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January 2006

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ILLINOISTM COUNTRY LIVING

Volume 63, No. 9, January 2006

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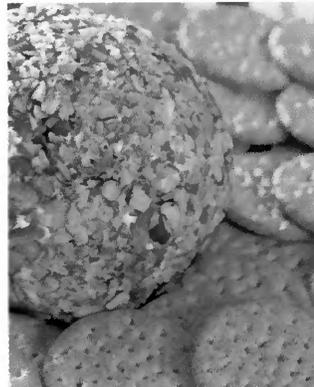
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WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

A light of hope shines for small town America. Find out how small town residents are being empowered to enrich their communities, their lives, and the lives of future generations.

Published by
Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives
6460 South Sixth Frontage Road East,
Springfield, IL 62712
www.icl.coop
(800) 593-2432 • aieinfo@aiec.coop

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Illinois Country Living is a monthly publication serving the communications needs of the locally owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives of Illinois. With a circulation of more than 150,000, the magazine informs cooperative members about issues affecting their electric cooperative and the quality of life in rural Illinois.

Illinois Country Living (ISSN number 1086-8062) is published monthly and is the official publication of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, 6460 South Sixth Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. The cost is \$2.50 plus postage per year for members of subscribing cooperatives and \$6 per year for all others. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, Illinois, and additional mailing offices.

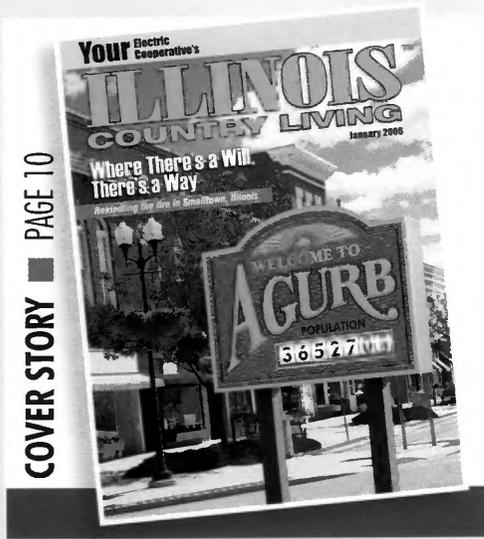
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Illinois Country Living, P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708.

ADVERTISING: The national advertising representative is The Weiss Group. 1-877-934-7747. Acceptance of advertising by the magazine does not imply endorsement by the publisher or the electric cooperatives of Illinois of the product or service advertised. Illinois Country Living is not responsible for the performance of the product or service advertised.



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The Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives and 23 Illinois electric cooperatives are members of the Touchstone Energy, a national alliance of 625 electric cooperatives. Touchstone Energy cooperative employees adhere to four core values — integrity, accountability, innovation, and commitment to community.



Innovation the Key to Future Needs

Co-ops adding new technology for better service and efficiency

The success of a co-op is dependent on how well it responds to the needs of its local members. The Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Illinois have pledged to meet their members' needs by following four core values: integrity, accountability, innovation, and commitment to community.

Each of these cornerstones is key to supporting our pledge of providing excellent service to you and helping improve the quality of life in rural Illinois. Let me give you a few examples of how co-ops are putting those words into action with innovative new technologies and services.

Let me start with automated meter reading (AMR). Illinois co-ops are way out in front when it comes to installing these high-tech meter-reading systems. AMR systems use existing power lines as a communication path to every meter on the system. And while the main objective is accurate and efficient meter reading, AMR systems actually provide much more than that.

For example, AMR systems are being used to provide better end-of-line voltage monitoring. That simply means better power quality for you. AMR systems are also being used to respond to and track outages and perform remote connects and disconnects. This helps to shorten the length of outages, improves efficiency, and saves money.

With an AMR system your co-op can provide you with more information about your daily

energy use. That can help you control your energy budget. In the near future I expect we will see this information online so you can have easy access to information about your energy use patterns. It also opens up the possibility of new and innovative rates that could give you new

options and help your co-op control demand costs.

AMR systems can reduce the need for sending trucks and personnel to accounts, saving as much as \$100 per trip. Co-ops are also integrating AMR systems with supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems that remotely control and monitor substations. By combining AMR with SCADA and other systems like automated outage notification and computerized mapping

systems, we are creating powerful new systems that simply mean faster and better service to you.

Beyond the core business of providing electricity, many cooperatives are either working independently or teaming up with other co-ops and industry partners to provide some desperately needed infrastructure systems in rural Illinois. The services include broadband Internet service, rural water, and even rural sewer systems. By working cooperatively to accomplish these large and expensive projects, I think co-ops will overcome this formidable challenge just like they did nearly 70 years ago when rural Illinois was in the dark.

In rural Illinois broadband service is nearly nonexistent. In southern Illinois, six electric co-ops have formed a subsidiary called Southern Services. We are working with a partner to begin providing broadband service. Several co-ops in the state are providing WildBlue satellite broadband service. Without broadband service in place, enticing new businesses to our area is nearly impossible.

At our co-op we are trying to develop a rural sewer system that will use a proven new technology called sequential batch reactors. A fully-enclosed system, it will be odorless and environmentally efficient. Planning a rural sewer system is a huge undertaking, but it's worth the effort.

We are also converting to new more energy efficient transformers that use soybean oil instead of mineral oil. A biodegradable oil like this is safer for the environment in the event of a spill.

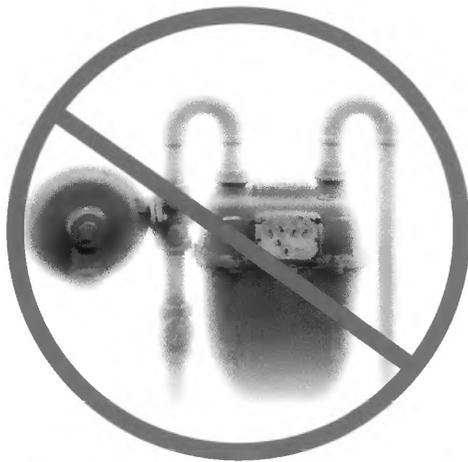
I believe co-ops are innovative because we don't have the bureaucracy inherent within large, distant utilities. We are right here at home in our community, and governed by open-minded local leaders. They understand we need to constantly try and improve, but are also mindful of the expense side of the equation. Innovation embarked on just to have the latest technology is simply not prudent. Each co-op is different, with local needs that will dictate the innovative approach it takes to provide better service. ■

"I believe co-ops are innovative because we don't have the bureaucracy inherent within large, distant utilities."

Alan W. Wattles is the President/CEO of Monroe County Electric Co-Operative, Inc., Waterloo, Ill.



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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Noland Picked to Head Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives

The board of directors of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), Springfield, Ill., has selected N. Duane Noland to replace retiring President/CEO Earl Struck. Noland will begin serving as President/CEO in January.

Before accepting the position, Noland served as vice president of Hickory Point Bank and Trust. From 1990 to 2003, he was a member of the Illinois General Assembly, serving two terms in the Illinois Senate and four terms in the Illinois House of Representatives. As a state senator, Noland served as assistant majority leader, and vice chair of the Agriculture and Conservation Committee. One of the many leadership awards Noland received was the Illinois Electric Cooperative Public Service Award.

Noland is also vice president of Noland Farms and the seventh generation to operate the 2,500-acre centennial family farm in Macon and Christian counties. Noland and his wife Tina have three children and reside in rural Blue Mound, Ill.

An active civic and agricultural leader, Noland has served on the board of directors of organizations such as Millikin University, Decatur Memorial Hospital, the Grain & Feed Association of Illinois,

Macon County Farm Bureau Foundation, the American Red Cross, and the Illinois Corn Growers Association.

Struck, of Springfield, has served as AIEC President/CEO since February 1994. He has been with the association for 27 years, serving earlier as director of legal and government relations.

Struck said, "With rising energy costs, deregulation uncertainty, and many other challenges, I know Duane will work with our co-op leaders to meet these challenges and continue our history of improving the quality of life for rural Illinois co-op members. Duane has a proven track record of service to rural Illinois, and I congratulate our board of directors on the wise decision they've made."

Based in Springfield, the AIEC provides legal, engineering, communications, safety training, legislative representation, and other services to 26 Illinois electric co-ops. AIEC member cooperatives serve more than 239,000 farms, homes, and business in 83 counties, with 54,117 miles of line. The AIEC is a member of Touchstone Energy® — an alliance of more than 625 local, consumer-owned electric utilities around the country. ■



Former Illinois State Senator N. Duane Noland is the new President/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. Noland said, "I was born into a cooperative family. I learned at a young age how a co-op works, that it is member-owned and member-controlled."

