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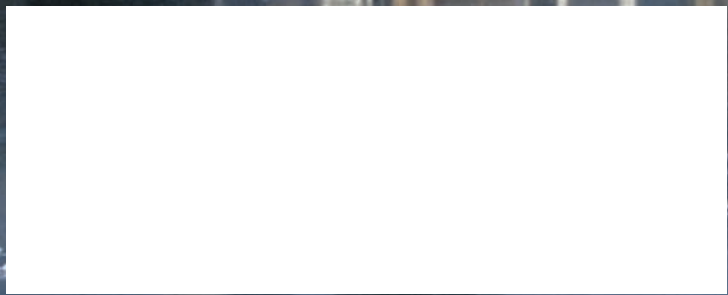
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CHICAGO CHRISTMAS

Twinkling lights and mystique await Windy City visitors.

Published by
Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives
6460 South Sixth Frontage Road East,
Springfield, IL 62712
www.icl.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 181,000, 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 \$10 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: Contact Lisa Rigoni, Advertising Manager – 1-800-593-2432 or lrigoni@aiec.coop. 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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ILLINOISTM COUNTRY LIVING

Volume 68, No. 8, December 2010

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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.

Costly EPA regulation is coming

EPA regulation of CO2 and coal ash will raise rates

The biggest challenge for electric cooperatives is the same challenge we've struggled with for most of our history — politics. Today we are faced with many factors that are raising the cost of electricity, but the number one issue is how we will address the issue of climate change.

As it stands now Congress has failed to find a fair, affordable and achievable solution and the EPA is moving forward with regulation of carbon dioxide (CO2). All sides agree that regulation is not the best solution. We need a legislative solution not regulation.

Nearly 80 percent of the electricity produced in the Midwest is generated with coal. With increasing demand, rising rates, CO2 regulation on the horizon, transmission line overload and an economy already in the tank, we need to find the political will to craft an intelligent solution. We are working hard to educate our co-op member-owners and our elected representatives on this new energy crisis and the solutions we think will be effective.

It is election day as I write this. I just finished casting my vote at my local precinct in rural Macon County. I hope you exercised your right to vote, too. Although there are many things to be concerned about in our economy, our country and across the globe, you just have to marvel at the impact your vote can have and the difference this election could make.

Elections also make a difference in our courts and justice system. For example, the EPA is set to regulate carbon dioxide because the Supreme Court ruled that they had that authority to do so under the Clean Air Act. Some of the legislators who originally passed that legislation will tell you that regulating carbon dioxide

was not their intent. None the less that process is going forward despite lawsuits and proposed legislation to halt it. The new Congress seated in January will need to address this issue.

The EPA is also considering new regulation of coal ash. Burning coal creates ash, just like a wood fire does in your fireplace. The EPA is proposing new rules that would classify coal ash as "hazardous material." Such a designation will have a deep

and dramatic impact on the cost of electricity. It also would deal a blow to the widespread recycling practice of incorporating coal ash into useful products and materials such as concrete. The EPA acknowledges that coal ash can be managed as non-hazardous material and that it only becomes a problem when not handled responsibly. Electric co-ops currently meet or exceed all existing state and federal regulations for the storage, use and disposal of coal ash. We support those current regulations.

In 2000 under the Clinton Administration, the last time the EPA reviewed this issue, it determined that coal ash does not meet the "hazardous material" criteria. We respectfully believe they got it right then.

One of our generation and transmission co-ops has estimated that the cost of this proposed "hazardous materials" regulation would raise its cost by \$11 million, about one-quarter of the co-op's total annual fuel bill.

In addition to keeping the cost of energy as low as possible, co-ops are also working hard to improve reliability. In recent years we've seen several major ice and wind storms that have left devastating, long outages in their wake. Our co-ops have responded by increasing their vegetation management programs using modern utility arborist standards, purchasing high production clearing equipment, and using new software tools such as geographic information systems to do a better job of tracking maintenance of the 56,626 miles of right of way and power lines owned by co-ops in Illinois. I urge you to have your own "reliability" plan this winter. For example, we have a backup generator on our farm. Always remember to be safe around electricity, especially any downed power lines during or after a storm.

I also urge you to stay involved in your electric co-op and your community. Attend your co-op's annual meeting. Get involved in your local school or a charity. Educate yourself on the issues facing your community. And when election time rolls around again, vote for strong leaders who have proven their commitment to your co-op and community. ■

"The EPA is proposing new rules that would classify coal ash as 'hazardous material.' "

Duane Noland, President/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives is a former state senator, active on his family farm near Blue Mound and a member of Shelby Electric Cooperative.





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How to live with deer

A new website provides Illinois residents with information on how to coexist with white-tailed deer. The website provides information about white-tailed deer natural history, IDNR's strategy for managing the deer population, damage prevention and abatement techniques, public health and safety information, what to do about injured or orphaned deer, and information about the role you can play in managing Illinois' deer population. The cooperation of landowners and land managers, as well as cooperation among neighbors, is essential to maintain deer numbers at acceptable levels.

Go to <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/deer/>.

Weather radios and smoke alarms are gifts that save lives

With the holiday shopping season in full swing, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM) suggest you consider a list of unique gift ideas designed to keep friends and family safe at home or in a vehicle.

"Basic preparedness presents, like a flashlight, weather radio or a first-aid kit, can be a real lifesaver when disaster strikes," said IEMA Director Andrew Velasquez III. "While we never know when the next emergency will happen, you can give your loved ones the peace of mind in knowing they're better prepared for the unexpected."

Velasquez said holiday preparedness gift ideas include:

- NOAA Weather Alert radios with extra batteries
- Items for a disaster kit for the home, office or dormitory, such as a first-aid kit, bottled water, non-perishable food, blankets, flashlight and batteries

- Items for a safety kit for the automobile, such as jumper cables, flashlight, blankets, sand and a small shovel

15 feet of every sleeping area and be maintained in working order. Since Jan. 1, 2007, state law also requires all buildings

that use fossil fuel and have sleeping rooms or have an attached garage to have an approved, operating carbon monoxide detector installed within 15 feet of any sleeping area. Homes that have all electric appliances and do not have a fireplace or an attached garage are exempt from the requirements.

Other fire safety and prevention gift ideas include ABC-rated fire extinguishers, foldable ladders for second-story emergency escapes and flameless scented candles.

Most preparedness and gift items can be found in hardware and department stores. For additional information on emergency preparedness, visit the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov. The OSFM website, www.state.il.us/osfm, offers more information about fire safety.



"The best holiday gift is one with the potential to save lives," said Illinois State Fire Marshal Dave DeFraties. "Smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are great gifts, but for those whose homes are already equipped for safety, you may consider first aid or CPR classes."

DeFraties said the gifts will also help friends and loved ones comply with Illinois law, which requires that working smoke alarms be placed within

Coal plant converted to biomass

The E.J. Stoneman Station biomass power plant is delivering power to 28,000 electric co-op members. Dairyland Power Cooperative is purchasing the entire 40 MW output of the renewable energy facility to help serve the energy needs of its member cooperative consumers.



Dairyland Power provides wholesale power to the members of Jo-Carroll Energy in northwestern Illinois. Renewable energy at the Stoneman Station is produced through the burning of various types of wood waste, including green wood residue from forestry and tree trimming operations,

railroad ties, demolition waste and sawdust.

The Stoneman Station, located in Cassville, Wis., has a unique history. Formerly a coal-fired power plant owned and brought into service by Dairyland in 1951, Dairyland sold it in the 1990s. Current owner DTE Energy Services has now resurrected the Stoneman Station as a biomass facility, selling the renewable energy back to its original owner.

Clean coal technology can create Illinois jobs

Clean coal technology has the potential to rejuvenate the coal industry, boost the use of an important domestic energy source and create thousands of new jobs and other economic benefits, according to a report released in April by the Regional Economics Application Laboratory at the University of Illinois.

