MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative



HomeWorks
Connect Update

Capital Credits
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Honoring Office Professionals



SOMEONE SWITCHED TO GEOTHERMAL

Smart homeowners around the world have scrapped their old furnaces and air conditioners and replaced them with a WaterFurnace geothermal comfort system. That's because WaterFurnace geothermal systems use the clean, renewable energy in your own backyard to provide savings of up to 70% on heating, cooling and hot water. You won't need that old inefficient furnace or that unsightly outdoor air conditioner because a WaterFurnace system provides complete comfort for your home with a single unit. And with the renewed 30% federal tax credit* available for a limited time, now is a great time to make the switch to geothermal. Contact your local WaterFurnace dealer today to learn more.

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Kalkaska

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Comfort 1/Aire Serv of Southern Michigan (517) 764-1500 comfort1.net/geothermal

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Walton Htg & Clg (989) 772-4822 waltonheating.com

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Kiessel Geothermal Htg & Clg (231) 747-7509 kiesselsgeo.com

Portland

ESI Htg & Clg (517) 647-6906 esiheating.com

Sunfield

Mark Woodman Plmb & Htg (517) 886-1138 mwphonline.com

Traverse City

D & W Mechanical (231) 941-1215 dwgeothermal.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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Country Lines, Your Communications Partner

For more than 35 years, our co-op members have received Michigan Country Lines because it is the most effective and economical way to share information with our members. An empowering communication tool, Country Lines keeps members up-to-date about everything going on within their electric co-op. Issues contain news about our services, director elections, member meetings and management decisions that members need to know about as owners of the co-op. The magazine also includes legal notices that would otherwise have to be placed in local media at a substantial cost. And, sending Michigan Country Lines to you helps the co-op fulfill one of its important principles—to educate and communicate openly with its members. The board of directors authorizes the co-op to subscribe to Michigan Country Lines on behalf of each member at an average cost

of \$3.82 per year, paid as part of members' electric bill. The current magazine cost is 47 cents per copy. Michigan Country Lines is published for us, at cost, by the Michigan Electric

Cooperative Association in Lansing. As always, we welcome and value your comments.

COUNTRY LINE





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_000_3305

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

Email: tricoenergy@homeworks.org

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Join us on Facebook. facebook.com/homeworks.org



Co-op Membership Highlighted In May

Mark Kappler, General Manager

In May, several cooperative principles are highlighted at HomeWorks Tri-County Electric.

- Your board of directors authorized a \$2.1 million capital credit refund, and nearly every active member will receive a bill credit or check with your share of this refund. Read more about capital credits, and why they're important to cooperative owners, on page 5. (Co-op principle #3—Members' Economic Participation)
- Two districts are holding board seat elections. If you are a member in District 3 (most of Clinton County) or District 6 (Clare and Isabella counties), your April issue of Michigan Country Lines had a little something extra—a ballot and reply envelope. (Co-op principle #2—Democratic Member Control). If you choose not to use the mail ballot, you will have an opportunity to vote at your district meeting.

By the way, this new voting procedure will apply to Districts 1, 5 and 7 in 2019, and to Districts 2 and 4 in 2020. With the change, we've also moved up the nominating deadlines by a month, so watch your January issue of *Country Lines*, or join us on Facebook, where information will be posted.

• Starting May 14, HomeWorks staff and I will bring a sloppy joe supper to each of our seven districts, and we invite you to join us when we're in your neighborhood. You should have received an invitation in the mail with all the details. We will try to keep the meeting brief, but interesting and informative, so that you can stay up-to-date on HomeWorks. (Co-op principle #5—Education and Information)

We plan to bring our new Chevy Bolt to each meeting so you can get a closer look at an electric vehicle. We'll also discuss our new fiber project—construction should be getting underway in Phase 1 at about the same time as the district meetings. We'll have our usual operations update and door prizes, plus we'll have LEDs and other energy savers, such as LED nightlights and power strips, for sale with instant rebates!

We look forward to seeing you at your district membership meeting if your schedule permits.

