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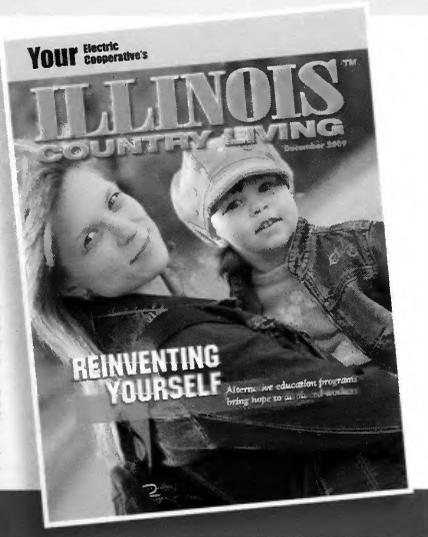
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REINVENTING YOURSELF

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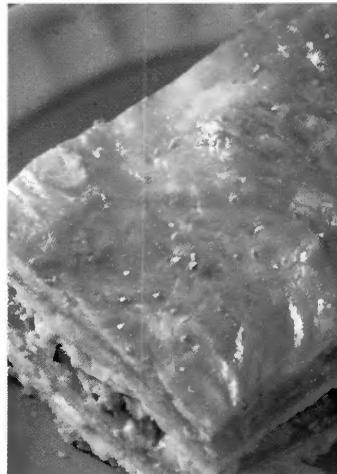
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The Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives and 25 Illinois electric cooperatives are members of Touchstone Energy, a national alliance of 660 electric cooperatives. Touchstone Energy cooperative employees adhere to four core values — integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community.

What Would Lincoln Do About The Energy Crisis?

Be a leader ... stand up and be heard

"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail." These powerful words spoken by Ralph Waldo Emerson are how I would summarize the concept of leadership. To be a leader, one must take chances and stand up for what he or she knows to be right. We are the leaders of tomorrow. And as the future generation, we should look back on the successes of our past leaders, leaders like Abraham Lincoln. In June, I was given the privilege to go on the Youth to Washington tour that was sponsored by Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives. Traces of Lincoln's greatness were everywhere in Washington, at the Capitol Building, at his monument and at the White House. And it's through historical sites like these that Lincoln's legacy will live on forever.

On the first day of the trip, we stopped at Gettysburg, Pa. There, we went to the visitor's center and looked at weapons and military equipment and then headed to the cyclorama to set the mood for the battlefield. As we walked through the battlefield, I was in awe of the number of people who lost their lives and of the sacrifices that were made during the war. And as we traveled further, we found ourselves at the exact spot in Soldiers' National Cemetery where President Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln's carefully crafted address came to be regarded as one of the greatest

speeches in American history. In just more than two minutes, Lincoln invoked the principles of human equality espoused by the Declaration of Independence and redefined the Civil War as a struggle not merely for the Union, but as "a new birth of freedom" that

would bring true equality to all of its citizens, and that would also create a unified nation.

Being from the state of Illinois I am truly in the "Land of Lincoln." President Lincoln has inspired me in so many ways. He wasn't the most popular man in his time, but he stood up for what he believed and never stopped fighting for it. I trust that without Lincoln, our country wouldn't be what it is today.

As I walked up the steps of the Lincoln Monument, I turned around and gazed out across the reflecting pool and saw the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building for the first time, and something hit me. On these very steps so much history had been made. Such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. giving his famous "I Have a Dream Speech." Standing in the shadow of the great emancipator, Dr. King followed the example set by President Lincoln in courageously standing up for what he believed even in the face of danger and skepticism. Both of these great men were killed for doing what they knew must be done to live in harmony and to unite the great country that we live in today.

Lincoln began his political career in the great capitol city of Springfield, Ill. in 1832 with an unsuccessful campaign for the Illinois General Assembly. Even though Lincoln lost that election he continued to work hard and became a lawyer. Eventually in 1846 Lincoln was elected to one term in the United States House of Representatives. As he gained the trust and loyalty of the American people, Lincoln ran for President in 1860 and became the 16th President of the United States of America.

Just like Lincoln, electric cooperatives have been leaders since they began to spread across rural America after President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Act in 1935. Right now we are not only in a financial crisis, but we are also in an energy crisis. Electric cooperatives across the United States are making the effort to work together with local and federal government to have input with the major bills developing in Congress. As a sign of the times, we have to depend on less foreign oil and develop new forms of energy. Cooperatives are researching and developing new ways for renewable energy, energy efficiency, nuclear power and advanced clean coal generation. They can only do so much; so it's up to us to contact our local Congressmen and tell them how we feel. It's time the American people take notes from President Lincoln and stand up for what we believe in and be heard. ■

"It's time the American people take notes from President Lincoln and stand up for what we believe in and be heard."

Luke Sailer is the son of Jack and Gina Sailer. They are members of Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative. Sailer is the 2009 Youth Leadership Council representative and will represent Illinois at national electric cooperative meetings.



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Gasoline Will Also See a Cap and Tax Increase

For more than a year, the electric co-ops have been warning members of how climate change legislation being debated in Congress could impact your electric bill. But the climate change legislation's cap-and-trade provisions for controlling carbon dioxide emissions will also impact the cost of gasoline, diesel, natural gas and propane.

The debate in Congress is beginning to focus on the economic impact of the legislation in terms of consumer cost,

job loss and the overall impact to the economy. As you can

imagine that cost estimate depends on who is making the prediction and on the factors used in the calculation.

Take gasoline cost increases for example. The American Petroleum Institute says the cap-and-trade legislation could increase

the cost of a gallon of gasoline by 77 cents. However, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates it will increase 23 cents if the legislation's key

cost saving features are effective.

Although there is plenty of debate on how much, there is no question the economy will take a hit from higher energy costs. The CBO estimates that the House-passed climate legislation would reduce gross domestic product by up to 0.75 percent by 2020 and 3.5 percent by 2050. CBO Director Douglas Elmendorf and other senior government experts also said forecasts for economic impacts were riddled with ambiguity.

Testifying before a Senate energy panel Elmendorf said, "The uncertainties are very large, even for 2020, and they get larger over time." ■



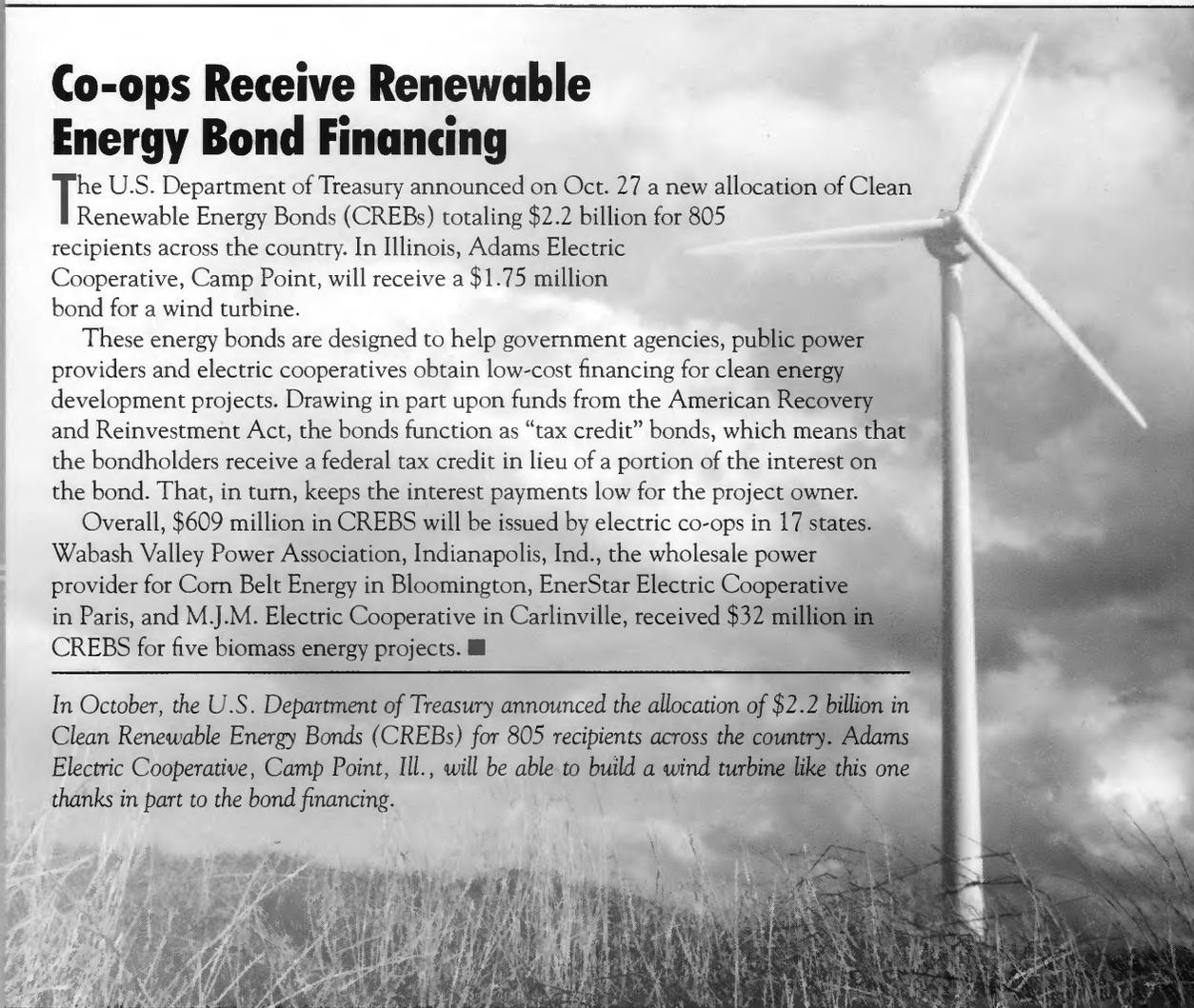
Co-ops Receive Renewable Energy Bond Financing

