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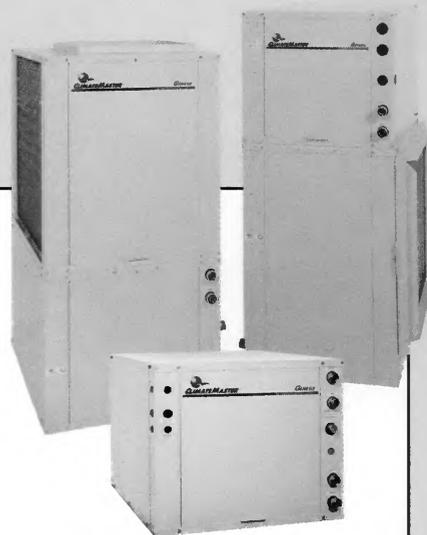
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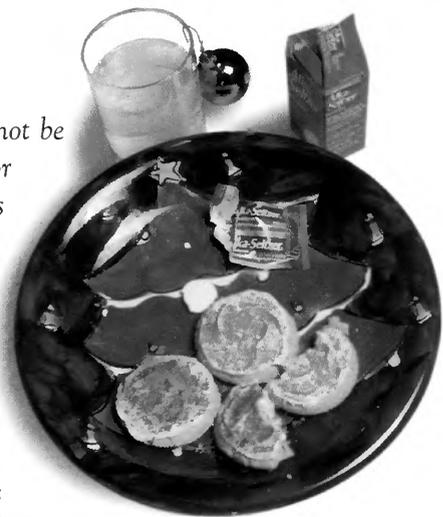
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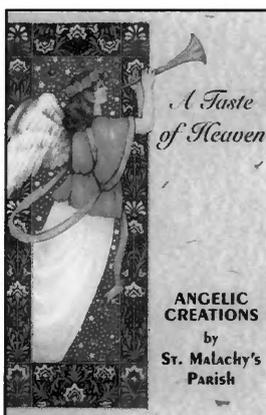
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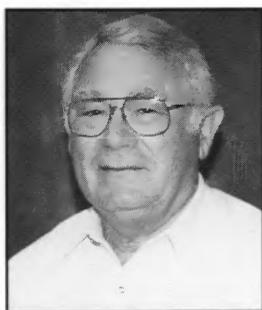


Illinois COMMENTARY

Co-ops committed to tomorrow's leaders

One of the things that sets electric co-ops apart from other electricity suppliers is our local nature. We're part of the community and we care about the people who live there. After all, they are our friends and neighbors. In fact one of the internationally recognized cooperative principles is concern for community. It's not just a concern, it's a commitment.

With that in mind, the electric co-ops of Illinois



Briscoe N. Menke

set up a scholarship fund to memorialize past co-op leaders. It began with two \$1,000 scholarships, one for children of co-op directors and employees, and the other for members' children. Since the launching of the program six years ago, a second scholarship to benefit members' children has been added.

Co-ops have placed stories in their newsletters urging young people to apply. Candidates are judged on the basis of grade point average, college entrance exam scores, and work and volunteer experience. High school seniors pursuing a college education in the state of Illinois are eligible to participate in the program.

There is an even older program, and that's our "Youth to Washington Tour." The program has run continuously since 1957, when then-U.S. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson urged electric co-ops to send promising young people to tour the nation's capital. The idea was that prospective leaders could experience our form of government first-hand.

Little did the future president realize that his off-the-cuff remarks at a gathering of local co-op leaders

would lead to a program that has lasted more than 40 years. Since that time, Illinois co-ops have sent more than 2,500 of our best and brightest young people to Washington.

We're proud to be involved in these programs, because they provide needed community services, and it gives an opportunity to recognize our communities' outstanding young people. And, they help develop future leaders.

Two members of the Illinois House, Art Tenhouse of Liberty and Tom Ryder of Jerseyville, participated in the tour as students years ago. So did inventor/entrepreneur Curt Jones, who went on to invent Dippin' Dots ice cream, and many other leading citizens from all across downstate Illinois.

Many of the young leaders have come home from the trip to return later as interns and assistants to legislators. Brian Hetzer, son of Norris Electric Cooperative director Kent Hetzer, took the trip two years ago, then returned this summer as an intern to Rep. David Phelps.

"Illinois Electric and Telephone Cooperatives Youth Day," a part of the Washington tour program, brings nearly 300 rural high school student leaders to the state capital every spring. Participating co-ops send selected youths, often finalists in the Washington contest, to Springfield. While there, they tour selected sites in the capital and visit with their area legislators.

A highlight of last year's tour was a visit to Secretary of State Jesse White's office. Even though White's office is large, the young people were packed in, and White was unable to see all of them. He climbed on top of his desk, and told them about his life as a paratrooper, professional baseball player, legislator and leader of the Jesse White Tumblers. He urged his audience to take part in the political process, and to at least follow matters closely enough that they can cast informed votes.

All these programs are in place because our co-ops care about their communities. They're proof positive that co-ops understand that the real power of cooperatives is the human connection. Let all of us remember that we need to invest in and nurture our greatest asset — the leaders of tomorrow. If you know a young person who would benefit from these programs, please contact your local cooperative for more information.

Briscoe Menke of Carthage serves as a board member for Western Illinois Electrical Coop. and for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. Menke is retired after a career with USDA as farm program director for Hancock county and an ag loan officer for Marine Trust Co. in Carthage. Menke and his wife Jeanne have two sons and are members of the Elvaston Presbyterian Church.

The opinions and views of guest commentators are their own and may not represent those of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives or the electric co-ops of Illinois.

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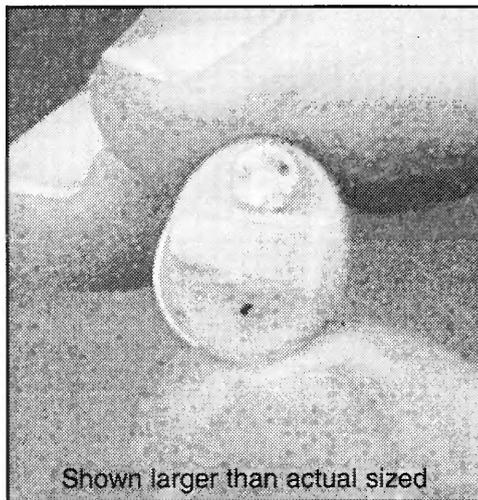
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"The right aid is just wonderful, fits just perfect... last week we had a Christmas Party at a restaurant with approximately 50 people and I could sit and talk with the parties that were there and could hear every word." *JoAnn Kellar, OR*

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Co-op to build clean coal generating plant

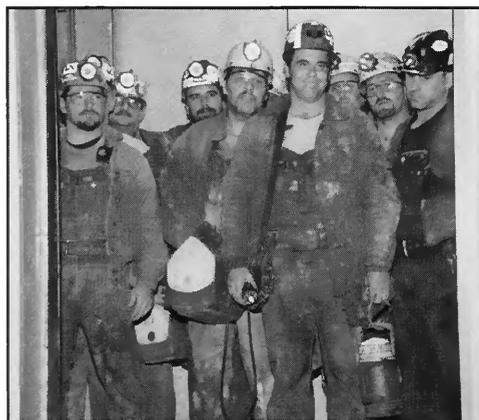
Corn Belt Energy Corporation, a locally owned energy cooperative headquartered in Bloomington, has developed a plan for construction of the first coal-fired generating plant to be built in Illinois in 14 years. The plant will be built on land owned by Turriss Coal Company and will use approximately 70,000 tons of coal per year from the company's Elkhart mine in Logan County.

The plans call for a 91-megawatt plant costing \$137 million. The plant is moderately sized compared to many Illinois coal-fired power stations. Most coal plants are three to five times the size of the proposed Corn Belt plant. Because the plant will demonstrate new clean coal technology it will be partially financed with grants totaling \$51 million from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory, Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs and the Illinois Clean Coal Board. Corn Belt Energy is taking the lead ownership position in the plant and is expecting several other cooperatives to become joint owners.

"We needed to minimize the cost of

power for our members," says Jeff Reeves, president/CEO of Corn Belt Energy. "One of the ways to do that is to own our own generation instead of buying power on the market. Right now electricity has become a very volatile commodity. Wholesale power prices have been as high as \$7 per kilowatt-hour during peak demand times when energy supplies are at a premium."