Notice Of Member Access To Rules And Rates

As a member-customer (member) of HomeWorks Tri-County Electric Cooperative (Cooperative), the following information is available to you from the Cooperative, upon request:

- 1. Complete rate schedules;
- 2. Clear and concise explanation of all rates that the member may be eligible to receive; and
- 3. Assistance from the Cooperative in determining the most appropriate rate for a member when the member is eligible to receive service under more than one rate.

For more information, visit homeworks.org or call 800-562-8232.

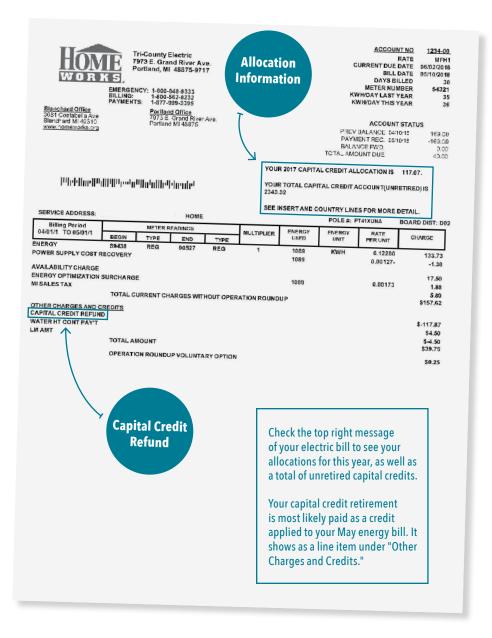
Watch May Bill For Your **Capital Credits**

HomeWorks Tri-County Electric member-owners will see the benefit of cooperative principle #3— Member Economic Participation on their May energy bills.

The board of directors authorized an allocation and retirement of capital credits after the audit was approved in March.

First, because we operate on a nonprofit basis, margins will be allocated back to members based on their energy purchases during 2017. This includes the co-op's margins of \$402,343, and \$1,964,108, representing HomeWorks Tri-County's share of Wolverine Power Cooperative's 2017 margins.

These allocations are not cash—they are an accounting of your share of ownership in the Cooperative. Check the top right message area of your electric bill to see your allocations for this year as well as a total of unretired capital credits.



Retiring Capital Credits

Retiring capital credits is a way of ensuring each generation of members provides its own equity in the Cooperative.

The board's philosophy is to pay most of a retirement from the oldest capital credits on account, and a smaller percentage from the most recent year.

We believe this achieves the purpose of recycling the Cooperative's capital, while also giving our newest members a chance to see one of the most fundamental cooperative principles in action.

This year's general retirement totals \$2,827,000, of which \$680,000 retires capital credits allocated by Tri-County Electric in 1991, 1992, and 2017. We are also retiring \$2,147,000 in power supply capital credits from 1991 through 2001, and 2017.

For most members, your retirement will be paid as a credit applied to your May energy bill. It will show as

a line item under "Other Charges and Credits."

The board also set aside funds for retiring capital credits to members' estates, on a first-come, firstserved basis. Estate retirements will include both Tri-County Electric and Wolverine Power capital credits. For more information about estate retirements, call Member Services at 1-800-562-8232.



To Easily Manage Your Energy **Efficiency Project Contractor**

By Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen

Once you've hired a contractor for your energy efficiency renovation, you need to manage your contractor to ensure quality. Follow the steps below and you'll be on your way to celebrating a successful project in no time.

Establish a single point of contact.

First, you should decide who will be the main contact with your contractor. Clear communication is critical because a renovation that includes energy efficiency improvements comes with extra challenges. A single point of contact will help avoid confusion, conflicts and cost overruns.

Have a discussion about quality.

Before the work starts, have a discussion with your contractor about quality. You want the contractor to know you'll be carefully overseeing the work and that there may be others involved in this oversight, such as building inspectors, your electric cooperative or an independent energy auditor. You can discuss the standards of a professional, high-quality job. And you can agree on the points at which the contractor will pause so you or someone you designate can review the work.

Put change orders in writing.

It will be tempting to add "just one more thing" along the way, and the contractor may agree a change is simple and possible within the timeframes. Contractors and customers often miscommunicate about change orders and end up disagreeing about additional costs when the project is completed. Before you make any changes, be sure to get a written cost quote. If it's significant, you can then weigh the cost against the benefit of the change.



End with an inspection.