The U.S. Department of Treasury announced on Oct. 27 a new allocation of Clean Renewable Energy Bonds (CREBs) totaling \$2.2 billion for 805 recipients across the country. In Illinois, Adams Electric Cooperative, Camp Point, will receive a \$1.75 million bond for a wind turbine.

These energy bonds are designed to help government agencies, public power providers and electric cooperatives obtain low-cost financing for clean energy development projects. Drawing in part upon funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the bonds function as "tax credit" bonds, which means that the bondholders receive a federal tax credit in lieu of a portion of the interest on the bond. That, in turn, keeps the interest payments low for the project owner.

Overall, \$609 million in CREBS will be issued by electric co-ops in 17 states. Wabash Valley Power Association, Indianapolis, Ind., the wholesale power provider for Corn Belt Energy in Bloomington, EnerStar Electric Cooperative in Paris, and M.J.M. Electric Cooperative in Carlinville, received \$32 million in CREBS for five biomass energy projects. ■

In October, the U.S. Department of Treasury announced the allocation of \$2.2 billion in Clean Renewable Energy Bonds (CREBs) for 805 recipients across the country. Adams Electric Cooperative, Camp Point, Ill., will be able to build a wind turbine like this one thanks in part to the bond financing.



Cigarettes Create Hazardous Waste

Studies show that contaminants from cigarette butts can get into soils and waterways, harm or kill living organisms and generally degrade surrounding ecosystems. Cigarette butts can take up to 10 years to decompose and contain trace amounts of toxins like cadmium, arsenic and lead. They constitute as much as one-third of all litter nationwide when measured by the number of discarded items, not volume and, of course, they are a fire hazard. The countryside is not a giant ashtray. ■



Photo by Jason Means

Grant Money Available For Low-Income Home Weatherization

Approximately \$242 million in additional Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program (IHWAP) funding is available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to assist with low-income home weatherization efforts over the next two years.

“This funding makes it possible for even more people to get assistance through the Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program,” Governor Quinn said. “Individuals can now get the services they need to stay safe and warm this winter at no additional charge while reducing the cost of their home energy bills.”

Measures may include: weather-stripping and caulking; insulating attics and walls; furnace work; repairing windows and doors; and replacing windows, if needed.

Eligibility criteria: a person making \$21,660 or less; a family of two making \$29,140 or less; a family of three making \$36,620 or less; or a family of four making \$44,100 or less. Priority is given to households with high heating bills in relation to income, and households containing elderly members, persons with a disability or young children.

Weatherization assistance applications are processed through a network of 35 local administering agencies. Visit WeatherizationIllinois.com or call 877-411-9276 for more information. ■

Democrats Bypass Republicans and Approve Global Warming Bill

Despite a boycott by Republicans, Senate Environmental and Public Works (EPW) Committee, Democrats quickly passed global warming legislation in early November. The procedural moves used to speed passage of the bill could undermine moderate lawmaker support if the bill reaches the floor of the Senate. Republicans strongly urged more thorough economic analysis of the bill. Some Democrats are unhappy with the bill, too. Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) voted against the bill and Tom Carper (D-Del.) did not vote.

Senate Republican Conference Chairman Lamar Alexander (Tenn.), said, “We want to participate in any clean energy bill, but we’re not willing to do that until we know what it costs. We’re not about to begin to vote on a national energy tax that collects hundreds of billions of dollars and puts in a Washington slush fund and starts handing it out all around the country without knowing exactly the consequences of that.”

Electric co-op leaders have asked for legislation that is fair, affordable and achievable. Affordability seems to be in question. On the low end supporters point to studies that show an “average” cost increase to homeowners of \$80 to \$111 per year.

Scott Ramsey, President and CEO of Southern Illinois Power Cooperative, says, “It troubles me to hear Senate leaders speak in terms of average impacts to electric bills. The problem with such statements is that calculations often include the averages from states with little or no coal and natural gas-fired power generation.” For southern Illinois consumers the annual increase in electricity cost could be between \$240 and \$1,300 depending on the cost of carbon allowances, says Ramsey. ■



Keep New Pets Safe from Electrical Hazards this Holiday

Every year thousands of pets around the country are given as gifts during the holiday season. Please remember, a frisky dog or curious cat can cause an electrical hazard or fire. Safe Electricity offers this safety checklist:

- Keep electrical cords away from puppies and kittens so they don't chew on them and receive a severe shock. Cover the cord with a heavy plastic sleeve or ask your pet store for a bitter tasting product you could put on the cord.
- Check to be sure nightlights and appliances are completely plugged into wall outlets. Small fingers, paws or tongues can easily find partially exposed prongs and are a hazard for curious children, puppies and kittens.
- Halogen lamps should never be used in play areas. Halogen bulbs can reach very high temperatures, and if knocked over during play, could easily start a fire.
- All appliances near sinks or bathtubs should be plugged into an outlet equipped with a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI). Playful pets can knock radios, curling irons and other items into the water, but GFCIs stop the flow of electricity instantly.
- Do not allow pets to curl up for a nap behind warm computer equipment. They need to learn to stay away from all electrical connections.

For more electrical safety information, visit www.SafeElectricity.org. ■



DOE Approves \$3.4 Billion of Federal Grants for Smart Energy Grid

President Obama announced in October the largest single energy grid modernization investment in U.S. history, funding a broad range of technologies that could help transform the nation's transmission system into a smarter, stronger, more efficient and reliable electric system. The \$3.4 billion in government grants, made as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, will be matched by industry funding for a total investment of more than \$8 billion in the U.S. transmission grid.

The Electric Power Research Institute estimates that the deployment of smart grid technologies could reduce electricity use by more than 4 percent by 2030, a savings of \$20.4 billion for businesses and consumers across the nation. The investment is also expected to foster the growth of renewable energy sources like wind and solar.

Only the city of Naperville received a smart grid grant in Illinois. But the good news is more than half of Illinois' electric co-ops are already well on the way to building a smart grid by installing automated meter reading (AMR) equipment. Several Illinois cooperatives are participating in a national cooperative smart grid demonstration grant application. Winners for that round of smart grid grant applications have not been announced. ■



Oral History of Illinois Agriculture Web Site Launched

Anyone with a computer can now see and hear the history of Illinois agriculture told by the people who lived it. The Illinois State Museum launched the Audio-Video Barn Web site (<http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us>), featuring 300 hours of interviews with more than 130 people involved with agriculture in Illinois over the past 129 years. The Web site is the culmination of a two-year Oral History of Illinois Agriculture project led by the Illinois State Museum and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

The interviews tell the story of Illinois agriculture from the people who know it best – grain farmers, beekeepers, elk ranchers, 4-H kids, college professors, broadcasters and pumpkin growers, among others, from every corner of the state. A unique feature of the Web site is the ability to search the audio and video clips based on topic, name, date, or geographic location. The Web site also features educational resources for students and teachers, including instructional videos on how to do oral history interviews and lesson plans based on agricultural themes. ■





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REINVENTING YOURSELF

Alternative education programs bring hope to displaced workers

By Ed VanHoose



Students enrolled in LLCC's truck driver training program must complete 160 hours of training with at least three weeks of "in-truck" experience.