Thrill Seekers Have a New Place to Play

Do you have expansive acreage that's just sitting idle? Providing a safe place for adventure-seekers who ride off-highway vehicles (OHV) might be the perfect way to increase economic development in your area, while doing something productive with your land. There are only a few such courses in the state for OHV riders to enjoy, one of which is the new Rocky Glen OHV Park in Rockford. The new OHV park opened in October. Although there are a few parks in other parts of the state, Rocky Glen is the only OHV Park in Northern Illinois. The 120-acre park site features miles of trails and three scramble areas of different difficulty levels, so anyone can participate, regardless of their skill level.

According to Sue Grans of William Charles Investments, the developer, riders appreciate the park for its convenience, varied tracks, and scenic trails. She says, "Rocky Glen has hosted a wide variety of riders so far. I've seen kids as young as 12, men as old as 55, and lots of women riders, too."

Rocky Glen is located just north of the US Highway 20 Bypass, between South Main Street and the Rock River. For more information about the park, check the Web site at www.rockyglenohv.com.

You might look at your acreage differently now. Developing an OHV park could benefit you and your community. For more information about OHVs, contact the All Terrain Vehicle Association by phone at (866) 288-2564 or visit their Web site at www.ATVA@ATVAonline.com. ■

Winter Olympics in Illinois are special

The first image that usually comes to mind when people hear the words "Special Olympics" is a track meet. But in Illinois, Special Olympics athletes compete in 19 different summer and winter sports. One of the most enjoyable and exhilarating events that happens each year is the annual Special Olympics State Winter Games.

Nearly 400 athletes from Illinois will gather in the Galena area for the 26th Annual Special Olympics Illinois State Winter Games January 31-February 2, 2006. Volunteers help with every aspect of Winter Games; many act as ski escorts on the slopes at Chestnut Mountain.



Jessica Linneman competes in snowshoeing at the Illinois Special Olympics Winter Games.

Athletes will compete in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing at Chestnut Mountain Resort in Galena and in figure skating and speed skating at Five Flags Arena in Dubuque, Iowa, just across the Mississippi River, about a 20-minute ride from Galena.

The Touchstone Energy co-ops of Illinois have been proud sponsors of Special Olympics in Illinois and Jo-Carroll Energy provides electricity to Chestnut Mountain. "The Special Olympics oath is let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt," says Michael Hastings, President/CEO of Jo-Carroll Energy. "I think we could all learn something from these very special athletes."

To find out more about Special Olympics, or to get involved as an athlete, coach, volunteer, or sponsor, visit the Illinois Web site at www.soill.org. ■

Electric Heating Set To Rise This Winter

With the costs of heating fuels up substantially this winter, consumers will seek ways to reduce the impact. One way will be to switch to electric heating. According to the Energy Information Administration (EIA,) the cost of natural gas is up 48 percent, heating oil is up 32 percent, and propane is up 30 percent this winter over last.

The price of electricity, however, is only up about 5 percent from a year ago. As a result, it is anticipated that consumers will shift somewhat from heating their homes and offices with fuels that have risen at much higher price increases compared to electric heating increases.

Sales of electric heating appliances are rising. Heat pumps may also increase, encouraged by the new energy bill that offers tax credits for efficient heat pumps.

Increases in heating costs are not new. Over the past five winter seasons, the cost to heat a home with natural gas has increased from \$465 to \$1,096, or 136 percent; with fuel oil has increased from \$627 to \$1,577, or 152 percent; with propane has gone from \$736 to \$1,427, up 94 percent.

By contrast, the cost to heat a home with electricity has increased only slightly, from \$717 to \$755, a 5-percent increase. ■



Postage Rates Rising 5.4 Percent

Hang onto your pocketbooks — postage rates are increasing again. The Postal Rate Commission has voted unanimously to raise postage rates by 5.4 percent, effective January 8. First-class standard letters and flat mail pieces will increase from 37 cents to 39 cents. This rate increase — the first since 2002 — is needed to fulfill the requirement of a federal law passed in 2003. That law requires the Postal Service to establish a \$3.1 billion escrow account, with use of the funds to be determined by Congress at a later date. Without this federal mandate, it would not have been necessary to raise rates in 2006. For more information go to www.usps.com. ■



Free \$Smart Energy Design Web Conference

A free energy efficiency Web conference is being held January 18 from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. The program is for consumers, small business owners, utility personnel, developers, contractors, architects, and engineers.

This program is sponsored by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), the Geothermal Heat Pump Consortium (GHPC), and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Building Research Council (BRC) and will be broadcast from the WILL studios on the University of Illinois campus. The program is part of the State of Illinois' new energy program, the Small Business \$Smart Energy Program (SB\$E). The SB\$E program in Illinois provides engineering design assistance and helps identify opportunities for energy savings.

The primary goals of the SB\$E program are:

- To reduce the cost of doing business in the state through improved energy efficiency,
- To support job creation,
- To mitigate pollution by reducing energy usage,
- To improve small business competitiveness through intelligent building design and efficient building components and systems.

To sign up for the Web conference go to <http://webcast.sedac.org>. For more information on host sites for the Web conference contact Jessica Commins, \$Smart Energy Design Assistance Center, (202) 558-6413, or Jessica@SEDAC.org, or go to www.sedac.org. ■

Touchstone Energy Co-Ops Working on Jobs

Illinois' Touchstone Energy® co-ops are working together with community leaders to bring new jobs to rural Illinois. On Tuesday, November 8, five southern Illinois electric cooperatives hosted a Touchstone Energy economic development "boot camp" at Southern Illinois Power Cooperative in Marion. Local economic development representatives and co-op leaders learned how corporate site selectors think — what information they want about vacant buildings and property sites. Each economic development group was given a mock request for information about their communities in advance. During the workshop, each group met with experts to discuss the pros and cons of their proposals, and how they could improve their proposal and attract more site selectors.

Hosts of the boot camp were Egyptian Electric Cooperative in Steeleville, Monroe County Electric Co-Operative in Waterloo, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative in Eldorado, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative in Dongola, and Tri-County Electric Cooperative in Mt. Vernon.

In May, 11 central Illinois cooperatives hosted the same economic development boot camp.

Touchstone Energy has developed additional economic development tools, with more in the works. For example, the New and Emerging Technologies (NET) Conference is held each year to bring corporate and cooperative

leaders from across the country together to discuss their power needs and concerns. During the conference they also learn about new and innovative programs the co-ops offer.

Another job building tool is the Touchstone Energy Sites Across America Web site. Vacant properties and available building sites in co-op communities are featured. Sites Across America is the only site with listings from across the country. This unique approach provides one stop shopping for site selectors. ■

I Resolve to Change My Energy Wasting Ways!

Top 10 New Year's Energy Saving Resolutions (and how to accomplish them!)

I Resolve To...

1 Reduce my heating costs!

Replace or clean furnace filters once a month and get a tune-up every few years to be sure your furnace is clean and properly adjusted. Install a programmable thermostat to save even more. You can automatically lower your temperature while at work or asleep and raise it when you're home. For every degree you lower your heat in the 60-70° range, you'll save up to an additional 3 to 5 percent.

2 Not heat the attic this year!

Attic insulation should be a minimum of R-40. That's about 10-12 inches of insulation. Electric cooperative energy advisors recommend cellulose insulation. Don't forget to add fiberglass batts or insulation board to the top of your access door and weatherstrip around it.

3 Stop letting the cold air in and the warm air out!

Get a blower door test to find out exactly where your air leaks are. You can also use a candle or smoking incense stick and check around all windows and doors. Use caulk and weatherstripping to seal up your home inside and out. Don't forget to caulk along all baseboards and window trim, install foam gaskets behind covers on outlets and switches, use expandable foam around pipe entry points, and seal around your dryer vent.

4 Worship the sun's energy!

Use landscaping and drapes to take advantage of the sun's heat in the winter and block it in the summer. Open drapes on south facing windows during the winter months to gain the sun's natural heating.

5 Pay attention to my hot water heater!

Set your water heater setting to 120° unless your dishwasher requires a higher temperature. Insulate the pipe coming out of the heater. Pre-formed pipe insulation sleeves simply snap into place and make it easy. Consider installing an extra water heater insulation blanket. Use low-flow showerheads. Cooperative energy advisors often recommend Marathon electric water heaters because of their high efficiency and long life.