Almost all efficiency measures require some kind of final inspection. For example, infrared thermometers can show voids in blown insulation, and fiberglass batts can be visually inspected to ensure there are no air gaps and the batts are not compressed.

HVAC measures require special attention. ENERGY STAR® has a program to ensure quality HVAC installation. Forced air systems typically have poorly balanced supply and return air delivery that can often be improved. Air flow can be measured at each register, and a duct blaster test can identify and quantify duct leakage.

When you review the work, it may be helpful to take photos or to bring in an energy auditor. Be sure to have these inspections outlined in the contract and discussed beforehand, so the contractor is comfortable.

When the renovation is complete, it may be tempting to sign the check, shake hands and breathe a sigh of relief that it's all over. Depending on the size and complexity of the project, it may be worth the extra step of having a final audit by a licensed energy auditor.

Once you confirm that the work is 100 percent complete, you can write a check for the final payment, then sit back and enjoy your revitalized, more energy-efficient home!









Know what's **below**. **Call** before you dig.

Michigan's free & easy utility notification system.

For your safety and for the protection of underground utility lines, always follow these steps before starting any digging project:

1.
Contact MISS DIG at 811 or missdig.org.

2. Wait three business days for utility owners to mark their lines.

3. Respect the marks.

4. Dig with care.

Visit missdig.org for more information.

Shopping for New Appliances? Look for the ENERGY STAR!

Take a look around your home—are outdated appliances wasting energy and costing you money? If so, it's time to upgrade to efficient ENERGY STAR® models!

ENERGY STAR products provide the same features you're already used to, but can use **up to 75 percent less energy** than standard models. Your purchases will be even more affordable with cash incentives from the Energy Optimization program!

What is ENERGY STAR?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) introduced ENERGY STAR in 1992 to help consumers identify energy-efficient products. The ENERGY STAR label can now be found on major appliances, lighting, electronics, and even new homes and commercial buildings. To earn the ENERGY STAR label, a third-party certification process verifies:

- Significant energy savings
- Features and performance consumers demand, plus greater efficiency
- Comprehensive product testing

Did you know? Since the early 1990s, ENERGY STAR has helped consumers save \$362 billion in utility costs!

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

Save now with cash back from the Energy Optimization program!		
Product	Efficiency comparison (vs. a new standard model)*	Energy Optimization program incentive**
Clothes washer	Uses 35% less water and 20% less energy	\$125
Clothes dryer	Uses 20% less energy	\$125
Computer	Uses 60% less energy	\$50
Dehumidifier	Uses 15% less energy	\$75
Dishwasher	Uses 5% less energy and 15% less water	\$75
Chest Freezer	Uses at least 10% less energy	\$75
Refrigerator	Uses 20% less energy	\$200
Television	Uses at least 25% less energy	\$50-100
Room air conditioner	Use 15% less energy	\$50

*All data according to energystar.gov. **Incentive amounts are subject to change; other restrictions may apply.



SAVE BIG WITH ENERGY STAR®!

It's time to upgrade outdated, energy-wasting appliances with ENERGY STAR models. You'll use up to 75% less energy AND save upfront with cash incentives from the Energy Optimization program:

REFRIGERATOR: \$200

CLOTHES WASHER: \$125

DEHUMIDIFIER: \$75

DISHWASHER: \$75

Visit our website for a full list of incentives!

michigan-energy.org • 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.



Snap Shot

Show Us Your Garden

- 1. Linsey Dykhouse of Lake Odessa says, "Every year, my kids (Reid, left, and Charlie Dykhouse) pick from our garden and create their own farm market on our front porch."
- 2. Sue Mills of DeWitt reports, "We love bees and sunflowers."
- 3. Tammy Pytlowany of Lake Odessa shared a home garden photo. This perennial and annual bed of flowers is a summer passion for Tammy and has been the backdrop for family photos, senior photos, square dances and a wedding.
- 4. Suzanne Moomey of Barryton took this photo in Alaska in 2016.
- 5. Karen Retter of Jerome, who receives HomeWorks Tri-County Electric service at Barryton, sent in a blooming Snap Shot. "Trilliums are one of my favorite mighty little flowers, able to push their way up through the winter dullness to welcome spring and brighten up our yard," she writes.