Top of page: Randy Myers performs a pre-trip inspection as part of his training in the truck driving industry at Lincoln Land Community College.

Times are hard. In October of 2009, unemployment rates in the United States reached nearly 10 percent. With scores of Americans out of work, many are turning to educational institutions as a means to reinvent themselves.

Randy Myers of Decatur is one such individual.

When asked about his motivation for returning to school Myers said, "I was working at Caterpillar and we went through a RIF (Reduction in Force) which caused me to be laid off in April. After I collected myself, I began to talk to my fiancé and others. I found the truck driver training program here at Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) and decided to enroll. I needed to find a way to take care of my family. I don't like not working."

Myers is not alone in his desire to improve himself. People all around

Illinois are seeking alternatives in higher education, and the state's colleges are responding by offering programs suited to the needs of adult learners.

Bob Howard, Director of the Truck Driver Training Center at LLCC (www.llcc.edu) explains the role of programs.

"Folks that I see in this economy that take advantage of some kind of training, whether it be at a college or some kind of trade school — they tend to come out of it a lot better. And they tend to come out of it with a skill set that will keep them from getting unemployed in the future. If they do get unemployed they can go somewhere else and work, rather than just going to the same factory over and over."

The truck driver-training program is just one offering at LLCC. Through its Workforce Development and Com-

munity Education division, LLCC has broadened its course offerings beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom setting.

Dr. Judy Jozaitis, Vice President of the center, spoke about LLCC's strategy for expanding programs.

"Here in the Workforce Development center, we are always on the lookout for where there are job openings, what will be needed in terms of staff and what kinds of skills they're going to need. Then we look for ways to develop and offer these programs," Jozaitis says.

By tailoring its programs toward emerging careers, and forming relationships with potential employers LLCC is able to provide job placement assistance to its students. Currently, the truck driver-training program has a track record of 100 percent placement of students after they graduate.

Howard says, "Every student that was involved in our program was offered a legitimate job. We don't just teach truck driving. We literally change lives."

LLCC's approach to alternative education is shared by Heartland Community College (www.heartland.edu), with campuses in Normal, Lincoln and Pontiac. Heartland now offers several courses designed to provide high quality energy education and training for consumers, businesses and renewable energy installers. With emerging energy technologies becoming ever more important to the U.S. economy, these courses are becoming an increasingly valuable resource to professionals looking to keep up with the new energy market. In fact, many of the courses are specifically tailored toward professionals already familiar with traditional energy-related technologies.

Julie Elzanati, Coordinator of the Green Institute for Heartland Community College says, "If an HVAC installer gets laid off, they could enroll and get skills in an emerging area. The program should fit them perfectly because they already have a basic skill set in the field."

Heartland offers a variety of options for students, ranging from one-day classes on the possible jobs in the energy field to a renewable energy

degree through its technology department. In the spring of 2010 Heartland plans to offer several different certifications including the BPI Building Analyst Certification. The BPI or "Building Performance Institute" certification will provide intensive training to evaluate existing residences for energy improvements. Evaluations can range from weatherization needs to examination of the types of heating and cooling systems installed in a home.

Heartland also offers several one-day renewable energy courses including Solar Domestic Hot Water Systems, Basic Photovoltaics and Introduction to Wind Systems.

According to Elzanati, "The Occupational Wage Survey for Illinois indicates that the average salaries for electrical and electronic technicians range from \$45,000 to \$60,000 a year, with entry level wages averaging between \$14 and \$20 an hour." Heartland has found an interest in their graduates from employers from renewable energy firms, utilities, building automation companies and construction-related industries. While Heartland does offer each of its courses individually, Renewable Energy and Environmental Controls courses combined make up the Associate in Applied Science degree in Renewable Energy that will prepare students for

entry level employment in a variety of settings. Students obtaining this degree will ensure they have the credentials to match their experience in the field, and the knowledge of emerging technologies necessary to compete in the modern market.

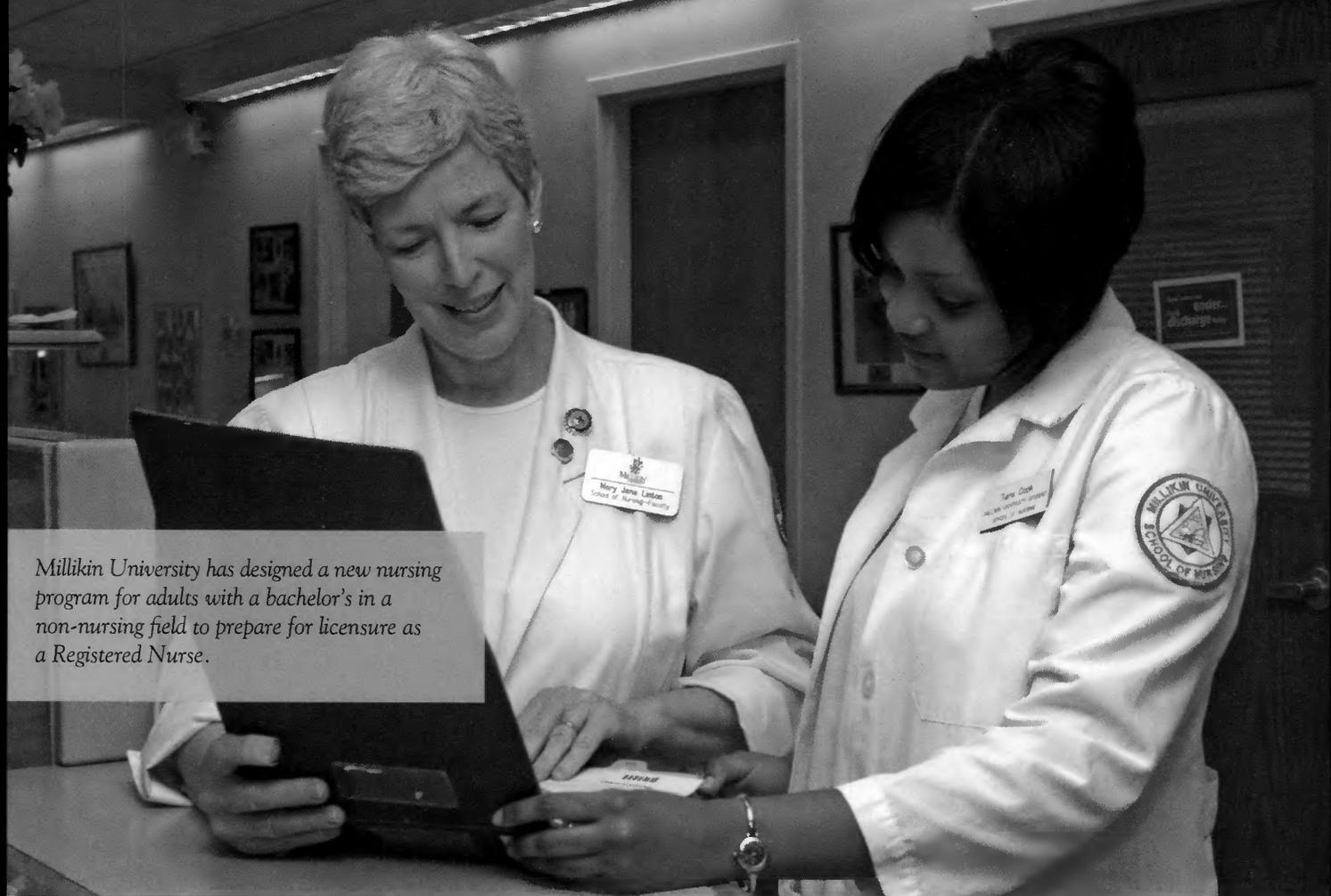
Of course, not everyone is suited for a career in a renewable energy field. Many students are contemplating going back to school for the first time since high school. Fortunately, there are programs available for students of all walks of life. One such program is Lincoln College's Accelerated Bridge to Education or "ABE" program.

Lincoln College's ABE program (www.lincolncollege.edu) is a bachelor's degree program designed specifically for working adults. Students can earn a bachelor's degree in a variety of subjects including Business Administration, Liberal Arts, Health Services Administration, or even a Certificate in Dental Services Management. One of the most attractive benefits of the ABE program is that students can earn up to 27 credits in the program for prior work or life experience.