6 Stop paying too much to run my appliances!

Replace appliances with Energy Star® models. Get rid of that old refrigerator in the garage; it could be costing you hundreds of dollars a year. Don't keep it too cold; 37-40° for refrigerators and 0-5° for freezers is adequate. Use the air-dry cycle on your dishwasher. Wash full loads of clothes in warm or cold water when possible, and rinse all in cold water; they'll get just as clean. Don't peek at your food while baking. Every time you open the oven door, you release 25 percent of the heat.

7 Light up my life efficiently!

Change out all high-usage bulbs and replace them with compact fluorescents. They use less energy, last 10 times longer, and distribute more light per watt. Install timers or motion sensors on lighting you often forget to turn off, or want to turn on automatically. This is great for outdoor lighting as well as closets, garages, and utility rooms. Use lamps for task lighting instead of illuminating an entire room.

8 Become more aware of my energy wasting habits!

Look around you. Is the TV on when no one is in the room? Do you keep the outside lights on all night? Are you using hot water when you don't need to? Did you fix the leaking faucet or running toilet? Do you use the microwave, toaster oven, or crock-pot when possible? Did you install low-flow showerheads?

9 Contact my electric cooperative when considering new heating, cooling, water heating, or home building options.

Your co-op may offer rebates or special rates or be able to help you choose wisely and save money.

10 Continue learning about energy efficiency!

Read the Energy Solutions column in this magazine for energy saving tips. Also, check out the following Web sites: www.mylocalco-op.coop, www.energystar.gov, www.dougrye.com, and <http://dulley.com>.



by Nancy Nixon

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Driving through many small towns in Illinois, one can't help but be struck by the redundancy. The once-vibrant downtown areas have been reduced to ghost towns, and the "mom and pop" shops that once thrived along yesterday's commerce centers are now vacant and boarded up. Everyone shops, visits the doctor, and eats somewhere else. This is inconvenient for the community's residents and it robs potential tax revenue from the local economy. Dwindling tax revenue affects schools, roads, water and sewer systems, property values, housing, jobs, and overall quality of life.

There are many factors that contribute to the decline of a town. Maybe a major employer relocates, or schools consolidate, leaving one town without the central social activity the school once provided. The corner grocery store or a church could close, leaving the town without those services. Residents often sit by and helplessly watch the town vaporize. They simply don't know where to turn for

Rekindling the fire in Smalltown, Illinois

help in rekindling the fire their town once had.

Illinois Coalition for Community Services (ICCS) is a little-known non-profit organization in Springfield dedicated to "helping communities help themselves." You might not have heard of the organization as it quietly works behind the scenes. Coalition Executive Director Joe Dunn prefers to focus on the communities his group is helping, rather than promote his organization. ICCS, which is primarily funded through the Illinois Department of Human Services and other sources, was started in Chicago in 1934 as a community prevention program to help at risk youth. Since then it has become much more, now helping communities turn ideas and dreams into reality.

Every town must start the process of revitalization, but how? Dunn worked for Senator Paul Simon for a number of years, and Simon was known for his commitment to rural Illinois and for his rural town meetings. The most repetitive question he heard at those meetings was how residents could keep their town alive. Simon would reply, "Get the 12 most creative and imaginative people in town together and brainstorm at somebody's house. You'll probably come up with 50 great ideas for what you'd like to see in your town; then decide which of them you could realistically do." The coalition steps in when someone from the community calls them for assistance in working on a plan.

With the help of volunteers, ICCS economic development specialists provide services in 74 Illinois counties. The list of services they provide is lengthy, including teaching communities to conduct public meetings, recruit and motivate volunteers, organize youth mentoring programs, and generate infrastructure improvement. They also can assist with fundraising and grantwriting, and help the community develop a budget and a strategic plan. Dunn says the coalition's ultimate goal is for a community to become sustainable, so it no longer needs its services.

With help from the coalition, many towns are seeing results. For example, Shawneetown is improving its water and sanitation system, and East Dubuque is developing youth services. Barry is completing its community plan, which includes recruiting more businesses to its industrial

park and facilitating infrastructure improvements.

The coalition helped Colchester start a committee called the Colchester Community Connections, organized out of concern for the future of the community's children. According to Dunn, the committee started out by creating some community service, summer, and after-school programs for kids. From those successes, they began partnering with other local groups, fueling a community-wide effort that has led to some substantive city planning. "I don't think this effort would have taken place if this group of residents hadn't stepped forward and decided they were going to do something about their community," says Dunn.

Dunn's future goal for the coalition is to provide assistance to more communities and develop connectivity among the many committees and

individuals they work with around the state. The coalition developed the Illinois Peoples Assembly (IPA) to nurture that connectivity. "Whenever you get people around the table, all of a sudden there's a huge amount of energy because people share ideas that have worked for them. Or they hear about successful projects from other communities that they haven't been able to get off the ground," states Dunn. He adds that the IPA gives people a voice in their communities. And when issues come up that really affect them, they can team up with others and do some advocacy as a group statewide. It gives them the power of many voices.

Dunn looks enthusiastically toward the future. He knows there is growing need for the services ICCS offers. The greatest challenge will be keeping pace to accommodate the need.

Kids take to the street in East Dubuque, proud of their participation in their community's youth center. The youth center was created by community volunteers with help from the Illinois Coalition for Community Services (ICCS) in Springfield. Photo courtesy of ICCS.



Turning small towns into agurbs

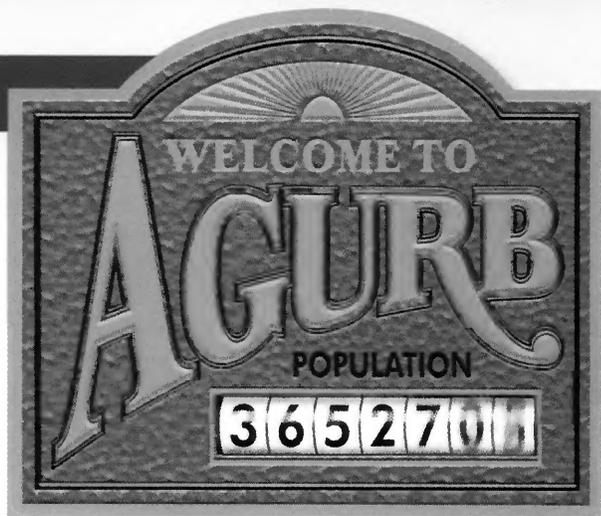
Jack Schultz, Industrial Site Selector and CEO of Agracel in Effingham, and author of "Boomtown USA, The 7-1/2 Keys to Big Success in Small Towns," has spent more than three years visiting and studying small towns located across the country. He's fascinated by what factors cause one small town to thrive, while another seemingly equal town dies. Of the nearly 15,800 communities he's researched and/or visited, he's labeled the 397 most successful of them "agurbs."

According to Schultz, there is a population shift as people from the cities are fleeing to agurbs for a better quality of life, less stress, and a lower cost of living. Existing in 45 states, agurbs are defined as prospering small towns located outside of major metropolitan areas, with ties to agriculture. They experienced population and employment growth from 1990-2000, and a per-capita income growth of more than 2 percent per year from 1989-1999.

Schultz thinks agurbs are the way of the future for rural America, and he's formulated 7-1/2 steps for

helping small towns achieve the success they're seeking. The steps include possessing a can-do attitude, sharing your vision, leveraging your resources, developing strong local leaders and maintaining local control, building and embracing the brand you create, and being prepared for the highs and lows you and your community will face. Many towns are now using these steps to improve their communities. The first step, though, is to come up with the idea that sparks action.

In his travels, Schultz has seen many towns turn themselves around using an idea that at first seemed absurd. For example, a community in Kansas is generating revenue by selling yellow bricks at 10 dollars each, and has begun building a yellow brick road in its downtown area. The project was promoted well, with 100 bricks sold in the first month. To



date, 11,000 bricks have been sold, and sales proceeds are being used to fund community projects and programs. Tour buses from around the country are bringing people to see the yellow brick road. The tourists buy food, lodging, and perhaps a souvenir, and that revenue funnels back into the town's economy.

Another story is about a woman in Texas who started a homemade pralines business when she was 60. Now in her 70s, she's still going strong, and employs 20 people as the only manufacturing operation in her small town. Another town in the state of Washington was transformed from a dying sawmill and railroad town into a quaint and thriving Bavarian village. The town now draws people from across the U.S. and internationally, and hosts several major festivals each year. Tourism is now a booming business there.