Reeves says the coal-fired plant will be the first large-scale demonstration of a boiler built by the D.B. Riley Company that dramatically reduces nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions. The basic boiler design has been used for 30 years in Europe, but has been redesigned to use re-engineered burners that will substantially reduce NOx emissions. The Department of Energy has funded the burner improvement through the Low Emission Boiler System program. The new generating plant will also be built with scrubbers to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions. Using this new clean coal technology, the plant will exceed all current environmental re-



The coal miners from the Turriss coal mine in Logan county, and miners across the state and nation will benefit from new clean coal technology and increased demand for coal.

quirements.

Plans call for construction to begin in 2001 and be completed by late 2004. During construction, nearly 200 jobs will be created. Operation of the plant will require 24 fulltime employees, according to Reeves. But the economic impact will benefit the entire state and coal industry.

Coal is the state's third largest industry, but it has been in decline since 1990. A future turnaround in the industry will require commercially available clean coal-fueled technology and companies willing to invest in coal-fueled facilities.

Clean coal technology will also mean stable electric rates. Of the nation's 25 power plants with the lowest operating costs, 23 are fueled by coal. The price of coal has declined 40 percent in real terms as natural gas prices have more than doubled recently.

Reeves said, "There is no one answer to our power supply needs and the cost of energy. It will take all of us working together to find answers to our energy requirements, keep our economy growing, build environmentally sound power plants, and provide reasonably priced energy solutions for our cooperative members."

EPA says air quality improving

The latest annual air quality trends report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shows that total emissions of six principal air pollutants decreased 31 percent since passage of the Clean Air Act in 1970.

The six major pollutants are smog, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, nitrogen oxide and particulate matter. Of the six, only nitrogen oxide showed an increase in the 30 year period. However, NOx emissions were down by 10 percent since 1990 and new EPA rules should make even further reductions in the near future.

In the 1990s alone, concentrations of lead decreased by 60 percent and sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide went down by 36 percent each. The agency report pointed out that during this same period U.S. population and gross domestic product both increased dramatically.

Copies of the report are available to download at www.epa.gov/airtrends.

Source: Illinois Energy Association

Sensors turn lights off automatically

More than 20 percent of all electricity generated in the United States is used for lighting. And half of that energy is wasted.

You could ask everyone in the family to turn off room lights when they aren't needed. But if you have young children, active teenagers or forgetful adults in the house, it's one thing to ask, and another thing to get them to cooperate.

Here's a better idea. Install occupancy sensors. They could help save a few dollars each month on your electric bill.

An occupancy sensor automatically turns lights on when someone enters a room, and then turns them off once the person leaves the area. In the home, they're ideal for basements, garages and hallways.

They're inexpensive devices and can be purchased at home centers and hardware stores. Since they're designed to replace a regular wall switch, they're easy to install and inexpensive.

Occupancy sensors also provide hands-free lighting. They make a home safer and more convenient for older and disabled people.

Source: Leviton Institute, www.leviton.com.

Heating assistance available for low income households

Governor George H. Ryan announced earlier this year that the state would increase the amount of assistance provided this winter to low income Illinois households through the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Illinois will receive an additional \$24.7 million in federal funding to help low-income households meet their energy costs.

"Rising natural gas prices will create an extra burden on all low-income households this winter and particularly those on fixed incomes," Ryan said.

Total funding for the LIHEAP program in Illinois this winter is approximately \$140 million, with \$75 million from the federal Low Income Energy Assistance Block Grant and \$65 million from the state's Supplemental Low Income Energy Assistance fund. Last winter, \$112 million was available.

"We realize that households that heat with natural gas are facing some steep price increases this winter," said DCCA Director Pam McDonough. "At the governor's direction, we have increased

benefit levels by an average of 20 percent. For example, a very low-income family of four will be eligible to receive \$587 towards their gas bill this winter, compared to \$470 last year."

The energy assistance program is geared to households with incomes up to 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Benefits are provided directly to the household's gas or electric utility or delivered fuel dealer for households that heat with fuel oil or propane.

Benefits include repairs of inoperable residential heating systems, payments to utilities or fuel dealers on behalf of eligible households to help reduce energy bills, and emergency assistance to help disconnected households regain energy services.

LIHEAP is operated throughout the state by a network of local agencies that work with utilities, determine eligibility and provide benefits to households. Anyone wishing to apply should contact the local agency in the county where they live. Additional assistance is available by calling the toll-free LIHEAP information line at 1-800-252-8643.

Barriers to building more power plants

Electricity consumers across the nation are blaming public officials and private competitors for failing to foresee today's problems and bring new plants on-line sooner.

A major factor behind today's lack of generation capacity in many parts of the country is overbuilding in the 70s and 80s. With so much excess capacity sitting around, few saw generation as a wise investment.

As a consequence, between 1988 and 1998, utility generation capacity grew only 0.1 percent annually, to 686,692 megawatts - though utilities compensated to some extent by getting more out of the capacity they already had; averaging an annual 1.9 percent output increase. Demand, however, grew far faster.

More than 95 percent of the new, proposed generation involves gas-fired generation using high-efficiency technologies that promise far more output than existing power-plant averages. And gas-fired facilities generally take only about 18 months to site and build.

One problem with this is that natural gas prices have doubled since last year, when most current plans were proposed and cost-justified. A power plant that is profitable when gas is \$2 per thousand cubic feet (mcf) might not be at current \$4 prices.

Other problems in meeting the demand for electricity include air quality requirements that can keep new facilities out of high-growth areas. Even operating current plants may be difficult. That's a major factor behind a decade-long drop in generation capacity in California despite growing population and demand.

The other major problem with building both is the "not in my back yard" issue. No one wants a power generator, or transmission built in their area. For example, peaker plants in the Chicago area are being opposed by local communities.

Source: *Charlotte LeGates, Energy.com correspondent*

Geothermal heat pumps a smart choice for schools

Algebra and chemistry are hard enough without trying to learn them (or teach them) in a room that's too cold, or so hot and humid that concentration is impossible. An increasing number of school districts are finding that the most economical and energy-efficient option for school heating and cooling is a geothermal heat pump (GHP) system. They consume very little electricity because they tap into the natural thermal energy stored in the earth. They also improve comfort, reduce maintenance costs and increase indoor air quality and safety.

Geothermal heat pumps have been installed at older schools and brand-new facilities, in single buildings and on sprawling campuses. Even though they can cost more to install than other technologies, geothermal systems offer 12-19 percent life-cycle cost savings over 20 years. Annual heating and cooling bills are slashed by 30-60 percent. The temperature in individual classrooms can be independently controlled.

The earth absorbs 47 percent of the sun's energy—about 500 times more energy than the human race consumes. And the earth is an efficient storage me-

dium. As a result, the temperatures a few feet below the earth's surface remain fairly constant. Using loops of pipe buried underground, GHPs capture this thermal energy and move it inside buildings to provide heating in the winter. In the summer, they reverse the process, transferring heat out of buildings and returning it to the earth.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, geothermal heat pumps are the most energy-efficient, environmentally clean, and cost-effective space conditioning systems available. EPA found that GHPs are about 48 percent more efficient than the best gas furnaces.

Carterville Community Unit School in Carterville is one of the first Illinois schools to use geothermal heating and cooling. The idea came from Superintendent Tim Bleyer, who three years ago researched and then purchased a geothermal heat pump for his home.

For more information about geothermal heat pumps, contact your local heat pump dealer or electric cooperative.

Sources: Energy.com, and the Geothermal Heat Pump Consortium www.geoexchange.org.

Natural gas demand and price rising

With wholesale natural gas prices at record highs, energy experts are concerned that consumers will see substantially higher heating bills. At the heart of the problem is basic supply and demand economics, according to the Illinois Commerce Commission's Gas Policy Committee.

The steady increase in demand for natural gas reflects the popularity of that fuel in a booming national economy. Two major factors in that situation are increased use of gas in the electricity generation industry and higher prices for oil and oil products.

New power plants are also a part of the increased demand. Ed Kelly of Cambridge Energy Research Associates estimated that 96 percent of proposed new electricity generating capacity is gas-fired. However, ICC staff pointed out that demand for natural gas by the electricity generation industry is up only 6 percent over last year.

On the other side of the equation, supply has failed to keep up with the increased demand for natural gas. Much of the blame for this situation was put on lower than normal prices for natural gas in the past few years. This lack of profitability discouraged new production and according to Kelly "the chickens are now coming home to roost" in the form of higher energy prices.