Jenna Basset, Assistant Director for the program, says, "The main trend I've seen is our students have reached a glass ceiling, so to speak, in their careers. They have experience and the life knowledge, but are constantly



Students enrolled in Lincoln College's ABE program can earn a bachelor's degree by attending classes specifically designed for working adults.



Millikin University has designed a new nursing program for adults with a bachelor's in a non-nursing field to prepare for licensure as a Registered Nurse.

being overlooked for desired positions because the other applicants for the position have 'Bachelor's Degree' on their resume. Our students know that when they complete their degree, they'll be able to move up in their careers and in pay, enabling them to provide a better life for themselves and their families."

Programs such as Lincoln College's ABE are so important precisely because so many college students now must also support a family. Melissa Rohlfs, Director of Marketing and Public Relations for Lincoln College, is quick to point out that, "More than one-third of students in U.S. higher education are now 25 and older – by 2012 it will be one half." With a greater influx of non-traditional students, it's no wonder that programs like Lincoln's ABE program are becoming more common.

Millikin University (www.millikin.edu), with campuses in Decatur and on the Parkland College campus in Champaign, offers a simi-

lar program called the Professional Adult Comprehensive Education (PACE) program. It is designed for adults who want to earn a degree but need to work around a job, family and community commitments. The PACE program offers a choice of five Bachelor of Science degrees: Accounting, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Nursing RN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Organizational Leadership.

Amy Hodges, Media and Public Relations Coordinator for Millikin University, says, "The PACE program focuses on one course at a time, with classes held usually in the evening, one night per week. Because of the format of the courses, students in the PACE program are generally over 22 years of age, have work experience and may even have some college credit."

Millikin also plans to offer a new track in their nursing degree program. Designed for adults with a bachelor's degree in a non-nursing field to

prepare for licensure as a Registered Nurse, this program will seek to fill the shortage of qualified nurses in Illinois. Other colleges are also planning for new programs.

At Wabash Valley College (www.iecc.edu/wvc) in Mt. Carmel, the Dean of Instruction, Theresa Marcotte, is excited about their upcoming advance-manufacturing program.

"We are merging several programs into an advance-manufacturing program. It will be a more current program that reflects where the science is going and evolving. We're going to kick it off with a bio-fuels portion and certificate. We'll look at creating bio-fuels and we'll look at the performance of bio-fuels in diesel engines, so we'll have a nice cross-over with our current Diesel Equipment Technology program."

One common theme of all of the programs is a concern over paying for everything. Marcotte admits that funding is probably the biggest challenge to creating these new edu-

cational curriculums, but says that the Department of Labor has really helped out in getting these programs established.

"That's what helping us transfer into advance manufacturing. The DOL grant was available specifically for that purpose and it fit in nicely with what we were trying to do — update our program."

A shared sentiment among all of the colleges is the insistence that there is a program available out there for anyone. Anyone wanting more information on a college near them should contact www.iccb.state.il.us to find the list of community colleges throughout the state. Although that site doesn't list four-year institutions, any of the colleges listed would be able to assist a student.

Like Randy Myers says, "They show enough confidence in you that you begin to develop confidence in yourself. They keep us well grounded. We have great staff and teachers in Illinois."

PAYING FOR YOUR EDUCATION

Once a person makes up the decision to go back to school, one question looms ominously: How am I going to pay for it? After all, everyone knows that college is prohibitively expensive, right? Not necessarily, says Carmen DeJesus, Assistant Director of Financial Aid for the University of Illinois Springfield.

"Students have a wide variety of options available to them when it comes to paying for college. The most important step they can take is to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). By completing this document, students can find out what types of aid they qualify for."

Some of the possibilities are federal grants, state grants and scholarships. The FAFSA alerts an educational institution when a student qualifies for financial assistance in paying for college. Potential students should fill out this document as early as possible when deciding to go back to school. The application can be found online at www.fafsa.ed.gov or by contacting the financial aid office of any educational institution.

Bob Howard of LLCC also suggests another program available to dislocated workers. "The program that Randy is coming through is called the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). It provides federal money from the Department of Labor to help people re-train if they're laid off and getting unemployment." To find out more information about WIA contact your educational institution.

In addition to grants, Illinois students also have loans available to help them pursue their education. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) still has \$66 million available to make low-interest, federally-secured student loans to Illinois students through the Federal Family Education Loan Program for the 2009-10 academic year.

The Commission provides educational funding with student loans, as a loan guarantor and via numerous public programs such as the successful Monetary Award Program (MAP), the Illinois Veteran Grant and the College Illinois!® 529 Prepaid Tuition Program. For more information, visit www.KnowHow2GOIllinois.org.



A student at Wabash Valley College, a part of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, takes part in the new advanced manufacturing program.

The Right Tree in the Right Place

Safety and reliability are improved with vegetation management

Vegetation management (VM) is the industry term for trimming trees and cutting brush in right-of-ways. This practice is necessary to prevent overhead power lines from contacting trees and brush. Most utilities use specially trained crews for this job. The examples given in this article apply specifically to Menard Electric Cooperative in Petersburg and its relationship with Burton Tree Service (BTS), but could apply to other cooperatives as well. Keep in mind other providers may employ similar techniques, but some practices may vary.



Just like cars, electric utility systems require routine work. A properly maintained system is more reliable. Electric co-ops use VM to aid in the maintenance of their distribution lines. The goal of VM is to reduce outages and take care of potentially hazardous situations. Sometimes, a tree that would not normally have grown to reach the height of overhead power lines, will, given the opportunity of full sunlight, proper nutrients and reduced competition. Because of this, VM is necessary.

Right-of-ways, which are areas of land that accommodate poles, overhead lines and underground pipelines, travel through many yards in the rural areas. These areas deserve special attention. Homeowners can take note of overhead lines when planting trees to prevent future problems. Any tree nursery can tell you the growth potential of most tree species. Keep the future in mind when planting your trees. Far too often vegetation managers hear homeowners say they never looked up. Often, people say they did not think the trees would grow fast enough to be a problem in their lifetime. Once a tree has been planted under a power line, it becomes the cooperative's responsibility to maintain that it does not interfere with power lines.

Vegetation contractors have a tough job and must keep both the utility provider and the homeowner in mind when performing the necessary work. They also use pruning techniques that are best for the health of the tree. Sometimes conces-

sions must be made to provide electrical service. Menard Electric contracts BTS to trim the trees in its right-of-way. This is of no cost to the member.

BTS does remove trees that may cause hazardous situations. In order to prevent future problems and rising workload, we try to cut out volunteer tree species, or trees not planted by human hands, under power lines in rural settings. This process is what we refer to as cutting brush. A small amount

of a systemic herbicide is used to prevent stump sprouts. Low-growing plant species provide natural competition for volunteer trees. In the long term, manual removal of target species is more economical and environmentally sound than complete vegetation removal.

Safety

The utility field harbors many hazards. For example: most distribution lines carry 7,200 volts (it takes 110 to make toast). As trees grow and touch energized lines, that current takes a path to ground through the branches. This presents a potentially fatal situation for anyone leisurely or professionally in the tree. Go to safeelectricity.org to read Shawn's story.

The tools of our trade are hazardous. Proper training is a must. Chainsaws and brush chippers do not distinguish from wood or workers. Extreme caution is necessary when operating any equipment. Tree care professionals sometimes are required to climb trees to maintain line clearance. This takes us out of the protection of an insulated aerial lift and directly into the dangerous area around the power line.

Vegetation managers strive to aide electric co-ops in providing a safe and reliable power supply. When homeowners permit vegetation contractors to do their job to the best of their ability, potential line contact is reduced. We all hope to keep this cooperation a part of cooperatives. Remember, the right tree in the right place makes this possible. ■

David Schenck is a certified arborist and an employee of Burton Tree Service, the vegetation management contractor for Menard Electric Cooperative, Petersburg, Ill.

"When homeowners permit vegetation contractors to do their job to the best of their ability, potential line contact is reduced."

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A Hazard-Free Holiday

Check those lights ... check them twice; got to find out if they're tattered or nice

Another year is coming to an end, and we could reflect on 2009, though that's probably better for January. The only thing that immediately comes to mind is the jubilation that all the rain from September through November wasn't the equivalent of snow.

The holidays are upon us, or soon will be. And that means decorating with evergreens, indoors and out.

Outside, there's not much to worry about as long as you don't put heavy strands of lights on a weak limb. Then the limb bends and potentially breaks. Most of us view that in a negative light.

Most of us don't use the old-fashioned lights from the 50s and 60s that generated enough heat to warm your house for the entire month. Gone are the bulbs as big as your wrist.

