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America’s Perfect Storm
Will the country be able to keep up with the growing demand for energy?
Jennifer Taylor

Low-Hanging Fruit
Energy savings can add up fast with these five simple, cost-effective projects.
Mike Buda

How Sweet It Is
Michigan mint oil is the key ingredient in Hanover’s Michigan Mints.
Rhonda Dedyne

COLUMNS

16 Neighbors Linda Kotzian
Incubator hatches new businesses

20 Gardening Rita Henehan
Growing herbs made simple

22 House & Home James Dulley
Flush high bathroom energy costs

24 Kids ‘N Pets
Readers share their photos

30 Right at Home Marla Kay Houghteling
Somebody else’s dog

DEPARTMENTS

6 Readers’ Pages
Renewable energy bills, letters

18 Home Cooking
Cooking with citrus

26 Country Lines Marketplace
Classifieds from readers

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Michigan’s Electric Cooperatives
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Legislature Focuses on Alternative Energy Promotion

The Michigan House and Senate are entertaining a flurry of bills that would promote the use of less, but greener, energy and impact how much customers would pay for it.

In late January, the House Energy and Technology Committee voted out three bills addressing how much renewable energy utilities should include in their electricity mix, how utilities will help customers cut their energy use, and how much of the cost they could pass on to customers. Although the bills were passed on a bipartisan vote, it was clear that they are works-in-progress and further modifications are likely.

Passage of the renewable and energy efficiency bills is being wrapped up in economic and jobs creation rhetoric. Gov. Jennifer Granholm was expected to feature alternative energy as an economic stimulus in her State of the State address at the end of January.

Energy and Technology Committee Chair Frank Accavitti, D-Eastpointe, echoed what Granholm was expected to say in her message to the state.

"Michigan gave birth to the auto industry, and now we can pave the way for the renewable energy economy, which will create good-paying jobs for our workers," Accavitti said. "This bipartisan plan will secure Michigan's role as a leader in the emerging renewable energy industry and help us as we work together to get our economy back on track."

The renewable energy bills stipulate that 10 percent of annual electricity sales come from renewable energy sources—such as solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and biomass-based power—by 2015. They also would create a system of renewable energy credits, overseen by the Michigan Public Service Commission, to help providers comply with the new standard. Providers could generate renewable energy credits from their own energy systems, contract with an entity that produces renewable energy, or purchase renewable energy credits.

The energy efficiency legislation, HB 5525, would push utility companies to create programs to get energy efficient products into the hands of their customers, both homeowners and businesses. Natural gas or electric utilities would have to submit an "energy efficiency programs plan" for MPSC approval.

The utilities would be able to recover the cost of efficiency programs in rates, and would be eligible for a financial incentive of up to 15 percent of the cost of their programs if they met or exceeded performance standards.

Despite the action in the House, the overall picture for the alternative energy bills is unclear. The legislation is linked to another bill, HB 5524, which would roll back the state's electric choice law. Although electric choice, passed in 2000, hasn't worked as promised for residential customers, some commercial and industrial customers have benefited. Those customers claim that rolling back electric choice would be giving monopoly status back to the state's two big utilities, Detroit Edison and Consumers Energy.

Also, when and if the bills pass the full House, they face certain scrutiny in the Senate Energy Policy and Public Utilities Committee. Committee members already have introduced bills dealing with incentives for renewable energy facilities, formation of a renewable energy commission, and a tax credit for renewable energy purchases.

Can Man
John Drees ("Can Man," Jan. '08) was my father-in-law for several years and I was proud to be able to name his first grandson after John. Since both my parents died at a young age, John and Zerna were their only grandparents and I felt it was important that my kids keep a close relationship with them even after their father and I divorced. In fact, when John and Zerna were still living in Traverse City, my present husband and stepchildren and I would even go to their house for a front-row seat to watch the Cherry Royale Parade.

I remember going up to Paradise when the kids were little and it is very beautiful right on Lake Superior. However, I was surprised when John and Zerna chose to retire up there, when most retirees head to warmer climates! I was equally amazed that they continue to make the long trip back and forth across the U.P. to Traverse City so often.

When John was in the hospital in a coma he looked so awfully ill, and it took him a long time to fully recover. It is not surprising that he then devoted his life to collecting cans and bottles to raise money for the Paradise sports programs. I am glad to see he is getting public recognition for his hard work and generosity!

Laura, via countrylines.com

Attic Access & Energy
I have been looking for an attic-access insulated cover for my disappearing stairway and I have already researched the different ones in your article ("Insulate Your Attic Door," Jim Dulley, Jan. '08).

Several of my neighbors purchased the Energy Shield I and Energy Shield II products. After hearing how pleased my neighbors were, I wanted to know more. After reviewing the website, I was very impressed and this is the product I'm going to buy!

I think your readers should know about these products, so they can make an informed decision about all the products available to homeowners for attic-access insulation covers. The website is pesinc.org. Be sure to see the product features and video on the home page.

Sophie, via countrylines.com
Light Bulb Facts
Fluorescent lamps may use less electricity for a given light output, but with an incandescent bulb the heat energy given off isn’t wasted if the room requires heating. The heat given off will cause the room thermostat to cut off earlier thus saving on the fuel used to heat the room.

Marsden of Oxford

You’re right, a houseful of CFLs will require a tiny bit more heating in winter, but also less cooling in summer. – ed.

Green Is Good
I just read your article “Green Is Good, Greed Isn’t” (Comment, Mike Peters, Jan. ’08) and I agree wholeheartedly. You don’t get something (anything) for nothing. I think this is where a lot of governments and other folks part company with reality.

There are certain rules in the engineering world that cannot be altered, shortened, or otherwise rewritten. Horsepower is horsepower, ohms are ohms, and amps are amps. Dealing with them MUST be done by the rules or you will only spin the wheels.

I’m 70 years young and I worked for Guardian Industries in several countries around the world, building parts of the equipment that make glass for the flat glass industry. You may be familiar with Guardian’s plant in Carleton. My main area of responsibility was the mechanical portion of the 30’x150’ (give or take) electric ‘tin bath’ portion of the process. I learned firsthand how electricity can be used to serve mankind in my 30 years with Guardian.

I also learned you can only cut so many corners, or you will pay later. If a 150-ton-per-day glass plant loses power, the cooling will stop and the process will eat itself up, so to speak. All plants have three gigantic Caterpillar generator sets that take over in case of a power failure. The plant in Venezuela is entirely self-generating with turbine generators, and the power company is the backup. Fuel is cheap there, compared to here.