Upcoming Snap Shot Contest Topics And Deadlines

"Fan Spirit," Deadline: May 15 (July-August issue) "Fall Colors," Deadline: July 16 (September issue) "Pumpkin Faces," Deadline: Aug. 15 (October issue)

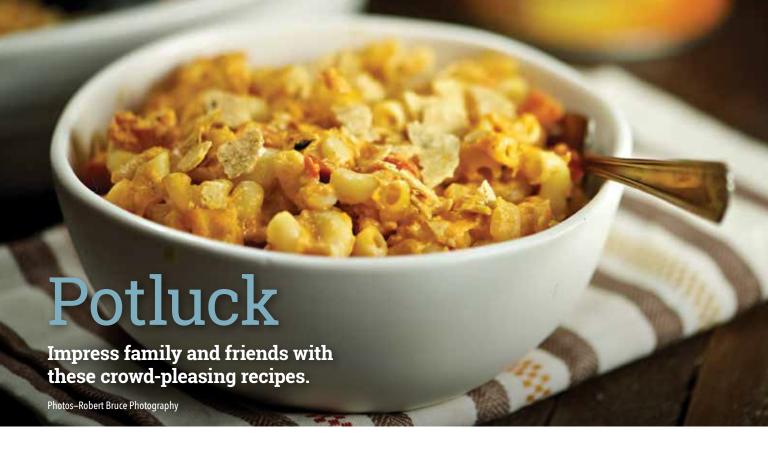
\$100 energy bill credit!

Enter to win a

Go to 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 "Fan Spirit" Photos!

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!



Southwest Mac And Cheese (pictured above)

Jennifer Quail, Midwest Energy & Communications

- 1 pound uncooked macaroni or shell pasta
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 15-ounce can packed pumpkin (not pie filling)
- 1 16-ounce package Mexican-style four cheese blend, shredded
- 4 ounces cream cheese, cut into small pieces (for a lighter option, use 4 ounces Neufchatel cheese instead)

1/4 to 1/2 cup milk, almond milk, evaporated (not condensed) milk or heavy cream

- 1 10-ounce can diced tomatoes and green chilies, drained ¼ to 1 teaspoon dried chipotle chili powder, to taste
- · salt, to taste

Preheat oven to 350 F. Prepare pasta according to the package directions, drain and return to pot. Cover.

In a heavy skillet, melt the butter and sauté the diced onion until translucent but not browned. Add the pumpkin to the skillet with the onions and stir over medium heat until warmed through. Mix in the shredded cheese and cream cheese into the pumpkin mixture and stir until melted and smooth. Use milk product to thin as needed until consistency is smooth but not runny. Do not boil. Stir in the can of drained tomatoes and green chiles into the cheese sauce. Season with chipotle powder and salt to taste.

Add the warm sauce to the reserved pasta and stir until combined. Serve immediately, or transfer to a slow cooker set on warm. If you prefer baked mac and cheese, transfer pasta to a greased 3-quart casserole dish. Top with ½ cup shredded cheese and crumbled tortilla chips. Bake for 20 minutes or until top is browned.

Experiment with spices! For a brighter gold color and more bite to the flavor, add ¼-½ teaspoon mustard powder. For a traditional chili con carne flavor, add ¼ teaspoon ground cumin. You can also vary the heat by using different strength tomatoes and chilies, or you can use salsa instead of tomatoes, at your desired heat level.



Watch a video of this recipe at https://goo.gl/qUZrVr



Cookies And Cakes: due July 1

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

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



Buffalo Chicken Meatballs

Heather Poland, Cherryland

11/2 pound ground chicken

- ½ cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 small carrot, finely grated
- 1 celery stalk, minced
- 2 green onions, minced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ teaspoon paprika

- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/3 cup buffalo sauce (I used Franks, or use your favorite buffalo sauce)
- 1/3 cup blue cheese or mozzarella
- 3 teaspoons blue cheese or ranch dressing, optional for garnish

Preheat oven to 400 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside. In a large mixing bowl, combine the ground chicken, panko and egg. Let set for 5 minutes, so panko is soaked by the egg. Add the carrot, celery, green onion, garlic, paprika, salt and pepper. Using your hands mix together until just combined. Using a spoon or cookie scoop, shape into meatballs and place onto prepared baking sheet. Place in oven and bake for 15–20 minutes until cooked through (internal temperature of 160 F). Remove from oven, place the meatballs in a bowl, add the buffalo sauce and gently toss to combine. Drizzle with ranch dressing and blue cheese, if desired. Serve immediately.