These days, we have the small twinkling lights that generate as much heat as a beetle, but can cause problems if improperly used. Electricity is still electricity no matter what and if lights and cords are not in the best condition, problems will occur.

On the other hand, new light strands tend not to go out when a single light no longer works. If I had a dime for every strand that was thrown away just because one light was out and no one wanted to check every bulb, including me, I'd be spending winters some-
place warm.

Some holiday light aficionados have everything checked in July and ready to go as soon as the holidays roll around. Others have everything jammed in a box and will spend hours untangling all the cords and checking all the lights. And of course, filling the air with sounds that definitely are not of the season.

(This is assuming that the lights came down in the first place and weren't "accidentally" left up all season. That seldom happens, I'm sure.)

The first step is to check your electrical cords to make sure none of the light strands are frayed and sparking. Little four-legged gray critters, some-

times looked on unfavorably by homeowners and hunted by cats, like to chew wires throughout the year for whatever reason.



It's not that the wires taste like cheese or look like peanut butter. The wire is there, the mouse's brain isn't large, and the two seem to go together.

You don't need a magnifying glass to see damage. The wires will stick out, and if you carefully plug the strands in, they don't light.

More un-holiday sounds fill the air. Make sure that anything you use to fix damaged strands is outdoor-rated. Masking and duct tape, and band-aids are not.

Don't overload the sockets, which always is easier said than done. If fuses or circuit breakers keep blowing, something is wrong.

If you use extension cords, make sure they are in good condition and rated for outdoor use. Go with heavy duty cords. While most are orange and stand out like a sore thumb, there are other colors out there. Or gather some leaves or evergreen boughs and cover the cords, but not the ends. This gives the appearance of a covered cord in the yard to anyone who has good eyesight, but at least it's not glaringly pumpkin-colored, which is better two months ago.

Don't forget a timer to turn the lights on and off, if you happen to forget. There's not much need to have the lights on at noon, or pass midnight, though some like the complete show from dusk to dawn.

Finally, while not electrical-related, wreaths and swags hung outdoors should be totally outside. Don't place them between the interior door and a glass storm door. The heat that generates between the two on a sunny day can start drying out the needles, which could potentially turn into a fire hazard.

The best bet is to keep the evergreens completely outside. If they dry out, then the needles fall straight down and become less of a fire hazard.

Merry Christmas and happy holidays to all. ■

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.



"Wreaths and swags hung outdoors should be totally outside. Don't place them between the interior door and a glass storm door."

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Commandment No. 2: "Thou Shalt Invest"

Buy into energy efficiency for a timely payback

I trust you're all having a good holiday season, spending time with family and friends and preparing for the new year. I certainly enjoyed visiting with many of you in Southern Illinois at the energy workshops sponsored by your electric cooperatives in October and November. Now it's time to go back to work and back to the 10 Commandments of Energy Efficiency.

There are a lot of things happening in our country today that I don't understand, it's better that I stay with the things I do understand.

I know that making energy improvements is the best investment in the country today. I know that it's the only thing in your house that will save you money month after month and will have a payback. I also know that your home will be more comfortable as a result of these improvements.

For example, Mr. Tom Hunt, my co-host on the Home Remedies radio show, said he is saving \$50 per week on the cost of gasoline compared to a few months ago. He said, "What if we took that \$200 per month and made energy improvements to our house?" I responded, "Tom, you're a genius!"

Energy Commandment No. 2: "Thou Shalt Invest."

Whether it's \$5 or \$200 per month, start setting some money aside for energy improvements. For \$20, you can buy and install several compact

fluorescent lights. For \$40, you might buy all the caulk you need to seal up air leaks.

For an investment of less than \$100 and a few hours of elbow grease, you might reduce your average monthly utility bill by \$10, \$20, \$30 or more a month. Where else could you invest \$100, get your money back in three to 10 months and continue getting that savings forever?

to adjust the thermostat before leaving the house, or would a programmable thermostat make more sense? Is your hot water heater set warmer than necessary? Touchstone Energy® has developed Together We Save, a campaign that underscores how making simple changes in how we use energy can glean immediate cost savings.

At the epicenter of the campaign is TogetherWeSave.com, a Web site that includes a variety of interactive applications that demonstrate simple, yet effective ways to reduce energy usage.

When co-op members arrive at the site, they'll find nine animated, interactive applications. Each application focuses on a different energy- and money-saving action that, once completed, outputs an actual savings calculation. For example, in the "Lower Your Water Heater Temperature" application, users can change the temperature setting on the water heater dial. The application then displays a savings amount.

Co-op members can get an even better idea of potential dollar savings by taking the site's virtual Home Tour. Within each of the home's rooms are at least two energy-saving action items. As visitors move through each room and complete the suggested actions, a digital counter keeps a running total of potential dollar savings.

The savings calculations from each individual visit to the Home Tour are funneled into another counter that continuously aggregates national potential savings and tracks the number of visitors to the site.

Another unique component of Together WeSave.com is the Touchstone Energy TV Web portal, featuring videos designed to offer easy-to-follow advice on energy savings tips and techniques.

Log on to TogetherWeSave.com today and see how controlling your energy costs can be easier than you thought. Or, for other energy efficiency tips, contact your local electric cooperative. ■

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 501-653-7931. You can also sign up for a free newsletter and order his "how to" videotapes.



"At the epicenter of the campaign is TogetherWeSave.com, a Web site that includes a variety of interactive applications that demonstrate simple ways to reduce energy usage."

Together We Save Campaign Hits the Pocketbook in a Good Way

Habits are hard to change, but doing so can save you money. Have you been paying attention to Doug Rye's column? Do you always remember

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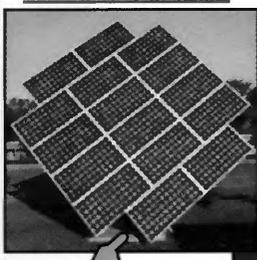
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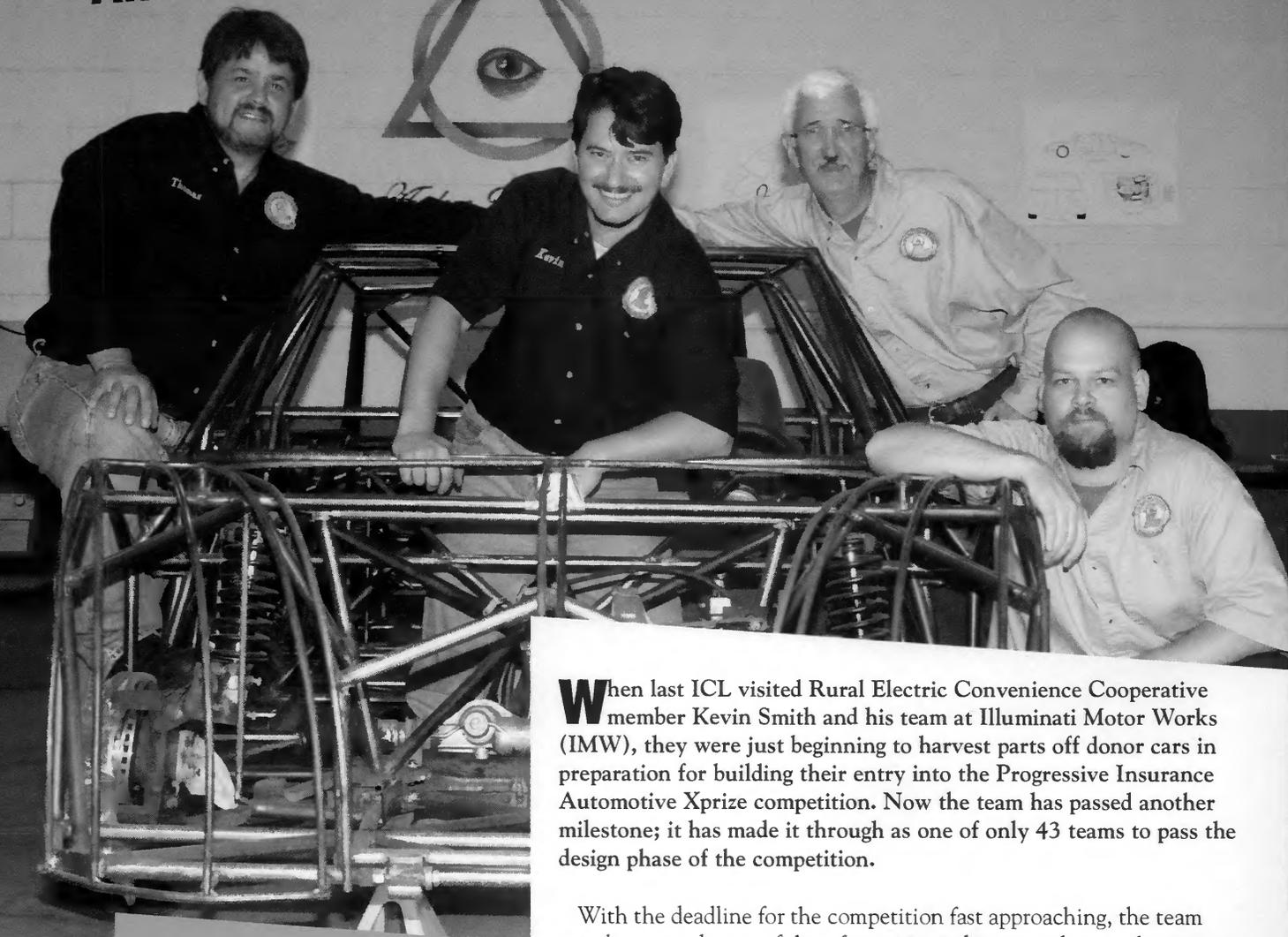
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RACING TO

