accelerating progress in Alzheimer's care, research, and support through the engagement of millennials." Along with generating awareness, the organization provides grants for in-home care, offers Google Hangouts support groups for individuals under 40 who are caregivers to those with the disease, and works to help people become advocates of their own.



Nikki and her husband Ken stand by their MEC-sponsored Christmas tree for the Comstock Christmas Riverwalk in Adrian.

While Nikki loves working with this organization, her advocacy hasn't stopped there. She is working on opening an intergenerational day care for adults and children in Lenawee County. The center would offer extended hours and weekend coverage to help serve families that work outside of typical business hours. Nikki understands all too well how difficult it is, often impossible, to work a full-time job while caring for a loved one. She wants this center to provide a source of relief for those in situations like hers, or those who simply need care when other organizations are closed.

Nikki has some advice for others facing this devastating diagnosis. "Don't let this disease defeat you. Put your pride away and ask for support." Anyone who talks to her knows that she lives that advice every day.



# Potato Perfection

Nothing beats the humble potato.

Photos—Robert Bruce Photography

## Baked Mustard Potato Wedges (pictured above)

Sharron Fromius, Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op

- 5–6 cups small new potatoes, cut into wedges
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, more or less according to your preferences

Preheat oven to 400 F. Lightly oil or spray a rimmed baking sheet. Clean and cut potatoes into wedges. In a large bowl, or Ziploc bag (I prefer using bags), mix the olive oil, mustard, butter, garlic powder and oregano. Add potatoes to bowl or bag and mix well. Dump potatoes onto the baking sheet. Spread out in one layer as much as possible. Generously sprinkle with salt, pepper and Parmesan cheese. Bake for about 30 minutes or until they are fork tender and the desired crispiness you like.



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



## Refrigerator Mashed Potatoes

Donna Miller, Cherryland

- 5 pounds potatoes
- 2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese
- 1 (16-ounce) container sour cream
- 2 teaspoons onion salt
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon pepper
- 1 stick butter, softened

Peel and cook the potatoes, drain well, then mash them with a mixer. Add remaining ingredients and blend well. Eat right away or put in the fridge. Potatoes will thicken up more if refrigerated; they tend to be thinner if used immediately. Keep in the fridge for up to one week.





## Heather's Sweet Potatoes

Heather Vedder, HomeWorks Tri-County

- 6 sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup orange juice, plus 1 teaspoon orange juice concentrate
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon nutmeg
- pinch of salt
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup pecans, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons of butter
- half a bag of marshmallows

Preheat oven to 350 F. Boil the cubed sweet potatoes in salted water until soft. Mash the sweet potatoes (some lumps will remain). Add orange juice, orange juice concentrate, brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Spread mixture in a shallow, rectangular pan. Sprinkle with pecans; dot with butter. Bake for 34 minutes. Add marshmallows. Bake for another 10–15 minutes until marshmallows turn slightly brown.



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

**Eggcellent** ... due May 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

Little Bay Boards owner Jason Thelen knows that snacks and drinks are a great way to kickstart the creative process. Thelen uses organic coconut oil in his all-natural board wax, so he confidently uses the same oil, a trusty cast iron pan, and a heat gun to whip up some potato chips for his friends and neighbors. He's modified the recipe for your kitchen.



## Beach-Style Potato Chips

- 4 Russet potatoes
- coconut oil (Jason warns you, coconut oil tastes like coconut. He calls these chips Hawaiian flavored.)
- sea salt
- garlic (optional)

Wash potatoes. Slice potatoes evenly about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick. This is important so that they cook evenly. Soak the slices overnight in fresh water. Using a cast iron skillet, melt about a half inch of coconut oil in the pan. Bring the pan to a temperature between 325–350 F. Higher temperatures will cause the pan to smoke. Add a little garlic (minced is fine) into the oil as it's heating up. Take potatoes and lay them out on a paper towel to dry them. Dab dry. Place sliced potatoes evenly in the hot oil. Cook to your preference. (Jason likes his a bit softer, while his wife likes them crunchy.) Remove from oil. Sprinkle with sea salt. Cool and serve.