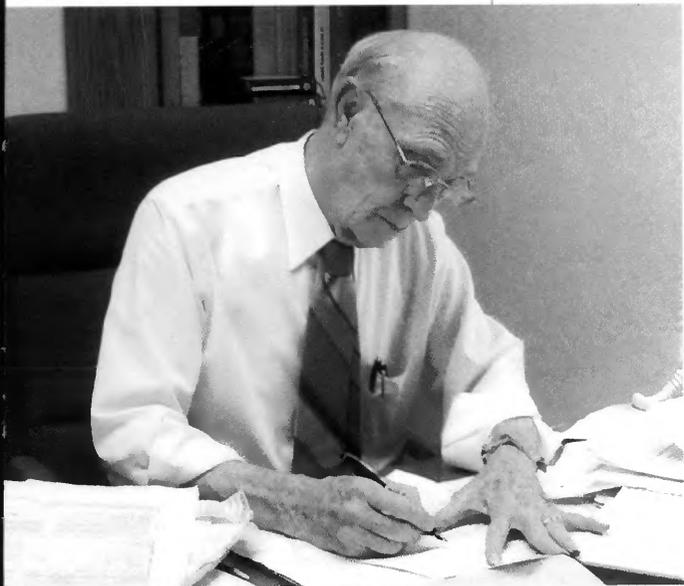
There are 16 Illinois towns that Schultz has deemed agurbs. Schultz says, "Paris is an example of a community that needed to bring some more industry in and did it as well as any small town I've seen in traveling around the country." He also gives high praise to Peru for taking a big risk in providing infrastructure around Interstate 39 when it was built. The "crazy idea" that town leaders had years ago has resulted in millions of dollars in tax revenue. Marion, which made Schultz's top 100 list of his "Golden Eagles," or in his eyes the best small towns in the country, tenaciously turned its community around when it could have died.

Jack Schultz, CEO and Industrial Site Selector of Agracel in Effingham, and author of "Boomtown USA, The 7-1/2 Keys to Big Success in Small Towns," speaks about his experiences to a crowd of Illinois co-op leaders during the 2004 annual meeting of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in Springfield.



The little town that could

When Robert Butler became Mayor in 1963, Marion was a quiet community of 11,000 people. Coal mines and factories, that had provided good wages for local residents for decades, were closing. With less disposable income in the community, businesses that once thrived began closing their doors. Agriculture alone couldn't sustain the area. Marion was in trouble.



Marion has been Mayor Robert Butler's heart and soul for the past 42 years. Through his guidance, strong city leadership, and a committed community, the town that was on the decline now has a bright and prosperous future. Photo is courtesy of the Marion Daily Republican.

From the day he took office, Butler knew that reviving Marion couldn't be up to him alone. He and community leaders rolled up their sleeves and got to work. He says, "It takes teamwork among your chamber of commerce, residents, and city council to be successful. These groups have to be united in their efforts and united with the business community."

By the early 1980s, some progress had been made, but it took a tragic natural disaster to really light a fire under the town. In 1982, Marion was hit by a devastating tornado. Reeling from \$50 million in damage, 10 deaths, and hundreds of injuries, the town had to work together to rebuild.

In the years since the tornado hit, Marion has made significant infrastructure improvements and solved long-standing flooding problems. Community leaders have been committed to beautifying their town. They've made it a priority to make the community attractive to developers as well, streamlining paperwork required to bring a new business to town, and offering as many incentives to them as possible. Butler advises, "You have to be aggressive in presenting your community and create a favorable climate for business."

Regional collaborations have also played a part in Marion's success. In May 1999, leaders from Williamson County, Marion, and several other communities along the Route 13 Corridor teamed up to create the Regional Economic Development Corporation (REDCO). Butler says, "I tell our people not to worry about the competition from area towns because we're all in this together. What's good for one of our area towns will help the rest of us. Our real competition comes from other states."

Through REDCO, the area has successfully developed new industrial parks and sites, and welcomed the Heartland Regional Medical Center, a 20-acre Circuit City distribution center, two medical insurance processing centers, a Blue-Cross/Blue Shield office, Japanese auto parts supplier Aisin, restaurants, two large home improvement stores, and a hotel. The 20,000-square-foot-state-of-the-art Marion Cultural and Civic Center replaced the original structure that burned in

1997. A Super Wal-Mart is in the works, and the completion of a minor league baseball stadium in Marion in 2007 will be the icing on the cake.

Having weathered successes, failures, and even tragedy, Butler is proud of Marion and what it has accomplished during his reign in office. The once-dilapidated town is now a bustling city of 16,000. Butler knows that the dreams he and local leaders once had have come to fruition. Butler shares that while driving around Marion one day, he was trying to remember when the explosion of both commercial and residential development had occurred. He realized that it had been happening all along. Marion had become an agurb.

The people who are working to turn their communities around aren't any smarter than the people in your town; they simply had a dream and kept pushing until it became a reality. Butler, Schultz, and Dunn all agree on one thing. Start small. Every little accomplishment will strengthen your cause. Celebrate your small successes, then move on to something bigger and celebrate that. You'll have some setbacks along the way, but remember that where there's a will, there's a way. Don't give up until you feel the warmth of the fire returning to your community. ■

To learn more about economic development in Marion and Southern Illinois, visit REDCO online at www.redco.org or phone them at (618) 998-8252. To read more stories about the unique towns Jack Schultz has visited throughout the country, pick up a copy of his book, "Boomtown USA: The 7-1/2 Keys to Big Success in Small Towns." It's available online at www.boomtownusa.net. And for more information about services provided by the Coalition for Community Services, contact Executive Director Joe Dunn by phone at (800) 728-1523 or by e-mail at joeiccs@aol.com.

Eliminating Household Hazards

How to dispose of the 100 pounds of hazardous waste in your garage

Winter is a great time to clean out the garage because it allows you to get out of the house while still avoiding the cold of winter. But before you toss all that extra “stuff” into the trash or pile it on the top shelf, remember there are proper methods for storing and disposing of hazardous waste, such as used motor oil and paint.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that the average household stores up to 100 pounds of hazardous waste, and many of these materials can be found in the garage. Proper storage and disposal of such materials should be a priority for everyone.

When purchasing hazardous materials, only buy what is needed and make sure the product contains a safety closure. Always store items in their original containers with the label intact. Never place hazardous materials in household containers such as butter dishes, milk jugs, or containers labeled for another product.

Every garage should contain a locked cabinet that can be used to store hazardous materials. This keeps them out of the reach of children and pets, and helps prevent accidental spills. Kitty litter, sand, or sawdust should be stored near the cabinet and placed on any spills that may occur due to a broken or leaking container. A separate broom and dustpan, labeled HAZARDOUS USE ONLY, should be used when cleaning up these spills.

Storing hazardous waste is only half of the

equation. Proper disposal of hazardous waste requires more effort than pouring it down the drain, on the grass, or placing the item in the trash.

Used motor oil and oil filters pose a disposal problem for car owners who choose to change their own oil. Recycling is an excellent way to dispose of used oil. Common collection sites for used oil include service stations and commercial recycling centers. Oil filters should be drained overnight, placed in a sealed container and taken to a hazardous waste collection site.

Half-empty paint containers, containing both latex and oil-based paints, are common in any garage. Properly stored, paint can have a shelf life of 10 years, so keeping paints that are used on walls or furniture that may eventually chip or need touching up is recommended.

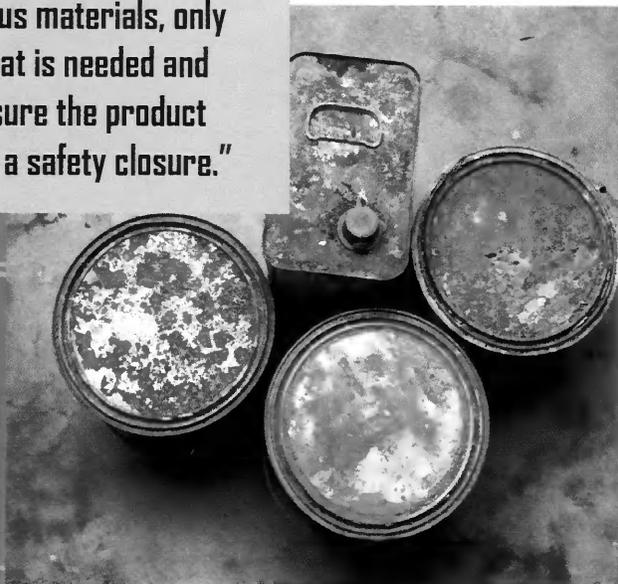
If a large quantity of unwanted paint is left, consider donating it to community service organizations, theatrical groups, or recreation centers. Although dried out containers of paint are usually accepted by waste disposal companies, call your company before placing those items in the trash. Paint can also be taken to hazardous waste collection sites and some recycling facilities.