ICC staff estimated with normal winter weather from October of this year to March, 2001, customers could see a \$200 to \$300 increase in their home heating bills over 1999. They cautioned, however, that last year was warmer than normal and featured lower than average natural gas prices.



Electrical Fires At Home

When you hear of a tragedy striking someone, do you think, "It can't happen to me?" Well, we all do, and we're all wrong!

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reports that 40,000 residential fires caused by problems with electrical wiring systems occur every year. These fires claim more than 350 lives, cause thousands of injuries through shocks and burns, and result in more than \$2 billion in personal property damage.

About 7,100 fires resulting in 120 deaths are caused by electric cords and plugs every year. Lamps and light fixtures account for about 8,900 fires and 60 deaths; switches and outlets are involved in 4,700 fires and deaths. Another 3,600 people are treated for injuries associated with extension cords.

Electricity has improved our lives in countless ways. It's a force for good—but it is a powerful force that must be used with respect and caution. So enjoy all the benefits that electricity brings you, but don't take it for granted, and don't use it carelessly.

Source: National Electrical Safety Foundation (www.nesf.org); U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.uscpsc.gov/indexmain)

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A Christmas survival guide

'Tis the season for tangled and broken Christmas lights. For stalking mall parking lots until you find a spot right by the door, just to have someone sneak up that lane the wrong way and steal it from you. For waiting in a two-hour line for the lady who insists the sweater was on sale for a dollar less than it rang up. For standing in the Santa line for an hour with your cranky kids.

Although Christmas is a time to get together and celebrate the birth of Christ, the time leading up to it can be stressful. Take heart: Help is on the way.

SURVIVAL SHOPPING

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the malls, were last minute shoppers, both big and small. The aisles were crowded, the shelves were bare, looking around, there was nothing to spare.

It's easy to put off Christmas shopping, thinking you have plenty of time. Don't forget: You're not the only person who thinks that. By the time you do go shopping, the malls are jammed, things are picked over, the items you wanted are gone, and little Tommy winds up with underwear and a 2000-piece puzzle instead of the computer game he really wanted. "The best time to start shopping for Christmas seems to be right af-

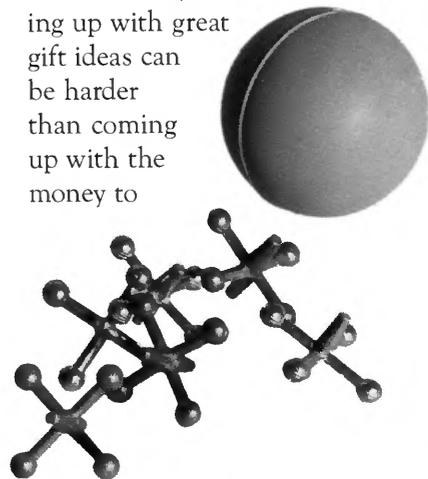
ter the kids go back to school, in September or October," says Kerrie Wells, owner of Deerfields, a gift shop in Canton. She suggests that

"The best time to start shopping for Christmas seems to be right after the kids go back to school, in September or October"

by November, you should be half-way done shopping. By December, you should just be going out for last-minute items.

Rosie Wells, Kerrie's mother-in-law, helps Kerrie at Deerfields, and suggests starting Christmas shopping in January and continuing all year.

For some, coming up with great gift ideas can be harder than coming up with the money to



pay for them. "This year, candles are really popular," says Rosie. "You can't go wrong with a nicely scented candle."

Think about safety when buying kids' toys. If a toy involves a child riding in or on it, be sure to add appropriate protective gear. Read labels carefully for an age recommendation and always read the fine print. Even innocent-looking toys, like Legos or marbles, can be deadly in the hands of a child who is too young to use them. If you are buying for kids under three years, avoid toys with small removable parts. They are choking hazards. For the kids under eight years, avoid sharp-edged toys or electrical toys. Buy well-built toys. A poorly manufactured one may present unexpected hazards. Noisy toys may damage a child's hearing. And be wary of toys with long strings or cords because children could become entangled.

Don't be discouraged. Start shopping early, and you'll see shelves filled with a wide array of safe toys.

FOODS

Food is also an important part of the Christmas holiday, and few Christmas tables are without a large turkey.

Occasionally, an exotic trend tries to take root, and other meats, most often ham, will vie for a place at the Christmas table. Even so, turkey is by far the most popular meat dish for Christmas dinner.

But there are pitfalls in the holiday kitchen. Often, there's just one cook, and he or she's probably overworked. Or, there may be too

many people in the kitchen. That can pose problems, too. Aside from the obvious precautions, such as keeping panhandles turned inward, everybody needs to be careful not to get burned by hot foods, pans or liquids.



"Cooks should practice safe food handling all year 'round, but they need to be especially careful during the holiday season, when under pressure."

The University of Illinois Extension emphasizes that cooks should practice safe food handling all year 'round, but that cooks need to be especially careful during the holiday season, when the cook is under pressure. It's especially important to take care with food handling, since it's more likely that the very young and the very old might be there, and they're particularly susceptible to foodborne illnesses.

Keep several points in mind when working with foods. Follow the basic rule that cold foods should be kept cold, and hot foods should be kept hot. And everything should be kept clean.

While many recommend using a time/weight/temperature chart to determine cooking time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends using a thermometer. A whole turkey should be cooked to 180 degrees F, and stuffing to 160 degrees F.

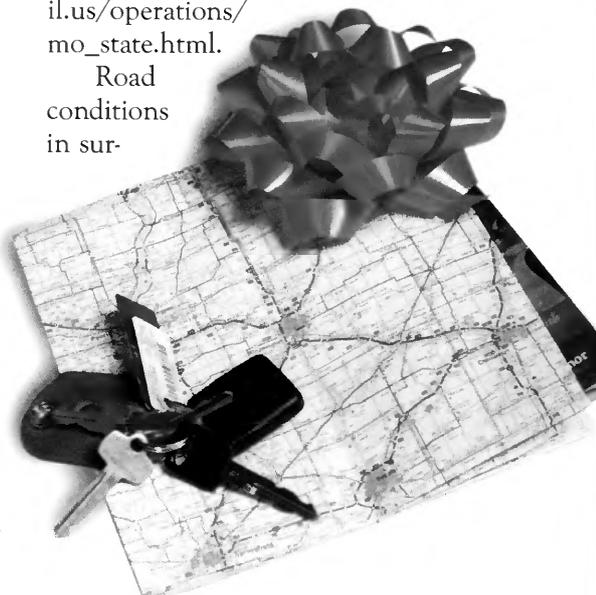
Keep cold foods below 40 degrees. Perishable foods, such as meat, gravy and mashed potatoes should not be left in the danger zone — between 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F — for more than two hours.

Keep all work surfaces, utensils and hands clean when working with food. For more information on food handling, visit the National Food Safety Database at <http://www.foodsafety.gov>.

TIPS FOR SAFE WINTER DRIVING

Before you head out, check out these web-sites. Illinois statewide road conditions: http://www.dot.state.il.us/operations/mo_state.html.

Road conditions in sur-



rounding states <http://www.dot.state.il.us/road/otherst.html>.

Be sure to have supplies in your car in case you get stranded. Have a flashlight, blankets, snacks and bottled water. Have a big piece of brightly colored ribbon to tie onto your radio antenna to let people know you need help. It might be wise to have a bag of sand and a small shovel in your trunk. Be prepared to spend a night in a hotel or motel, if necessary.

"Be sure to have supplies in your car in case you get stranded. Have a flashlight, blankets, snacks and bottled water."

Take your cell phone if you have one, and make sure the battery is charged. You can use it to call for help, if you need to, or to let the people you're visiting know if you're on schedule.

TRAVEL DURING THE HOLIDAYS

One of the fun things about Christmas is the opportunity to visit friends and family. There will be many people on the road during the holiday season. While most families drive to their holiday destination, many will be going by other ways, often by air.

No matter how you travel, be sure to allow extra time! Even during a time of peace on earth and

good will toward men, tempers flare and nerves frazzle. Traffic will probably be heavy, and there may be fog, snow, sleet or all the above.

We found some wonderful advice for parents at www.survive-the-drive.com. For example, here are a few of their entertainment ideas.

Penny Ante - Give each kid 25 cents and fine them a penny whenever they fight or whine. If they have all their money when you stop, promise to double their money.

Foil Them - Toss a roll of tin-foil in the back seat and let the children create tin-foil sculptures.

Color My World - Pick a color and the first person to find 50 things that color wins.

"No matter how you travel, be sure to allow extra time! Even during a time of peace on earth and good will toward men, tempers flare and nerves frazzle."