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



# Strengthening Schools And Communities

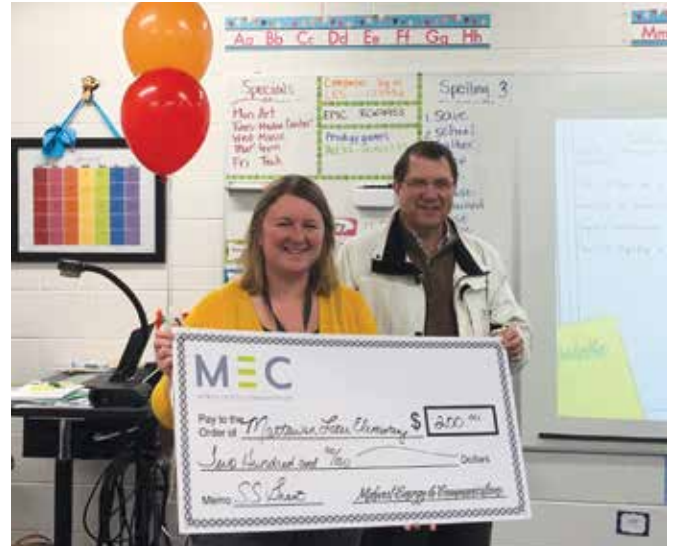
Our MEC prize patrol surprised 22 educators in January with grant awards from our 2018 Strengthening Schools grant program.

Beth Baker, a special needs teacher with the Van Buren ISD, was one of the teachers we surprised with funding for students to attend a performance of The Lion King. "The words 'thank you' do not seem large enough to express our gratitude," she said. "I was shaking the whole time you were talking, on the verge of tears, and could not wrap my head around the generosity of Midwest Energy & Communications. Our students just don't get these opportunities, and I wish you could have seen their faces when the magnitude of your generosity finally sunk in."

Grants are funded with partnership dollars from Touchstone Energy Cooperative. Co-op members Carla Chase, Dr. Steve Cramer and Samantha Evans, evaluated and scored all applications, and determined final awards without knowledge of the school, district or community.

Awards were presented to the following schools and projects:

- Colon Elementary School, \$2,500 for level-reading books
- Lawton Elementary School, \$1,000 for iPads
- Marcellus Elementary School, \$700 for Books on Buses program
- Marcellus Middle/High School, \$650 for equipment for digital and multimedia design class
- Mattawan Later Elementary, \$200 for field trip
- Mattawan Middle School, \$1,550 for expansion of beekeeping club
- Morenci Elementary and Middle Schools, \$2,000 each for STREAM outdoor learning space
- Portage Central High School, \$1,000 for community teen-read event



Jennifer Wolff of Mattawan Later Elementary receives the opportunity to take her third graders on a field trip to help expand their learning outside of the classroom. The check was presented by MEC member Dr. Steve Cramer.

- Prairie Elementary School, \$2,500 for iPads and accessories
- Ross Beatty Junior/Senior High School, \$1,650 for robotics team; \$1,500 for art class supplies
- Ruth Hoppin Elementary, \$1,050 for decompression learning space and classroom
- Sam Adams Elementary, \$700 for books; \$1,150 for weekend meal backpack program
- South Walnut Elementary, \$2,500 for sensory tool library
- Springbrook Middle School, \$500 for special needs classroom library
- Stubnitz Environmental Education Program, \$2,500 for native pollinator landscape and garden
- Three Rivers High School, \$1,000 for courtyard school garden
- Van Buren County Intermediate School District, \$1,000 for field trip
- Volinia Outcomes School, \$1,350 for maple syrup sugar shack/classroom; \$1,000 for curriculum and supplies for middle school alternative education program

"Many organizations give lip service to being involved and giving back to their community, but I had the privilege of witnessing first-hand how our own MEC takes that responsibility seriously by investing in our local schools," said Cramer. "I witnessed the surprise, joy and even tears of teachers, students and administrators as we provided grants for so many worthy projects. These funds truly are making a difference in the quality of education and life for our young people."

Information and applications for the 2018–19 funding cycles will be available at [teammidwest.com](http://teammidwest.com) beginning in April.