Many hazardous materials come in aerosol cans. Never place pressurized aerosol cans in the trash. Discharge the contents of unwanted containers into a cardboard box until you no longer hear the air being released from the can. Do this in a well-ventilated area and wear protective gear if instructed to on the label (do not depressurize pesticides in aerosol cans, simply take the pressurized can to a hazardous waste collection facility). Recycle the empty container.

To locate a hazardous waste collection site in your area, contact your local health department, city hall, or the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. For more information go to www.epa.state.il.us/land/waste-mgmt/index.html.

Information taken from 57 Ways To Protect Your Home Environment (and Yourself) published by the North Central Extension Region. ■

“When purchasing hazardous materials, only buy what is needed and make sure the product contains a safety closure.”



Jodie Tate is the Natural Resources Management Educator for the University of Illinois Extension Springfield Center, (217) 782-6515 or jtate@uiuc.edu





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A Houseplant Renaissance

How to help your houseplants thrive even if you have a brown thumb

The winter landscape doesn't change drastically, which is all well and good as there's nothing much to do except look at it in all the glories of brown, gray, and black. That's why we have houseplants.

Houseplants provide the green we long for during December, January, and February. It's our attempt to bring the outdoors indoors.

Of course, many of our attempts fall flat.

We're seeing the start of a houseplant renaissance, just like there was in the '70s when disco was popular.

Back then, I remember having plants everywhere. There were special watering cans, which were nothing more than watering cans sold as "Houseplant Watering Cans," special fertilizer for every type of plant, and special devices for improving humidity, which amounted to plastic tents and a portable humidifier. It didn't take long to see that if I wanted to live in a jungle, going to Costa Rica would be a better investment.

We don't see all the sorts of plants that we did 30 years ago. Current plants fall into two main categories: succulents (including cacti) and those that demand hardly any attention and can suffer through the non-tropical indoor conditions.

For the truly brave, you can find all sorts of ferns, orchids, bromeliads, and palms.

Also, most people have come to terms with the

fact that killing a houseplant doesn't leave you branded with a PK on your forehead. So, if the plant dies, then it dies. Life goes on. Ob-la-di.

Most of the succulents can tolerate the low humidity and light con-

ditions indoors during winter. Cacti are particularly adept at adapting to the 30 percent or less humidity levels. As long as you don't over-water them, they get by until spring.

That doesn't mean you can just plop them down in a corner and let them go. They will dry out just like anything when the furnace is going full blast. You can probably get by with a good thorough soaking once every four to six weeks.

And I won't even discuss those grafted cacti that never grow because the two cacti are about as similar as a cat to a tiger or lion. At least it takes

several years for them to die.

The low-light, low-humidity plants are just as brown thumb friendly.

Aroids such as philodendron, Peace Lily, and Devil's ivy are most common. Others include Sanseveria (mother-in-law's tongue or snake plant) Aspidistra (Cast iron plant), and some ferns, though many of the ferns thumb their green fronds at the low humidity.

The above list can thrive with good light, or in a north window. If they get too much light, leaves may yellow a bit. But during the winter, that seldom happens.

They will go to town with a humid environment, or muck it out in dry conditions, though they will let you know it by turning brown along the leaf margins and looking somewhat limp, but not wilted.

Misting is just about absolutely worthless. It makes you feel good, but it helps the plant for about 30 seconds.

Many people have a misplaced notion that water misted in the air just hangs in that spot and never moves. It moves just like misting perfume. Same effect.

That's why you need humidifiers or cold-water vaporizers to keep the humidity at a semi-jungle level. It's also better for your furniture and most people.

Most of the non-succulent plants like a moist soil, but if you let them dry out, they'll wilt a bit. If you don't water, they'll wilt a bit more. You really have to go out of your way to kill them by under-watering.

Yet, if you love them incessantly and over-water, they'll wilt just as fast since you've rotted off the roots.

Some people get into the it's-Saturday-so-I-must-water-the-houseplants routine. While that's not ideal, it works about 90 percent of the time for most plants under most conditions. Better to check the soil every day and water when it starts to dry. ■

"Houseplants provide the green we long for during December, January, and February."

David Robson is an Extension Educator, Horticulture, at the Springfield Extension Center, University of Illinois Extension, P.O. Box 8199, Springfield, IL 62791. Telephone: (217) 782-6515. E-mail: drobson@uiuc.edu.



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I'm hooked! Your magazine is a true gem! My only question is, where have you been all my life? The other magazines with "country" in the name have lots of pretty pictures, but no depth or purpose other than shallow entertainment. I'm completely mesmerized by each issue of COUNTRYSIDE I get, and cannot put it down! It's the most-read magazine I've ever had. I even read all the ads! Cover to cover, you're the best. — Cheryl, Pa

Really enjoy your magazine. It's like having a houseful of friendly neighbors in for the afternoon.

Being 83 years old, of course I lived through the big Depression. My folks had always practiced frugal ways, having been brought up that way, so it wasn't as hard for them as for some. I find many of the same money-saving hints we used then (and I still do) but also quite a number of new ones. We never get too old to learn. — Ruth S., Idaho

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LEARN how to do everything right—the first time
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Okay—you got me! And I'm glad! I sent for a sample issue, mailed back the invoice with "No thanks" written across it, and then read the magazine... cover to cover, every word, including the advertising, and decided I need this magazine. I had no idea there were so many people who felt the way I do. — Carol S., Ohio

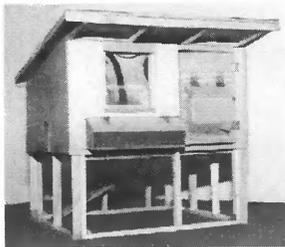
I continue to enjoy this magazine. Fascinating people, ideas, opinions, observations and hopes, as well as information and practical advice abound. — Harland C., Maryland

Thank you for 17 years of COUNTRYSIDE. We love it and the reasons for it! — Mrs. G.H., NY

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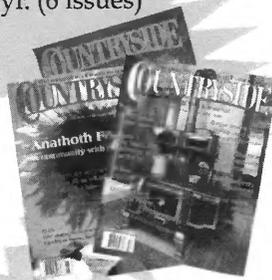
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PLEASE NOTE: Articles listed here have already appeared in print, and not all back issues are available—another good reason not to miss any more!

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DGNIL

Curing Winter Window Problems

New super windows cure winter sweats and save energy

Every year as winter approaches I get numerous calls from folks telling me that their windows are sweating, causing wood rot, mold and mildew, and other undesirable problems. One of my favorite answers is, "Windows don't sweat, a football player sweats." Actually, the proper word is condensation. But I personally think sweat sounds best, so we'll say windows "sweat."

Simply put, windows "sweat" because the windows are colder than the dew point of the air in the room. Only two steps will prevent this problem.

No. 1 - Make the window warmer. Consider this. What happens if you set a glass of cold iced tea on the coffee table? First mother screams, "Don't set that there, it will leave a ring on the table!" What is happening? The cold surface from the glass is below the dew point. Moisture in the air moves to that cold spot and turns to water. Solution - warm the glass. For example, if you pour that same glass of iced tea into a Styrofoam cup, no condensation occurs because the Styrofoam cup is warmer than the dew

point in the room.

No. 2 - Lower the humidity. If you are having moisture problems on your windows in the winter, perhaps the most economical solution is to lower the humidity in the room.

Determine the source of the moisture. Is it from having

lots of plants; is it from not using the vent fan when showering, bathing, or cooking? If your house is on a slab, most humidity comes from not using a vent fan in kitchens and bathrooms, as well as bad ductwork and air infiltration.

However, if your house has a crawl space, the condensation on your windows is most likely coming from your crawl space. Eliminate water and moisture problems under your house by totally sealing the ground and foundation walls with heavy plastic and close the foundation vents.

In either case, the solution might be to make the windows warmer, which means adding storm windows or by replacing existing windows with super high efficiency windows.

A Doug Rye house will require just about half as much energy as the average house built in America. Once that house is constructed to my standards, which includes caulking, cellulose insulation,

Marathon water heaters, etc., the single biggest source of energy loss in that house will now be windows.