In results that may be transferrable to other states, the report analyzes the impact of several ongoing and potential plant projects on employment, labor income and economic growth in Illinois. "Each of the projects, if built, could provide needed energy supply ... and significant jobs — both in construction and operations," the report said. Four of the primary technologies and projects analyzed include:

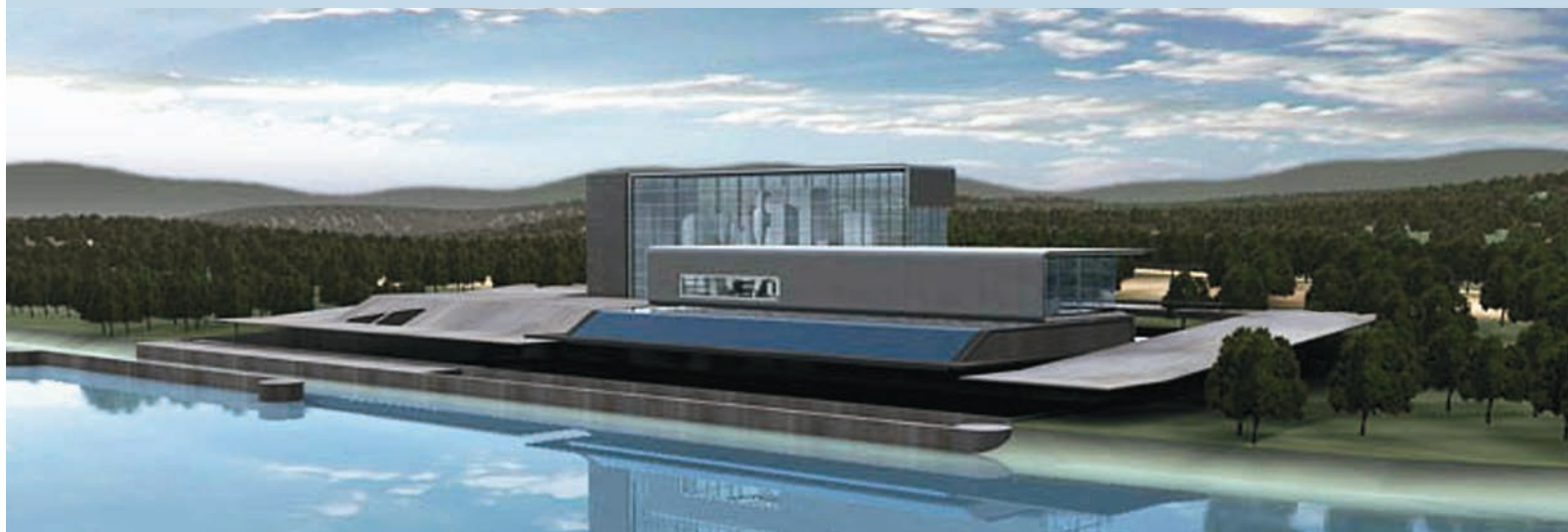
Pulverized coal: The 1,600-mw Prairie State project in Washington County, Ill., is the largest coal-fired plant under construction in the United States. The state-of-the-art facility could support more than 16,000 direct and indirect jobs during its 5-year construction period and more than 1,700 jobs during its operating period.

Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle (IGCC): The FutureGen project was going to be 275-mw demonstration project for coal gasification, electricity generation,

hydrogen production and carbon capture and sequestration technology. The project fought for and won approval, then was cancelled, and recently approved again but on a smaller scale and not in Mattoon as originally planned. The originally proposed project would have created 12,000 direct and indirect jobs during construction and 450 jobs during operation. The scaled back plan would create 500 construction jobs and add 50 permanent jobs.

Hybrid IGCC: Coal is converted to synthetic gas (syngas), cleaned and converted into substitute natural gas in a process that removes most of the carbon dioxide (CO₂), mercury and sulfur. The captured CO₂ can be used for enhanced oil recovery or sequestered. A 620-mw hybrid IGCC plant could create up to 19,000 direct and indirect jobs during construction and up to 1,200 operating jobs.

Coal-to-Liquids (CTL): The CTL process converts coal to diesel fuel by first converting coal to gas, then converting the gas to a liquid. The end product is virtually sulfur-free and burns more completely with lower emissions than low-sulfur diesel. A mine and plant sized to produce 48,000 bbl/day could create nearly 12,000 direct and indirect jobs during construction and 4,500 operating jobs.





Tree-killing beetle discovered in Champaign and Grundy Counties

A destructive pest that feasts on ash trees has been confirmed in Champaign and Grundy counties. The emerald ash borer (EAB) was discovered in Champaign County at Prairie Pine Campgrounds in Rantoul and in Grundy County at the Three Rivers Rest Area on I-80 in Morris. "Grundy County is already under our EAB quarantine, which includes all or parts of 23 counties in the northern and central parts of Illinois," Warren Goetsch, IDOA bureau chief of Environmental Programs, said. "However, Champaign County is not. Therefore, the quarantine boundaries will need to be adjusted."

The quarantine is intended to prevent the accidental spread of the beetle. It prohibits the intrastate movement of potentially-contaminated wood products, including ash trees, limbs and branches and all types of firewood.

Since the emerald ash borer was first confirmed in the Midwest in the summer of 2002, more than 25 million ash trees have been felled by the beetle.

Champaign and Grundy are the fifteenth and sixteenth Illinois counties with a confirmed EAB infestation. Previous detections were made in Boone, Bureau, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Iroquois, Kane, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, McHenry, McLean, Will and Winnebago counties.

Anyone who suspects a tree has been infested is urged to contact either the county Extension office or village forester. For more information, visit www.IllinoisEAB.com.

Grand Opening of the Delbert D. Mundt Water Treatment Plant

EJ Water Cooperative, Inc. held a grand opening for its new water treatment plant located in rural Beecher City on October 27. Despite the high winds, approximately 150 people gathered outside the Delbert D. Mundt Water Treatment Plant for the ribbon cutting ceremony. Delbert D. Mundt was honored for his vision of EJ Water, hard work and dedication to the cooperative from its beginning. Mr. Mundt, backed by the current EJ Water Board of Directors, cut the ribbon symbolizing the start of the new water treatment plant, which will supply treated, softened water to about half of EJ Water's customers.

EJ Water Cooperative, Inc. has developed into a

7 county regional water system, serving members in Effingham, Jasper, Clay, Cumberland, Richland, Fayette, and Shelby counties. It is one of the fastest growing water systems in the State of Illinois and recently became the largest rural water cooperative in Illinois. The system currently has approximately 1,500 miles of water mains and has over 7,500 rural memberships, now serving over 18,000 rural people and also providing water to the towns of Watson, Edgewood, Dieterich, St. Peter, Ste. Marie, Clay City and Louisville. EJ Water also has Interconnect Agreements with Effingham, Hardinville, Newton, and Montrose.





Cherish the season

The lively sound of carols and storytelling around the table, the familiar smell of pine and grandma's freshly baked cookies, the sparkle of softly falling snow and the little ones' breathless anticipation of Santa's arrival.

Let the sounds, aromas and visions of the season be the memories you cherish.

Merry Christmas from our Touchstone Energy® cooperative family to yours.



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Where there's
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By Lisa Rigoni

“*City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, dressed in holiday style. In the air there's a feeling of Christmas. Children laughing, people passing meeting smile after smile ...*” Verse one of this familiar Christmas carol, “Silver Bells” describes a typical Chicago scene during the winter and especially during the holidays. Indeed, as you become a part of the hustle and bustle, you begin to experience the enrichment of the city's history, the enchantment of the season and culture, and feel the excitement build along with the memories you create with family and friends.

According to the Chicago Office of Tourism, the Windy City dazzles this time of year with a flurry of activity. You'll find anything from special holiday exhibitions at Chicago museums to popular annual traditions like the Magnificent Mile Lights Festival and the Daley Plaza Christmas Tree to celebrations of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. Visitors of all ages and backgrounds will find ways to experience the joy and magic of the holiday season. So the big question is ... where to start?