Beth Baker receives the surprise of a lifetime from MEC.



In a fitting style, the office building at the headquarters of Banks Hardwoods, Inc. feels like a comfortable cabin in the woods.

## More Than Customers:

# Partners In Investing In A Better Rural Community

Banks Hardwoods, Inc. has been an electric member of Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC) for many years, and recently expanded that relationship by adding our propane service to fuel their forklifts, supplement boilers for their kilns and heat the facility.

Headquartered in White Pigeon, Banks has locations in Newberry, Mich., and Menomonie, Wis. The company employs roughly 200 people and serves clients around the globe. It would be easy for a company that large to become impersonal and focus solely on profit, but that's not Banks.

The leadership team at Banks believes in building personal relationships with both customers and employees and understands that what happens outside of work has a great impact on what happens at work. The average tenure of an employee is at least 12 years, and leaders pride themselves on building a strong family culture. Fulfilled employees mean better service for customers, and it's the foundation of the "quality everything" motto.

The commitment to quality doesn't end there though. The company boasts an expansive GoGreen program that promotes smart environmental practices to reduce its impact on energy and natural resources. Several years ago they worked on an Energy Optimization project that dramatically reduced the amount of electricity consumed through light fixtures. Other efforts include using green fuels, conserving water in the boilers, practicing smart climate control, recycling, and reducing chemical use.

The company is also a member the American Chestnut Foundation and has planted about 18,500 hybrid chestnut trees on the White Pigeon property to replenish the



Welcome to Banks Hardwoods.

wood consumed and help restore this tree that has been obliterated by blight.

## MEC and Banks Hardwoods

For a company that can use 15,000 gallons of propane in a month, switching providers could have been a daunting task. However, we dedicated ourselves to making sure this was done correctly and even identified issues with the previous set up. Our operations managers, Andy Badner and Billy Meggs, worked with Banks to fix the existing issues and create solutions for more efficient and convenient propane use. This included building a dedicated LP filling station so the forklift drivers can easily fill up whenever needed rather than getting individual tanks refilled.

"Working with MEC has been great," said Mike Middleton, project director. "Our experience with them has been 'quality everything' just like our motto. They are very thorough and make sure everything gets done by the book."

At MEC we believe in being more than suppliers; we believe in being a partner to help create a successful business environment. We're proud to work with a company that shares our commitment to strengthening the community.



# PETOSKEY *Stands Up* FOR LITTLE BAY BOARDS

By Emily Haines Lloyd // Photos by Northern Territory Imaging and Design



**I**f it takes a village to raise a child, then it most certainly takes one to raise a brainchild.

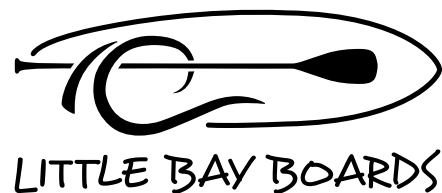
Little Bay Boards, the brainchild of Jason Thelen, is the well-loved Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP) darling of Petoskey. Indeed, it was the community of Petoskey that inspired Thelen to turn a dream into a successful business. Today, Thelen has carved out more than just a great company, he has created relationships with many other local business owners and friends. And that, Thelen notes, is one of his greatest successes.

Thelen, a Petoskey resident and great-great-great-grandson to Chief Petoskey—a legendary figure amongst the native Odawas and the namesake of both the town and Michigan's state stone—hadn't intended to build a thriving artisan SUP business. He, like most Michiganders, was looking for a way for his family to enjoy the nearby water and lakes.

"That's the thing about Michigan," said Thelen. "You want to get out on the water as soon as possible and stay out as long as you can."

So, Thelen, who at that time worked as a full-time carpenter, tried his hand at building his own stand-up paddleboard. After scouring the internet for how-to's and professional advice, from the likes of Paul Jensen, godfather of the hollow wood paddleboard and Jason's mentor, he opted to start with a smaller board for his then 9-year-old daughter.





Visit [littlebayboards.com](http://littlebayboards.com) to learn more  
or call 231-838-8451.

