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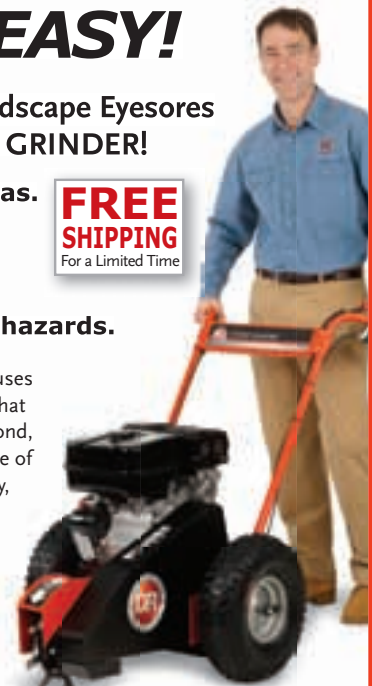
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10 OH, SO NATURAL

On the cover: Common Ground, a store managed by Jacqueline Hannah in Urbana, is an example of cooperative grocers taking root around the country.

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Connecting farmer to consumer, one pear at a time

Lt. Governor Simon says farmers' markets have room to grow

Every year my husband Perry and I garden at my family's home in Makanda, a town of less than 500 people in southern Illinois. Our garden is small, but we enjoy it in a big way.

This spring, we intend to plant sweet corn, tomatoes, potatoes and a variety of herbs. We also have the pleasure of deciding where to replant two peach trees that grew at the edge of our compost pile last year.

But a mainstay of our diet is pears, thanks to a pear tree we planted about 20 years ago. This means, at our house, it is all pears all the time! We eat them, freeze them and give them away. This year at Christmas we gave frozen pear sauce to a long list of friends and family.

The pear sauce isn't worth a lot of money, but it does offer something that's hard to find — a connection between food and the person growing it. Our state consumes nearly \$48 billion of food annually, but less than 5 percent of that food comes from Illinois. It travels an average of 1,500 miles to get to our tables, and those trips account for nearly 20 percent of its price.

As the only statewide elected official from Southern Illinois and the chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, I have been working to improve the connection between consumers and the farmers in their community — both personally and as an advocate for farmers' markets.

One way to accomplish this connection is by improving access to farmers' markets for low-income residents. These urban, suburban and rural residents often live in "food



deserts" with no access to fruits and vegetables, let alone locally grown produce.

I'm working with markets to reach these residents by finding affordable ways to install wireless debit card-style machines to accept food stamp benefits known as LINK. Not only does this introduce a new customer base to the markets, it improves the health of those who eat fresh food.

The promising news is that in the last couple of years more and more Illinois citizens receiving LINK have been able to redeem their benefits at farmers markets across the state. Last year, 49 farmers' markets and direct-marketing farmers in 20 counties redeemed nearly \$70,000 worth of LINK benefits. This is an increase of over 522 percent since 2009!

But we have a lot of room to grow. In Illinois, there are 75,000 farms that cover over 75 percent of the state — including my husband Perry's family farm in Randolph County. We can make better connections between these growers and the potential buyers here at home, as well as with the important markets in other states and abroad. The Governor's Rural Affairs Council will be conducting rural listening posts around the state this

spring, and we'd appreciate your input as we move ahead.

Mentioning Perry's family farm reminds me that it is almost time for us to continue one of his family's traditions out in Makanda. Each spring we plant our potatoes the way his family has for generations.

We cut up the seed potatoes so that each chunk has one eye, and then dip the chunks in ashes before we plant them. I think this adds potassium, but I get the feeling that this tradition dates back farther than scientific data would.

Unlike our pears, we only grow enough potatoes for home consumption. We prefer to dig up the spuds just before it's time to cook them. Sometimes we have our dinner guests help with the digging. We promise it will be fun, and any help in potato digging is welcome.

Our family traditions may not be replicable outside of our small garden, but the connection we have to the food we grow and share is something that more Illinois citizens should be able to experience.

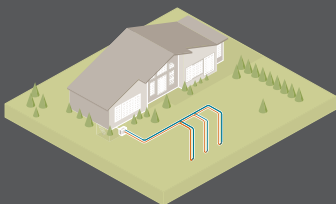
Making our food system more local and sustainable means better health and greater economic opportunity, but also an opportunity to bring communities closer together.

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Simon offers a lifetime and legacy of public service. She is a lawyer, teacher and working mother.