Cover photo courtesy of © City of Chicago / GRC

Steeped in tradition

Holiday traditions are abundant in many different areas during Chicago's blustery winter months. For example, Chicago has celebrated the opening of the holiday season with the lighting of the **City Christmas Tree** for an astounding 97 years. It happens in the heart of Chicago's downtown "Loop," and is accompanied by festive musical performances.

Chicago's first municipal Christmas tree was lit in 1913 on Christmas Eve by Mayor Carter H. Harrison in Grant Park. The tree was a 35-foot tall Douglas Spruce, decorated with 600 multi-colored lights and topped with the Star of Bethlehem. In December 1956, the city's Christmas tree was actually one large tree that had been created from many smaller trees. At that time, the tree was 70-feet tall, decorated with some 4,400 lights and more than 2,000 ornaments. It was located in the Grant Park tree platform at Congress Parkway and Michigan Avenue. In December 1966, the Tree Lighting Ceremony was moved to Civic Center Plaza, now known as Daley Center Plaza (Washington and Dearborn streets). In 1982, the location was changed to State Street and Wacker Drive, and was returned to Daley Plaza the following year. In 1991, the Mayor requested a large single transplantable tree to be transplanted in a city park after the holidays. The largest that could be found was 35 feet – deemed not large enough for the plaza's open space. As a result, a smaller version was constructed using a total of 17 trees standing 50 feet. This is the first year since 1955 that the city has used one single tree. It will be on display through New Years. See it for yourself!

Photo courtesy of © City of Chicago / GRC



Celebrating its 10-year anniversary, **Navy Pier's** annual holiday extravaganza returns in a WinterWonderFest, Dec. 3, 2010 through Jan. 2, 2011. Admission is free, though wristbands are required to participate in rides and attractions (\$16-\$19). This holiday tradition features more than 750,000 holiday ornaments, hundreds of decorated trees, an indoor Ferris wheel, musical carousel, North Pole e-wish center, large-scale inflatable games and giant slides, Winter WonderStage, carolers, and more! For details on times and events at Navy Pier visit www.winterwonderfest.com.

Shopping – Chicago style

Mickey Mouse and his friends traditionally lead a parade down North Michigan Avenue signaling the opening of a holiday favorite, the **Magnificent Mile Lights Festival® along Michigan Avenue**. It's an area you won't want to miss during your Chicago adventure. Beautiful lights, storefronts donned in splendid color and winter scenes are a natural part of the holiday experience. The shopping alone will keep your spirits up.

In addition to Michigan Avenue, be sure and check out **Chicago's neighborhoods** for additional shopping options. Division Street and the Southport Corridor are home to specialty shops that carry the work of independent and Chicago-based designers. In the Lincoln Park neighborhood, shop along Lincoln Avenue, Clark Street, Armitage Avenue or Halsted Street, or venture further north to the Lakeview neighborhood (along Clark Street, Belmont Avenue or Broadway) – a great way to pick up those unique gifts for the special people in your life. In recent years, national stores like Anthropologie, Marc Jacobs and Cynthia Rowley have also opened shops in these neighborhoods.

You'll also find **Woodfield Mall**, just a hop, skip and a jump away, in Schaumburg. For a complete list of stores and holiday hours, call 847-330-1537 or visit www.gowoodfieldmall.com.

Is there a hunter or sportsperson in your circle of family and friends? In the northwest metro area of Chicago, in Hoffman Estates at the Prairie Stone Business Park, you'll find **Cabela's**, which opened in 2007. The 185,000-square-foot retail showroom is an educational and entertainment attraction filled with

animal displays, aquariums and trophy animals interacting in re-creations of their natural habitats. Need more information? Call 847-645-0400 or visit www.cabelas.com. If you'd like help creating the perfect Chicago-area shopping adventure to suit your needs, visit www.chicagofashionre-source.com.

Photo courtesy of Lincoln Park Zoo



Maybe shopping is not your thing

That's OK, because there is something to do for everyone. Are you looking for more lights, perhaps? Then you are in luck! How about heading out to **ZooLights at Lincoln Park Zoo**, 2001 North Clark St., where you'll hear laughter and see wide-eyed excitement as both young and old look on in amazement at the more than two million lights strung throughout the park. And oh my, yes there are also – you guessed it – lions and tigers and bears, plus so much more. Animal exhibits even stay open late so you can roam the grounds to take photos with Santa, prepare family crafts and enjoy watching animals of all kinds, from reptiles and amphibians to birds and mammals and everything in between. Lights will be on Fridays – Sundays until Dec. 12, 2010; then the lights will be on daily from Dec. 17, 2010 – Jan. 2, 2011 (excluding Dec. 24-25). Call Lincoln Park at 312-742-2000 for additional information or visit www.lpzoo.org/eve_zoolights.php

It's likely that you already know about the **Museum of Science and Industry**. But did you know it has a Christmas Around the World exhibit? It runs through Sunday, Jan. 9, 2011, 9:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Sunday. (Closed Christmas Day.) The exhibition includes more than 50 trees and displays decorated by volunteers from Chicago's ethnic communities to reflect holiday traditions from around the globe. *Holidays of Light*, a multicultural display of holiday traditions that celebrate light or enlightenment, such as Diwali and Hanukkah, also illuminates the museum's halls during this time.

Music and stage production favorites

Add these long-time favorites to your itinerary to round out your experience. Showtimes for **Robert Joffrey's *The Nutcracker*** are Friday, Dec. 10, 2010, through Sunday, Dec. 26, 2010 in the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University. Tickets range from \$30 to \$115. The Tchaikovsky masterpiece features the full Joffrey company, local children's choruses and more than 120 young dancers in a transformed theater of beauty, fantasy and wonder.

And at the Goodman Theater, you can see the traditional production of ***A Christmas Carol*** through Friday, Dec. 31, 2010. For three decades, more than one million people have enjoyed Charles Dickens' classic story. Audiences look forward to the "Bah, Humbugs," the arrival of the ghosts, the music and dancing and Scrooge's joyful discovery of life and love.

Caroling and ice skating opportunities

On Fridays through Dec. 17, 2010, 6 – 6:50 p.m. **Millennium Park** will host caroling at **Cloud Gate** and invites you to join them throughout the holiday season. In addition to the sing-along, you can hear the voices of different Chicago choral groups, including the Chicago Children's Choir, the Old Town School of Folk Music and the Wicker Park Choral Singers. Read about the history of these organizations at www.millenniumpark.org.

After the 50-minutes of caroling, lace up your skates and take to the ice at Millennium Park's **McCormick Tribune Ice Rink**. The rink, now in its 10th season, has more than 100,000 skaters glide over the ice annually. It's free and open to the public. Skate rental is available for \$10. The ice rink is located on Michigan Avenue between Washington and Madison streets. Detailed schedules are available at the Millennium Park website, listed above.

Sports fans take note of the Chicago SportsFest!

It runs Dec. 18 and 19, 2010, at McCormick Place in Halls A & B (2301 S. Martin Luther King Dr.) The event draws more than 60,000 to the McCormick Place says Cindy Gatziolis, City of Chicago office. "There are a great many sports activities and interactive play opportunities in what we call a million square feet of fun." That fun includes interactive zones featuring trampolines, golf, climbing walls, football, chess, obstacle course, tot's zone, bowling, table tennis, inflatable tumbling, tennis, badminton, boxing, a pitching zone, fishing ponds, giant slide, 40-Yard dash, a skateboarding area, wrestling and open courts for volleyball and basketball. Hours are 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Discounted parking is available for \$10 and more information can be found at www.chicagosportsfest.us.

There is so much to see and do in Chicago, that you'll have a hard time fitting it all in ... just as we did. For your convenience, we've included additional links and sights at www.icl.coop.

We would love to hear about your experience. Tell us about your adventure and share your pictures at our Illinois Country Living FaceBook page.

Photo courtesy of © City of Chicago / GRC



Are you ready to plan your winter Chicago trip?

For more information contact the Chicago Office of Tourism at 877-CHICAGO or visit www.explorechicago.org. They stand ready to help you plan your visit, from event happenings to special holiday packages at area hotels. Be sure and tell them Illinois Country Living sent you!