Visit [countrylines.com](http://countrylines.com) to watch a video  
about how Little Bay Boards are made.

"From there, things went in a way I still don't quite understand," said Thelen.

It began with strangers at the beach coming up to their vehicle, admiring the board and asking where they got it. Then people asked how he'd done it himself. Finally, Thelen's wife asked if he thought he could build another one. So, he did. Then he sold it. Then, he built another board and sold that one, too.

As with many small businesses, there was a time when Thelen had to make a decision to stay with his full-time carpentry position or take a leap into this SUP venture.

With the support of his family, Thelen jumped. Or, rather, he paddled.

With each leap of faith, another answer, another supporter, another order would arrive.

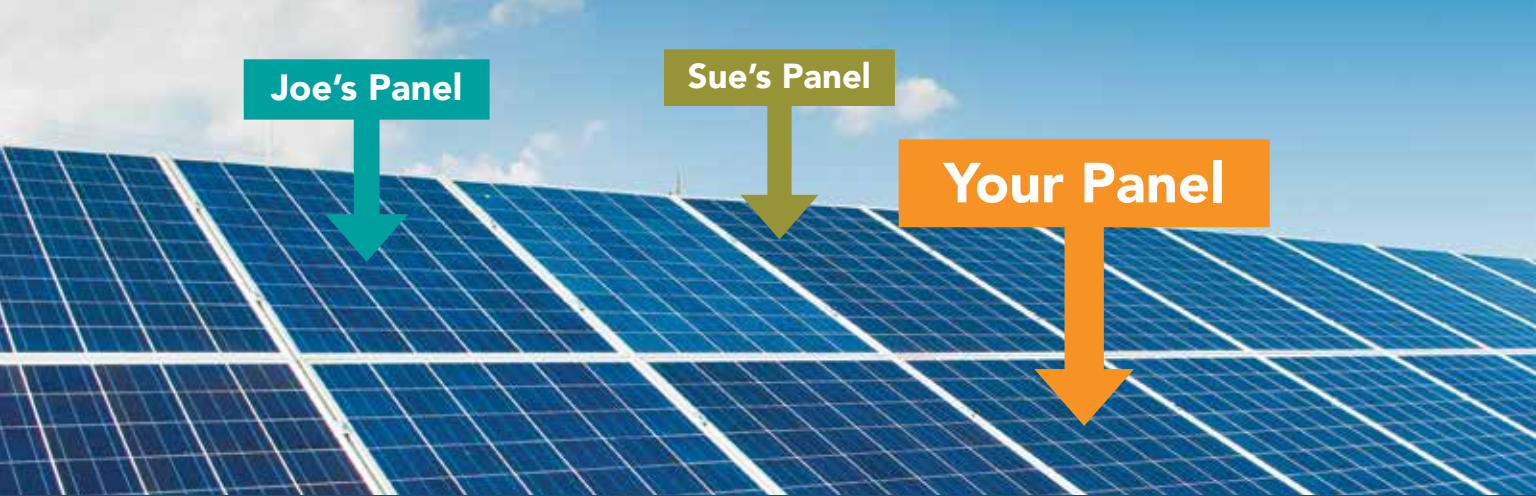
Community members, like the owner of a local boutique, Lake Affect, offered space to showcase a board. Local friends and neighbors set aside wood cut-offs and leftovers that they thought Thelen might be interested in using. A friend and owner of Northern Territory Imaging and Design offered his services to help Thelen reach and connect with more people. T-shirts and the website were all created by folks from the neighborhood. Eventually, his now-business partner took over the day-to-day details to give Thelen more time to create. His business neighbor from Mary Bea Art was a daily inspiration on his creative process. Even the Little Bay Board's landlord was a source of support as he lent his own machinery and tools to help Thelen develop his craft.

Of the nearly 6,000 residents in Petoskey, Thelen notes that some days it feels like nearly everyone in the community has, in one way or another, had a big impact on Little Bay Boards.

"Things have grown beyond my dreams. We have boards that we've shipped to Switzerland and Australia," said Thelen. "But in the end, I'm building these boards and this business with the local people I see every day at the grocery store. I feel like the [entire Petoskey] community is giving our company...this big, loving hug that helps us grow."