Here are a few other tips for traveling with children from *Survive the Drive*:

1. Involve your children in planning the trip.
2. Plan for spills and car-sickness.
3. Drive while the kids are sleeping.
4. Play games
5. When you take a rest stop let them play. Bring a Frisbee or stop at a playground.

WHEN THE HOLIDAYS DRIVE YOU NUTS

Say the words "Christmas," or "New Year's" and most people think of good times. However, about one in 20 feel otherwise, according to the National Mental Health Association.

There are several reasons people get depressed around the holidays. Many of these reasons are a result of the busy holiday season, with demands on people to produce the "perfect" holiday for loved ones. Other reasons deal with coping with a loss during previous holiday seasons.

Another reason could be physical - the lack of sunlight produces physiological changes that can cause the holiday and winter blues - called seasonal affective disorder.

Some remedies are simple but can be difficult to do:

- Trying to make holidays perfect for everyone is an unreal expectation. Trying not to "overdo" will relieve stress.
- Another cure for the holiday blues is to do something for



someone else. This not only aids the other person, but can also be spiritually healing for the person with the blues.

- It is especially advisable to get exercise and eat nutritious foods during the holidays, when depression can creep in. When the body is fit and healthy, it can have a like affect on the mind and spirit.

But just what are the signs

"There are several reasons people get depressed around the holidays."

of holiday depression?

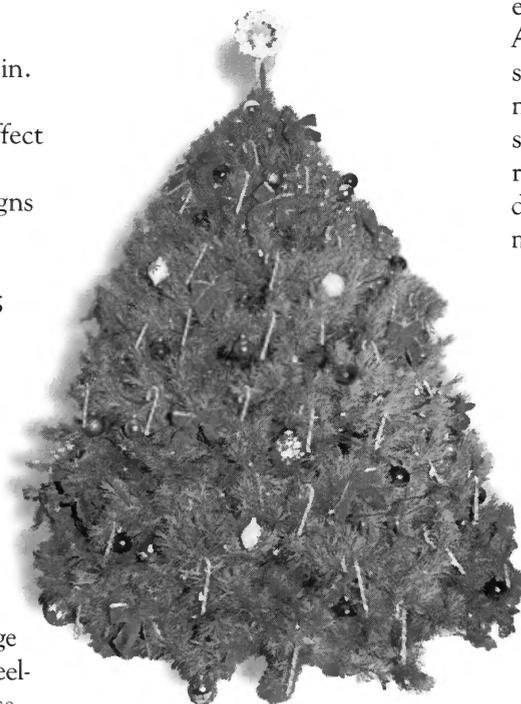
Among symptoms that adults can experience are constant headaches, a change in sleep patterns, anxiety, feelings of guilt or unworthiness, and a decreased interest in hobbies or interests. Children will often be more rebellious and disruptive.

DECORATING IN AND OUT

It starts as a vision, your home beautifully decorated for the holidays, as if it came straight from the pages of a Christmas catalog. Digging out the artificial tree and bending it back into shape, or driving to one of Illinois' real-tree farms is probably your first Christmas chore.

To make your hunt for a real tree successful, go when the temperature is above freezing so you can assess the tree's needles. They should be plentiful, smell like fresh evergreen and be extremely flexible. The trunk should be

straight, and long enough to cut off another two inches when you get home. Shelby Electric Cooperative member Lowell Pfeiffer, of Pfeiffer's Trees, says, "Be sure the



"Be sure the tree you choose is freshly cut. If you keep it watered it will stay fresh through Christmas."

tree you choose is freshly cut. If you keep it watered it will stay fresh through Christmas."

Once you have your tree home, safety should be one of your key issues. Water it daily to

keep it from turning brown, drying out and becoming a fire hazard.

Before your family begins the decorating ritual, check all your lights for broken bulbs, empty sockets, cracked insulation or bare wire. As a rule, only connect three strands of lights, and don't plug more than three sets into one extension cord. Don't run cords behind radiators, under carpets, through doorways, around pipes, or near metal.

Now, don't forget the ornaments; they let you personalize your tree with designs that show your history and style. A new ornament is a wonderful way to keep a record of your children, grandchildren or your first Christmas together as a newly married couple. Every year, your tree probably gets a little fuller and more beautifully decorated, expressing the memories of the past years.

After putting up your tree, it's time to go outside. Remember to place lights with insulated staples or plastic clips. After Christmas, your perfectly decorated home must be turned back to its original self. Discard your tree as soon as it begins to dry out. Don't burn it in your fireplace.

For more information about holiday decorating safety, turn to this month's Safety column on page 14. If you would like to know about tree farms in your area, a great website to try is Captain Jack's - www.christmas-tree.com.

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Safety

AROUND YOUR HOME

Holiday season safety tips

It seems as though the holidays sneak upon us earlier each year. It's a time that can be very joyful and stressful all at the same time. Decorating, menu planning and shopping are all a part of the holiday season, but don't let safety take a holiday.

There are many things that can easily slip by as holiday preparations take place. I just thought I'd mention a few areas and some safety tips to help you have a safe and happy holiday season.



Mary Zitek
*Association of Illinois
Electric Cooperatives
safety technician*

the most common thefts occurs when someone bumps into you - while you're distracted, your pocket is picked. Don't leave your packages unattended. Try to store packages in your trunk so they are not in full view. If you feel uneasy in the parking lot, have security walk you to your car. If you're shopping with small children, keep them next to you or in eye's view at all times. Discuss a meeting place in case of separation.

When shopping for toys, refer to the age-appropriate labels. New labeling is now required on toys for children three to six if they pose a choking hazard for children under three. Select toys according to age and ability. For infants and toddlers make sure the toy does not have small parts that may pose a choking hazard or pieces that can easily fit in the ears or nose.

Decorations

One of the most festive parts of the holiday season are all the decorations and lights. Check all electrical cords, plugs, wires and bulbs before you use them. Don't overload electrical outlets or extension cords, and turn off lights when you turn in for the night. Use of a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) is recommended and UL approved lighting should always be used. Do not use lights on a metal tree. When using lights outdoors, use those intended for outdoor use. Make sure all connections are secure so

snow and rain won't affect them. If using a ladder, follow the manufacturer's guidelines. Do not use on snow or ice. Have a buddy below to help.

Use care when burning candles. Make sure that they are not near other combustible materials. Do not use candles on or near Christmas trees and never leave candles unattended or alone with small children.

When purchasing an artificial tree make sure it is labeled as fire resistant. If purchasing a fresh tree test for freshness by grasping a branch between your thumb and forefinger. Pull it toward you, if it is fresh, very few needles will come off. Check the water level daily. Keep it away from heat sources. Hang glass ornaments or those with small pieces away from lower branches that are within reach of small children or pets. Be aware that some decorations such as mistletoe, amaryllis and holly berries are toxic. Also, old tinsel may contain lead and fire salts contain heavy metals.

Hang stockings by the chimney with care and don't light a fire in the fireplace while they're there! Before starting a fire, move all decorations away and be sure the flue is open. Do not burn wrappings; they burn fast, throwing out sparks and debris. Discard any plastic wrap on toys immediately!

Entertaining

Be sure to wash hands, utensils, etc. that come into contact with raw poultry. Follow cooking instructions carefully and store leftovers as soon as possible. Turn pot handles in and don't overload circuits with electrical appliances. If hosting a gathering, make sure there are non-alcoholic beverages available for those who are driving. Keep an eye out by upholstery and trash cans for smoldering cigarette butts.

Weather

Prepare for inclement weather. BUCKLE-UP! Keep extra blankets, mittens and hats in the car. Heed storm warnings and have your car winterized before the winter season. Be careful walking on snow and ice. Don't try to shovel all at once. Take a break.

Stress

Finally, take some time out for yourself. Enjoy part of the holiday by listening to music, watching a favorite movie or just putting your feet up and resting awhile.

Seasons greetings to all and have a safe new year!