Our home here in Weidman, is heated with expensive propane. This year we added a corn burner. The initial cost was around $2,000 and the fuel for this year will be about $600. The stove should pay for itself in three or four years. If I were building a new home today I certainly would be looking at geothermal. I enjoy Country Lines and look forward to each issue.

Frederick Hartway, Weidman

It is good to see the Cooperative finally dealing with issues of renewable or alternative energy, and we have been interested in the several articles and editorials on the subject.

I wish we could believe that the “free market” or “common sense” will change how we use and create energy, but it seems to us we would all be far better off if governmental encouragement had started long ago. The government has been supporting traditional sources of energy with tax breaks for decades, so it is not that the government hasn’t been involved.

Seems to us that the problem with your reasoning is that “economic sense for Michigan” can be short-term or long-term, and up to now short-term vision and planning has predominated. For our grandchildren, renewable and alternative forms of energy, along with entirely different ways of using energy (less waste, more care), are essential for their future.

Dr. & Mrs. Philip Woolcott Harbor Springs

Mike Peters replies: Thank you for reading Country Lines, and for your email. Michigan electric co-ops have been using renewable energy for many years, as stated in the comment. We have also worked with our members to reduce usage and conserve energy by promoting energy efficient appliances (such as ground source heat pumps), conducting energy audits, and general education. All of these efforts work together to reduce electric and gas consumption. As utilities we must think long-term, and as co-ops that have a mission to provide reliable service at the least-cost practical, we take that charge seriously. We lead the way nationally to create tax incentives for renewable energy, and Congress did so in 2005 with the creation of “Clean Renewable Energy Bonds” that allow co-ops and municipal utilities to raise capital through the sale of tax-exempt bonds, with the proceeds to offset the development of renewable energy sources.

Co-ops have been making long-term plans for many years. Many utility assets can last up to 50 years or more. As technology improves and the cost comes down, we are typically the first utilities to move forward with implementation. Michigan co-ops have more automatic meter reading equipment in place than all the other utilities combined, including Detroit Edison and Consumers Energy. We are working with the Michigan Public Service Commission to implement pilot programs that use this new technology to reduce consumption and change the way our members consume energy.

We expect to start these programs early in 2008. As for renewable generation, our work with John Deere Wind Energy to develop the Harvest Wind Farm speaks for itself. However, Michigan co-ops have also been looking at other renewable energy projects. We are working to develop more from landfill gas, methane digesters, and biofuels generation. We hope to continue our efforts to develop renewable supply without a mandate, which will drive up costs and lock in existing technology solutions when better and cheaper alternatives are being developed.

Rest assured, your co-op will continue to look for low-cost ways to meet your energy needs, help you use energy more efficiently, and promote and develop renewable energy where it makes sense.

Peppermint Oil
In your January 2008 issue, I read about the use of peppermint oil to rid chipmunks from various locations. As stated in the article, it does rid barns, cars and storage buildings of unwanted critters, and is wonderful for ridding your garage or house of mice. Not to mention leaving a wonderful fragrance. But please allow me to add some other useful information.

Peppermint oil, while widely known for food flavoring, has other personal uses. I carry a small bottle with me wherever I go. When feeling drained from a hectic day or driving for hours, a couple of sniffs will give you a little ‘pick up.’ If you are a bit strained due to an emergency, a couple sniffs will calm you, and a couple drops in a glass of water will ease an upset stomach.

Dr. Norman Wolffis, Healthy Spirit Naturally, Reed City

Favorite Small-Town War Memorials
In our May issue, we’d like feature some of our readers’ favorite small-town war memorials.

Please send a color photo (not from a computer printer) of your favorite war memorial, along with your name/address/phone to Editor, Michigan Country Lines, 2859 W. Jolly Rd, Okemos, MI 48864, or by email to czuker@countrylines.com by April 1.
It’s hard to escape the media coverage surrounding climate change. Lawmakers, business leaders, clergy, and environmental groups compete for sound bites. According to recent polls by ABC News and others, the American public is generally aware of climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They are unclear, however, about what needs to be done, who should do it, and what it will cost. Resoundingly though, consumers say they don’t want to get stuck with a big price tag to pay for climate change solutions.

Solutions to curbing greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, include energy efficiency, new technologies (such as finding ways to store carbon dioxide emissions produced by coal- and natural gas-fired power plants), nuclear power, and renewable energy resources. But what will these solutions cost? According to one article last year in The Washington Post, electricity bills could rise by 25 to 33 percent just to “stimulate and pay for new technologies.”

“All of this presents a huge challenge for electric utilities, especially electric cooperatives,” says Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the service arm of the nation’s 900-plus not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric co-ops. “Electricity demand is increasing because of growth, and we need to build more generating plants and transmission lines to meet this growing demand.”

Rising Demand
According to the North American Electric Reliability Corporation—which oversees reliability of the bulk power system covering the United States and most of Canada—demand for electricity will increase over the next 10 years by 18 percent, although the electric industry’s capacity to generate power will increase by only 8.5 percent.

A longer-term forecast by the U.S. Department of Energy predicts that demand for electricity will increase by 40 percent over the next 25 years. Clearly, the country could face brownouts and blackouts unless additional power plants are brought into service.

“We have an obligation to keep the lights on and prices affordable at a time when the costs of fuel and raw materials to build new generation are skyrocketing,” states English. “With a shortage of electric capacity, huge increases in demand for power, and the cost of climate change, we have the making of a perfect storm.”

Facing Climate Change
Based on calculations by Charles River Associates, a utility analysis firm, climate change proposals currently circulating in Congress, if passed, could result in a...
If climate change legislation is not handled intelligently and carefully... electric bills could double or even triple, based on the best available estimates.

Perfect Storm from page 9

50 to 80 percent increase in wholesale power costs by the year 2020. Translate that into retail rates and electricity bills could climb by 25 to 40 percent.

“When it comes to climate change, Congress will legislate, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will regulate, and state and local governments are already moving forward,” says NRECA Vice President of Environmental Issues Kirk Johnson. “With carbon constraints in our future, it’s essential that lawmakers and elected representatives understand the financial repercussions their political actions could cost Americans.”

The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal observed this past summer that the issue of cost should be put on the table. If climate change legislation is not handled intelligently and carefully given these accumulating factors, electric bills could double or even triple, based on the best available estimates.

The Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), a nonprofit utility-sponsored consortium, whose members include electric co-ops, has developed a seven-part plan to reduce carbon dioxide emissions based on technological solutions including energy efficiency, carbon capture and storage, and renewable sources. Although ambitious, the EPRI model would cut carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels (45 percent) by 2030.

Efficiency Helps
Energy efficiency, by reducing the amount of power needed, remains one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Over the past three decades, electric co-ops have emerged as leaders in helping their members use electricity wisely. However, energy efficiency alone can’t indefinitely postpone the need to build new power plants or solve climate change. EPRI notes that efficiency improvements will reduce electric demand just 9 percent over the next 22 years.

All Costs Are Rising
Renewable energy and nuclear power development are greatly impacted by massive global price increases for raw materials such as nickel, copper, steel, and concrete, all of which raise construction costs for new generating plants. And renewable energy sources, such as wind turbines, require transmission lines to move any power generated. At present, the nation’s electric grid is not equipped to do so.

With 50 percent of the nation’s power supply produced by burning coal—in Michigan the number is closer to 80 percent—research and development of carbon capture and storage technology becomes crucial for keeping coal-fired power plants viable—and the lights on. EPRI asserts, however, that cost-effective carbon capture and storage technology will take years, if not decades, to become commercially available. The best guess—assuming the federal government embarks on a massive $30 billion research and development program (bigger than putting a man on the moon)—affordable carbon capture and storage technology could hit the market as early as 2020.

Since no single “silver bullet” solution for tackling climate change exists, electric co-ops are working closely with policymakers to seek long-term, practical, and affordable remedies to our nation’s energy challenges. Through it all, electric cooperatives remember their commitment to delivering a reliable supply of electricity at a competitive price.

Jennifer Taylor writes about energy issues for NRECA.

Low-Hanging Fruit

Energy savings can add up fast with these simple, cost-effective projects.

Whether you live in a new house or an old one, you can do some things to reduce your energy bills. The things you do now are permanent; they pay dividends this year and every year after. And these are the easy things to do. They don’t cost a lot of money and their combined total payback can be huge—depending on the condition of your house, up to 20 percent or more. There are other things you can to, too: Seal up all the energy-wasting cracks in your house envelope by caulking around windows and doors; insulate duct work in unheated spaces; replace your old refrigerator with a new energy-efficient model (but don’t keep the old one to cool a six-pack in the garage).

Start at the top.

Insulation is your primary defense against heat loss through the house envelope. Adding insulation to an unheated attic is easier than insulating existing walls and is likely to have a greater impact on comfort and energy use. If there is no floor in the attic, simply add more insulation between the ceiling beams, either loose-fill or unfaced fiberglass batts. In Michigan, install 12 to 15 inches of fiberglass or cellulose insulation in the attic floor. If you do it yourself, make sure you read up on correct installation practices.

Materials that could be damaged by moisture, such as fiberglass batts and cellulose, should never be used to insulate a basement. Interior basement insulation should start with rigid foam installed against the basement walls. If you are considering finishing your basement and using it as a living space, seek the advice of an experienced professional.

If you have a crawl space, it should be sealed, not ventilated. To do this, use thick polyethylene sheeting (6 millimeter thickness) as a moisture barrier to cover the ground and seal tightly to walls and columns. Then use rigid foam to insulate foundation walls.

Cover the glass.

When properly installed, window shades can be one of the simplest and most effective window treatments for saving energy. Shades should be mounted as close to the glass as possible with the sides of the shade held close to the wall to establish a sealed air space. You should lower shades on sunlit windows in the summer. Shades on the south side of a house should be raised in the winter during the day, then lowered during the night.

For greater efficiency, use dual shades—highly reflective (white) on one side and heat absorbing (dark) on the other side—that can be reversed with the seasons. The reflective side should always face the warmest side: outward during the cooling season and inward during the heating season.

Quilted roller shades, and some types of Roman shades, feature several layers of fiber batting and sealed edges. These shades act as both insulation and air barrier. They control air infiltration more effectively than other soft window treatments, but even heavy drapes will help.

Several manufacturers have designed two- or three-cell pleated or cellular shades with dead air spaces, which increase their insulating value.

Re-lamp with a twist.

Incandescent lamps (or “bulbs”) are the most common lighting type in American homes, available in all shapes and sizes. The problem with incandescent lamps is that they are a very inefficient technology; only 10 percent of the electricity they use is actually converted into usable light – the rest is wasted as heat.

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are becoming increasingly popular as a highly efficient alternative to standard incandescent bulbs. A single 20-watt CFL will provide the same amount of light as a 75-watt incandescent light bulb and last up to seven times longer. Because CFLs use less energy and last longer, you will save up to several times their purchase price each year through reduced electricity bills and fewer replacement bulbs.

Models on the market today are comparable in light quality to incandescent lamps and are easily compatible with standard screw-in lamp fixtures of several common styles. ENERGY STAR® qualified CFLs ensure the highest performance and reliability. For the best compatibility with standard-size screw-in fixtures, look for the spiral-shaped mini sub-compact fluorescent lamps, which are much smaller than conventional CFLs and are available for $1-4 each.

Dial down.

You can easily save energy in the winter by setting the thermostat to 68 F while you’re awake, and setting it lower while you’re asleep or away from home. By turning your thermostat back 10 to 15 degrees for 8 hours, you can save about 5 to 15 percent a year on your heating bill—a savings of as much as 1 percent for each degree of setback for each 8-hour period.

In summer, follow the same strategy with central air conditioning by keeping your house warmer than normal when you are away, and lowering the thermostat setting to 78 F (26 C) only when you are at home and need cooling. Sure, thermostats can be adjusted manually, but programmable thermostats avoid discomfort by returning temperatures to normal as you wake or return home.

It’s a misconception that a furnace works harder than normal to warm the space back to a comfortable temperature after the thermostat has been set back, resulting in little or no savings. Years of research have shown that fuel required to reheat a building to a comfortable temperature is roughly equal to the fuel saved as the building drops to the lower temperature. You save fuel between the time the temperature stabilizes at a lower level and the next time heat is needed.

Wrap your water heater.

The American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy recommends that, if your electric water heater was installed before 2004, you install an insulating jacket over your gas or electric water heater, especially if your water heater is in an unheated space. The insulating jacket, widely available for around $10, will reduce heat lost through the tank’s walls by 25 to 40 percent, saving 4 to 9 percent on your water heating bills. Follow directions carefully when installing one.