"I feel like the [entire Petoskey] community is giving our company...this big, loving hug that helps us grow."  
— Jason Thelen



# Plug Into The Sun With Community Solar

Community solar is a great way to enjoy the benefits of renewable solar energy without the investment and ongoing maintenance. We've teamed up with SpartanSolar to build a community solar array on our Cassopolis property at the intersection of M60 and Decatur Road. Construction is slated to begin late this spring, and we expect the array to go live this fall.

Co-op members are eligible to buy subscriptions to one or more panels on the array. Your subscription entitles you to a share of the energy produced, which is credited on your bill.

Ready to learn more? Here are a few frequently asked questions about community solar. For more information, visit [spartansolar.com](http://spartansolar.com).

## The FAQ On Community Solar

### What are the advantages of community solar?

Community solar provides access to clean solar power without the cost of installation and maintenance.

### Where will the community array be located, and how does the power actually get to my home?

The community array will be located on our property at our Cassopolis headquarters. Your contract entitles you to credit for the power generated, based on the number of panel subscriptions you have. The clean energy produced by the solar array will be pushed onto the electric grid, not routed to any specific home. No extra meter is required.

### Am I actually buying a solar panel?

No, you are purchasing a subscription to a portion of the entire solar array, and you will receive credit for the solar power generated from that subscription for 15 years.

### What are the methods of subscription payment?

\$600/panel up-front or \$10/month/panel for five years.

### How am I reimbursed for the solar power generated by my panel subscription?

Your MEC bill will include a credit of \$0.10/kWh for the power generated in the month prior to the billing. The credit is based on the number of panel subscriptions you have. No extra paperwork is needed.

### When will credits begin?

Credits will begin to accrue after the array goes live, which is anticipated for fall of 2018.

### Can I cancel my panel subscription(s) if I move or change my mind?

Yes, and you will receive a prorated refund.

### How do I sign-up?

We are now pre-selling subscriptions for our array, which is slated to go live this fall. Sign up now at [spartansolar.com](http://spartansolar.com) and our Customer Solutions Team will email your contract and other information within a few days. You will not be charged until the array goes live.



## Statement Of Non-Discrimination

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

## Midwest Energy & Communications

### NOTICE OF OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

On December 21, 2017, Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC) filed an Application for Approval of Renewable Energy Plan with the Michigan Public Service Commission (Commission) pursuant to the "Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy Act" (2008 PA 295, MCL 460.1001, et seq.) and MPSC Order Case No. U-15800 dated December 4, 2008.

Any interested person may review the filed Renewable Energy Plan on the MPSC website under Case No. U-16594 at: [www.michigan.gov/mpscdockets](http://www.michigan.gov/mpscdockets) and at the offices of MEC, 1610 E Maumee St, Adrian, MI 49221, or at the office of the Commission's Executive Secretary, 7109 West Saginaw Hwy., Lansing, Michigan 48917, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Written and electronic comments may be filed with the Commission and must be received no later than 5 p.m. on May 8, 2018. Written comments should be sent to the: Executive Secretary, Michigan Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, Michigan 48909, with a copy mailed to: MEC, 1610 E Maumee St, Adrian, MI 49221. Electronic comments may be emailed to: [mpscdockets@michigan.gov](mailto:mpscdockets@michigan.gov). All comments should reference Case No. U-16594. Comments received on this matter becomes public information, posted on the Commission's website, and subject to disclosure. Comments must not include information you wish to remain private.

Any proposed Renewable Energy Plan Charges may not exceed \$3 per meter per month for residential customers, \$16.58 per meter per month for commercial secondary customers or \$187.50 per meter per month for commercial primary or industrial customers.

## Fuel Mix Report

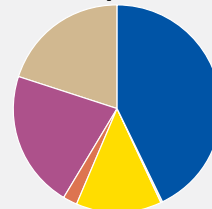
The fuel mix characteristics of Midwest Energy & Communications as required by Public Act 141 of 2000 for the 12-month period ending 12/31/17.