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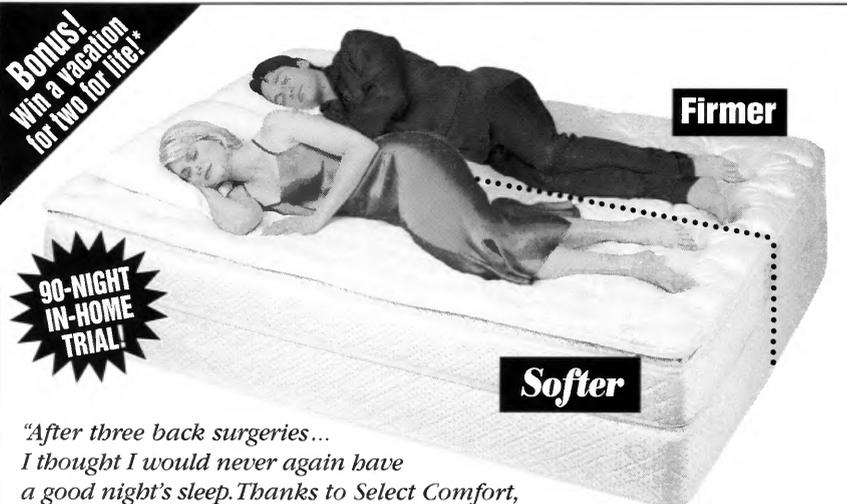
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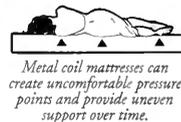
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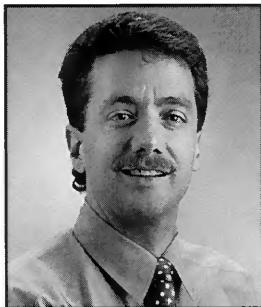
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Your YARD AND GARDEN

Impress your friends with Christmas tree trivia

In a couple of weeks, if you already haven't done it, or you choose to be one of those plastic lovers, you'll get a Christmas tree for the holidays. Soon your house will smell like an evergreen forest with sparkling lights reflecting the twinkling lights patiently strung on the tree.



David Robson

Last year's column dealt with selecting a tree and keeping it safe. Not to repeat myself (make sure the needles are flexible, the butt end is sappy, it smells like an evergreen and not a garbage can, and the color is right), I thought I'd hit on the holiday origins.

This way, you can impress all your friends at the holiday parties. You casually throw into the conversation "Hey, Mary. Did you know that Washington crossed the Delaware due to the fact that the Christmas tree wasn't yet an American institution but a European one?" I can guarantee you all ears will be turned your way, especially if you're not talking to someone named Mary.

You can start a holiday tradition by gathering the little ones around and passing along some of the Christmas tree legends. Make sure the baby is well diapered before setting him/her on your knee.

According to legend, to make the tradition a little more impressive, Hessian mercenaries were so reminded of their faraway home by a candlelit evergreen tree, that they abandoned their posts. Of course, they probably were celebrating the holiday spirit with a little of that German holiday spirit. They nodded off, which many do after partaking of the holiday spirits. General G. Washington then took advantage that night, attacked, and defeated them. Then he probably finished off their holiday spirits.

Way, way, way back, Martin Luther supposedly in-

vented the Christmas tree years before Al Gore thought about it. Luther attached lighted candles to a small evergreen tree, simulating the effects of the starlit heaven that looked down over Bethlehem on that first Christmas Eve. I couldn't find records if Luther also was credited with the first Christmas tree fire. Do not put lit candles on your tree to imitate Martin Luther. Just give him the credit.

Until about 1700, the use of Christmas trees appears to have been confined to the Rhine River District. From 1700 on, when lights were accepted as part of the decorations, the Christmas tree was well on its way to becoming a tradition in Germany.

Some people, not to give the Germans all the credit, trace the origin of the Christmas tree to an earlier period. Egyptians, in celebrating the winter solstice, brought green date palms into their homes as a symbol of "life triumphant over death." When the Romans observed the feast of Saturn, part of the ceremony was the raising of an evergreen bough. The early Scandinavians were said to have paid homage to the fir tree, though why cutting a tree to pay homage to it escapes me.

To the Druids, sprigs of evergreen holly in the house meant eternal life; while to the Norsemen, they symbolized the revival of the sun god Balder. To those inclined toward superstition, branches of evergreens placed over the door kept out witches, ghosts, evil spirits and the like. This use does not mean that our Christmas tree custom evolved solely from paganism.

Trees and branches can be made purposeful as well as symbolic. The Christmas tree is a symbol of a living Christmas spirit and brings into our lives a pleasant aroma of the forest. The fact that balsam fir twigs, more than any other evergreen twigs, resemble crosses may have had much to do with the early popularity of balsam fir used as Christmas trees.

Some other tidbits to make your head swim:

The first outdoor lighted Christmas tree in the United States was in New York in 1912. It was NOT at the Rockefeller Center.

The first recorded Christmas tree in Illinois was reported at Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) in 1804.

Mark Carr is credited as the first Christmas tree salesman when he took two oxen sleds of the trees to New York City in 1851.

Franklin Pierce was the first President to have a tree in the White House in 1856.

David Robson is an Extension Educator, Horticulture, at the Springfield Extension Center, University of Illinois Extension. You can write to Robson in care of Illinois Country Living, P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708. Telephone: (217) 782-6515. E-Mail: robsond@mail.aces.uiuc.edu



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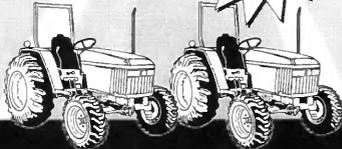
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Today's

TECHNOLOGY AND YOU

Increase your comfort and health with a humidifier

Q: Dear Jim: My house gets so dry in fall and winter that the static electricity sparks from my fingers could light Soldier Field. I have seen so many humidifiers at stores I get confused. What type is best and can one really lower my utility bills?
- Dan T.

A: Dear Dan: There are hundreds of models of humidifiers ranging from \$20 to \$200, so your confusion about which to buy is understandable. The effectiveness of each design does vary significantly depending on your specific home and needs. Actually, the static sparks from fingertips are the least of the problems, especially if you have

allergies.

Indoor air that is excessively dry can be as much of a problem as air that is overly humid. For example, harmful bacteria and viruses can thrive in your home in very dry conditions, while dust mites and molds thrive in very humid conditions. Large seasonal indoor humidity level swings can seriously damage the house structure, furniture, cabinetry, etc.

Running a humidifier to maintain a comfortable and healthy indoor environment can lower your heating bills overall in several ways. When the indoor air is too dry, moisture from your skin evaporates at a very rapid rate even though you are not aware of the moisture loss.

This evaporation lowers your skin temperature. With properly humidified air, you can often set the furnace/heat pump thermostat a few degrees lower to reduce your heating bills and still feel comfortably warm. Also, if your house is overly dry, the lumber framing may shrink during the heating season. This allows cracks to form and gaps to open which increases cold outdoor air leakage into your house.

When making your selection, first determine the moisture output capacity (gallons per day) of the humidifier that you need. Although this is somewhat dependent on your climate, a newer airtight, 2,000 square foot house typically needs about 5 gallons per day and a loose one needs about 10 gallons per day to maintain an adequate humidity level.

The humidifier packaging often has sizing capacity charts. Since humidifiers are not extremely expensive, it is better to err on the smaller side. You can always buy another one and locate them in each end of your home. If you err on the large side, it will not run often and it may dump too much humidity into the air where it is located.

Once you determine the proper moisture output capacity, you must select



James Dulley is a mechanical engineer who writes on a wide variety of energy and utility topics. His column appears in a large number of daily newspapers.