Photo courtesy of DuPage County CVB

DuPage County offers a variety of activities and events

Horse-Drawn hayrides and snow rides

Take a ride through the prairies and woodlands of Danada Forest Preserve in Wheaton and learn about the features of this historic preserve. The cost is \$5 per person ages 13 and up; \$2 for children ages 5 – 12; children under 5 are free. For additional details or for groups of 10 or more, call 630-668-6012.

Holly Days Winter Festival is happening through Friday, Dec. 31, 2010

Visit the Polar Express, Santa's workshops, children's holiday cooking classes, a Christmas concert at the library, Paws with Claus and much more! Visit www.wpd4fun.org for specific dates and times of events.

DuPage Forest Preserve District hosts an 1890s Christmas at Kline Creek Farm throughout December, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Enjoy the house decked in greens, savor the aroma of holiday treats, and see the table set for company.

Snow Tubing at Blackwell Forest Preserve

Dec. 18, 2010, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

The Promenade Bolingbrook Symphony In Lights is open through December 2010

It's famed as the largest commercial holiday light show of its kind in Chicagoland – featuring more than 250,000 LED lights embedded in thousands of feet of holiday foliage and choreographed to the music of the Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

Links to special event and shopping websites:

www.millenniumpark.org
www.lpzoo.org/eve_zoolights.php
www.cabelas.com
www.gowoodfieldmall.com
www.snowdayschicago.us

www.winterwonderfest.com
www.dupagecvb.com
www.navypier.com
www.chicagosportsfest.us
www.chicagoparkdistrict.com

Chest compressions save lives

New CPR techniques recommended by American Heart Association

Have you ever been in a situation where someone around you needed CPR? Have you ever had to take emergency action to try to save someone's life?

For more than 40 years, the American Heart Association has guided healthcare professionals and the general public through CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) courses that teach how to administer emergency care to people who have gone into sudden cardiac arrest. The organization focused on A-B-C – Airway, Breathing, Circulation (Compressions) – using a series of techniques to open the airway, breathing into the victim's mouth and then performing chest compressions.

But in October, the organization changed its teaching to focus on the importance of compressions before opening the airway and breathing into the victim's mouth, changing the order to C-A-B.

"Performing chest compressions immediately when a person has been determined unresponsive keeps oxygen-rich blood circulating through the body," said Dr. Theresa Hoadley, Associate Professor at Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing in Peoria, and a member of American Heart Association Volunteer Leadership Team.

Starting chest compressions immediately also saves on critical time lost while trying to open the person's airway.

"We hope these new recommendations will encourage more bystanders to take action should someone have a medical emergency in a public setting," said Dr. Hoadley. "Performing CPR

immediately can double or triple a person's chance of survival. A person who may not have been comfortable at one time giving mouth-to-mouth to a stranger can rest assured that the simple act of per-

forming chest compressions can still be effective in saving a life."

Steps for effective CPR?

1. Make sure the scene is safe.
2. Shake the victim's shoulders and shout to see if they respond.
3. If the victim does not respond and the victim is not breathing or not breathing normally, shout for someone to call 9-1-1 and get an AED (automated external defibrillator), if available.
 - If you're alone, call 9-1-1 and get an AED if available. Follow the AED's voice prompts.
 - If no AED is available, immediately start CPR, beginning with compressions.

Compressions

4. Push hard and fast on the center of the chest 30 times, at a rate of at least 100 compressions a minute. For adults, push down at least 2 inches with each compression. If you haven't been trained in CPR, continue to give compressions until an AED arrives or trained help takes over.

Airway

5. If you have been trained in CPR, continue CPR by opening the airway with a head tilt – chin lift.

Breathing

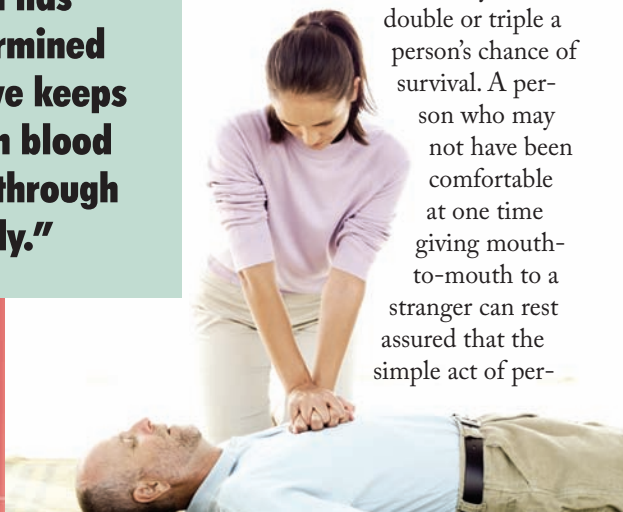
6. Pinch the victim's nose closed. Take a normal breath and cover the victim's mouth with your mouth, creating an airtight seal. Give two breaths (one second each). Watch for chest to rise as you give each breath.
7. Keep giving sets of 30 compressions and two breaths until the AED arrives or trained help takes over.

The American Heart Association reviews and updates the guidelines for CPR every five years, consulting the expertise of leading resuscitation experts from around the world. Guidelines are scrutinized for sudden cardiac arrest in adults, children, infants and newborns. The guidelines were first instituted in 1966, and are now used by a number of major organizations around the world.

Find a CPR class in your area by logging on to www.heart.org/cpr. The American Heart Association provides lists of classes for healthcare professionals and the lay (non-healthcare) providers.

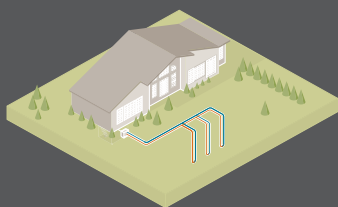
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"Performing chest compressions immediately when a person has been determined unresponsive keeps oxygen-rich blood circulating through the body."



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Gardening never ends

Holiday need-to-know hints, myths and gifts

Here it is again – the end of the gardening year and the holiday season.

True gardeners know that gardening never ends. We may concentrate on a different location (indoors) and with different plants, but we do something, even if it's something as mundane as watching HGTV or looking through the piles of gardening magazines and catalogs we've put off for the year.

But the holidays push some of the gardening thoughts to the dark recesses of the brain where the cobwebs are a little thicker. But only for a month. Or two. Or three.

December is the month to think about all the holiday plants such as trudging through the tree lots to find that perfect Frasier or Balsam fir, or fawning over poinsettias found at just about any retail outlet, possibly even the corner gas station.

Of course, the holidays let us go all out with decorating with plants, realizing full well that the plants may hang around into the new year, but start to look a little worse for the wear.

So, in an effort to minimize the need to read a whole bunch of sentences and paragraphs, we'll go with bullet-points for some need-to-know tidbits to get you through the "holidayze."

- Get the freshest tree possible. Now, also do it legally. Don't cut someone else's prized specimen in their yard. You will surely get coal in your stockings if you do that. Either visit a cut-your-own tree farm, or get the specimens as they seem to fall off the truck at the tree lot. Fresh trees

last longer and keep their needles on the plant, reducing the fire hazard.

- Of course, use only approved lights on the tree. Those big honking lights from the 1950s and 1960s should be avoided as they generate too much heat. If you can't keep your fingers on the light bulb for a minute without burning, you are using the wrong type. Turn the lights off when leaving the house and not at night.
- Make sure there is water in the reservoir at all times. Keep Fido from lapping it dry. As long as

the container is holding water, the tree is probably sucking it up; though the longer the tree is indoors, the less water it takes up. The colder you keep the room, the less the tree dries out and the longer it lasts. At 40 degrees, the tree will last months, though you might not.

- Poinsettias are NOT poisonous. There are rumors of some child in the Hawaiian Islands dying from eating a plant back in the early 1900s. However, there are no documented cases.

On the other hand, this is not a food crop plant. You shouldn't be tearing off the leaves and putting them in your salad. That's not their intended purpose.

If Fido eats some and barfs, more than likely he'll not eat them again.