Key West 'Shrooms

James Maxwell, Great Lakes Energy

- 1 package of portobello or white button mushrooms
- 1 package Phillips crab cakes (or similar)
- 1 package Swiss cheese, sliced
- 4 dashes Old Bay Spice
- 1/2 stick melted butter

Clean mushrooms and remove stems. Place on a microwaveable plate. Dip the mushrooms in the melted butter. Drizzle remaining butter over mushroom tops. Stuff mushroom tops with crab cakes. Sprinkle mushrooms with Old Bay spice to taste. Quarter the cheese slices and place over the stuffed mushrooms. Sprinkle mushrooms with remaining Old Bay spice. Microwave mushrooms for 4 minutes. Place on a serving tray, garnish and serve.

Featured Guest Chef

Enjoy this simple, yet delicious, dish with family and friends gathered around—no matter what the season.



Cherry BBQ Potato Chip Crusted Chicken Fingers

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 large bag Great Lakes Michigan Cherry BBQ Chips, crushed
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- pinch salt
- non-stick oil spray
- 2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch strips
- 1/4 cup butter, melted

Preheat oven to 400 F. Scoop mayonnaise into a shallow bowl. Place crushed BBQ chips in another shallow bowl and combine crushed chips with black pepper and a pinch of salt. Dip chicken pieces (just 1 or 2 at a time) in mayonnaise and then coat with chip mixture. Place chicken strips onto a greased baking pan. Make sure to space chicken out a bit so the sides are not touching and can get crispy. Drizzle chicken strips with melted butter. Bake for 20 to 22 minutes until chicken is no longer pink. Remove and allow to cool for 5 to 8 minutes before serving, so chips harden back up. Serve and enjoy!

Optional: Serve with dip or sauce.

Read the full story about Great Lakes Potato Chip Co. on page 14, and find this recipe and others at micoopkitchen.com.

Your Board In Action

Meeting at Portland on March 26, your board of directors:

- Reviewed the 2017 audit report with the independent auditor, Eide Bailly.
- Read and approved Board Policy 401 – "Assignment of Capital Credits"; Board Policy 403 – "Long Range Financial Management Plan"; and Board Policy 404 – "Retirement of Capital Credits," with minor wording changes.
- Authorized staff to allocate the Cooperative's 2017 margins, totaling \$402,343, along with \$1,964,108 in Wolverine Power Cooperative margins, to members based on their energy purchases during the year.

- Further authorized staff to make a general retirement of \$680,000 in Cooperative capital credits from 1991–1992 and 2017; and \$2,147,000 in Wolverine capital credits from 1999–2001 and 2017, to members as credits on their May energy bills, as well as retiring up to \$250,000 in Cooperative and Wolverine capital credits to estates at present worth value.
- Approved an application to CoBank for its \$5,000 Sharing Success matching grant program.
- Learned about progress made with the HomeWorks Connect fiber-tothe-home business.
- Learned incumbent directors Luke Pohl of Westphalia (District 3) and Ed Oplinger of Weidman (District 6) have been nominated for re-election to their board seats.

Learned there were 53
new members in February.
Acknowledged the March
safety report, listing employee
training and minor employee
and public incidents.

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 May 21 and June 25 at Portland. Members who need directions to the meeting, or wish to have items considered on the board agenda, should call 517-647-7554.

Filling Backpacks With Books

Meeting March 7, the Tri-County Electric People Fund board made 12 grants totaling \$10,833.75, including:

- \$1,000 to Eaton Area Senior Center, Charlotte, toward furnace repairs;
- \$1,860 to Barryton Area Mobile Food Pantry, for food truck deliveries;
- \$900 to Ionia County Great Start, for their kindergarten books for backpacks project;
- \$980 to Project Starburst, Big Rapids, for food truck deliveries;
- \$3,000 to Housing Services of Mid-Michigan, Charlotte, toward their housing assistance program;
- \$157.09 to an Eaton County family for plumbing repairs;
- \$721.77 to an Ingham County family for housing expenses;
- \$137 to an Isabella County family to assist with housing expenses;
- \$149.97 to an Isabella County family for housing expenses;
- \$1,250 to a Mecosta County family for well repairs;
- \$370.93 to a Montcalm County family to help with housing expenses.