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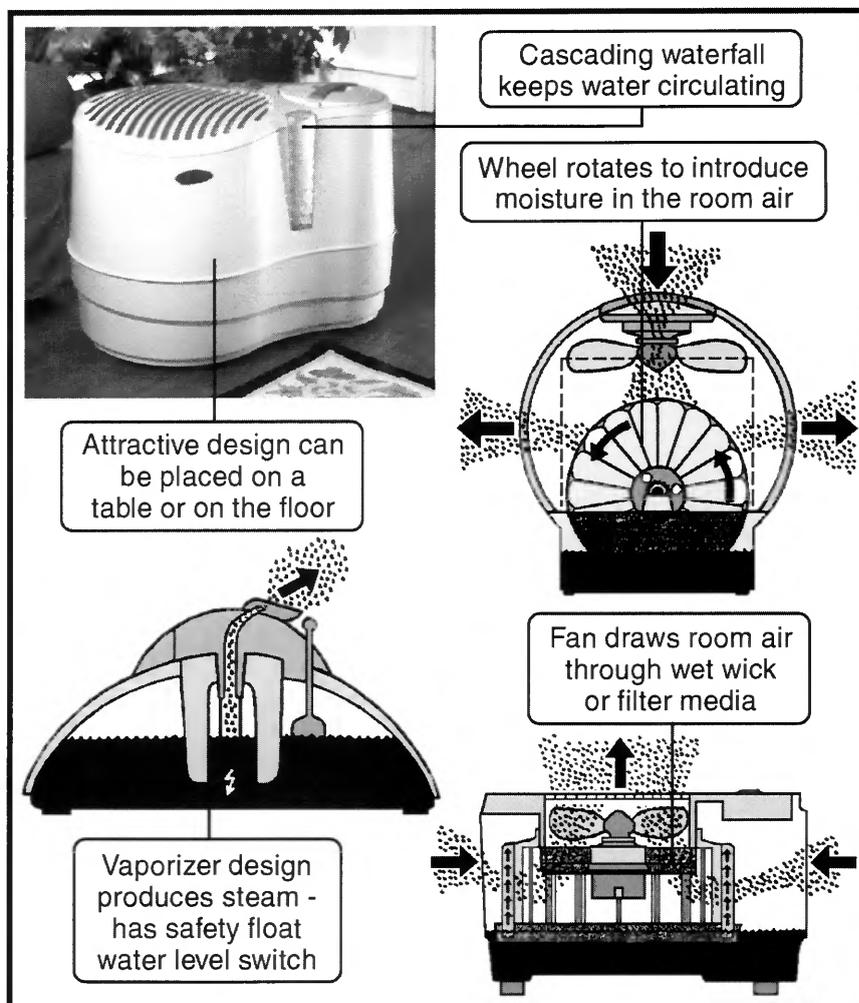
among the various humidifier designs available - evaporative, steam mist (vaporizers), warm mist, cool mist and ultrasonic. Each humidifier design has particular advantages depending on your specific comfort and health needs.

Evaporative models, where a quiet, low-wattage fan draws the room air through a wet wick or filter, typically have the greatest moisture output, up to 13 gallons per day (gpd). Select one with a tank housing and wick materials that are antibacterial. These designs are also easy to clean out. A humidistat is a plus, but evaporative models tend to self-regulate the moisture output even without a humidistat. I use this type in my own home.

Many models are available with replaceable paper wicks or permanent wicks. The newest design concept uses continuously cascading water over the wick instead of the wick being submerged in water. To also help clean the air, consider getting several smaller evaporative tabletop (3.3 gpd) models that combine an air cleaner along with a humidifier in one unit.

Hot steam mist humidifiers are effective. Since they boil the water, most microorganisms are killed and no hard water deposits (white dust) are emitted. Steam mist designs use more electricity than other fan-only designs and they do not self-regulate the humidity level. Although the multi-wall housing stays cool, the steam outlet may get hot enough to hurt a child's hand.

A warm mist design combines a hot steam mist with a cooler air-flow for safety. It uses the most electricity of all the designs to boil the water and run the fan. Ultrasonic humidifier designs vibrate



Small humidifiers for comfort and savings

the water at high frequency to introduce moisture into the room air. These use little electricity, but can create the white dust like a cool mist model.



Cool mist designs use little electricity and are safe around children. There are many variations, but basically, a spinning impeller picks up water from the reservoir and slings it into a screen to create a

fine mist. In hard water areas, this can create a fine white dust near it and it does not kill or filter out microorganisms like a steam mist model.

One of the best indications of

excessive humidification is when your windows (especially double pane, thermal) start to sweat. As the outdoor temperature drops, you will find that you have to run the humidifiers less to control window condensation. You can generally maintain a humidity level 25% higher with thermal windows than with single pane windows without causing condensation.

For more information, write for (instantly download - www.dulley.com) Update Bulletin No. 468 - buyer's guide of 10 humidifier manufacturers listing designs, styles, moisture outputs, features, prices, recommended sizing chart and window condensation charts. Please include \$3.00 and a business-size SASE. James Dulley, Illinois Country Living, P.O. Box 54987, Cincinnati, OH 45254.

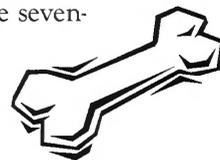
Illinois

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There was a farmer who was checking his crop. Then he saw a long limousine coming up the road and suddenly it hit a rabbit. The limousine came to a halt and the driver got out, looked the rabbit over, and then went to the trunk of his car. He got out a bottle, poured something on the rabbit, and lathered it up. Then he sat the rabbit down. The rabbit immediately sprang to its feet, ran a little ways, turned, stood upright, and waved, ran a little further, and did it again. Then it ran up a hill and at the top of the hill waved again. The driver of the limousine pitched the bottle in the ditch then got in his car and drove away. The farmer, in amazement of what he had just seen, ran to the ditch, picked up the bottle and read the label, which read: "Hair restorer with permanent wave."

Misty Stilley, Gibson City

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex was staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the Church. The plaque was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, "Good morning, Alex."



"Good morning, Pastor" replied the young man, still focused on the plaque, "Pastor McGee, what is this?" Alex asked.

"Well, son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service."

Soberly they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Little Alex's voice was barely audible when he asked "Which service, the 8:00 or the 10:00?"

Rosemary Suchomski, Pinckneyville

Is there a joke in YOUR family (that's proper for a family magazine)? Illinois Country Living pays \$5.00 for each joke chosen for Illinois Funnybone. Send your humorous story to Illinois Funnybone, P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708-3787.

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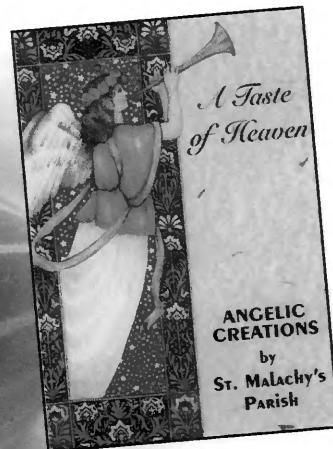
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St. Malachy's Parish, Geneseo

Angel Biscuits

5 C. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda
3 tsp. baking powder
2 C. buttermilk

Sift together dry ingredients. Dissolve yeast in warm water. Add oil and buttermilk. Mix well and knead several times, adding flour when needed as dough will be sticky. Roll out and make into biscuits. (You do not have to let them rise first.) Place on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 400° until nicely browned.

Christmas Cranberry Muffins **Mary Hughes**

Muffins:

1 1/2 T. butter
1/4 C. water
1/4 C. evaporated milk
1 C. flour

1/2 C. sugar
1 T. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
1 C. whole raw cranberries

Cream together butter and sugar, then add water, evaporated milk, flour, baking soda and salt. Stir in raw cranberries. Bake in greased or paper-lined muffin tin at 350° for 25 minutes.

Hot butter sauce:

1/4 lb. butter
1 C. sugar

1/2 C. evaporated milk
1 tsp. vanilla

Cook butter, sugar, milk and vanilla over low heat until smooth. Top each muffin with sauce before serving.

Eggnog Chiffon Pie

2 env. unflavored gelatin
1/4 C. sugar
4 C. bottled eggnog
1 C. heavy cream, whipped

Combine gelatin and sugar in top of double boiler. Stir in 1 cup cold eggnog. Place over boiling water and stir until sugar and gelatin are dissolved thoroughly. Remove from heat. Add remaining eggnog. If additional flavor is desired, add nutmeg and rum flavoring. Chill until slightly thicker than the consistency of unbeaten egg whites. Whip gelatin mixture until light and fluffy. Fold in whipped cream. Turn into pie shell. Chill until firm. Garnish with additional whipped cream, shaved chocolate and a red cherry in the middle.

"Muff" LoGiudice

1/4 tsp. nutmeg (opt.)
4 tsp. rum or rum flavoring (opt.)
1 (10-inch) baked pie shell

Nancy Munson Fiers

1/2 C. warm water
1 pkg. dry yeast
3/4 C. cooking oil
1 tsp. sugar

Microwave Fudge

1 lb. box powdered sugar
1/2 C. cocoa
1/4 C. milk

Place powdered sugar, cocoa, milk and margarine in a bowl. Microwave 2 minutes on high. Add 1 teaspoon vanilla and 1 cup nuts; stir well. Pour into buttered dish or foil dinner plate and place in refrigerator until cool.

Peanut Brittle

2 C. sugar
1/2 C. water
1 tsp. salt

Boil water, syrup and sugar until it spins a fine thread (about 12 minutes). Add raw peanuts. Cook until mixture turns golden brown (about 10 minutes); stir often. Turn off heat. Mix salt and baking soda in a cup, making sure there are no lumps. Add to hot mixture and stir thoroughly until mixed well and foamy. Pour into buttered jellyroll sheet. Break into pieces when cool.