After you insulate the tank, move on to the pipes that carry the hot water to faucets around the house. Insulating hot water pipes will reduce losses as the hot water is flowing to your faucet and, more importantly, it will reduce standby losses when the tap is turned off and then back on within an hour or so.

Keep the water heater thermostat set at the lowest temperature that gives you sufficient hot water. For most households, 120 F water is fine (about midway between the “low” and “medium” setting). Each 10 F reduction in water temperature will generally save 3 to 5 percent on your water heating costs. When you are going away on vacation, you can turn the thermostat down to the lowest possible setting, or turn the water heater off altogether for additional savings.
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**SAMPLE PROFIT CHART**

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**How Sweet It Is**

Mint oil is key in Hanover’s Michigan Mints. **Rhonda Dedyne**

Chocolate and mint. It’s a natural combination—especially if you’re candy-makers living in Michigan’s mint capitol, Clinton County.

Karl and Heather Hanover use the two heavenly ingredients every day to cook up batches of the delectable, distinctive candies. Every piece of Hanover’s Michigan Mints is impressed with the outline of the Great Lakes State, making the candies easily recognizable even after they’re wrapped in brightly colored foil papers.

“When we had the idea to produce mint candies back in 1992, our test molds had only the lower peninsula of Michigan,” Karl says, recalling the first samples of the now-well-known confection. “People liked the candy, but they wanted to see the U.P. as part of the design—we had new molds made right away.”

Since that rather modest beginning in a shop at the couple’s home in St. Johns, Hanover’s mints have journeyed far and wide. Karl and Heather originally marketed the product themselves at area retail outlets before turning that end of the business over to sales representatives.

“Probably 90 percent of sales are at stores that feature Michigan-made products,” Heather says of the over 1 million Hanover candies that are shipped from the couple’s shop each year. “We have three salespersons who market our products at state and national retail outlets, and we also take orders online at our website.”

The process of making the yummy candies begins in a commercial double boiler that melts 200 pounds of bulk chocolate—milk, dark or white. It takes about six hours to melt each batch, and another two hours to “temper” the melted sweet stuff into the proper consistency for candy making.

Each batch yields approximately 12,000 candies with the distinctive minty taste that comes from pure mint oil, purchased from local growers, such as Stoney Creek Essential Oils. The business that’s owned and operated by the father-son tandem of Tom and Doug Irner is a leader in Michigan’s mint industry.

“There are only about a dozen commercial mint growers left in the state, and we produce between 60 and 70 percent of all the mint grown here,” Tom says about the specialty crop that is harvested every summer.

“The mint oil that we sell commercially is shipped in barrels that hold 10,000 gallons—it doesn’t take much oil to flavor products like candy, toothpaste or chewing gum,” Tom says.

Hanover’s minty recipe illustrates that potency. About a cup of peppermint oil is used.

**Clinton County**

**Sets Pace For Mint Production**

Taste-tempting candy, like Hanover’s Michigan Mints, isn’t the only product that owes its existence to aromatic mint plants.

Mint oil is the key ingredient in a wide variety of essential daily items, from toothpaste and mouthwash, to chewing gum and medicines.

“All of our spearmint oil goes to the Wrigley company,” Tom Irner says about the potent flavoring that’s distilled at Stoney Creek Essential Oils, the business he owns and operates with a son, Doug. “The flavoring and a lot of the chewing gum is sold overseas.”

The Irner’s are among a handful of Clinton County farmers who have been involved in mint production since the 1920s. Mint plants like the rich, “muckland” soil near the county seat of St. Johns, and the Irner’s have also successfully adapted it on their farmland located in the Stoney Creek watershed.

“We’ve basically been specializing in mint production for a number of years now, trading ground with other crops like corn and beans to alleviate disease pressures,” Tom says about the 1,200 acres of mint that he and Doug harvest each year.

Mint is harvested similar to alfalfa, beginning in mid to late July, up to three cuttings per season ending in late August. The dark green plants with purple and white blossoms are cut and collected into ‘mint wagons’ that deliver the fragrant commodity to an on-site facility where steam is introduced and mint oil is distilled as an end product.

Oil that’s distilled from the Irner’s peppermint and spearmint plants accounts for between 60 and 70 percent of Michigan’s annual commercial mint production.

Optimum growing conditions in 2006 resulted in a “record year” for Michigan mint growers, the Clinton County native says, but this past year was not as profitable.

“Harvests were down about 10 percent in 2007,” Tom says, citing dry weather early in the growing season as the main culprit. “The plants didn’t fill in as much as they should have—our first cutting was just so-so.”

The bumper crop of 2006 boosted Michigan to a fourth-place position in the national production of spearmint with a value of $960,000, according to the National Agriculture Statistics Service—certainly helpful in the state’s faltering economy. Peppermint production was valued at $473,000. States in the Pacific Northwest typically lead the nation in all mint production.

Clinton County is continuing to hold its own in Michigan.

“We had good, healthy root systems this past fall heading into the winter,” says Irner who serves on the national Mint Industry Research Council and the Oregon Essential Oil Growers Association. “The outlook is good for 2008 in Clinton County.”

—Rhonda Dedyne
in each batch of candy—enough to flavor all 12,000 pieces.

It takes two hours to pour each batch of chocolate into the Michigan molds that are cooled down in a special compartment in the Hanover shop. Wrapping the candies in foil used to be a real labor of love. Each piece was hand-wrapped when the business first started.

“Later, we were able to purchase a machine that had been used by Russel Stover that can wrap about 100 pieces a minute,” Karl says of the speedier process that still requires a human touch. Karl places the individual candies on the conveyor belt where they’re machine-wrapped before Heather takes the finished pieces off the belt in preparation for packaging.

Watching Karl and Heather do their candy-wrapping thing is like an old “I Love Lucy” episode—except Heather manages to keep up without popping any candies into her mouth.

In addition to the Michigan molds, the Hanovers produce special orders for businesses and individuals who want a specific mold imprint. “We’ve done a number of molds with logos of corporations, and wedding molds that couples use for table treats and decorations,” Heather says.

Operating a home-based business that’s labor intensive is demanding, but somehow it fits the couple’s busy lifestyle. Heather has served on the St. Johns City Commission for the past eight years, and is an active volunteer in school and athletic activities. Karl coaches soccer and hockey at both the high school level and for youth travel teams.

“Now that the kids are older, they help out during our busy times of the year—it’s a real family business that works for us,” Heather says.