The Tri-County Electric People Fund recently granted \$900 to the Ionia County Great Start Collaborative (ICGSC) for their Books for Backpacks program. The collaborative utilizes community resources and supports to help local families have access to the tools needed to provide a healthy start for all children, birth to kindergarten entry. Here, People Fund coordinator Tanya Schneider (second from left), presents the check to (left to right): Ionia County Great Start Readiness Preschool Program Director Amy Opperman, ICGSC Director Sally Kapteyn, and parent liaison Jessica Murphy.

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.

Note: Applications must be received by May 21 for the May board meeting, and by July 1 for the July board meeting.



Curious About HomeWorks Connect?

Here Are Some Answers!

We're getting lots of positive comments and questions from HomeWorks members about your new fiber-to-the-home business. Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions:

Q. What is fiber-to-the-home service?

A: Fiber-to-the-home, or FTTH, is a technology that can be used to provide communications and entertainment services to your home or business. Fiber allows us to provide state-of-the-art voice and data services over fiber optic cable, which is as thin as a human hair.

The greatest benefit of fiber-to-thehome is the amount of information and services that can be provided over a single connection. Additionally, the services offer great speed and crystal clear connections.

Q: Why is HomeWorks offering fiber-to-the-home?

A: Our mission is to offer energy, comfort and communications solutions to enhance our members' quality

of life. Access to high-speed (true broadband) internet is a solution that builds on our past successes in delivering reliable electricity and competitively priced propane, with outstanding customer service, to mid-Michigan. This project helps in two ways:

- 1. Access to a fiber data system will help our engineers and operations teams monitor and maintain our electric system more accurately, respond to outages faster, and plan for system upgrades in an effective manner.
- 2. Our members have told us there is a need for better internet in our service area. Many people in rural mid-Michigan don't have access to a quality internet connection. If they do, it's very expensive and unreliable.

Q: When will fiber be available to my home or business?

A: Construction of the main line for Phase 1 begins in early May. We'll start adding service drops in July, and our first official member installations should "light up" in September.

After the pilot is complete, service will be offered in phases to the surrounding areas as interest is generated and the infrastructure is built.

Q: How can members sign up for service, or show interest?

A: Visit HomeWorksConnect.org and join our waiting list! By the time you're reading this, our crowd-sourcing site should be up and running. You'll be able to sign up for service and encourage your neighbors to sign up as well, helping determine where the next phases will be built.

Q: How can we get updates on when service will be available in

A: We plan to make regular news updates on our web page, the crowdsource site, Facebook page, at member meetings, and in Michigan Country Lines magazine.

Q: Will fiber-to-the-home affect my electric bill?

A: Our intention is for this business to have no negative impact on your bills, rates, or electric service.

Employees Change Roles, Welcome New CSR



Jessica Goodemoot has moved to the Propane/ New Construction team. Jessica started at HomeWorks in 2016 as a Customer Service Representative on the Electric team. She has 15-plus years of experience in customer service.



Angie Martin joined HomeWorks in 2016 as a Customer Service Representative on our Electric team. Angie has several years of customer service experience, most recently at Menards. She has also moved to the Propane/New Construction team.

Our Customer Service Team has seen some re-arranging due to employees moving out of the department for other opportunities at HomeWorks.

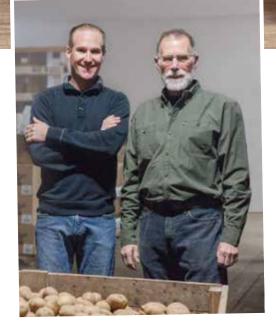


Morgan Mowatt joined the Customer Service team in April. Morgan has several years of experience in the customer service industry, most recently with Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). She is from the Ionia area.