English Toffee

1 C. sugar
2 sticks oleo
3 T. water

Cook sugar, oleo and water until light tan, stirring constantly. When tan, add vanilla and pour onto a buttered cookie sheet. Break Hershey's bar on top. As the bar melts, spread evenly over toffee with back of spoon. Cool and break up.

Turtles

2 pkgs. pecan halves
1 pkg. Kraft caramels
1 T. milk

Place pecans in groups of two on cookie sheet. Melt caramels and milk together for approximately 20 minutes in microwave. Stir until smooth. Spoon over pecans. Melt almond bark and chocolate chips. Spoon over pecan-caramel mounds. Refrigerate until firm.

Mary Wassell

1 stick margarine, softened
1 tsp. vanilla
1 C. nuts

Lynne Sebastian

2/3 C. white corn syrup
1 lb. raw peanuts
1 tsp. baking soda

Marcella Harris

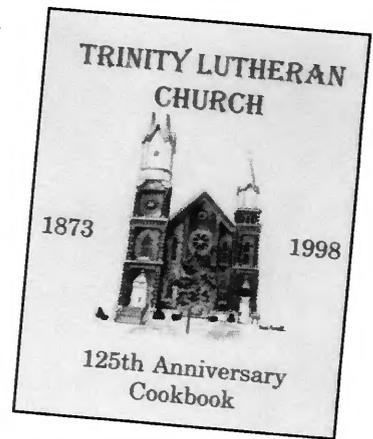
1 tsp. vanilla
1 lg. (1.55-oz.) Hershey's bar

Phyllis Farber

6 squares almond bark
1 (12-oz.) pkg. chocolate chips
2 buttered cookie sheets



The Trinity Lutheran Church of Carthage, submits its 1998 cookbook filled with 135 pages of fabulous recipes, plus a glossary of home remedies in the back. The cookbook is spiral bound and soft-backed and sells for \$8 including shipping and handling. To order, contact Traci Johnson, 2755 E County Rd. 1800, Carthage, IL 62321, or call her at (217) 654-2202.



Trinity Lutheran Church of Carthage

Puppy Chow

- 1 stick margarine
- 1 C. peanut butter
- 1 C. chocolate chips

Melt margarine. Add peanut butter and chocolate chips (15 to 30 seconds). Stir until smooth. Pour over cereal to coat. Put mixture and powdered sugar in a grocery bag; shake until sugar is gone.

Pecan Pie

- 1 C. sugar
- 1 C. dark corn syrup
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 tsp. salt

Beat eggs; add sugar, corn syrup, flour, salt, melted butter and nuts. Pour into unbaked pie crust and bake for 10 minutes at 400°, then for 30 minutes at 350°.

All-American Apple Pie

- 1/4 C. packed light, brown sugar
- 1/4 C. granulated sugar
- 1 T. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. grated lemon peel
- 1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg

Glaze:

- 1 lg. egg, beaten

Preheat oven to 425°. Spray a 9-inch deep-dish pie plate with vegetable cooking spray. In a large bowl, combine brown sugar, granulated sugar, flour, lemon peel, cinnamon and nutmeg. Mix well. Add apples to sugar mixture; stir until coated. Stir in raisins. Spoon into prepared plate. Place pie crust on top of filling. Trim edges, pressing against edge of pan. Cut steam vents in pie crust. To glaze, lightly brush pie crust with beaten egg and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until pie crust is golden brown, about 35 to 40 minutes. Place on wire rack and cool for 30 minutes. Serve warm.

Bread Pudding

- 4 eggs
- 2 C. milk
- 1/3 C. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon

Beat together eggs, milk, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla and salt. Set aside. Drizzle some caramel topping over bread. (You may add more caramel to the egg mixture). Pour egg mixture over bread. Bake at 325° for 40 to 45 minutes or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. After baking, drizzle caramel topping to make a glaze.

Kyle Kirby

- 1 (12 oz.) box Crispix cereal
- 2 1/2 C. powdered sugar

Greg Wetterich

- 1 T. flour
- 3 T. butter, melted
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 C. pecans, chopped
- 1 pie crust, unbaked

Brittany Ufkes

- 6 med. baking apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced (about 2 lbs.)
- 1 C. dark raisins
- 1 unbaked, ready-made 9-inch pie crust

- 1 tsp. granulated sugar

Sally Swank

- 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 5 slices dried bread, cubed
- Caramel topping for ice cream

No Bake Cookies

- 2 C. sugar
- 3 T. cocoa
- 1 stick margarine
- 1/2 C. milk

Mix sugar, cocoa and margarine and place over heat. After margarine melts, let boil 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from heat and add remaining ingredients, stirring quickly. Drop by spoonfuls onto waxed paper.

Angel Crisp Cookies

- 1/2 C. sugar
- 1/2 C. brown sugar
- 1 C. shortening
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Cream sugars, shortening, egg and vanilla. Add sifted dry ingredients. Form into balls the size of walnuts. Dip top half in water, then in sugar. Place on un-greased baking sheet. Press down in center with finger. Bake at 425° for 8-10 minutes.

Drop Sugar Cookies

- 2/3 C. shortening
- 3/4 C. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. grated orange peel
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 egg

Cream first 4 ingredients. Add egg, beat until light and fluffy. Stir in milk. Sift together dry ingredients. Blend in creamed mixture. Drop spoonfuls onto cookie sheet; top with colored sugar. Bake at 375° for 10 to 12 minutes.

Dustin Ellefritz

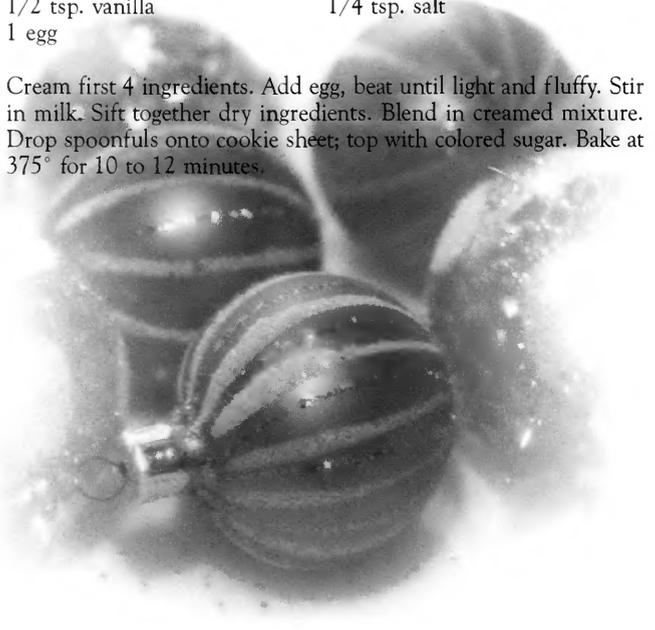
- 3 C. oats
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 C. peanut butter

Wilma Fecht

- 2 C. sifted flour
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. cream of tartar

Lena Seaver

- 4 tsp. milk
- 1 1/2 C. sifted flour
- 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt





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- All ads must be in one paragraph form. No centered copy. Maximum of four all-capital words per ad.
- **Check/cash/money order payable to Illinois Country Living and member's address label must accompany order.**
- Please type or print your ad neatly. You may use a _____ separate sheet if needed. Include your name, address and phone number. I am a member of _____ electric cooperative.
- The publisher reserves the right to reject any advertisement.

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Deadline for February issue: December 15

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FOR SALE: CASHMERE GOATS. \$75.00 and up. Males and females. Call (618) 275-4336.

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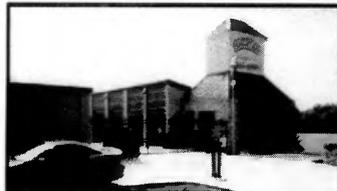
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December DATEBOOK

1, Lights Fantasia Christmas Parade in Olney. (618) 392-2241.

1-31, Hometown Christmas Holiday Light Display in Metropolis. A massive light display, each containing numerous figures and designs created by seemingly endless strings of colored lights. (800) 949-5740.

1-31, Once Upon a Holiday in Bloomington. This month-long event includes trolley rides, tours of historic mansions, a holiday art exhibit and sale, professional puppets, Santa's breakfast, a craft show, a parade, live music and more. (800) 433-8226.

1, Christmas on the Square in Paris. Santa arrives to celebrate with progressive dinner, decorated windows, horse-drawn sleigh rides and store specials. (217) 465-4179.