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NRECA offering teachers Mini-Grant Program

Ten teachers in rural parts of the U.S. will be the recipient of \$500 to be used during the 2012-2013 school year for student-based projects, offered through the Mini-Grant Program, sponsored by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Any rural teacher K-12 whose school or community is served by a rural electric cooperative, or whose students are served by a rural electric cooperative, may apply. All applications will be considered.

Criteria for awards will be based on the following:

- A project design that demonstrates cooperation between students;
- Appropriateness for age and grade levels;
- A project design that encourages a high level of student involvement;

- A project design that indicates coordination with your local Rural Electric Cooperative;
- A project design that focuses on student learning;
- Overall quality of the application and adherence to grant guidelines.

An eligible project should feature an investigation of the science of energy or electricity. Project ideas could include a study of the local geology, the history of hydroelectric generation in your community, or alternative sources of energy for the next generation. The project should be limited only by the imagination of your students and the resources you have available. Deadline is July 15.

For complete application/proposal instructions, please visit www.nrea.net ■

Green jobs for 700 weatherization specialists

Earlier this year the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) announced that capital funding will be given to 10 organizations who will train nearly 700 weatherization specialists across the

state. This is the first phase of a multiple-year green jobs initiative. For more information about this program please visit www.ildceo.net. ■

Water efficiency starts in the bathroom

Some 60 percent of our household indoor water usage happens in the bathroom. As such, updating old leaky fixtures and changing a few basic habits could go a long way toward saving fresh water, energy and money.

Undoubtedly, the toilet is the biggest water hog in the bathroom. Those made before 1993 use up to eight gallons of water per flush, five times what modern toilets use. If it's older you use a two liter soda bottle filling it partially with some water and sand or pebbles and then putting it into your toilet's tank, and force your toilet to use less water with every flush.

Plumbing leaks account for some 14 percent of the total water usage in an average U.S. home. Toilets are often a major culprit, but the shower can also be problematic as a water-waster, especially if the shower head in question was made before new regulations went into effect in 1992 mandating lower flow. A new shower head costs around \$10 and is a great investment. ■



Know when to replace carbon monoxide detectors

The Office of the State Fire Marshal warns everyone to pay special attention to the distinct signals sent by carbon monoxide alarms when their life has expired. Frequently, people may believe that a beep coming out of their CO alarm means it's time for a battery change, when in fact it means that the device needs to be replaced.

"It is extremely important to pay attention to the different beeps that come out of a dead CO alarm. We want to ensure that our residents understand the difference in order to take immediate action and prevent a tragedy," said State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis.

Carbon monoxide is the number one cause of poisoning deaths in the nation according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Because CO is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas, it can kill people before they realize its presence. It can be produced by gas or oil appliances such as furnaces, clothes dryers, water heaters, ovens, space heaters or, in some cases, by fireplaces and wood burning stoves.

For additional information go to www.sfm.illinois.gov. ■



Prairie Power, Inc. leaders keep eye on power portfolio risks in changing energy market

The members of Prairie Power, Inc. (PPI), a generation and transmission cooperative serving 10 central Illinois distribution cooperatives, held their Annual Meeting, Feb. 8 in Springfield. President and CEO Jay Bartlett said the generation and transmission cooperative (G&T), serving 10 Illinois distribution co-ops, is working hard to improve system reliability and manage rates, while building fiber optic infrastructure for smart grid communications and economic development, and investing in coal and wind energy.

Bartlett expressed optimism for the future of the co-op but also concern for the economy and energy markets. "U.S. debt, the European economy, all of these factors could lead to shocks without options. All of this is impacting energy markets and making risk-management key," said Bartlett.

ACES Power Marketing, owned by 19 member cooperatives including PPI, helps keep rates stable by managing power portfolio risks. David Tudor, President/CEO of ACES, told the members at the PPI meeting that transmission congestion would be a growing issue. Tudor told the members, "You are in a really good position. My advice is look for portfolio diversity and be patient."

PPI and Southern Illinois Power Cooperative (SIPC), along with co-ops and municipal utilities in other states have invested in Prairie State Energy Campus, which is ready to go online now. Both PPI and SIPC along with the Indiana G&T, Wabash Valley Power, have invested in the Pioneer Trail Wind Farm, a 150-megawatt wind farm in Ford County, Illinois. Diversified power portfolios along with the services of ACES Power Marketing, will help the co-ops manage power supply risk. ■



After Prairie Power, Inc.'s Annual Meeting Feb. 8, PPI Board President Jack Clark (right) and President and CEO Jay Bartlett talked to David Tudor, President and CEO of ACES Power Marketing about the changes in the power market and how the co-op owned G&T can manage its power supply risk.