CHIPPIN' AWAY

With Great Lakes Potato Chip CO By James A. Curtis // Photos by Robert Bruce Photography and Dre Photography





Chris Girrbach and Ed Girrbach, owners of Great Lakes Potato Chip Company.

ddie, what happened to my blankets?" said Ed Girrbach's mother when she noticed they were missing. Ed jokes that after he explained he'd been selling them as ponchos to his schoolmates, "mom's reaction helped me understand at an early age about the 'cost of goods sold."

Ponchos were Ed's first foray into business, but the now co-founder of Great Lakes Potato Chip Company (GLPCC)—a member of Cherryland Electric Cooperative—would carry that entrepreneurial spirit his entire life, eventually leading him—along with his son and business partner, Chris Girrbach—to open Pangea's Pizza Pub in Traverse City. Even more, it was that same spirit that inspired a growing interest in manufacturing.

Ultimately, deciding where they would strike out next came down to a simple question: "Dad, what do you like?" asked Chris.

Ed thought for a moment and replied, "Well, aside from pizza, I like potato chips." And the idea for GLPCC was born.

The Girrbachs threw themselves into researching potato chips; and on May 5, 2010, they founded GLPCC with two part-time employees and one old fryer to begin manufacturing their favorite—skin-on kettle chips.

In the eight years since, the chip company has experienced tremendous growth and won numerous accolades, including being named "Number One Kettle Chip" by The Chicago Tribune, and "Most Investable Second-stage Food Company" at Crain's Food Summit. They also received a "Gold" rating for kettle and tortilla chips at the Saratoga Springs Chip Festival—the birthplace of the potato chip.

"We get asked a lot why we leave the SKIN ON."

"It's simple. It just TASTES BETTER."

Today, the chip company produces seven flavors of kettle chip, a tortilla chip, has 16 distributors, retails in seven states, employs 30 people, and is growing at a rate of 30 percent per year.

All this growth means more potatoes, and Michigan has no shortage—it's the leading producer of chipping potatoes in the nation. The Girrbachs developed a special relationship with Sackett Farms in Mecosta—a HomeWorks Tri-County Cooperative member—to supply their potatoes. Sackett Farms is a sixth-generation, family-owned farm specializing in A-grade chipping potatoes, whose crop is in high demand.

"Chris' first trip to Sackett Farms was humorous," said Ed. "He drove 110 miles to the farm in his pickup truck with a crate in the back and had to get in line with semi-trucks to load up the potatoes. He was the only pickup in the line, and we're thankful they let us jump in and hold up their process."

Chipping away at the potato chip industry, the Girrbachs eventually sent more than a pickup truck to Sackett Farms. Now, a semi-truck delivers 120,000 pounds of potatoes a week—and they are looking for more. The chip company has invested nearly half a million dollars in automation to double its capacity to keep up with demand. With each upgrade, Ed and Chris look closely at the most energy efficient equipment as part of their commitment to sustainability, and they value their partnership with their electric cooperative.

Coincidentally, GLPCC and Sackett Farms belong to electric cooperatives that are members of Wolverine Power Cooperative. The Wolverine cooperatives lead Michigan in new renewable energy. In 2018, the co-ops reduced their carbon footprint by 25 percent—now providing members with 56 percent carbon-free energy. "Cherryland operates as a true partner, their whole mindset is how do they help us, and how do we work together to find more ways to be energy efficient," said Ed. "We love doing business with them."

As Great Lakes Potato Chip Company continues to grow, Ed takes great pride in his Michigan-made products, their highest-quality ingredients, and their unique process to get a crispier, crunchier, tastier chip. "We get asked a lot why we leave the skin on," said Ed. "It's simple. It just tastes better."



to learn more about these Michiganmade chips.



Putting the HEART in Home Works

OFFICE EMPLOYEES GIVE THEIR ALL TO SERVE OUR MEMBERS

In last month's *Country Lines*, we featured our field crews, who work to keep our outside operations running smoothly at all times. This month, in honor of our Office Personnel Appreciation Day, which we celebrated April 25, we want to recognize our inside office employees. These are the people who work behind the scenes to serve you, our members.

This includes our team members in customer service, billing, accounting, dispatch and engineering, IT, communications, safety, energy optimization, and management. These employees enjoy working for you, and they put their heart into doing the job right, every time. Thank you, HomeWorks office employees, for your hard work. We appreciate you!