Mistletoe is classified as poisonous. It can cause some serious physical health problems. Of course, the biggest problem is that it can end up with a 50-year life sentence if you get caught under it. Sometimes it might be wise to turn the other cheek quickly.

- Don't forget gardening gifts as presents or hostess gifts. A great pair of leather garden gloves, sturdy gardening pruners, and even foam kneepads make wonderful presents if you are just at wits end. You almost can't have enough pairs of gloves nor hand pruners.

There are some great gardening magazines such as Fine Gardening and the companion Container Gardening, Horticulture, and Garden Design that also can whet the gardener's appetite throughout the season. Even a membership to a local botanical garden (including the Chicago Botanic Garden and Missouri Botanical Garden) indicates some thought.

And a gift certificate to a favorite garden center or nursery would always be welcomed, though probably not as much as a gift certificate that says you will do the mowing, weeding and digging for a year. ■



"Don't forget gardening gifts as presents or hostess gifts."

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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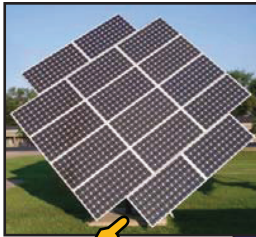
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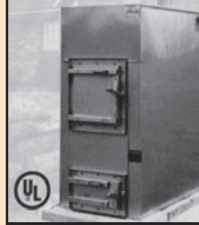
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Energy Commandment No. 7

Thou shalt not believe everything you hear

"For unto us a child is born." Oh man, I love the Christmas season and having grandchildren doesn't hurt that one bit.

As I mentioned last month, we have so very much for which to be thankful this holiday season. And electricity is certainly one of the most important things. I am still reviewing the lists that many of you have submitted about additional uses for electricity.

I have been teaching folks about energy efficiency for over 30 years and I tell you, there is more information available today about that subject than at any other time in history. It seems that everyone has an interest and opinion about saving our world and helping people have lower utility bills.

Every day I see energy tips on television, in magazines, newspapers and even direct mail pieces sent to the house. You can go to the Internet and read about energy efficiency for hours.

Most of the stuff I see says something like this: "Saves up to 50 percent on your heating and cooling costs." If that were true, I would suggest you do just two of the items and save 100 percent. If only it were that easy.

Actually folks, save up to 50 percent means anything from 1 percent to 50 percent. If that product saved you 10 percent it would meet the claim. Simply stated, there are lots of folks out there trying to sell you something, but it is my opinion that few, if any, of the advertised products regarding energy savings actually will give you

the advertised savings.

This may come as a shock to you, but misleading advertising is not new.

About 25 years ago, I developed what is still known as the Doug Rye Super Energy-Efficient house. It also happened to be very "green" but that color wasn't as important in those days. The Doug Rye house had cellulose insulation, lots of caulking, energy-efficient windows, tight ductwork and a

geothermal heat pump. When people built their houses in this manner, they could heat and cool a 1,200-square-foot house for about 50 cents per day or \$15 per month.

One day a national company came to me and said if you will use our product in your houses we will guarantee a 30-percent savings on heating and cooling costs. Well, I figured

30 percent of \$15 is \$4.50 a month. I asked what it cost to use their product on a 1,200-square-foot house and he said, "\$1,100."

Well, I immediately knew this was not a good investment. I also knew his product wouldn't do anything to make a Doug Rye house more efficient.

But they persisted and showed me a four-page warranty of which I read every single word using a magnifying glass. The warranty said to file a claim one must submit a copy of the last 12 months' utility bills prior to the installation of the product and a copy of 12 months' utility bills after the installation of the product. The claim must be filed in the 13th month after the product was installed. I noticed that the name of the warranty company was at the end of the form so I called them for more information.

When I talked to the man at the warranty company he wasn't even familiar with the product I was asking him about. He told me his bonding company had placed warranties on hundreds of products and just assumed they would have to pay a few claims. They intentionally made it as difficult as possible to file the claim, he added.

Well, at least he was honest about it. Folks, just remember there are a lot of people trying to take you green by claiming to be green. Please listen to me and don't believe everything you hear.

On a lighter note, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. See you in 2011! ■



"Few, if any, of the advertised products regarding energy savings actually will give you the advertised savings."

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Q: Why Become a Foster Parent?

A: Why Not?

By Catrina McCulley Wagner

“A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove . . . but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a [child].” -Forest E. Witcraft

As she pulled the car up to the curb in front of the children’s shelter, the caseworker glanced in her rearview mirror to see 8-year-old Cody in the back seat gazing fearfully at the tattered brick building with the murky windows and crumbling concrete steps. Was this his new home? What would his life be like in this run-down place full of kids, like him, who had been taken from their parents and

were awaiting foster homes? How did he end up here? He stared at the shelter, trying not to blink, as his eyes filled with tears.

“Currently, there are more than 15,500 kids in need of foster care in Illinois,” says Kendall Marlow, Deputy Director, Division of Communications for the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Foster parents and their

families play a critical role in the lives of thousands of young people, providing a temporary safe haven, love and support, with the ultimate goal of getting the child back to his or her family. “Illinois has a need for more foster families. Kids need stability and love in order to thrive, and foster families can provide that during a difficult time in their lives,” Marlow says.

Egyptian Electric Cooperative members, Christine and Les O’Dell have been married for 20 years and have two children, Grant, 19 and Sarah, 16. They love being parents and this year, decided to become foster parents because they knew they had more love to give. The couple com-

pleted their foster care training and almost instantly got a call for a potential placement.

“Christine and I talked about how we really needed to make a list of questions to ask (for when placement calls came in), but we didn’t have time. We received a call that very evening asking if we would take an infant girl. We said, ‘yes.’ Then a little while later, we got a second call. The caseworker said they could not find a placement for the girl’s older brother who was four and would we be willing to take him for a night or two? We agreed,” remembers Les.

“When they brought the children, the little boy instantly stole our hearts. He was the most outgoing, pleasant and polite little guy we’d ever seen. We instantly fell in love with them both. But the next day our caseworker called to say that they had found a family in a nearby community for the infant girl. She wondered if we’d be interested in keeping the little boy. We said, ‘Absolutely!’”

In the three months that followed, “J,” the little four-year-old, stole the O’Dell’s hearts and forever changed their lives. “He was a delight. All of us loved him and he considered our daughter to be his best friend. He was enthusiastic and loved to learn. He had two younger sisters, though, and the goal is to keep siblings together. Eventually a placement for all three was found and “J” left us to live with his sisters and another foster family,” Les says.

“It was hard to say goodbye and let go, but we knew there would always be another child who needed us,” says Christine.

And she was right. At the beginning of the summer, the O’Dells welcomed another foster child into their hearts, a seven-pound infant boy. “We absolutely love him like he is ours and we really enjoy loving him and watching him grow. He still has daily visits with his mother and, of course, the goal is eventually reunification. Until

then, he is one of us,” Les says.

“We are so blessed to get to have these children in our lives. This was not something we would have ever expected to be doing at this point in our lives, but I wouldn’t trade it for anything. We get a little less sleep now, and we are re-learning how to parent younger children, but every time we get a smile, or see a milestone, or get a hug, we just want to experience more of it. We want to see these children grow into their fullest potential in life. To know that we are making a difference in the lives of children is worth it,” says Christine.

If you are reading this thinking, “I have more love to give, too,” consider becoming a licensed foster parent. “The first step is to contact your local DCFS office or private social service agency. Foster parents choose who they wish to be licensed by. Some base their decision on their religious affiliation, personal knowledge, or location,” says Judith Rehder, DCFS Downstate Resource Development Manager.

“Illinois has a need for more foster families. Kids need stability and love in order to thrive, and foster families can provide that during a difficult time in their lives.”

“The physical home is licensed, as well as the parents. The home needs to be a safe, clean environment, large enough to accommodate additional children. The parent(s) have to be physically healthy, pass criminal records checks and be fiscally solvent. A licensing specialist will come to the home and do a preliminary check. If all looks good, the family will proceed through the licensing home study and the prospective foster parents will complete an extensive training course designed to prepare them for the challenges of caring for foster children.