April is Financial Literacy Month

Americans carry more than \$2 trillion in consumer debt, and 30 percent of consumers report having no extra cash, making it impossible to escape the burden of living paycheck to paycheck. Because too many Americans are insufficiently educated about their personal finances, April is devoted to helping everyone get a fresh start on taking control of their money. Go to the Money Management International website for more information.

Get out of debt one step at a time

Debt can feel like a load of bricks on your chest, slowly crushing you. You can't throw it off in one big shove - you've got to dismantle it brick by brick. Take these steps to reduce your debt burden and start breathing easily again:

- Figure out where you stand. Debt can seem overwhelming unless you cut it down to size. Make a list or spreadsheet of your creditors, and note how much you owe each one. You'll find it easier to deal with smaller sums of money one at a time.
- Set some priorities. Identify which debts need to be paid off, or at least paid down first. Pay attention to debts with the highest interest rate - they'll cost you more in the long run if you delay taking care of them.
- Cut back on spending. Select one spending item, such as buying new clothes or eating in restaurants, and eliminate it for a specific period of time. Use the money you save to pay down your debt. You'll start reestablishing smart spending habits at the same time.
- Get tough with credit cards. It may be impossible to cut up your credit cards these days, but make an effort to limit their use unless you have a real emergency. Make yourself wait at least 24 hours before buying anything; most of the time you'll realize that your "need" was really just an impulse that you can ignore.
- Start a plan for saving. Get into the habit of putting a little money away each week. Even a small amount will add up over time, giving you more flexibility and easing your anxiety about financial worries. ■

Congress likely to sign bill for 54.5 MPG

After years of wrangling on the issue, auto companies, regulators and policymakers have finally come to terms on increased Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards for vehicles traveling American roads. According to the plan, automakers will double the average, unadjusted fuel-economy rating of their car and light truck vehicle fleets to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025 from today's standard of 27 miles per gallon. Congress is likely to sign the new bill, which will start taking effect for the 2017 model year, into law this summer.

According to the White House, the higher standards will likely lead to price increases of some \$2,000 per vehicle to cover the costs of more expensive technology, but drivers should save an average of \$6,600 in gas over the life of a vehicle.

Critics point out that no one can be sure how much new technology will add to the cost of vehicles, let alone how



fluctuations in gas prices, consumer tastes and the overall economy could impact what types of cars people want to drive. While the new rules represent a gamble in regard to these variables, enough Americans see the benefits of more fuel-efficient vehicles outweighing the trade-offs. ■



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Oh, so natural

Cooperative grocers on growing spree

By Jonie Larson Gates



18-month-old Sawyer was comfortably perched and playing on a stack of organic bananas in a grocery store he regularly visits – a cooperative grocer that carries 80 percent organic produce, as much locally grown as it can get.

Sawyer and his mom, Alto Pass residents, visit Carbondale's Neighborhood Co-op Grocery every Wednesday. She said she started shopping at the store a couple years ago before Sawyer's birth.

"It's important to us for environmental reasons. But once he was born, it was about providing him with healthy and safe food. We love the co-op," she says of her family.

Francis Murphy, General Manager of the store, is happy about her choice and says some 2,700 area residents have become owners in the co-op. Each pays \$100 for one share to belong and shop at the store where as owners they receive regular discounts and quarterly specials. About 55 percent of the sales come through owners, another 45 percent are just people who choose to shop and shop.

Murphy is well-versed in what he does. He's been with the cooperative since its meager beginnings, which in turn resulted in its name. The co-op, like most, formed out of need. What wasn't available to some area neighbors through conventional grocery stores, led them on a buying quest.

It got its start in someone's living room in 1980 as people began to change their diets. According to Murphy, a network of neighbors, of which he was one, would gather and look through a food catalog of bulk items. If for instance, something came in a 50 lb. bag, each of the neighbors would agree to take five or 10 pounds of it. In essence it was a buying club.

Then once a month, utilizing the flatbed truck of then University Professor Lloyd Tucker, someone would make a trek to Wisconsin to pick up the goods. He says it was a relatively short trip there to get

what was needed, but he jests about the return trip.

"The truck would only go about 45 mph once it was loaded down," Murphy laughs. Consequently it took about 12 hours to get back to Carbondale. The food would then be dropped off in bulk at various homes and they would each share in dividing it up and distributing it to the other neighbors.