What makes our office team great is their strength, knowledge, dedication, willingness to do the job, and the way they do what it takes to assist fellow team members. They go above and beyond to assist every member and customer, and strive for excellence in service. I am extremely proud of the team we have at HomeWorks.

~ Missy Robson, Manager of Customer Service





WE APPRECIATE THE HARD WORK OF EACH OF THESE OFFICE EMPLOYEES!

Accounting:

Cheryl Blaschka Christina Korber Jeralyn Marshall Pat Simmer Sara Bauer

Billing:

Christy Manting Joy Frazee Rita Owen

Energy

Optimization:Brandon Trierweiler

Blanchard Customer Service:

Cheri Rauch Erin Storey Sara Nartker Stacey McEvoy

Portland

Customer Service:
Angie Martin
Becky Beard
Jessica Goodemoot
Jessica Hinds
Karen Beard
Luanne Goodman
Mary Jane Hoppes
Michelle Huhn
Missy Robson
Morgan Mowatt
Peyton Thompson

IT & Safety:

Randi Vanas

Stacey Brown

Chris O'Neill Jamie Trommater Jeff Erridge Tom Manting

Dispatch & Engineering:

Brian Thompson Chris Jensen Deb Rogers Kelly Vroman Val Wohlscheid

Communications:

Charly Markwart Jayne Graham

Human Resources:

Angel McCliggott

Executive Assistant:

Tanya Schneider

General Manager:

Mark Kappler



Where In *Michigan* Is This?

Identify the correct location of the photo above by May 20 and be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 electric bill credit. Enter your guess at 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 March 2018 issue is Ann Pihlaja, an Ontonagon County REA member, who correctly identified the photo as the Traverse City Cherry Festival Air Show.

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

March 2018



Photo courtesy of Karen Murphy

I Remember...



Berry Picking

I remember going berry picking with my grandfather, Carl (Lavy) Hagstrom, in the woods around Cheboygan. My grandfather had special berry picking pails and adjustable belts. He said it was important for both hands to be free to pick the juiciest ones! But my belt was always too big, so I hung it from my neck.

I never saw anyone who could pick berries as fast as he could. It didn't matter if we were picking raspberries or huckleberries, he always filled his pail first. He would tease me because I couldn't keep up with him, but he knew I was eating two berries for every one I put into my pail. My hands were always stained with the juice.

We took the berries home for my grandmother to can and the rest she saved for us to eat on our cereal or to make a special treat. Many evenings after dinner, our family would get involved in making homemade ice cream. It was hard work turning the handle of their ice cream machine, but it was worth it, as my grandfather would add some delicious berries. I always looked forward to summers in Cheboygan with my grandparents and making berry ice cream!

Joelle Majerowicz, Presque Isle Electric & Gas Co-op

We invite members to share their fondest memories.

Guidelines

- 1. Approximately 200 word
- 2. Digital photos must be at least 600 KF
- 3 Only one entry per household per mont
- 4. Country Lines retains reprint rights
- 5. Please include your name, address, email, phone number and the name of you
- 5. Submit your memories online: countrylines.com or email to cdorr@meca.coop

country Lines will pay \$50 for stories we publish.





homeworks.org facebook.com/homeworks.org **Report Outages: 1-800-848-9333**



...To your annual District Membership Meeting!

This is your chance to learn more about the electric utility you own. We're excited to tell you about all we've been doing over the past year! *Check out this schedule for your meeting date:*

- > District 1: May 21...St. Mary's Parish Life Center, Charlotte
- > District 2: May 16...St. Edward's Family Center, Lake Odessa
- > District 3: May 22...Eagle Park Hall (Election)
- > District 4: May 17...Montabella Jr-Sr High Cafeteria, Blanchard
- > District 5: May 14...Fulton Elementary School Gym, Middleton
- > District 6: May 15...Beal City High School small gym (Election)
- > District 7: May 23...St. Michael's Parish Center, Remus

Doors open and light supper served at 5:30. Business meeting at 6:00.

PEOPLE FUND
25TH ANNIVERSARY
Please bring a
non-perishable food
item or a cash
donation for your
local food bank.

Featuring...