“Foster parents can choose how many children they wish to foster at

a time, contingent on the size of their home and how many children they already have. However, many limit their availability to only one or two, regardless of the other factors. They can also choose the gender and ages of prospective foster children. Foster parents often know their strengths or family needs and thus are the best to make these decisions,” Rehder says.

“Illinois has a need for foster parents of all kinds, but especially those who would be interested in taking an African American child, those who speak Spanish, and those who are willing to take sibling groups,” Marlow says.

“These (foster) kids will work their way into your heart fast! The hardest part is having them leave. But we know that while we don’t have much to give, we do have lots of love and so we just try to make their lives as good as we possibly can,” says Les.

“Prepare to have your heart broken, but in a good way.” Christine adds. “Your heart will break for these children who just desperately need love and stability. Prepare to fall head over heels in love with your foster children. I couldn’t imagine being a foster parent without giving myself over to it completely. You have to have enough love in your heart to give away.”

Becoming a foster parent can be a lot of work and even sometimes heart breaking, but if you can help just one child reunite with his or her family or find a good and loving forever home then ... Why Not? ■



Home Cookin'

Who: Iuka Grade School PTO

Cost: \$10, plus \$3 shipping

Details: soft-backed, comb-bound

Pages of recipes: 89

Send checks to: Nikki Smith at
6600 Bee Branch Road, Salem, IL 62881
or call 618-547-3509.

To Santa

Holiday Butter Cookies (above)

- 1 C. butter
- 4 C. flour
- 2 C. white sugar
- 3 eggs

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Melt butter in a pan over low heat. In a large bowl, combine butter with 2 C. of flour and the sugar. Beat in eggs until well blended. Slowly mix in the remaining 2 C. of flour. Roll out the dough to a thickness of 1/4-inch. Using cookie cutters, cut out shapes. Place on cookie sheets about 1-1/2 inches apart. Bake for 12-15 minutes. Decorate as desired.

Holiday Butter Cookies

Winter Vegetable Chili

- 4 tsp. vegetable oil
- 1 med. butternut squash, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 2 med. carrots, diced
- 1 med. onion, diced
- 3 T. chili powder
- 1 (28-oz.) can tomatoes
- 1 (4-oz.) can chopped mild green chilies
- 1 C. vegetable or chicken broth
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 2 (15-19-oz.) cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/4 C. fresh cilantro, chopped

In a Dutch oven over medium-high heat, heat 2 tsp. oil. Add butternut squash and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown; remove. In the same pan, heat 2 more tsp. oil. Cook carrots and onion until well browned. Stir in chili powder. Cook 1 minute, stirring. Add tomatoes with their liquid, chilies with their liquid, broth and salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 30 minutes, stirring occasionally to break up tomatoes. Stir in black beans and butternut squash and heat to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer 15 minutes or until squash is tender and chili thickens. Stir in cilantro.

Creamy Mashed Potato Casserole

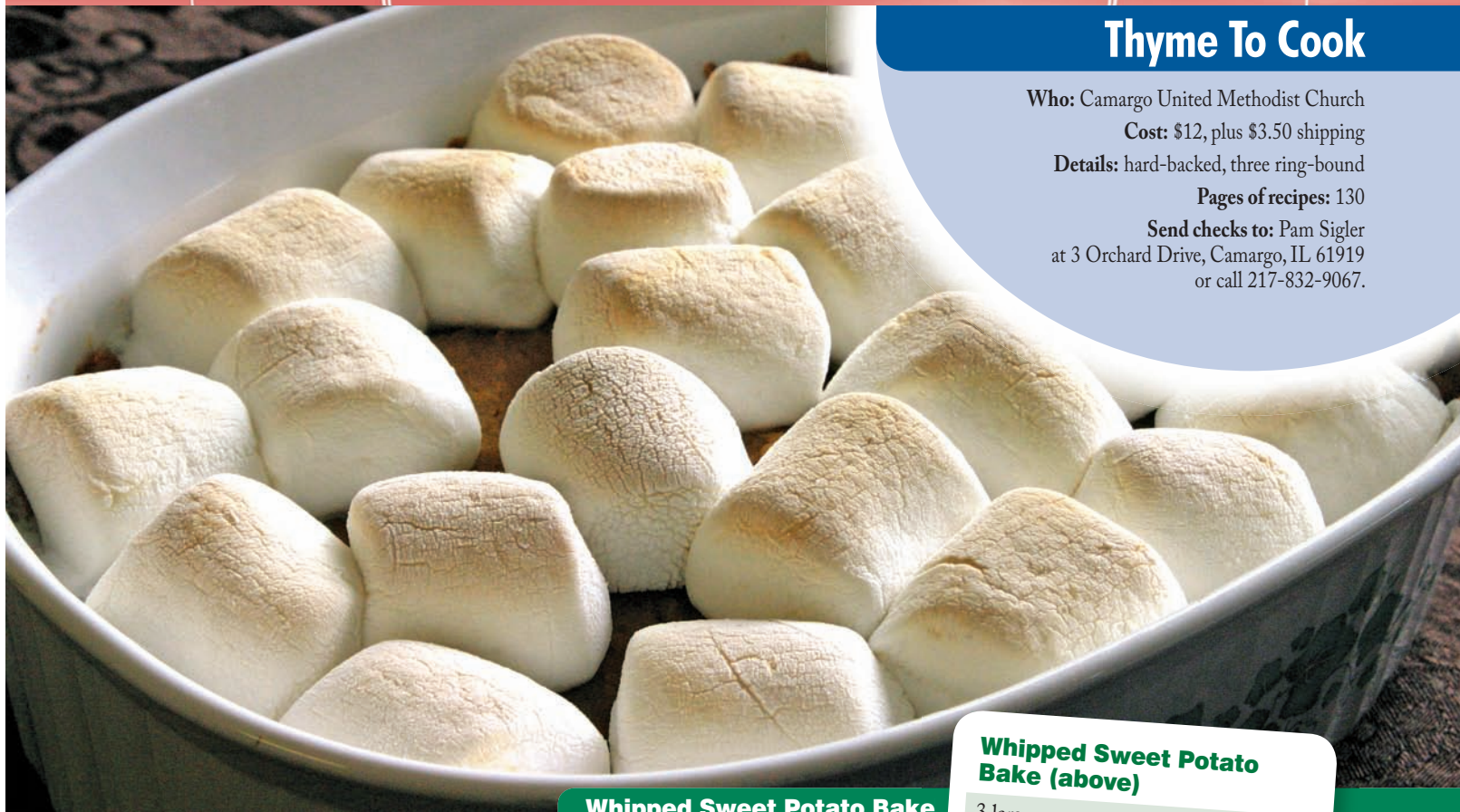
- 3 lbs. potatoes (red)
- 2 cans cream of mushroom soup
- 2 lbs. hamburger
- 3 C. American shredded cheese
- 2 C. sharp Cheddar shredded cheese
- 2 cans French style green beans
- 1 T. butter
- 1/4 C. milk
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Wash and cut potatoes, boil them in water until soft. In a skillet, brown hamburger. Drain grease. In a 13x9-inch pan, spread the hamburger on the bottom and sprinkle with 2 C. of American cheese. Spread green beans on top of cheese layer. Spread cream of mushroom soup on top of the green beans. Sprinkle 1 C. American and 1 C. sharp Cheddar cheese on top of that. Drain potatoes. Add milk, butter, salt and pepper. Use a mixer to whip the potatoes, and then add the potatoes on top, covering the entire pan smoothly. Sprinkle remaining sharp cheddar cheese on top and bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

Wonder Fudge

- 3 C. powdered sugar
- 1 C. pecans
- 1 C. chocolate chips
- 1 stick butter
- 3 tsp. hot water
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

Mix chocolate chips and butter over boiling water (double boiler method). Mix pecans with powdered sugar, set aside. When chips and butter are melted, remove from heat and add hot water and vanilla, stir. Mix with powdered sugar and nuts. Spread out into a buttered 8x9-inch pan.