Only recently have I been able to obtain a triple-paned (that's right, three panes of glass) with two coats of low-e glass and krypton gas. It's a super window.

Here's an example of how well these super windows work. In Gatlinburg, Tenn., last winter, it was 4 degrees below zero and inside a house built with these triple-paned windows, the surface temperature of the window was 72 degrees. That's almost no heat loss.

What are the advantages of a super window? First, it has a u-value of .21 and a solar glazing coefficient of .33. That simply means that it is as energy efficient as any window available today. Never cold, never hot, never any window sweating, and lower utility bills. Exactly what everyone would like to have, right?

Here's how you can get these super windows at no cost.

First, let's look at new construction. A family building a new home in southeast Arkansas recently sent me house plans to calculate the amount of heating and cooling needed for the new home. The construction was to be to Doug Rye standards, including geothermal heating and cooling. The calculation showed that the home would need 9 tons of cooling capacity on a 100-degree day when using double-paned windows. However, if the house has the "super window" it needs only 7.5 tons of cooling. That's a savings of about \$6,900 on the initial cost of installing a geothermal system. That savings would pay for about 17 of the "super windows." In other words, the family gets the very best at no additional cost. By the way, the family's monthly utility bill would be reduced by about \$30 a month by making this change. Remember, energy items cost nothing, they make you money.

These windows are good for existing homes, too. If you are going to spend money for replacement windows, why not buy the best?

"If you are going to spend money for replacement windows, why not buy the best?"

Doug Rye, the "Doctor of Energy Efficiency-the King of Caulk and Talk" can be heard on several different Illinois radio stations. Or you can go to his Web site at www.dougrye.com, e-mail him at info@philliprye.com, or call (888)-Doug-Rye or (501) 653-7931. You can also sign up for a free newsletter and order his "how to" videotapes.



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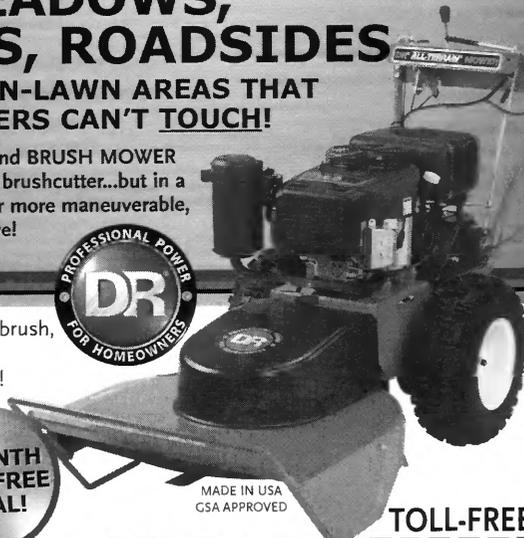
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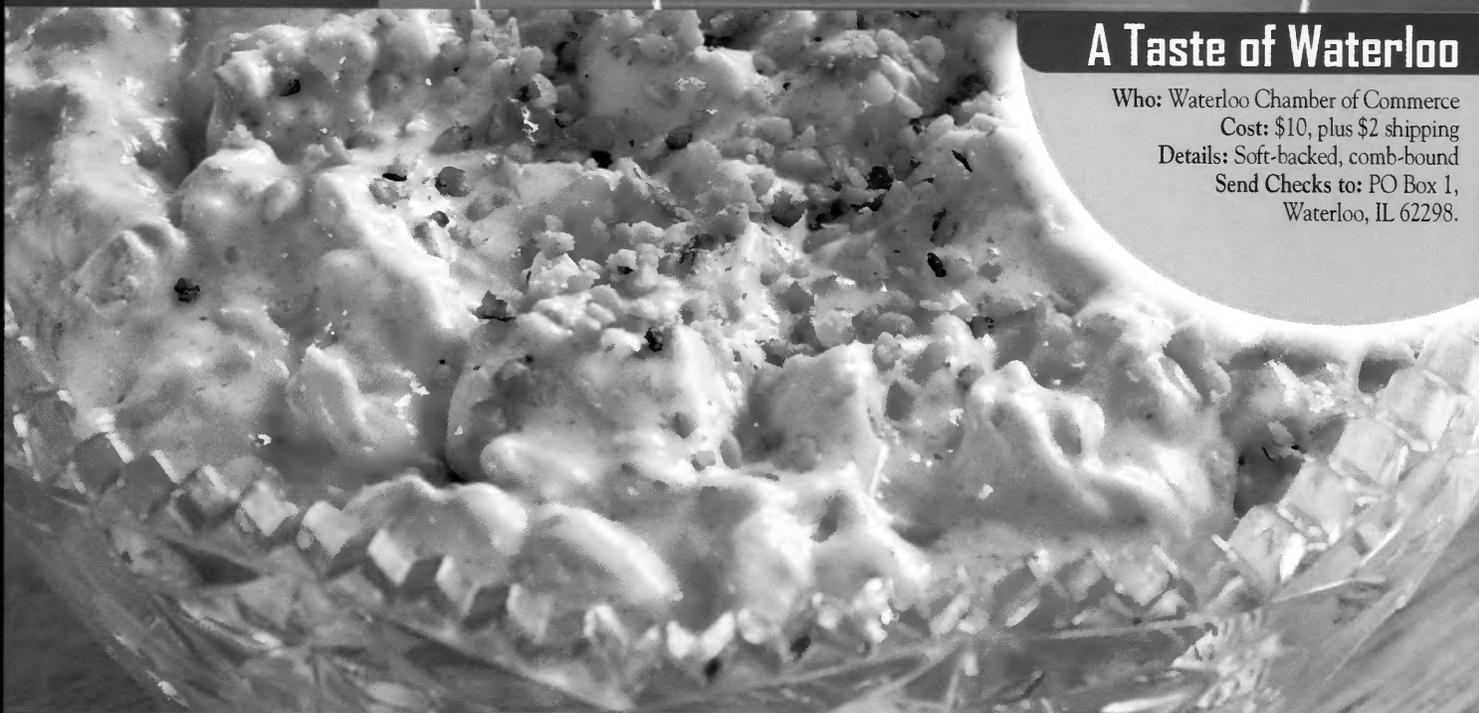
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Disappearing Cream Cheese Croissant

Pauline Mudd

- 2 cans Pillsbury Crescent Rolls
- 1 (8-oz.) pkg. cream cheese
- 1/4 C. sugar mixed with 1 T. cinnamon
- 1/2 C. sugar
- 1 stick butter, melted

Lightly spray a 9x13-inch pan with cooking spray. Unroll one can of the rolls, keeping sections joined. Press into the bottom of the pan. Add sugar to the cream cheese and microwave 45 seconds on high, and then stir until smooth. Spread evenly on the crescent layer. Layer the second can of crescents over the cream cheese. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar mixture and pour butter over all. Bake at 375° for 20 minutes.

Pink Salad (above)

Tammy Crossin

- 1 (8-oz.) tub Cool Whip
- 1 (20-oz.) can crushed pineapple, drained
- 1 C. marshmallows
- 1 C. chopped nuts
- 1 C. coconut
- 1 can cherry pie filling
- 1 can Eagle brand milk

Mix all ingredients together and refrigerate for several hours.

Impossible Lasagna Pie

Vicki Brombloich

- 1/2 C. small curd cottage cheese
- 1/4 C. grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 lb. ground beef, cooked and drained
- 1 tsp. oregano
- 1/2 tsp. sweet basil leaves
- 1 can tomato paste
- 1 C. Mozzarella cheese
- 1 C. milk
- 2/3 C. Bisquick
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper

Microwave directions: Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish. Layer cottage cheese and Parmesan in the bottom of the dish. Mix ground beef, oregano, basil, and tomato paste and 1/2 C. Mozzarella. Spoon evenly on top of the cottage cheese. Beat milk, Bisquick, eggs, salt, and pepper until smooth. Pour on top of meat mixture. Put in the microwave on high for 15-20 minutes or until a knife inserted in comes out clean. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Let stand for 5-10 minutes before cutting.