Eventually the buying club knew it was time to make the next step. So, they acquired a downtown location – "humble beginnings" as Murphy calls it. They built a counter out of available wood and had no cash register, unless you count Tucker. He was adept at adding up things in his head, so that sufficed. However, the store was only open when Tucker was available. The hours revolved around

his teaching schedule.

In 1990, the store took another leap when it incorporated as an Illinois not-for-profit entity, Murphy says.

"We acted as a co-op, but instead of equity shares, we asked members for \$3 to \$5 a year to belong." He says it wasn't long before they knew the not-for-profit status was a mistake. So, in 2003, the owners voted to convert to a cooperative – an owner equity system.

Murphy's cooperative food experience sets him up as an expert of sorts. From his beginnings as a cashier and board member of this cooperative, he worked his way through the ranks to co-manager. He then left to be manager of a Greensborough, N.C. cooperative in 1994, but returned to Neighborhood Co-op Grocery as general manager in 1998. He and a team of department managers, including a specialty chef, report to a board that operates through "Policy Governance" a system established by John Carver specifically for non-profits. Murphy said it clearly defines where board management ends and management begins.

In 2006, the grocery moved to



Francis Murphy, General Manager of Neighborhood Co-op Grocery, dips into the bulk foods section of the store in Carbondale.



its current location at 1815 W. Main Street, Carbondale, and made improvements to the tune of \$1.5 million. Murphy walks the 7,300 square feet of retail space and points out the enhancements. There are 48 linear feet in the bulk department, and portions of the store are devoted to packaged groceries, dairy, meat, produce, supplements and body care. Then there's the well-supported deli, cheese and bakery, which combined make up 17 percent of the sales. The unique foods are prepared in a full in-house kitchen by "a really capable chef" as Murphy says. The chef came to the cooperative from southern California where he served as chef for Ocean Beach People Organic Food Co-op.

"He gives us a cuisine you wouldn't normally find in the Midwest." It's easy to recognize when peering into the showcase. Some of the chilled staples include Scarlet Quinoa, Wild Rice Tofu Salad, Lebanese Salad, Nutty Raisin Millet Salad and probably a dozen more.

Over in the ready-to-eat warm section, on this mid-winter Wednesday, the chef was serving up a tasty East Indian Chicken dish. Those stopping in for a quick bite can find readily-prepared sandwiches named for some of the top names in the music industry. Shoppers can grab a Mick Jagger, a Stevie Nicks or a Sam Bush and be on their way.

The newest addition in the grocery is the 12-foot beer cooler and 24 linear feet of wine. The department, installed last October, offers a variety of craft beers. Murphy says the regional micro-breweries are seeing about 20 percent growth per year, compared to the national brands, which continue to experience decreases.

"In relatively small batches, you can put a lot of quality and skill into the end product." He also touts what he calls an "incredible" hotbed of southern Illinois winery growth. The whole department has been received well, he says.

Part of Murphy's job is determining what the store will carry. He says it's a team effort on a regular basis, but that the National Cooperative Grocers

While there are more healthy options and corporate stores than their used to be, the co-ops are defining paths of their own.

Association (NCGA), of which the store is a member, is a great resource. And if it's not on the shelves, members can request special orders at any time.

While the Carbondale cooperative grocery is a model of sorts, it's certainly not alone. In fact, several other established cooperative grocery stores exist and others are forming by the month. Urbana is home to Common Ground, a store managed by Jacqueline Hannah, who has been

mentored by Murphy. She has served in that capacity for five years, starting out in natural foods as a teenager.

"Their goals were so much higher than profit," Hannah says of Common Ground. "I get to run a business and help people to see value of community." Like Neighborhood, Common Ground is community owned, with owners paying a \$60 one-time fee. Common Ground serves about 3,700 individual consumers annually. It was started in 1974 in a church basement. In 2006 it moved to its current location at 300 S. Broadway Suite 166, and is working on a major expansion.

Common Ground is seeing financial gains, with sales up 34 percent in 2011, greater than the reported 8- to 12 percent national growth of food cooperatives, Hannah says.

The overall growth of food cooperatives in the nation is picking up speed. Murphy says it's the biggest boon since the '70s when most food co-ops came into existence. He notes the growth of co-ops with a jest. He recalls in the 1990s when suddenly the stores got big enough to get the attention of the corporate grocers. Suddenly, he says, an industry where shorts and Birkenstocks were the most common attire, found itself in a sea of suits as the mainstream grocers started looking for ways to boost their sales of natural products.