**Minty Facts**

- It takes four tons of mint plants to produce 25 pounds of oil, and a pound of oil can flavor 135,000 sticks of gum.
- Peppermint is used for making menthol, for flavoring and in medicine.
- Spearmint oil is used chiefly for flavoring chewing gum.
- Peppermint oil can help relax muscles of the digestive tract to relieve symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome.
- Peppermint is useful in reducing sinus congestion when added to a bowl of steaming water.
- Peppermint may ease headaches and migraines. Apply a rub to temple area in circular motion and across forehead.
- Use peppermint to soothe arthritis pain. Mix 4-5 drops of oil into 1 ounce of lotion and massage into joints.
- Mint oil can increase energy and aid in reducing depression when used as aromatherapy.
- Adding mint oil to your humidifier can kill bacteria.
- Mint oil added to animal shampoo is a natural flea and tick repellant.
- Note: All mint oils should be kept away from eyes.

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As the first commercial kitchen “incubator” in Michigan, The Starting Block provides a licensed kitchen where its clients can produce, package, store and ship their products. It also offers the marketing and business know-how to successfully grow their businesses.

In the face of Michigan’s manufacturing job losses, Director Ron Steiner gets excited about the little incubator’s potential for a positive impact on jobs. Most Starting Block clients have ties to agriculture and natural resources. “That,” Steiner asserts, “offers plenty of opportunity to build some really good Michigan businesses here that aren’t going to leave the state.”

Current Starting Block clients include Vicki Fuller of Fremont, who owns Maple Island Pie Factory, LLC, and Lisa Dutcher of Hesperia, who owns Sassy Seasonings. Others produce or packaging products such as gluten-free pastry mixes, imported virgin olive oil, candied nuts, cornbread stuffing, and cherry juice concentrate. Business owners, who often hold “day jobs” outside of their incubator ventures, have 24/7 access to the facility so they can produce their products at any time it suits them. Kitchen tenants rent facilities by the hour, and office tenants get high-speed internet and all utilities except long-distance phone for a $110 monthly fee.

Fuller considered running her pie business from home, but a visit to The Starting Block convinced her that licensing requirements make it easier just to use its commercial kitchen. Plus, she appreciates the business guidance that’s available.

“They told me just what to do—first step, second step, third step, fourth step—making it so much easier for me to get this endeavor started,” says Fuller.

“I love the partnership,” Dutcher adds. “Using The Starting Block has been a great experience for me.”

Getting Started & Growing

As a former director of the Oceana County Economic Development Corporation and a current regional entrepreneurship educator for MSU’s Ag Extension office, Steiner has a long history of helping businesses bloom.

While working for MSU in 2003, he started the kitchen incubator in Hart and with state and federal funding, opened The Starting Block in 2006. Keeping the doors open since has sometimes been a challenge, admits Steiner. He brought in Jim Henley and Jane Dosemagen to help him in 2005. The two now have restaurant backgrounds and the same determination to make The Starting Block a major resource for the regional business and agricultural community. Dosemagen manages the orderly operations while Henley oversees sanitation, safety and process training. All three learned to operate on a shoestring budget with past business ventures and use that experience to help their clients.

“When you’re an entrepreneur, you do everything that needs to be done to make the business run,” says Dosemagen.

Not dwelling on job descriptions, the trio has installed flooring and equipment, painted walls, and scrounged for used equipment for the incubator. And, local businesses have willingly provided equipment free or at a very reasonable cost.

Steiner proudly shows a used forklift donated by Elston-Richards, Inc., of Grand Rapids, a candy-coating machine from Hart food processor Gray and Company, and desks from Dow Chemical. Other finds include equipment bought from a closed school and a $20,000 walk-in cooler acquired for $6,500 (assembly and installation, courtesy of volunteers). Such savings, Steiner says, allows current incubator grant funds to be used for rent and overhead expenses.

Donations have also helped fund educational programs. For example, Great Lakes Energy’s People Fund provided a $4,750 grant in 2007 for business classes for high school-age entrepreneurs to plant seeds for future business startups. The Starting Block also offers business and marketing classes to the general public, and Henley plans to develop training that will give kitchen and serving staff practical experience before a new restaurant opens.

Targeted, relatively short business courses and continued support from The Starting Block can launch people into their own businesses faster and more successfully than longer, more general classes offered through most colleges, claims Steiner.

“Once people realize what we’re trying to accomplish, it captures them,” Steiner reports, “and donations follow.” More federal grant dollars will become available when enough nonfederal matching funds are received.

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**Lemon Crackle Cookies**

2 c. sugar
1 c. butter
2 eggs, beaten
4 1/2 T. lemon juice
grated rind of 1 lemon
2 t. baking soda
2 t. cream of tartar
1/2 t. salt
3 c. flour

Cream sugar and butter together; add eggs and beat well. Add lemon juice and rind. Sift dry ingredients together and stir into batter. Drop by small teaspoonfuls onto an ungreased baking sheet. Bake at 375° for 6-8 minutes. Cookies will spread while baking and should be thin and crisp.

Janice Harvey, Charlevoix

---

**Orange Pineapple Salad**

1 3-oz. orange or orange-pineapple flavored Jell-O
1 8 1/2-oz. crushed pineapple, undrained
1 c. diced orange sections
1 11-oz. mandarin oranges, drained
1 c. miniature marshmallows
1 c. sour cream
2 T. mayonnaise
2 T. grated cheddar cheese

Dissolve Jell-O in 1 cup hot water. Add pineapple and chill until slightly thickened. Fold in orange sections, mandarin oranges and marshmallows. Pour into a 11x7-inch or 8x8-inch pan and chill until firm. Combine sour cream and mayonnaise and spread on set Jell-O. Sprinkle with cheese and serve.

Paula Brousseau, Bellaire

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**Mandarin Sunshine Cake**

1 23-oz. yellow cake mix
1/4 c. applesauce
4 egg whites
1 11-oz. mandarin oranges
Frosting:
8 oz. whipped topping, thawed
1 3.4-oz. instant vanilla pudding
1 15 1/2-oz. can crushed pineapple in juice

In a large bowl, mix together cake mix, applesauce, egg whites and oranges, stirring together by hand just until moist. Pour into a greased and floured 9x13-inch pan and bake at 350° for 30-45 minutes. Cool completely. Blend frosting ingredients together and spread on cake. Store in refrigerator.