Thyme To Cook

Who: Camargo United Methodist Church

Cost: \$12, plus \$3.50 shipping

Details: hard-backed, three ring-bound

Pages of recipes: 130

Send checks to: Pam Sigler
at 3 Orchard Drive, Camargo, IL 61919
or call 217-832-9067.

Whipped Sweet Potato Bake

Whipped Sweet Potato Bake (above)

3 large cans sweet potatoes, drained
¼ C. butter, melted
1 tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. nutmeg
24 large marshmallows

Beat sweet potatoes, melted butter, cinnamon and nutmeg together until blended and smooth. Pour mixture into a 1-1/2-quart baking dish. Top with marshmallows and bake 15-20 minutes at 350 degrees.

Christmas Tea

1 stick cinnamon
1 T. whole cloves
1 pkg. red hots
6 black tea bags
8 C. water
4 T. ReaLemon
1-1/2 C. sugar
1 (6-oz.) ctn. frozen orange juice concentrate
6 C. hot water

In a large pan, boil cinnamon, cloves, red hots and 6 cups of water for 20 minutes. Add tea bags and 2 more C. water. Stir in ReaLemon, sugar, orange juice and 6 C. of hot water.

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

Photos by Catrina McCulley Wagner

Peanut Butter Snowballs

1 C. powdered sugar
½ C. creamy peanut butter
3 T. butter, softened
1 lb. white chocolate coating

In a mixing bowl, combine peanut butter and butter. Mix until blended. Add sugar and mix well. Shape into 1-inch balls and place on a waxed paper lined cookie sheet. Chill for 30 minutes or until firm. Meanwhile, melt white chocolate coating in a double boiler. Dip balls in coating and place on waxed paper to set.

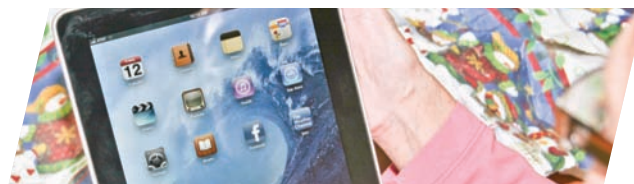
Serendipity

1 yellow cake mix
1 (12-oz.) pkg. chocolate, peanut butter or butterscotch chips
½ (10-oz.) bag mini marshmallows
2 eggs
½ C. oil
2 T. water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9x13-inch pan. Put cake mix into a large mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, mix eggs and oil together with water. Then add to the cake mix. Blend well. Add chips and marshmallows. Bake for 25 minutes.

Calling all cookbooks!

Is your church or community organization selling its own unique cookbook filled with favorite recipes of cooks in your area? If so, send your cookbook to Catrina Wagner, Illinois Country Living, P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708. Please include the price of your cookbook plus postage costs and the name, address and telephone numbers (both day and evening) of the cooperative member we should contact for more information.



Holiday gifts for him and her

The holidays are a special time when we stop to remember those people most important in our lives. But what do you get that special someone that will elicit the “Wow!” moment on Christmas morning? This month’s Powered Up will focus on some of the hot “must-have” items for the 2010 holiday season, sure to put a smile on anyone’s face.



Apple iPad

\$499 - \$829



(<http://www.apple.com/ipad/design>)

Earlier this year, the iPad took the world by storm, transforming the tablet PC market with an unusually user-friendly interface that has caused competitors to scramble to produce a comparable offering. Probably the only downside to the iPad is the price. Also, keep in mind that some of the models do not support 3G access. That means they won’t be able to access the Internet unless there is an accessible wireless network nearby. By taking advantage of the iTunes app store, users can customize the iPad to fill a wide variety of needs. From apps like Martha Stewart’s cookie maker (<http://www.marthastewart.com/cookie-recipes-app>) to the Weather Channel’s Max app, there is something for everyone on the iPad.

Kinect for Xbox 360

\$149



(<http://www.xbox.com/en-US/kinect>)

Microsoft unveiled its new Kinect in November announcing, “You are the controller. No gadgets, no gizmos, just you!” Kinect will get your kids off the couch and exercising while they play because it doesn’t use a controller. Kinect works by adding a device with infrared cameras to your Xbox 360 that tracks a player’s movement and transmits those movements back to the console. You can purchase Kinect devices almost anywhere games or game systems are sold. There are some minor issues that you should be aware of when using the Kinect. Most of them have to do with the camera’s ability to differentiate between the user and the background. So be sure to wear colors that set you apart from the room you’re in.

Hallmark’s recordable storybooks

\$25 - \$60



(<http://www.hallmark.com/online/in-stores/recordable-storybooks/>)

What a great idea! These books allow you to record yourself reading a familiar story so that your loved ones can play it back at anytime. This book will be a great gift for little ones love being lulled to sleep by your familiar voice when you can’t be there. It could be sent to a spouse serving overseas, or to children of a parent overseas. If Grandma and Grandpa live far away they could both send and receive the book. Sometimes it’s the simple technology that makes the best gift!

Looking for more gift ideas? How about a fLip video camera, a digital photo frame or for the hunter in the family, a new trail camera?

fLip cameras (<http://www.theflip.com/>) range in price from \$150 - \$250, are small and extremely portable but still offer an above average recording resolution.

Digital photo frames can be found almost everywhere these days. They’ve even been spotted in the checkout lane of grocery stores! Ranging in price from \$20 on up, these make great gifts when combined with digital photos. Keep in mind that some of them require you to buy your own flash drive to store images. Check the package before purchasing.

There are so many options available when purchasing **trail cameras**, but the ones offered by Wildgame Innovations (<http://www.wildgameinnovations.com>) have gotten great reviews. For about \$100 you can get a quality 5.0 mega-pixel camera that works both during the day and night.

Ed VanHoose is the Digital Communications Administrator/IT Manager for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in Springfield. He is a specialist in the IT field with over 12 years of experience working in leadership roles for technology based projects in Illinois and Missouri.

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- 3) Prepayment is required. Include check or money order with ad for amount due. Also include address label from Illinois Country Living or other proof of Illinois electric cooperative membership. Only members of Illinois electric cooperatives may place Marketplace ads.
- 4) Mail to: Illinois Marketplace, P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708, by deadline.
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Out but not down

Illuminati Motor Works looks to the future

By Edward VanHoose

The team at Illuminati Motor Works (IMW) had high hopes for its car “Seven” at the culminating event for the Progressive Insurance Automotive X PRIZE (PIAXP). After all, they had spent over two years of their lives working on the car, with the hopes of proving that a greater than 100MPG equivalent automobile could be produced with current technology. Although they passed almost every test at the trials, they missed one—a slipping clutch caused the car to miss the 0-60 Mph acceleration test by 5 seconds. The almost entirely self-funded team did not have the resources to replace the clutch in a timely manner at the Michigan International Speedway. So, the X PRIZE dream ended.

As Jennifer Danzinger, Web Liason for IMW says, “We lost our chance at the \$5 million dollar prize by 5 seconds.”

But the competition doesn’t end the dreams of IMW. Now, they are refocusing their efforts with both renewed vigor and new goals.

“We are speaking with the people from Roush Engineering (www.roush.com) to figure out a way to simplify the engineering of the car,” says Kevin Smith, Team Leader / Engineer. “The eventual goal is to get into pre-production, to make the care more easily replicated. Right now, it’s a one-of-a-kind. That’s bad.”

Smith and his team hope to show that Seven can be affordably reproduced.

In the meantime, the team has been educating the public about the benefits of electric vehicles. In October, they attended the sustainability week at the University of Illinois.

“It was a real pleasure for us to be able to attend that



Illuminati Motor Works members Nick Smith, Kevin Smith and George Kennedy with “Seven” at the Michigan International Speedway.

event. We got to show the car to quite a few people,” says Smith.

In addition, the team has been showing the car at various other community events hosted by elementary schools, rotary clubs and other colleges. They also displayed the car at Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative’s (www.recc.coop) annual meeting.

When asked about the team’s future plans, Smith replies, “Well, we burned up our clutch and so what’s next? We fix what’s wrong, make improvements and come back with a fully functional Death Star... er... I mean fully functional ‘Seven.’”