While there are more healthy options and corporate stores than their used to be, the co-ops are defining paths of their own.

Both Hannah and Murphy are excited about the opportunities they have to work with local farmers, "locally" defined as producers within 100 miles. Hannah says her store is currently working with about 40 producers.

Murphy says nearly 90 percent of fresh produce in markets comes from California. However, the summer offers the opportunity to connect with area farmers. Murphy says about this time of the year, the produce manager begins making contact with farmers

to see what they'll be growing and selling. Neighborhood works with 30 to 50 farmers annually, helping them coordinate what they grow, "so we can maximize what we buy from them." He says they are trying to establish strategies to move produce farmers to grow organic.

According to Murphy, the numbers of cooperative grocery stores opening in the United States is trending between 10 and 12 each year.

"It's quite an exciting time ... a real resurgence."

The obvious concern might be competition from large chains and the survival rate of cooperative food grocers if the larger stores become more successful. Murphy, his board and others in the nation have calculated those risks.

"The co-ops have done a nice job of repositioning themselves. As a group, we've been able to negotiate contracts," he says.

And 10 years down the road?

"The existing co-ops are getting smarter and more sophisticated," he says and then offers a comparison. "The grocery giants are not very nimble ... they're like giant ocean liners," he says, noting that he doesn't believe their level of commitment is quite as high. General demand and trends steer their choices, he suggests.

At least at Neighborhood, the nine-member board is planning for 2014 and 2020. While in 2011, Neighborhood sold \$300,000 in locally grown meat, produce and eggs, that number is expected to increase.

Some short-term goals include establishing a satellite area at the university to give college students "better eating options," he says. The feasibility for that to occur is taking shape. He says the co-op is also exploring something similar at the hospital.

Longer-term, the Carbondale co-op would like to own an organic farm on which to grow more produce and also use as an education site.

In the meantime, both

Neighborhood and Common Ground offer up classes and are making their presence known in their respective communities.

This year being the International Year of the Cooperative has both making public appearances – in some cases combining their efforts with rural electric cooperatives. Common Ground will have a presence this year at Eastern Illini's Annual Meeting in Paxton. In Carbondale, Egyptian Electric Cooperative, along with the Credit Union and Neighborhood Co-op Grocery asked the City of Carbondale to distinguish the year with a proclamation for its city and it was granted.

Trisha Wright, recent Board Member of Neighborhood, said she likes to see various cooperatives working together.

"One of the main values (among cooperatives) is cooperatives helping cooperatives," Wright says, noting she is "passionate about seeing a greater sense of teamwork between consumer, utility and farmer-owned cooperatives." ■

For additional information on either of these cooperatives:

Common Ground
Phone: 217-352-3347
info@commonground.coop

Neighborhood Co-op Grocery
Phone: 618-529-3533
info@neighborhood.coop

Find the nearest food co-op

Illinois cities, predominantly college towns, are in discussion to spearhead cooperative grocery stores. **Several already exist, including but not limited to:**

- Duck Soup, DeKalb
- West Central Illinois Food Cooperative, Galesburg

Towns where groups are forming, including but not limited to:

- Macomb
- Bloomington
- Peoria

To learn more about statewide existing cooperatives and those forming, please check out the Illinois Country Living website for phone numbers and links. Also, read about various grants available to assist cooperatives. www.icl.coop



Home Safe Home

Prevention is still the best approach

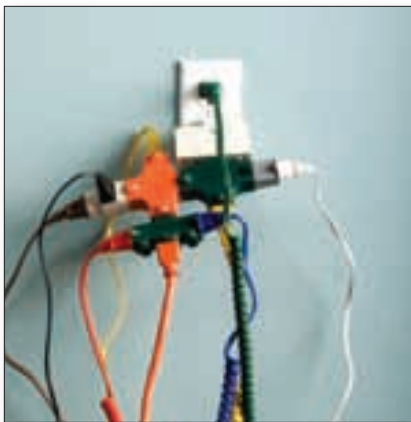
Electric energy use is typically on the rise during warmer weather, so as part of the new “Teach Learn Care” TLC campaign, Safe Electricity suggests “there is no time like the present” to conduct an electrical home inspection. The program encourages everyone to make sure your home is safe from electrical hazards to prevent electrical-related deaths, injuries and property damage.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), faulty home electrical wiring is responsible for 40,000 fires a year and results in the loss of 350 lives, thousands of injuries from electrical shocks and burns and more than \$2 billion in personal property damage. It’s estimated that more than 50 million homes and buildings have outdated or inadequate electrical wiring.