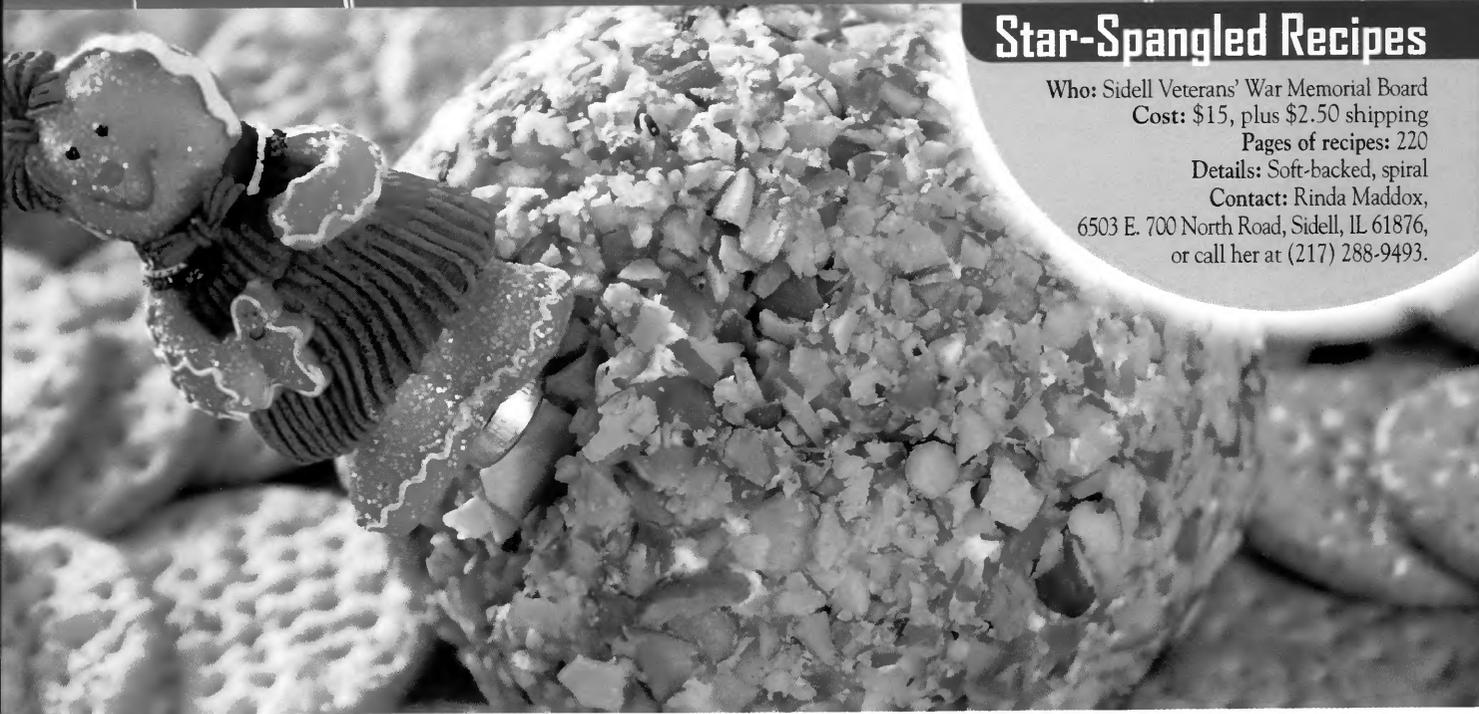
Double Chocolate Goopy Butter Cake

Kevin Johnson

- 2 sticks butter, melted separately
- 1 pkg. chocolate cake mix
- 3 eggs
- 1 (8-oz.) pkg. cream cheese, softened
- 4 T. cocoa powder
- 1 (16-oz.) box powdered sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Preheat the oven to 350°. Lightly grease a 9x13-inch pan. In a large bowl, combine the cake mix, 1 egg, and 1 stick of the melted butter and stir until well blended. Pat mixture into the prepared pan and set aside. In a mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese until smooth. Add the remaining 2 eggs, and the cocoa powder. On a low mixing speed, add the powdered sugar. Slowly add the remaining stick of melted butter and the vanilla. Continue beating until smooth. Spread filling over the cake mixture in the pan. Bake for 40-50 minutes. Be careful not to over-bake. The center should still be goeey when finished baking. Let cake cool, then cut.

Visit www.icl.coop to see an archive of past Illinois Country Living recipes.



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Pages of recipes: 220
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Ranch Dressing Cheese Ball (above)

Edna Eads

- 1/2 C. sliced natural almonds
- 2 (8-oz.) pkgs. cream cheese at room temperature
- 1 (1-oz.) pkg. ranch dressing mix
- 1/2 C. scallions, chopped
- Assorted crackers

Preheat oven to 350°. Spread almonds on baking sheet and bake until golden brown, approximately 4-6 minutes. Cool, then coarsely chop them and set them aside. In a bowl with a wooden spoon, combine cream cheese with dressing mix until mixed well. Stir in scallions. With a rubber spatula, gather the cheese into a rough ball. Gently roll in nuts until coated. With hands, press into a tight ball. Wrap in plastic. Refrigerate for 2 hours or overnight. Serve with crackers.

Cheesy Wiener Crescents (right)

Sharon Riggle

- 8 hot dogs
- 8 strips of Cheddar or American cheese
- 8 refrigerated crescent rolls

Slit hot dogs lengthwise, almost to the end. Place a cheese strip in each one. Separate crescent rolls. Place hot dog in shortest end and roll up. Bake at 375° for 12 minutes.

Cheeseburger and Fries Casserole

Carolyn Ball

- 2 lbs. lean ground beef
- 1 (10-oz.) can cheddar cheese soup
- 1 (10-oz.) can golden mushroom soup
- 1 (20-oz.) pkg. frozen French fries

Preheat oven to 350°. Brown ground beef in skillet, stirring until crumbly and drain. Spoon into a 9x13-inch baking pan. Pour mixture of soups over ground beef. Arrange French fries over top. Bake for 45-55 minutes or until potatoes are golden brown. Optional: Garnish with pickles and ketchup.

Photos by Catrina McCulley Wagner

Sawdust Pie

Loretta Lahne

- 7 egg whites
- 1-1/2 C. sugar
- 1-1/2 C. graham cracker crumbs
- 1-1/2 C. pecans
- 1-1/2 C. flaked coconut
- 1 unbaked 9-inch pie crust

Mix egg whites (unbeaten) and sugar. Stir in the graham cracker crumbs, pecans, and coconut. Stir together by hand. Pour in the pie shell. Bake at 325° until glossy and set, about 25-30 minutes. Do not over-bake – center will be gooey. Serve with sliced bananas or whipped cream.



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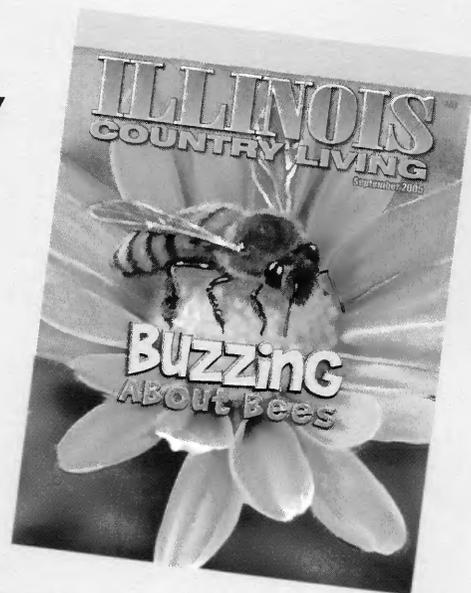
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The new geothermal system was operational this fall and the check presentation was held Nov. 22, on campus.

Egyptian Electric Cooperative and SIU submitted the geothermal grant application late last year. Mark Stallons, the cooperative's general manager, said, "We are very pleased that SIU received this grant. Because of the energy cost savings and environmental benefits, geothermal technology is an excellent match for many of our members, both commercial and residential."

The grants are available for any facility operated by a government or non-profit organization, and served by an Illinois electric cooperative. Eligible facilities, such as schools, community centers, libraries and churches, may apply for a grant of up to \$50,000 to help offset the higher initial cost of geothermal system installations.

"Geothermal heating and cooling systems are the most energy efficient available today," said John Freitag, vice president of operations for the AIEC. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in a landmark technical report entitled "Space Conditioning: the Next Frontier," calls geothermal systems "the most energy-efficient, environmentally clean and cost-effective space conditioning systems available."

Freitag points out that geothermal systems can save 50 percent in energy costs, and have been proven to decrease maintenance costs as well. Geothermal systems recover the earth's energy with loops of pipe in-



Southern Illinois University at Carbondale was recently awarded a \$50,000 grant toward the completion of a geothermal heating and cooling system in its temporary library storage facility. From left are Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association board President Paul Hicks of Carbondale, Association of Illinois Electric Cooperative Association Vice President of Operations John Freitag, Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation's Samantha Mattone, Egyptian Electric Cooperative General Manager Mark Stallons and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale Director of Plant and Service Operations Phil Gattton.

stalled underground. It is primarily the cost of installing this ground loop that creates the higher initial cost.