An Illinois Team's Quest to Build a 100+ MPG Car



Pictured from left to right: Thomas Pasko, Kevin Smith, George Kennedy, and Josh Spradlin

When last ICL visited Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative member Kevin Smith and his team at Illuminati Motor Works (IMW), they were just beginning to harvest parts off donor cars in preparation for building their entry into the Progressive Insurance Automotive Xprize competition. Now the team has passed another milestone; it has made it through as one of only 43 teams to pass the design phase of the competition.

With the deadline for the competition fast approaching, the team members spend most of their free time working together on the project.

The team never forgets the goal at hand. Written in large blue letters on the wall of the garage are the words: *Somebody has to do something. That somebody is US!*

A spirit of innovative cooperation has served the team well over the past two years. They have gone from chalk concept drawings, with plans involving multiple fuel sources, to a simpler design utilizing an electric motor.

"I believe in the KISS philosophy," says Smith. "Keep It Simple Stupid."

Early on, IMW found it necessary to cut back on the use of recycled parts from donor cars.

"What we discovered in this process was that you can't get the 100mpg required from a standard manufactured vehicle," says Smith. "Many

FINISH

By Ed VanHoose

For more information about Illuminati Motor Works, and to find information on sponsoring the project, visit illuminatimotorworks.com.

things get in the way: the way you had to cut the car apart to get the battery in it, the way the car was shaped in general, the sizes of the car. Standard vehicles are meant to hold an internal combustion engine with front or rear wheel drive.”

Josh Spradlin, IMW’s graphic designer and fabricator, explains further saying, “If you cut the entire body off the top, made the whole thing smaller, and rounded out the front end, then tapered the back and made it a lot smoother, you could do it. Of course, then it wouldn’t be the production car that came off the line anymore.”

Only a few parts of the car will now come from existing technologies.

“We stripped the wheels, brakes, basically the lower control arms, the suspension out of an existing vehicle,” says Smith. “That’s what we would have had to start with if we cut it back from an existing vehicle. Those parts meet FMVSS, that’s Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards already. If we had to engineer a brake caliper, it would have cost us \$50,000 for the first one. We hope to spend less than that on the entire car.”

All of the issues with using production vehicles led the team members to build their own body. Constructed out of 1-inch tube steel, the current incarnation of the vehicle looks nothing

like a standard vehicle. The end is tapered dramatically, while the front of the car is short and rounded. The compartment for the engine is just big enough to hold a manual transmission and the electric motor.

“The car is tapered on the back end to reduce induced drag on the back of the vehicle,” says Smith.

Unfortunately, the team discovered recently that it would not be able to use its proposed lightweight material for the body.

“In order for us to use the material the rules of the competition say we have to crash test it first,” says Smith. “Since we only have one car, that’s not going to happen.”

Even without the lightweight material, the frame of the car still comes in at an acceptable weight, demonstrated by Spradlin picking up one corner. The electric motor, although relatively small – just slightly larger than a lawn mower engine – will add about 170 pounds.

“Electric motors are measured like earthquakes,” Smith says. “If you measure the difference between a 5.0 quake and a 6.0 quake, a 6.0 is actually 10 times more powerful. That would be the same thing here. It’s a small size, but it has 200 times the power of the electric motor on the standard DeWalt saw.”

Smith forecasts the motor will go a half a million hours, making it transferable from one auto to the next. The group plans to manufacture an adapter plate to bolt between the stock transmission and the electric motor.

“I will unbolt this motor from the car and put it into the next one, and the next one. This is industrial rated.”

“If you go just 10 miles per hour for 1 million hours, then you’ve gone 10 million miles,” says Smith. “I’ve never had any cars that lasted anywhere near that!”

Sometime during the summer of 2010 will be the start date for the final event, with the actual driving events starting earlier in the spring.

“We have to have the vehicle done sometime during the first of the year,” says Smith. “We might be able to push it till as late as February.”

He laughingly adds, “That doesn’t include paint!”

Two years into the project, the members of the team take time out to reflect upon the reasons they began the project.

“I always wanted to do this,” Smith says. “Then the Xprize competition came and that was the driving factor I needed. Before the competition I never had enough of a reason, but with the competition and then fuel prices topping \$4 a gallon just a summer ago, I found my motivation.” ■

The competition will comprise two vehicle classes: Mainstream and Alternative. Mainstream vehicles will be required to carry four or more passengers, have four or more wheels and allow for a 200-mile range. Alternative-class vehicles will be required to carry two or more passengers, have no constraints on the number of wheels, and allow for a 100-mile range. All vehicles need to meet requirements for performance and features to make the cars attractive to consumers. IMW competes in the mainstream category for a \$5 million prize.

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**Pasta From The East Orient
(above)**

- 1 sm. box Angel Hair Pasta
- 10-15 T. peanut butter (to preference)
- 1/2 can honey roasted peanuts
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 2 tsp. Cajun seasoning
- 5 T. olive oil

Boil and cook pasta until al dente. In a large skillet, combine peanut butter, olive oil, paprika, Cajun seasoning and peanuts. Sauté until ingredients are creamy. Stir pasta into skillet with the sauce. Serve hot.

Pasta From The East Orient

Photos by Catrina McCulley Wagner

Slumgullion

- 2 C. macaroni, cooked and drained
- 1-1/2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 sm. onion, chopped
- 1 can tomato soup
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 (2-1/2-oz.) jar mushrooms
- 1 C. water

In a large skillet, brown beef and onion together, drain. Add tomato soup, mushrooms and water. Simmer for 45 minutes. Add macaroni before eating.

Slow Cooker Baked Apples

- 8 apples
- 1/3 C. raisins
- 1/3 C. chopped pecans
- 1/3 C. packed brown sugar
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg
- 2 T. margarine
- 1/2 C. apple cider
- 1 T. lemon juice

Peel the top 1/3 of each apple. Remove and discard the cores. Mix together raisins, pecans and brown sugar. Fill apple cavities with raisin mixture. Place apples in a slow cooker. Sprinkle with cinnamon and nutmeg and dot each apple with margarine. Add cider and lemon juice and cook on low for 8 hours.

Fudgy Pudding Cake

- 1 C. self-rising flour
- 3/4 C. sugar
- 2 T. cocoa
- 1/2 C. milk
- 2 T. butter, melted
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3/4 C. firmly packed brown sugar
- 1/4 C. cocoa
- 1-1/4 C. boiling water

Preheat oven to 350°. Combine flour, sugar and cocoa in a medium-size bowl. Add milk, butter and vanilla; stir well. Pour into a lightly greased 7x11-inch baking pan. Combine brown sugar and 1/4 C. cocoa; sprinkle over batter in the pan. Carefully pour boiling water over top. Do not stir. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream. Add a handful of chopped nuts into the flour mixture to add a little crunch, if desired.

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

Crock Pot Creamed Corn (Above)

- 1 (2 lb.) bag frozen sweet corn
- 1 (8-oz.) pkg. cream cheese
- 1/2 stick butter
- 6 T. water
- 2 T. sugar

Place all ingredients into a crock pot on low heat. Cook 4-6 hours, stirring occasionally to get everything mixed.