Susie Heil, Farwell

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**Orange Meringue Pie**

2 c. graham cracker crumbs
1/4 c. melted butter
3 eggs, separated, at room temperature
1 t. vanilla, divided
1/2 t. salt, divided
2 1/2 c. fresh orange juice, divided
3/4 c. sugar
1/4 c. cornstarch
1/4 c. finely grated tangerine or orange zest
1/4 t. cream of tartar
6 T. powdered sugar

Combine graham crumbs and butter; toss with a fork until moist. Press into bottom of a 9-inch pie pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 10 minutes; cool. Increase oven temperature to 375°. Whisk egg yolks, 1/2 teaspoon vanilla, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/2 cup juice in a medium bowl until smooth. Combine remaining juice, sugar, cornstarch and zest in a medium saucepan; whisk in egg yolk mixture. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly until thick and bubbling, about 5 minutes. Pour into crust. Beat egg whites, cream of tartar and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt in a large bowl with a mixer at high speed, until foamy, about 1 minute. Beat in powdered sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time; continue beating until soft peaks form. Beat in remaining 1/2 teaspoon vanilla. Spread meringue over warm pie, sealing to crust edges. Bake about 15 minutes until lightly browned and set. Cool to room temperature on a wire rack before serving. Serves 8.

Bonnie Gauld, Fife Lake

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**Lemon Curd**

1/2 stick butter
2 c. sugar
pinch of salt
1/2 c. lemon juice
1 T. lemon zest
3 eggs, well beaten

Put 1/2- to 3/4-inch deep water in the bottom of a double boiler. In the top, combine butter, sugar, salt, lemon juice and zest. Over medium heat, cook and stir until butter is melted. Stir in beaten eggs and continue cooking until thick, about 5-7 minutes. Pour into small tart shells and chill. Top with whipped cream, if desired.

Grace Meyers, Atlanta

---

**Garlic & Citrus Chicken**

1 5-6 lb. whole roasting chicken
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 orange, quartered
1 lime, quartered
1 ribs celery, quartered
1 head garlic, halved crosswise, + 3 garlic cloves, chopped
2 14-oz. cans chicken broth
1/4 c. frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
1/4 c. fresh lemon juice
2 T. olive oil
1 T. chopped fresh oregano leaves

Remove and discard neck and giblets. Rinse chicken and pat dry with paper towels. Sprinkle inside cavity with salt and pepper. Stuff cavity with celery, orange, lemon and garlic halves. Tie legs together with string. Tuck wing tips behind top of chicken. Place chicken, breast side up, on a rack in a large roasting pan. Pour half a can of broth in pan. Roast at 400° for 1 hour, basting occasionally and adding broth to the pan, if necessary, to prevent pan drippings from burning. Whisk together orange juice, lemon juice, oil, oregano and chopped garlic in a medium bowl. Brush juice mixture over chicken...
Citrus Fruit Bowl

1 1/4 1/2-oz. fruit cocktail, drained
1 10-oz. chunk pineapple, drained
6-8 oz. mandarin oranges, drained
16 oz. jellied cranberry sauce
1 1/2 c. whipped topping

Mix all ingredients together in a serving bowl. Refrigerate until thickened. Serves 6 to 8.

Dixie Lee Churchill, Pentwater

Grapefruit & Yogurt Pops

2 c. plain, low-fat yogurt
2 c. pink grapefruit sections
1 t. granulated sugar
1/4 t. salt

Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor and mix until smooth. Pour into popsicle molds and freeze until firm.

Gertrude Romanchok, Traverse City

Lemon Custard-Filled Cake Roll

Filling:
1/3 c. corn starch
1/2 c. water
2 lg. egg yolks
1 1/2 oz. can evaporated milk
3/4 c. granulated sugar
3/4 t. salt
1/2 c. fresh lemon
1 cinnamon stick
2 T. sweet sherry

Cake:
1 1/2 c. + 2 T. powdered sugar, divided
1 c. sifted flour
1/2 t. salt
3 lg. eggs
1 1/2 c. granulated sugar
1/2 c. намel
zest of 1/2 fresh lemon
1 stick unsalted butter, melted and cooled ground cinnamon for dusting

Dissolve cornstarch in water in a medium, heavy-duty saucepan. Add egg yolks; mix well. Add milk, sugar, salt, lemon peel and cinnamon stick. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until mixture just comes to a boil. Remove from heat. Strain into a small bowl. Discard lemon peel and cinnamon stick. Stir in sherry. Cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally. Grease a 15x10-inch jelly roll pan; line with wax paper. Grease and flour paper. Sprinkle a thin, cotton kitchen towel with 1/2 cup powdered sugar. Combine flour and salt in a small bowl. Beat eggs in a medium mixer bowl until foamy. Gradually add granulated sugar and lemon rind. Beat 4 minutes or until very light and fluffy. Stir in flour and salt. Lightly fold in butter. Quickly pour batter into prepared pan; spread evenly. Bake at 375° for 8-9 minutes or until top of cake springs back when touched. Immediately loosen and turn cake onto prepared towel. Carefully peel off paper. Roll up cake and towel together, starting with narrow end. Cool completely on wire rack. Unroll cake, remove towel. Spread filling over cake to within 1/2 inch of edges. Roll and refrigerate at least one hour. Unwrap and sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons powdered sugar and cinnamon before serving.

Jennifer Hansen, MECA

Fruit Punch

1 46-oz. pineapple juice
2 6-oz. cans frozen lemonade concentrate
1 64-oz. cran-apple juice
1 32-oz. apple juice
1 1/2 t. ginger ale
1 1/2 c. raspberries
1 1/2 c. lemon sherbet

In a large bowl, combine liquid ingredients; chill. Float scoops of sherbet on top and serve.

Connie Foltz, McMillan
Growing Herbs
Is Simpler Than You Think

Once you get used to fresh herbs, it’s hard to go back to the jars.

If you’ve been meaning to grow your own herbs but don’t know where to start… listen up! You’ll be surprised to discover that it doesn’t take an extensive investment of time or energy.

“Once you’ve tasted the fresh herbs out of the garden, it’s hard to go back to the jars. The flavor is not only stronger, it’s distinct,” says Midwest Energy Co-op member Karen Nelson, of Edwardsville. A certified master herbalist, she has been selling herbs for over 16 years and her nursery, Nelson’s Herbs, offers over 300 different varieties.