While use of this energy-efficient technology has grown in the residential market, it has been underutilized in institutional and commercial installations because of the higher installed cost.

"Facility managers and boards are sometimes tempted to move forward with the lowest initial cost alternatives, which mean less-efficient, traditional systems," Freitag said. "Traditional systems will have increased energy usage, greater operating costs and a much greater total cost in the long run. By providing the upfront incentive, the decision to go geothermal is an easier one."

"The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation appreciates the leadership of AIEC and the university on this effort. SIU will benefit from improved comfort in its facility, lower operating and maintenance

costs and reduced energy use, leading to less pollution in Illinois communities," said James Mann, Executive Director of Illinois Clean Energy.

"At the same time, organizations like Southern Illinois University can offer their peers and the wider commercial sector proof of the energy and maintenance savings during a building's lifecycle that far outweigh the initial capital investment for installing a geothermal system."

Illinois Clean Energy invests in clean energy development and land preservation efforts throughout Illinois. Facilities not serviced by Illinois electric cooperatives can apply directly to ICECF for geothermal system funding. Information on ICECF's other grant programs can be found at www.illinoiscleanenergy.org.

For more information about the geothermal system funding program, contact the local electric cooperative in your area or the AIEC at (217) 529-5561, or go to www.aiec.coop.

How to Bring Winter Heating Bills Down to Earth

Natural gas prices have nearly doubled since the 1990s, rising from \$5.80/Mcf in 1990 to \$10.74/Mcf in 2004, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Because natural gas and propane prices have risen significantly over the past few years, many homeowners have been switching to geothermal heat pumps. Electricity rates have been more stable and with a diversity of fuel sources from coal to new wind turbines, electricity should remain more stable in the future compared to natural gas.

Although saving money on energy costs is primary, electric co-op members who have geothermal heat pumps say the biggest benefits are quiet operation and dependable comfort all year. As an added bonus geothermal heat pumps have waste heat recovery systems that provide virtually free hot water.

Now geothermal heat pumps are also being recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) as the most cost-efficient, energy-efficient, and environmentally friendly heating and cooling systems available.

DOE's Energy Information Administration (EIA) is predicting that household heating energy expenses will continue to increase. The EIA based its forecast both on higher demand and higher prices for heating

fuels: 19 percent for natural gas, 45 percent for heating oil, and 22 percent for propane.

According to the EIA, families who use natural gas to heat homes - 55 percent of all households - will see their winter heating bills increase substantially.

This winter mild weather helped to decrease seasonal heating bills. But other factors are keeping gas prices high. Demand for natural gas continues to rise while domestic production and new gas infrastructure construction projects struggle to keep pace.

Although electric rates have been more stable, the true economic advantage of geothermal technology is it uses the renewable energy found just below the earth's surface. That won't change with the market or the weather. So geothermal users do not rely completely on the unpredictable supply and cost of fossil fuels or electricity for a good portion of their heating and cooling needs. Geothermal heat pumps help transfer this natural energy into home heating and can save homeowners up to 60 percent in their monthly energy bills.

For more information on how geothermal technology can save money while protecting the environment visit www.waterfurnace.com, www.geocomfort.com, www.geoexchange.com, or talk to your local electric co-op's employees.

Other energy saving tips

Here are some simple, inexpensive measures homeowners can take to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, courtesy of the Department of Energy's Federal Energy Management Program.

Turn down the temperature of your water heater to the warm setting (120 degrees F).

Install an insulating blanket on your water heater.

Use energy-saving settings on refrigerators, dishwashers, washing machines, and clothes dryers.

Replace old appliances with new, energy-efficient models.

Clean or replace furnace and heat pump filters.

If you have one, make up your waterbed every morning; the covers will insulate it and save up to one third of the energy it uses.

Replace your most frequently used incandescent lights with new compact fluorescent, which can save three-quarters of the electricity used by incandescents.

Apply caulk around leaky windows and doors. Don't forget to seal air leaks in your house - among the biggest culprits are utility cut-throughs for pipes, gaps around chimneys, recessed lights in insulated ceilings, and unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets.

Make sure your attic or crawl spaces are properly insulated.

Insulate hot water pipes and ducts wherever they run through unheated areas.

Install a clock thermostat to set your thermostat back automatically at night.

Schedule an energy audit for expert advice on making your entire home as energy efficient as possible.

For additional detailed tips on saving energy in homes, businesses, and schools, visit www.energy.gov/efficiency/index.html or contact your local electric cooperative.



No, they're not drilling for oil, but they are drilling for energy—geothermal energy. A geothermal heat pump uses the earth's energy making it the most energy-efficient heating, cooling, and water-heating system available today.

—photo by Bryce Cramer



With increasing energy prices, education about electricity needs to start in the classroom. Contact your local Touchstone Energy cooperative to request a free interactive and comprehensive Discovery Channel "Get Charged!" program kit for your middle school.

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7-8, Bald Eagle Days Environmental Fair and Wildlife Art Show in Rock Island. The largest event in the Midwest dedicated to the United States national symbol. Thousands of residents and visitors from around the Midwest turn out for the annual event, which includes live Bird of Prey demonstrations. (309) 788-5912 or www.qccaexpoenter.com.

8, The B & G Promotions Motorcycle Parts Extravaganza at the Belle Clair Fairgrounds in Belleville. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. This event will have hundreds of new and used parts for your Harley Davidson motorcycle. There will also be leather goods, jewelry, helmets, T-shirts, and other novelties. \$6 admission. (618) 864-9540 or www.barrysmotorcycles.com.

7-2/24, Fantastic Fridays at Chestnut Mountain Resort in Galena. Ski slopes at Chestnut Mountain Resort remain open until midnight every Friday during January and February. Admission is \$20 for a lift ticket or \$32 for lift ticket plus ski or snowboard rental. (815) 777-1320 or www.chestnutmtn.com.

12, Gateway Bridal Show at Gateway Center in Collinsville. View the latest bridal show fashions by elegant brides. First 300 brides receive a free gift bag! Win prizes and taste fine cuisine. View a decorated ballroom at Gateway Center. Brides get in free, everyone else admission \$5. (618) 345-8998 or www.gatewaycenter.com.



13-14, The 10th Annual Midwest Elvis Presley Competition at the Hilton Hotel in Springfield. Twenty Elvis Tribute Artists from around the country compete for \$3,500. (217) 793-3733 or www.pretalent@aol.com.

13-15, Fishing and Boat Show at the Warehouse Convention and Events Facility in Springfield. You will be able to find items for fishing and boating. There will be boats, ATVs, personal watercrafts, recreational vehicles, boat docks, hot tubs, clothing, equipment, pools, and other items for sale. Adults \$3, children ages 12 and younger are free. Friday 4-8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m.-6 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m.-3 p.m. (217) 467-2866 or www.thewarehouse.us.com.

14-2/25, The 2006 Bald Eagle Bus Tours in Galena. Guided four-hour tours of bald eagle wintering communities. Learn and view the bald eagle's habits, life history, preservation efforts, and threats to its future. Reservations required. Adults \$50, children younger than 17 are \$45. (815) 594-2306 or www.eaglenature.com.

20-21, Clifford The Big Red Dog – LIVE at Illinois State University Braden Auditorium in Normal. This live show features Clifford and his friends while they set upon a musical adventure on Birdwell Island. (309) 438-5444 or www.ticketmaster.com.

22, The 7th Annual Bridal Expo in Centralia. 12-4 p.m. Features vendors displaying everything it takes to plan a wedding. Fashion show put on by "Kelly's For the Occasion" at 2 p.m. (618) 532-3214 or www.centraliarecreationcomplex.com

27-29, Midstate Fish and Feather Expo at the Interstate Conference Center in Bloomington. Get great deals on hunting and fishing equipment. Don't forget to take your chance at winning a 16-ft. boat. Friday 12-8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-8 p.m., and Sunday 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (309) 452-9646.

28, Teddy Bear Check-Up at Miller Park Zoo in Bloomington. Teddy Bear and all his stuffed animals are invited to Miller Park Zoo for a medical check-up. If you have a favorite stuffed animal who receives lots of love, bring it out. Free with a paid zoo admission. (309) 434-2250.

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 March deadline is January 15.**

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