Winter's Day Soup

- 1 C. celery, chopped
- 1 C. carrots, chopped
- 1/2 C. onions, chopped
- 3 med. potatoes, cubed
- 1/2 C. butter
- 1/2 C. flour
- 4 C. milk
- 3 C. Cheddar cheese, grated
- 2 C. ham, diced
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Cook vegetables in 3 C. water until tender. In a saucepan, melt butter and stir in flour. Add milk to the flour mixture and heat over medium heat until boiling. Boil only one minute. Stir in cheese, then salt, pepper and ham. Add mixture to cooked vegetables, including the water the vegetables were cooked in. Heat all together, but do not boil.

Baked Sub Sandwich (Below)

- 2 (8-oz.) tubes refrigerated crescent rolls
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 1 lb. deli turkey
- 1/2 lb. deli ham
- 1/2 lb. deli hard salami
- 6 slices Swiss cheese
- 1/2 of a 12-oz. jar roasted red peppers, drained and sliced thin
- Olives, tomatoes, spinach, onions, opt.

Preheat oven to 350°. Unroll one package of crescent rolls without separating perforations. Place first roll of dough in the bottom of a 9x13-inch rectangle baking dish. Using your fingers, spread dough to fit into the bottom of the dish. Layer with half of the meat, cheese, peppers and other optional ingredients you choose on top of the dough. Pour half of the beaten eggs on top and then repeat meat, cheese and pepper layer. Top with remaining can of crescent dough. Pour the rest of the beaten eggs over the top dough layer and cover lightly with foil. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake an additional 20-22 minutes until golden brown and heated through. Let cool for 15 minutes, then cut and serve.

Simple Selections

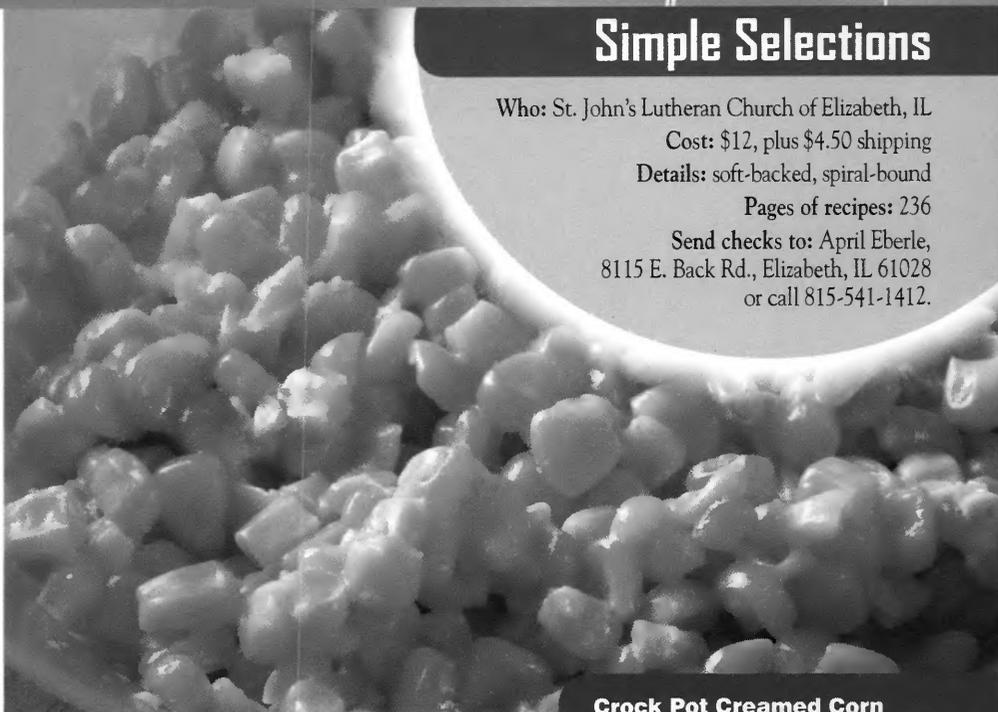
Who: St. John's Lutheran Church of Elizabeth, IL

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Crock Pot Creamed Corn

E. Whitney's Green Bean and Stuffing Casserole

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 2 pkgs. frozen French cut green beans | 1 (4-oz.) pkg. shredded Cheddar cheese |
| 1 pkg. chicken flavored stuffing mix | 2 T. pimentos, chopped |
| 1 can cream of chicken soup | 1 C. chicken or turkey, diced |

Cook green beans according to package directions with 1/2 tsp. of salt. Drain and set aside in a mixing bowl. Cook stuffing mix according to the package directions. Add stuffing to the green beans and mix lightly together. Add cream of chicken soup and diced chicken and pimentos. Mix and put into a large casserole dish. Spread cheese over the top and bake at 350° for 20-25 minutes, until hot and cheese is melted and bubbly.

Baked Sub Sandwich



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Have a Happy [Energy Efficient] Holiday Season

By Brian Sloboda

The holidays are a time for family, friends and celebrations. Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Christmas may be times of happiness and joy, but they are often followed by large utility bills. Don't let an expensive January electric bill be the last gift of the season — with a few simple energy efficient tricks you can still celebrate and save money, too.

The Brightest House on the Block

Energy efficient lighting is a good place to start. Everyone knows the house with the large light display: it's the one you take the kids to, the one you talk to neighbors about, and the one producing enough light to draw small airplanes attempting to land. It's also the house with the very large January electric bill.

Energy-saving light emitting diode (LED) lights could curb that bill. Whereas a string of traditional mini lights uses 36 watts of power, a string of LED lights only uses 5 watts and lasts up to 10 times longer. The lights are typically made of plastic and will not break, and many are brighter than traditional mini lights.

The drawbacks? A string of LED lights can cost two to three times more than traditional string lights, and many homeowners have reported mixed results with LED holiday lights. Unlike traditional incandescent lights, LEDs use computer chips to create the light. Depending on the quality of the manufacturing process, the brightness and life may not be what's expected.

A good rule of thumb: cheaper is not always better. Cheap LED lamps may appear dim compared to more expensive LEDs or traditional lighting. When looking for LEDs it's



a good idea to view the lights plugged in at the store, or make sure you can return the lights if they don't meet your expectations.

All holiday lights, whether LED or incandescent, should be placed on a timer. Simple timers cost around \$20 and can be set to turn on at sunset and off after a set number of hours.

The Gift of Energy Efficiency

The holiday season generally conjures up images of elves, a jolly toy maker from the North Pole, and mounds of beautifully wrapped packages. But many don't realize that among those gifts could lurk a vampire — an energy vampire. Many electronic gifts are, in fact, "energy

Energy Efficiency *quick tip*

Impress the neighbors this holiday season while trimming electric bills: use energy efficient LED lights, and install timers on outdoor lighting displays.

vampires," which use electricity 24 hours a day.

Cell phone chargers, computers, video game consoles, and any electronic device that comes with a large square plug are energy vampires, using electricity even when supposedly switched off. On average, home entertainment products such as TVs, stereos and video game consoles account for 7 percent of a home's annual electric bill. Computers and their related equipment account for another 5 percent of the yearly electric bill. These devices are typically always on and always consuming electricity.

Don't let these vampires ruin your holiday and drive up your energy bill year-round. When possible, unplug devices that are not being used, or plug them into a smart power strip that is designed to control the flow of electricity to specific devices plugged into it. For example, it may cut the flow of electricity to unused devices such as DVD players, video game consoles and stereo systems, while allowing TVs and satellite or cable boxes to remain plugged in and operational. To keep the whole entertainment center running lean, look for Energy Star-rated televisions and ask satellite or cable providers for energy efficient boxes.

Spreading Holiday Cheer

With the house decorated and the presents wrapped, it's time for the party to begin. Most holiday celebrations involve family and friends visiting. To stay energy efficient through it all, turn down the thermostat before guests arrive. Although it may be cold outside, once a home fills with people the temperature will quickly begin to rise. Cooking will also add warmth to a

home. Depending on the size of the home and the number of guests, many find it completely unnecessary to heat the home during holiday parties.



When cooking for the masses, the first direction of most recipes ("preheat oven to...") can be ignored: large pieces of meat such as ham, turkey or a roast don't require

a preheated oven. Any food that requires several hours of cooking can go into a cold oven, saving energy in the process. The exceptions to this rule are baked goods.

Being energy efficient is not at the top of most people's minds when celebrating a holiday. But what was a very happy holiday can turn sour with the arrival of January bills. Prevent the post-holiday shock by thinking creatively and shopping carefully. The money saved can be used for the other dreaded January bill: the credit card.