Even if you are not into cooking, just brushing against herbs as you work in your garden is worth the price of admission. Some gardeners never miss a chance to rub the leaves of their beloved basil or lavender and let those fragrances soothe the soul.

“First you need to decide on how big an herb garden you want,” Nelson explains. “If you are looking for a good place to start, think about planting a container full of culinary herbs.” Strawberry planters with individual side “pockets” make a nice container for herbs and generally hold five to seven plants, depending on the container size. You are better off using a large container (5 to 10 gallons) so they won’t need constant watering. Use a quality soilless mix. Throw in some 14-14-14 time-release fertilizer and you are set to go. Rosemary, French tarragon, sweet marjoram, oregano and thyme do well in containers.

Generally, it’s a good idea to pick a location that gets full sun (6 to 8 hours). But many herbs will do okay with 4 to 6 hours. The nice thing about a container is that you can move it if the herbs don’t seem to be getting enough sun. “Locate your container outside the kitchen door so you can run out and make a few snips as you cook dinner,” Nelson suggests. If you are more ambitious and want a more permanent herb bed, Nelson suggests starting with a 4’ x 4’ square, which will hold six to 10 plants comfortably. The important thing is to keep the herb patch a size you can reach across, so you’ll have easy access to the herbs without stepping on and compacting the soil.

If you are committed to a larger herb garden, Nelson recommends putting in four 4’ x 4’ squares with 2- to 3-foot walkways between them, and put a small seat or birdbath in the garden. One of the advantages of a larger herb garden is sitting among your herbs and enjoying their textures and scents.

Culinary herbs that grow well in Michigan are these perennials: chives, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, thyme, and winter savory. These annuals do well in our climate: basil, rosemary, summer savory and parsley (it’s a biennial but in colder climates parsley is grown as an annual). If you want to get more elaborate, hedge your herb bed with germander or a low-growing boxwood for a more formal look. Elfin thyme is great in pathways, creeping between stepping stones and putting off a scent when stepped on.

Nelson recommends harvesting fresh herbs before they bloom. “Harvest when dew is off in the morning, but before the sun leaches essential oils out of the herbs. Don’t harvest when wet because they will mold.” Gather eight or nine stems and bunch them together with a rubber band. Hang the bunches in a dry location, with the stems pointing upwards and out of direct sunlight. An attic works well. Generally, it takes about a week to 10 days for herbs to dry. To keep dust and dirt off them while drying, Nelson recommends taking a hole punch to a paper bag, then placing the bag over the herbs. Use cheesecloth over larger leaf herbs. Store dried herbs in airtight containers in a dark area up to a year. Herbs

Suggested Herb Uses

**BEEF:** Basil, Marjoram, Parsley, Sage, Thyme

**POULTRY:** Basil, Marjoram, Parsley, Sage, Thyme, Rosemary

**FISH:** Basil, Dill, Fennel, Lemon Balm, Rosemary, Savory

**TOMATOES:** Basil, Fennel, Garlic, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary

**SOUP:** Basil, Marjoram, Parsley, Sage, Thyme

**SALADS:** Basil, Fennel, Marjoram, Parsley, Savory, Tarragon

**CREAM SAUCES:** Dill, Parsley, Tarragon

**SALSAS:** Cilantro, Garlic, Parsley, Oregano

**BREADS:** Basil, Marjoram Oregano, Rosemary, Sage, Thyme
Karen Nelson, owner of Nelson’s Herbs, in Edwardsburg, recently expanded her gift shop to include a coffee shop large enough to hold seminars on topics such as harvesting herbs, herbal teas, and “green” cleaning. For more information about seminars and store hours, call 269-663-8164.

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can be frozen in a zip-lock bag or chopped and frozen in an ice cube tray with a small amount of water. Bon appétit!

Rita Henehan, a freelance writer from White Pigeon, is a member of Midwest Energy Cooperative. She is an advanced master gardener from Purdue University and her gardening book, “The Michigan Gardener’s Companion: An insider’s guide to gardening in the Great Lakes State” was published by Globe Peqout Press. Email her at rchenehan@voyager.net.

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Flush High Bathroom Energy Costs

Using several bathrooms in a home accounts for a significant amount of your year-round utility bills. Bathrooms use both hot and cold water, heating and cooling, and electricity for lighting and appliances. With whirlpools and other comfort appliances, bathrooms are used for more hours today than ever before.

Since people normally associate a bathroom with water usage, let's start there. Flushing toilets is the major cold water consumer in most bathrooms and the toilet typically is replaced when remodeling. During the winter, all of the cold water which comes indoors when the toilet is flushed draws heat from the house as the water in the tank warms up. This can be a significant hidden energy loss.

The maximum water usage allowed for new toilets is 1.6 gpf (gallons per flush) and most toilets use this maximum. Several of the major plumbing fixture manufacturers now offer super-efficient standard-flush toilets which use even less water. Since not as many of these super-efficient toilet styles are available, select the toilet first and then match the other fixtures to it.

The type of showerhead impacts both the amount of cold and hot water consumed. There are maximum water flow rates for showerheads. Large shower units with multiple heads use more water, though. If you have tried older low-flow showerheads in the past and were dissatisfied, the new ones provide a more forceful spray. Select a showerhead which has a tickle valve to slow the water flow while you are lathering. The main knob on some massaging showerheads also can be adjusted to just a trickle.

Much hot and cold water is wasted trying to get the shower water temperature where you want it. Manual and electronic shower valves are available which allow the temperature to be set on a dial or digitally. The correct temperature is reached quicker with less water wasted down the drain. Some may also allow you to reduce the water flow without changing the water temperature.

If it takes a long time to get hot water to the shower or sink, install a rapid hot water demand kit underneath the sink. When you need hot water, it draws hot water quickly to the faucet. Instead of the cold water being wasted down the drain while waiting, it flows back to the water heater tank. In addition to saving water, it saves energy because less incoming cold water has to be heated. Also, the hot water gets to the faucet quickly, so less heat energy is lost from the plumbing inside the walls and floors.

Bathroom heating is another energy consideration because you want the heat quickly, but for only a short period of time. A radiant system can make you feel comfortably warm without having to heat all the air in the bathroom. This feels similar to standing outdoors in the direct sun on a cold day. The air is cold, but the radiant heat warms your body quickly.

Electric radiant floor or wall heating is a good choice. Radiant wall heating panels warm and produce heat quickly so they are ideal for unplanned times in the bathroom. Electric in-floor radiant heat is very comfortable for a bathroom. Since it takes somewhat longer to warm up, put it on a timer for typical bathroom usage times. Overhead radiant bulbs also provide spot heating quickly.

