

# MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES

Great Lakes Energy Cooperative

## A Story *100 Years* In The Making

With Mammoth Distilling

A Front-Row  
Seat To History

Making  
Spirits Bright

Get Energy Wise





Sitting on new bleachers purchased with the help of a People Fund grant, students listen to a presentation by a member of the Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Club during the club's annual Harvest Days in September.

## A Front-Row Seat To History

**S**ince 1994, an antique tractor mounted on a 15-foot pole has stood watch over the Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Club showgrounds along U.S. 131 in Charlevoix County.

Although the well-known landmark may lead some passing motorists to believe the group who put it there is primarily made up of antique tractor enthusiasts, the 34-year-old organization is much more than that.

The group's larger purpose is really about providing the community with a window to the past. Earlier this year, Great Lakes Energy members, through their contributions to the People Fund, helped the Flywheelers (as the group is known locally) with its effort to provide an improved front-row seat to history.

Organization board president Bob DeVol said the group used a \$6,000 People Fund Grant, combined with grants from the Petoskey-Harbor Springs Community Foundation and the Charlevoix County Community Foundation, to purchase nine new portable bleacher sections for its showgrounds. Bob said that the new bleachers replaced several aging sets of bleachers that had been donated to the group many years ago and were well beyond repair.

The bleachers are primarily used for demonstrations to spectators during two four-day periods each year.

### Showtime

The group's annual Tractor, Engine, and Craft Show has taken place on the last full weekend in July since the organization was founded in 1988. The event features a host of daily activities, including demonstrations and parades of antique tractors, engines, and other equipment, and many other attractions such as food concessions, a flea market, antique autos, children's activities, threshing demonstrations, musical entertainment, small engine displays, arts and crafts, and more. The group's many buildings are also open with ongoing demonstrations. Some of these include a museum, a blacksmith shop, a grist mill, a filling station, a one-room schoolhouse, a sawmill, a shingle mill, and a basket and veneer mill. For many years, the show also featured tractor pulls. The show typically draws around 6,000 people during the four days, Bob said.

### Harvest Days

Each September since 1998, the Flywheelers have hosted their annual Student Harvest Days. During these special days, the group invites fourth-grade classes from all over northern Michigan to participate in a day full of events that showcase what life was like before many of the modern conveniences we enjoy today existed. Some of the same attractions and demonstrations during the annual show are offered in stations that students cycle through. One of the

stations features a one-room schoolhouse from the 1930s that was donated to the Flywheelers and relocated to the site many years ago. In another station, students get to see how wheat is harvested using a threshing machine, and in another station, they see the wheat turned into flour in a grist mill. In yet another station, students learn how water can be pumped without the use of electricity.

Indeed, many of the Flywheelers' displays and programs demonstrate what day-to-day life was like in many rural areas before electric cooperatives such as Great Lakes Energy brought electric service to previously unserved areas.

Bob noted that the group recently added stations highlighting land and water conservation information.

The Flywheelers welcomed 46 classes from around northern Michigan for Student Harvest Days this year, Bob said.

## History In The Making

The Flywheelers' organization traces its roots back to April 1988, when 27 people gathered to listen to Larry Matthews' idea of starting an antique engine show in the Walloon Lake area. Four months later, the organization that came to be known as the Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Club had been officially formed, and members hosted its first show on the Matthews farm on U.S. 131 on the last full weekend of July.

According to its articles of incorporation, the group's purpose is: "to promote the interests of forestry, agriculture, horticulture, household arts, mechanical arts, and sciences of historical value; to conduct annual public educational exhibitions of historical value; and to promote charitable, educational, and historical purposes."

For the first four years, the annual show took place on the Matthews farm. Then in 1991, the group purchased the property that is now its showgrounds. Since then, many buildings and other attractions have been added to the site. One of the early additions was a Sinker-Davis Sawmill Model #53. Bob noted that the lumber for many of the buildings that are now on the showgrounds was cut on that mill using logs donated from the area.

The Flywheelers' main sources of revenue used to support its projects and programs come from admissions and food sales during each year's show. Bob said that's why grants from sources such as the People Fund play a key role in the organization's success. To mark the group's 25th anniversary in 2013, Debra Matthews, daughter of founder Larry Matthews, wrote an in-depth Flywheelers history on its website. In the post, Debra notes that the dash between the words "Antique" and "Flywheelers" in the group's name is there for a specific purpose: "The dash reminds us that we are not just old tractors and engines, but everything antique," Debra wrote.

**For more information about the Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Association—including how to become a member and a detailed club history—visit the organization's website at [walloonlakeflywheelers.com/](http://walloonlakeflywheelers.com/).**



Students dump kernels of wheat into a grist mill at the Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Club showgrounds during Harvest Days in September.



Students watch as a Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Club member demonstrates making wooden shingles during the club's Harvest Days in September.



Students watch as Northern Michigan Antique-Flywheelers Club members demonstrate yarn spinning and other common household tasks during the group's Harvest Days in September.