Brian Sloboda is a program manager specializing in energy efficiency for the Cooperative Research Network, a service of the Arlington, Va.-based National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The Cooperative Research Network monitors, evaluates, and applies technologies that help electric cooperatives control costs, increase productivity, and enhance service to their consumers.

Top 10 Energy Saving Tips for a Happy Holiday Season

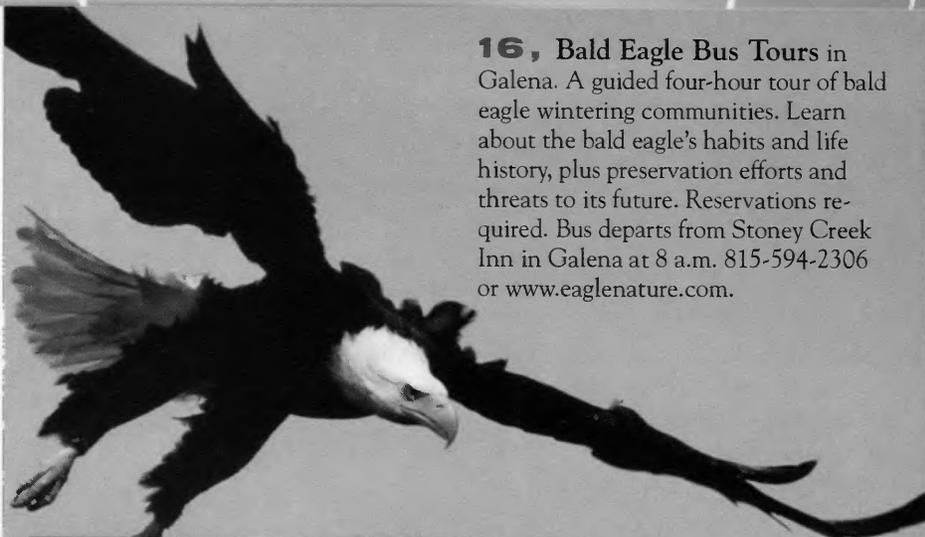
10. Ask for Energy Star rated appliances and CFLs
9. Skip the electronics and get the kids board games
8. Don't preheat the oven when cooking large pieces of meat
7. Lower thermostats and replace HVAC filters every 30 days
6. Check windows and doors for leaks and seal them
5. Install timers on outdoor lighting displays
4. Decorate with LED lights
3. Adjust power settings on video game consoles to the power saving feature
2. Vanquish energy vampires with a smart power strip
1. Follow Scrooge's example: skip the holidays!
(Not recommended for children)

1-2, ECA Hunting and Trade Show in the Orr Building at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield. 217-782-1698.

8-9, Singles in Agriculture Tri-State New Years at Turner Hall in Galena. Dance, tour museums, take trolley rides and more. 815-626-4483 or 815-284-6732.

9-10, Jimmy Buffet Weekend at Chestnut Mountain in Galena. An island-themed party with Caribbean food and tropical drink specials. Prize giveaways will include a pair of skis and bindings. Saturday: Live entertainment from 9 p.m. – 1 a.m. by Pirates Over 40, a Jimmy Buffet cover band. 800-397-1320 or www.chestnutmtn.com.

10, Volo Bog's 18th Annual WinterFest in Ingleside. Enjoy live music, photo contest awards, guided bog hikes and more. 815-344-1294 or <http://www.dnr.state.il.us>.



16, Bald Eagle Bus Tours in Galena. A guided four-hour tour of bald eagle wintering communities. Learn about the bald eagle's habits and life history, plus preservation efforts and threats to its future. Reservations required. Bus departs from Stoney Creek Inn in Galena at 8 a.m. 815-594-2306 or www.eaglenature.com.

23-24, Eagle Watch Weekend at Starved Rock Lodge in Utica. Enjoy free lectures and exhibits on "Birds of Prey" at the Lodge. Eagle viewing from the Veranda, so bring your binoculars! Raptor awareness presentations at 10 a.m., noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. by the World Bird Sanctuary, features birds of prey including a bald eagle. Seating is limited. 800-868-7625 or www.starvedrocklodge.com.



12-31, Pottery Demonstration in Galena. Watch clay being formed into artistic and functional pieces. Potter Charles Fach answers questions about the process. 815-777-0354 or <http://www.stonehousepotterygalena.com>.

14, Rain – A Tribute to the Beatles at Genesee Theater in Waukegan. Experience what Beatlemania was all about! From Ed Sullivan to Abbey Road! RAIN covers the Fab Four from the earliest beginnings through the psychedelic late 60s and their long-haired hippie, hard-rocking rooftop days. RAIN is a multi-dimensional experience with historical footage and hilarious television commercials from the 1960s. 847-782-2366 or <http://www.genesee theatre.com>.

15-29, Come Cook With Me in Galena. A one evening hands-on cooking class that explores the cuisines of the world. Classes include learning, hands-on cooking, a meal and recipes. Theme and menu can be viewed on the Web site. Thursday or Friday evening. 815-777-1556 or www.galenapeddlery.com.

15, Twilight Snowshoe Hike along the Galena River Trail to Beuhler Wilderness Preserve in Galena. Snowshoes and headlamps provided. Reservations required. 815-776-9425 or www.feerriveroutfitters.com.

23, Winterfest in Waukegan. This free winterfest will feature draft horse wagon rides, a petting zoo, ice croquet, kids snow sculpture area, and a super pizza cook off. There will also be sled dog team, cross country skiing, games and activities. 847-360-4700 or <http://www.waukeganparks.org>.

30-31, Antioch's Winter Arts and Crafts Faire 2010 in Antioch. This is a great time to "beat the winter blues" and get a head start on spring. The two-day arts and craft faire features handcrafted media from the Midwest. 847-395-2233 or <http://www.antiochchamber.org>.

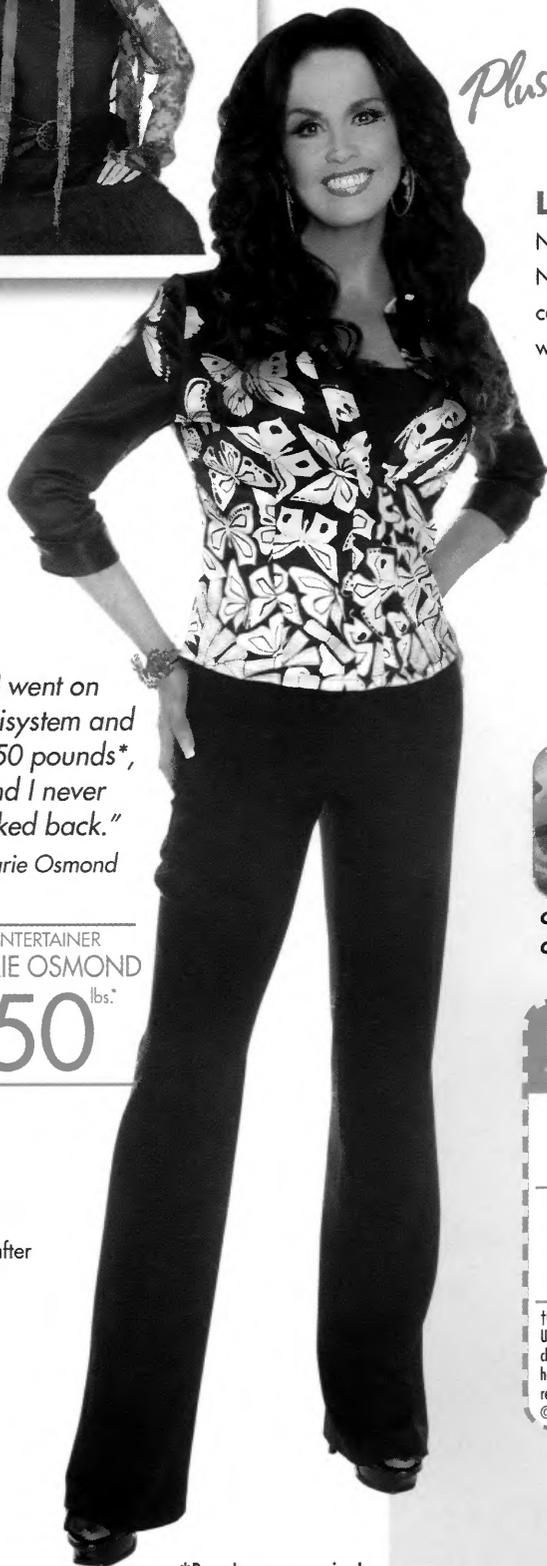
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