A high-quality bathroom vent fan with humidity- and/or motion-sensing controls is most efficient. It runs only as long as it is actually needed so excessive heated air (winter) or cooled air (summer) is not being sucked from your house. The newest, most quiet ones often require a larger duct so you may have to alter the vent pipe in the attic to accommodate one. They also minimize air leakage when the fan is not running.

Select a vent fan with a light fixture and install full-spectrum compact fluorescent bulbs. These are energy efficient and produce natural light for applying makeup. A vent fan with a built-in night-light is good for a child's bathroom.

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www.countrylines.com
February 2008
PHOTO GALLERY

Kids & Pets

Send in your “Unusual Wildlife Sighting” photo and it may be included in a future issue. Please send clear, well-focused photos (gloss finish preferred). Digital photos must be large enough files for print media. Photos will not be returned without a stamped, self-addressed envelope. No professional photos are accepted. Please include your name and indicate which Michigan electric cooperative you belong to. Send to: C. Zuker, 2859 W. Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 49964, or e-mail czuker@countrylines.com.

Left column, from top: Zachary Albin and Bertha, Thumb Electric; Madeline and Clare Frey hugging Annie, Great Lakes Energy; Glen Kirkey and Elrod King Kong, HomeWorks Tri-County; and David Lee Wagner III, Great Lakes Energy.

Center column, from top: Madelyn Schafer and Sadie, HomeWorks Tri-County; Michael Taylor and Gary Ezelle the squirrel, Great Lakes Energy; John and Jessie Walkiewicz with Bruno, HomeWorks Tri-County; Aileen Fager with Buttercup the miniature horse, Midwest Energy; and Julie Anna and Jack, HomeWorks Tri-County.

Right column, from top: Shaelyn Keenan and Kinder, Cherryland Electric; Tristin Braun and Bear, Midwest Energy; and James and Annabell Brand with Ruby, Great Lakes Energy.
HOMEOWNERS 62 OR OLDER – With a FHA government insured “Reverse Mortgage,” can borrow against the equity in their home with no monthly payments. 231-972-8898.


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BANDSAW MILL FOR SALE – Portable, 36-inch log capacity, 18HP, 231-464-7368.

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HERE’S HOUGH

We’ve heard that previous collections of Jim’s columns, now out of print, are collectors’ items. We can’t vouch for that, but we can attest, as readers have, that his current collection of favorite “Right at Home” columns from Michigan Country Lines is a sure cure for the blues. The book covers the last 10 years of Jim’s columns, and when it’s gone, it’s gone. Order with this form, or online at www.countrylines.com/store

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February 2008 www.countrylines.com
Somebody Else’s Dog

Enjoy this sweet story of love, caring and compromise.

When my friend Chris died, my husband and I adopted her 12-year-old Sheltie. We have a 5-year-old Lab mix and were settled into a routine. The Sheltie changed all that.

He peed all over the house, often after he’d just returned from outside. All night he paced, his toenails clicking out the hours on the wood floors. We kept our bedroom door closed because we wanted him to sleep on his bed, but he was determined to be in the bedroom. In the morning, we’d find him curled against the door as we stumbled out for coffee.

He played aggressively with our Lab, and to her credit, she let him herd her, snapping at her sides and face. He ran over to the neighbor’s yard as often as he could, lured by the sirens call of their female Sheltie. And he barked, at nearly every noise, or imagined noise.

I attributed much of his behavior to grieving. When the ambulance came for Chris at her home, Lucky ran off. He was recovered and went to live with one of Chris’ daughters while Chris remained in the hospital. He never saw his mistress again.

The crisis occurred in early July. My husband reached for Lucky’s collar to take him out of the bedroom for the unspoken time. Lucky bit him on the middle finger. We cleaned the break in the skin and bandaged it. Two nights later my husband’s hand swelled to resemble a red boxing glove, and the pain was intense. Heading home at 1 a.m. from the emergency room, I asked my husband if I should look for another home for Lucky. Perhaps he was feeling mellow from the IV full of antibiotics and pain medication, but to my surprise he said, “No.” We would keep Lucky. I was relieved that I could honor Chris by taking care of her beloved Sheltie (the one she let sleep with her and sit on her lap).

And after that, things improved. The peeing in the house stopped entirely; he stopped running towards the neighbors when we yelled a sharp, “hey.” Our routine became familiar, and he relaxed. (Treatment from the vet for a bad tooth and ear infections improved his disposition.) Now he sleeps most nights. When he comes into the bedroom, it’s usually to check up on us. The bedroom isn’t completely forbidden territory anymore. He and the Lab switch dog beds during the night, or sometimes decide to share the big plaid one.

Lucky lived in town and took short walks on a leash on sidewalks. Living with us, he’s forced to be a country dog. He walks the trails throughout the acres of woods that surround our home. He comes home loaded with burrs, pickers, grasses and twigs. While the Lab dashes through the underbrush in pursuit of anything that moves or makes a squeak, Lucky is content to stick to the path. Other animals seem to hold no interest when he is on his walk.

Winter has brought new obstacles. Shelties are not designed for navigating deep snow. After the last blizzard we headed for the woods on snowshoes. The Lab left us to head under the pines in bounding leaps. Lucky trudged along in the imprints made by our snowshoes. Soon he was encased in packed snow, on his stomach, paws and chest. He eventually slowed to a crawl, and I picked him up for the rest of the walk. We’ve always had an aversion to “doggy clothes,” but we’ve been scanning catalogs for suitable outerwear for him.

Lucky is not allowed upstairs, where I sometimes work on my laptop. The floor is carpeted and none of our dogs, previous pets included, have been allowed up there. We tried keeping him out of my husband’s downstairs study, but finally acquiesced. He lies beside the computer’s hard drive, soothed by the warmth and the hum. I remember when Chris was at the computer working on her poetry, Lucky curled up on a rug next to her hard drive.

So, dog and humans are coexisting by making adjustments. Lucky still barks more than we’d like, patrolling the house, checking the doors and windows. But he sticks to the dog bed most nights and adheres to a regular elimination schedule—outdoors. What more could we ask for?

Marla Kay Houghteling’s story is the first chosen from reader responses to Jim Hough’s call for columns to print when he’s on vacation. She lives in Harbor Springs and is a member of Great Lakes Energy Cooperative.
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