The team plans to spend the winter making performance modifications. “We’re looking into breaking some world records,” says Smith. “Perhaps we could break the Top Speed record for an electric 4-door sedan. We might even break the Top Speed record for *any* electric vehicle. We’re also looking at Maximum Range records and our ability to tow another vehicle.”

The German team, TW4XP, approached IMW shortly after the X PRIZE competition with a possible challenge of a race next year.

“We were talking and they mentioned they would like to do some kind of Route 66 race. If they put something like that together, we will definitely participate,” says Smith.

In the meantime, the team keeps moving forward with its long-range goal.

Smith says, “If battery technology leaps forward then there will be mass production. We would like to demonstrate that the technology is here now.”

To learn more about Illuminati Motor Works or to help with their effort to create sustainable mobility, go to www.illuminatimotorworks.org.

Illuminati Motor Works “Seven” specifications:

0-60 Acceleration: (Theoretical): 8 seconds
(Applied): 8.4 seconds

Top Speed:
(Theoretical): 225 MPH for 20 minutes
(Applied): True top speed has yet to be tested. Seven has been driven up to 130 MPH.

Range:
(Estimated): 200 miles at highway speeds.
(Applied): 199.3 miles on 94% of the 32.5 Kwh pack at speeds up to 65 miles per hour.

Miles Per Gallon Equivalent:
(Estimated): 200 MPGe at highway speeds.
(Applied): At the competition Seven averaged 182 MPGe at highway speeds.

Warp Drive Optional



Spent flowers from the summer and fall seasons make great composting waste.

Cold can't freeze out the compost cycle

Enthusiastic gardeners tend to compost piles year-round

By Kaleigh Friend

Have you turned your compost pile lately? If you haven't, don't count on Frosty the Snowman to help. Even though the temperatures have dropped and the decomposing process of your compost pile has slowed, you can still maintain your composting activities throughout the year. This low-maintenance activity will reduce the amount of waste entering landfills and will provide you with an excellent way to enhance the soil for your garden.

Compost, sometimes referred to as "the other black gold," is a stable form of organic matter. Compost is created by the biological process in which organic components decompose under oxygen-supplied conditions, according to Jennifer Fishburn, a Horticulture Educator with the University of Illinois Extension. Compost can be used to improve soil structure in both houseplants and gardens by increasing water retention in soil and by keeping minerals available for plant use.

Some of you may be bundling up and braving the cold temperatures to turn your compost,

but others may choose not to begin until spring. When warm weather returns again, there are a few things you'll need to get started. First, you'll need an aerated bin, homemade or store-bought, at least 3 feet in length, width and height, but no larger than 5 feet in length, width and height. Next you will start adding layers of green and brown matter, which provide nitrogen and carbon to the composting process.

Green matter consists of things such as yard clippings and non-dairy food wastes, while brown matter consists of things such as dried leaves, sawdust and twigs. Once you've added the materials and some time has passed, you may notice steam coming from the pile. This means the decomposing has begun, because the steam is due to the metabolic energy produced by the billions of microbes in the organic matter and soil. A pile's center can warm up to 140-150 F.

However, there are a few things you should leave out of your compost pile. Dairy products, meat and food wastes cooked in oil can attract pests and may lead to an unpleasant scent. If your compost pile does begin to have an objectionable odor, don't worry! Adding more brown matter and turning the pile are both easy ways to solve this problem. It's a good idea to build your pile down wind from your neighbors and away from your home or other structures, if you are worried you will have problems with odor.

Composting is a low-maintenance activity, but the more you turn your pile, the faster your compost will be ready. Duane Friend, Natural Resource Educator for the University of Illinois Extension, said if you don't rotate your compost pile, you can expect the process to take one to two years, but if you are more enthusiastic with your turning, your compost can be ready in as soon as three to six months. "Composting is doing what nature intended," Friend said. "It allows nutrients to go back into the soil to be used by plants."

"Composting is doing what nature intended."

You may be wondering, "But what about people who don't have a yard?" Michelle Bird-Vogel, Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Coordinator for the University of Illinois Extension, said the yardless might be interested in a different kind of composting called vermicomposting. In this process, various species of worms, including earthworms, do the work.

This process can be done indoors or outdoors in a small bin using newspapers and food waste. The volume created by this process is much smaller than the backyard type of composting, but is perfect for in-town and apartment dwellers that want to use compost for houseplants or other small planting projects.

The extension offices offer several programs to assist people with an interest in composting. First, there is the Master Gardener program. To become a Master Gardener, you must submit an application to your local extension unit. After the application has been reviewed, you will begin training by attending a course for 11 weeks, for about one hour each week. Before becoming a certified Master Gardener, there is also an internship period, and once certified, must remain an active volunteer.

There is also a Master Composter program, which is more regional. If a group is interested, contact your local extension office and ask for a training program that teaches a more in-depth education on composting, involving some hands-on activities. By contact-

ing your local extension office, you can speak to a staff member with knowledge on the topic that can answer any questions you may have.

The Green Center at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield will be hosting a composting symposium on Feb. 14, 2011 in coordination with other partners including the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. The event will take place from 12:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. and will include information on how and why to get involved with composting. For more information call the Green Center at 217-786-2434.

Composting is an excellent way to recycle, will provide exceptional planting soil for spring gardening projects and can save you money on mulch. All you have to do is get it started - leave the work to Mother Nature!



Leftover vegetables, like these tomatoes, are good for the composting bin.



When winter temperatures fall, composting materials continue to decompose beneath the surface where it's warmer.

1- 2/28, Bald Eagle Trolley Tours in Utica. 800-868-7625 or www.starvedrocklodge.com.

1-31, Eagle Meet and Greet in Alton. 618-465-6676 or www.VisitAlton.com.

6, Brian Regan at Effingham Performance Center. 800-745-3000 or www.theEPC.org

7-29, Come Cook With Me in Galena. 815-777-1556 or www.galenapeddlery.com.

9, The Kane County Sportsmen's Show at the Kane County Fairgrounds in St. Charles. 815-758-2773.

9, Volo Bog's WinterFest with storytelling and Native American flute music in Ingleside. 815-344-1294 or www.dnr.state.il.us.

12-16, Chicago Boat, RV & Outdoors Show, at McCormick Place, Chicago www.chicagoboatshow.com/.

13-16, All Canada Show at the Pheasant Run Resort Mega Center in St. Charles. 800-325-6290 or www.allcanadashow.com.

14-23, Alton Little Theater: Kindertransport in Alton. 618-462-3205.

15-2/26, The 2011 Bald Eagle Bus Tours in Galena. 815-594-2306 or www.eaglenature.com/#bustours.

18-31, 9 to 5 The Musical in Chicago. 312-922-2110 or www.broadwayinchicago.com.

20-3/31, Master Gardener Training at the Stephenson Co. Extension Office, Bldg. H in Freeport. 815-235-4125 or www.extension.uiuc.edu/stephenson.

21, Forever Plaid, a Barter Theatre production at Effingham Performance Center. 800-745-3000 or www.theEPC.org.

22, Swimmy, Frederick & Inch by Inch at University Park. 708-235-2222 or www.centertickets.net.

28-30, Snow Days, Chicago's Navy Pier. Visit www.snowdayschicago.us or call Mayor's Office of Special Events at 312-744-3315.



29, Junie B. Jones, a TheatreWorks USA production at Effingham Performance Center. 800-745-3000 or www.theEPC.org. Note: 60 minutes, for ages 5 - 11.

30, Opera UpClose at The Center - The Other 3 Tenors - Tribute to Mario Lanza in University Park. 708-235-2222 or www.centertickets.net.

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To be considered for inclusion, please submit events in the format used above. Preference is given to events sponsored by non-profit entities. Submitting an event is not a guarantee of publication. Photos are welcome, but will not be returned unless a self-addressed and stamped envelope is provided. Events are subject to change, so please contact the event sponsor for confirmation.

Deadline: December 15 for March Events. **Mail to:** Illinois Datebook, PO Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708. **E-mail to:** Lrigoni@aieccoop

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