### Comparison Of Fuel Sources Used

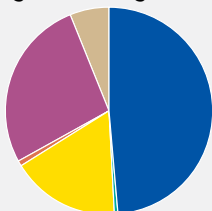
Regional average fuel mix used		
Your co-op's fuel mix		
Fuel Source		
Coal	42.8%	48.8%
Oil	0.3%	0.4%
Gas	13.5%	17.0%
Hydroelectric	2.2%	0.9%
Nuclear	21.3%	26.8%
Renewable Fuels	19.9%	6.1%
Biofuel	0.7%	0.9%
Biomass	0.4%	0.5%
Solar	0.3%	0.1%
Solid Waste Incineration	0.1%	0.1%
Wind	18.1%	4.1%
Wood	0.3%	0.4%

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.

### 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	3.0	3.7
Carbon Dioxide	1,674	1,999
Oxides of Nitrogen	1.2	1.4
High-level Nuclear Waste	0.0066	0.0083

\*Regional average information was obtained from MPSC website and is for the 12-month period ending 12/31/17. Midwest Energy & Communications purchases 100% of its electricity from Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative, Inc., which provided this fuel mix and environmental data.



Enter to win a

**\$50**

energy bill  
credit!



## Jack's Journal: Country Music Today

By Jack O'Malley

Several weeks ago I received an email from a listener to my radio show complaining that Country Music "isn't country anymore." It's a sentiment I've heard again and again. That's why, this month, I thought I would publish my remarks to that listener in the hopes it might help someone else. Here is my response:

## Where In *Michigan* Is This?

Identify the correct location of the photo above by March 20 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 2018 issue is Jon Jahnke, a Thumb Electric Cooperative member, who correctly identified the photo as the Charlevoix South Pier Light Station.

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



January photo courtesy of Thomas Mann

I've been in country music a long time now. The loyalty to the genre is amazing. Everyone has his or her likes and dislikes. I've heard your complaint many times over the years, and I've even discussed it with artists. Here is the long and the short of it: what you like is what you like. You are not wrong.

This is the issue. Country music has always evolved—from the Hillbilly Days to the 1960s Nashville sound to the outlaws of the '70s and so on. Vince Gill had an interesting take on it when he was asked "his opinion" of current music. He said, "It isn't my cup of tea...but I know what I was playing wasn't necessarily the cup of tea of the guys who came before me."

Eddie Rabbitt once told me that when he was coming along, he knew that he was pushing the older artists off the radio. That's just the way it works. He said, "Now it's my turn to be pushed out the back door...[but] I am just gonna try and hang on to that doorknob as long as I can."

The point I'm trying to make is that country music has always evolved. From fiddles and guitars to adding drums and then electronics, the music has changed. From Ferlin Husky to Jim Reeves and Ray Price, artists have learned from the music of their era—just like young artists are doing today. Garth Brooks was disliked by traditionalists in the 1990s, 25 years ago, some might argue. Today, he is as country as anyone else.

So, yes, today's instrumentation might not be considered classic country, but it reflects the times. However, the one constant in country music is the lyrics. This is where I believe country music really lives. It's not found in a fiddle, but in the songs themselves. They still talk about real life! We aren't in coal mines and factories like the '60s. We aren't in the '70s or '80s anymore either. Today's world is cell phones and instant communication. Artists today are talking about life today, not a life of bygone years.

My friend, time marches on. WTCM FM is and always has been your Top 40 country music station from the '70s to today. We played the hits then and we play them today—with a large "tip of the hat" to our past.

Thanks for loving country music!

Readers, this will be my last *Michigan Country Lines* article as I am stepping into a new adventure...wish me luck!

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A woman with blonde hair tied in a bun is sitting on a dark-colored cushioned windowsill. She is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark leggings. She is holding a white mug in her right hand and a book in her left hand, looking down at the book. The window behind her is large and multi-paned, letting in bright, warm sunlight that creates a soft glow around her. The view outside the window shows green foliage.

TOGETHER  
OUR FUTURE IS **BRIGHT**



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Enjoy the benefits of solar energy without the cost of installation and maintenance. Panel subscriptions are available through our SpartanSolar community program for as little as \$10 per month.

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