1-1/1/01, Holiday Lights Fair in DuQuoin. This event will include several outdoor lighted silhouette displays. (800) 526-1500.

1-3, DuQuoin Christmas Stroll in DuQuoin. Festival of Trees display, street carolers, horse-drawn carriage rides and Santa will be at the celebration. (800) 455-9570.

1-3, Christmastown USA in Carlyle. (618) 594-4015.

1-2, Taking Tea in Taylorville. Enjoy the fun and fantasy of high tea the British way. Scones and clotted cream, a vintage fashion show and musical interludes. (217) 287-7946.

1-3, The 11th Annual Christmas Market in Carlinville. Central Illinois' most festive holiday celebration features heated tents filled with fine arts and crafts, entertainment, shopping and more. (217) 854-2141.

1-3, Live Nativity in Lincoln. A live depiction of the birth of Christ. (217) 732-3946.

1-10, Christmas in Illinois Amish Country in Tuscola. Local crafts, homemade foods and baked items, gifts, Santa rides and local entertainment. (800) 500-3705.

2, Christmas Village Craft Sale and Luncheon in Murphysboro. Tour homes and churches filled with crafts. (618) 684-4848.

2, Holly-Day Happenings in Decatur. Christmas music, crafts, storytelling in an 1860s Christmas setting. (800) 331-4479.

2-3, A Country Christmas Schenck Farmhouse Open House four miles east of Canton. Enjoy Antiques, country crafts, herbs, baked goods, greens and apple cider. (309) 647-3442.

2, Jingle Bell Rock and Run in O'Fallon. (618) 624-4503.

2, Monticello Christmas Parade in Monticello. Start off the Christmas season as Santa comes to town. (800) 952-3396.

2, Civil War Ball and Debutante Cotillion in Palestine. (618) 586-9418.

2, Christmas Open House in Mt. Pulaski. Traditional and seasonal music will be performed, and coffee and cider will be served. (217) 732-8930.

2, Christmas in the Heart of Charleston in Charleston. Bring the entire family to this winter wonderland in Historic Downtown Charleston. Enjoy a parade, meet Rudolph and Frosty the Snowman, welcome Santa, enjoy free food and listen to traditional caroling. (217) 345-7427.

2, Christmas in Kenny. This event features a homemade dinner, a visit with Santa, crafts and more. (217) 944-2433.

2, Christmas in Petersburg. Holiday sales, entertainment and a parade will fill the town. (217) 632-7363.

2-3, Christmas Parade and House Walk in Marshall. (217) 826-5660.

2-3, Festival of Trees in Jacksonville. (800) 593-5678.

2, Christmas Around the Square in Oakland. This celebration includes a house walk, a Christmas craft bazaar, a festival of lights, food, carolers and a live Nativity scene.

2-23/26-29, Holiday Lights at the Zoo at the Henson Robinson Zoo in Springfield. The zoo will be aglow for the holidays in this display of thousands of twinkling lights. (217) 753-6217.

Illinois Country Living publishes event listings as space allows, giving preference to events of regional or statewide interest. Event listings are provided by the event sponsors and the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. The magazine assumes no responsibility for the accuracy of information submitted for publication and advises calling ahead to confirm dates and times. To be considered for inclusion, send listings and photographs (If sending photographs please include self-addressed stamped envelope) to Illinois Datebook, Illinois Country Living, PO Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708-3787. The deadline for submission is 45 days prior to the publication date.

3, Shrine Choir Christmas Program at Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows Church in Belleville. (618) 394-6272.

3, Victorian Christmas Tea at James Millikin Homestead in Decatur. Visit this restored historic home beautifully decorated for Christmas. (800) 331-4479.

34, Christmas Concert in Havana. A variety of concerts will be featured by area performers. (309) 543-4156.

4, December Tea in Chester. (618) 826-4187.

7-9, Holiday Craft Sale in Carbondale. This event will feature more than 75 crafters. Students, faculty, staff and members of the Southern Illinois community shop for holiday decorations, gifts and unique items. (618) 453-3636.

8-9, Christmas in Edinburg. House tours, senior brunch and craft sale. (217) 623-4058.

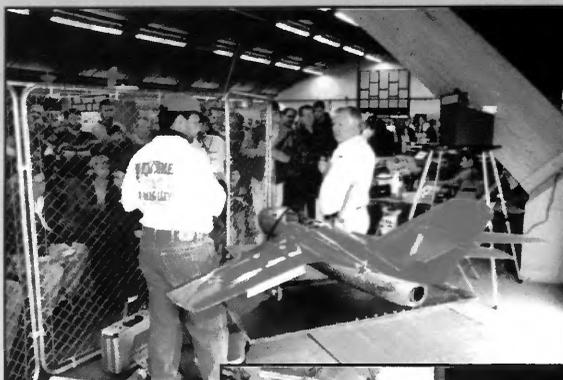
8-10/15-17, "A Christmas Carol" at the Historic Lawford Theatre in Havana. The Third Annual Presentation of the Lawford Theatre's original version of the holiday classic. (309) 543-GRRR.

8-10, Century Corners Holiday Walk, downtown St. Charles. You are invited to visit a dozen quaint shops in historic Century Corners where hospitality is as unique as the wonderful array of offerings. Holiday sales and refreshments. (630) 377-6161.

9, Lucia Fest in Paxton. Come and enjoy a brunch, bazaar, bake sale and live auction. (217) 379-3554.

9, Holiday Open House in Vandalia. (618) 283-1161.

9, Murder Mystery Dinner in Pomona. An interactive murder mystery and wine tasting. (618) 893-4500.



1-2, Radio Control Model Hobby Show at the DuPage County Fairgrounds in Wheaton. Do your Christmas shopping at the Midwest's largest radio control



hobby show. Radio-controlled model airplanes, cars, boats and helicopters all on display and available for sale. Come see indoor helicopter and jet engine demonstrations. Bring the front page of Illinois Country Living with address label for \$1 off admission. (630) 837-8437.

9, Victorian Christmas Walk in Geneseo. Geneseo's Victorian spirit sparkles downtown with Christmas magic in the air. Each of the storefront windows will be filled with family, friends and even some animals depicting Victorian scenes from a time long ago. Enjoy chestnuts roasting, ride a horse-drawn carriage and bring back memories from a time past. (309) 944-2686.

9, A Taste of Christmas in Galena. Step back in time while you sip a cup of hot cider and tour the holiday-decorated parlors of Galena's bed and breakfasts. Delicious homemade desserts, cookies, cakes and other Christmas treats will be available for sale. (815) 777-4100.

10, Christmas Home Tour in Geneseo. See for yourself the beauty that exists inside some of Victorian Geneseo's most beautiful and unique homes - each decorated to the hilt for the holiday season. (309) 944-2686.

10, Annual Candlelight House Tour in Belleville. (618) 233-0600.

16-17, Arts and Crafts Festival at Pride of Prairie in Decatur. (800) 331-4479.

31, First Night in Springfield. Ring in the New Year at this downtown festival of arts and entertainment. (217) 753-3519.

31, First Night in Pontiac. Horse and buggy rides around the square, food booths and fireworks. (815) 844-6692.

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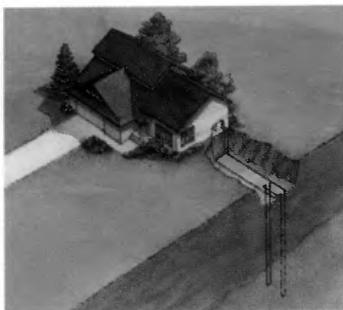
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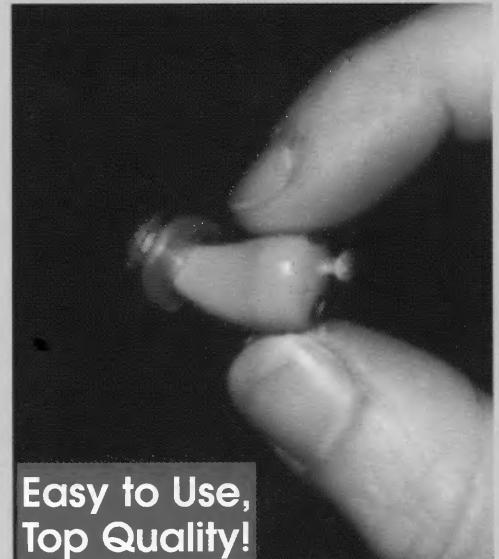
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