“Electrical hazards have a tendency to remain hidden until it’s too late to avoid disaster. Don’t let the small cost of prevention stand in the way of protecting your family and your property,” says Mike Ashenfelter, Sangamon County Electrical Inspector. “There are many things you can inspect on your own to ensure electrical safety in your home.”

Check electrical outlets for loose fitting plugs that can shock or be a fire hazard. Replace missing or broken wall plates so that the inner wiring components are not exposed. If you have young children, make sure safety covers are used on unused outlets and outlets are not overloaded with too many appliance plugs. Consider installing tamper-resistant receptacles which have a built-in shutter system which prevents hairpins and other small objects from being inserted into the outlet.

Check the cords of the appliances in your home as well as the plugs and



connectors. Make sure they are not frayed, cracked or damaged, placed under rugs or carpets, resting on furniture, or located in high traffic areas. Do not nail or staple cords to walls, floors or any other objects.

Extension cords should be used on a temporary basis only because they are not intended for use as permanent household wiring. Have additional outlets installed where you need them instead of relying on extension cords and power strips. If you are using extension cords, make sure they have safety closures to protect young children from shock hazards or mouth burn injuries. Never use an indoor extension cord for outdoor use. Use an extension cord specifically for outdoors; they are heavier and less likely to be damaged.

Check your electrical panel to make sure the breakers and fuses are properly rated for the circuit they are protecting. If you do not know what the correct rating is, have a qualified electrician identify and label the correct size to be used. If you are replacing a fuse, make sure you replace it with the same size as the one you are removing.

Check light bulbs and appliances to make sure the wattage matches fixture requirements. Make sure not

to replace bulbs with those that have higher wattage than recommended. Additionally, the bulb should be screwed in securely to prevent overheating.

If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker or gives you an electrical shock, immediately unplug, repair or replace it.

Check for or install ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). A GFCI is an inexpensive electrical device that shuts off power instantly if there is a problem and should be installed in all “wet” areas of the home such as bathrooms, kitchens, and basements. GFCIs should be tested monthly to insure they are working properly. It’s estimated that more than two-thirds of the roughly 300 electrocutions occurring each year in and around the home could be prevented if GFCIs were installed in household branch circuits.

Consider installing arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs) on bedroom circuits, smoke detectors in all bedrooms and in hallways within 15 feet of bedrooms, and at least one smoke detector on every level. Carbon monoxide detectors should also be within 15 feet of each bedroom unit. As always, check with your local electrical inspector if you have questions or concerns.

Inspect all outdoor connections, appliances and tools for frayed cords, broken plugs and cracked or broken housings. ■

Molly Hall is Director of Safe Electricity. E-mail molly-hall@SafeElectricity.org. Safe Electricity is a public awareness program of the Energy Education Council. www.EnergyEdCouncil.org



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Embracing a phrase with fervor

Why 'low-input' may be good for you and the environment

Every now and then, buzz words or phrases come along. A current one is “low-input.”

It's an idea of not putting much time and/or money into something, but still enjoying success. It may mean substituting chemical use for a little physical labor, though some will say “low-input” means less labor as well.

The two-word phrase is often used as an adjective in front of several gardening practices such as vegetable gardening, fruit raising, flower care or turfgrass maintenance.

Low-input is also used in front of other agricultural pursuits such as livestock farming and row crop production.

From a horticulture perspective, there is nothing wrong with “low-input.” It seems like just the sort of thing everyone would like and embrace. Who wouldn't want more time on their hands to read a book, paint or play with kids and grandkids. And if you save money at the same time, that's a double whammy.

However, with “low-input” comes a change in mentality, which in itself may not be a bad idea.

That change in mindset usually is dealing with perfection.

As a culture, we've come to embrace perfection. Right or wrong, we look for that perfect apple at the supermarket, shunning the fruit with a blemish or two.

Yet, how many remember going out to the gnarled apple tree in the pasture, pulling down a branch and grabbing a less-than-perfect apple? We remember the joke “What's worse than finding a worm in an apple?” and eat around any damage we might find. Then we threw the core on the ground or pitched it into the nearby field.

These days we look for those tomatoes or peppers that are pure



red or green. Produce has to be large and hefty so we feel we're getting our money's worth.

The use of chemicals and intense production practices has yielded top quality, world-envious produce. Gone are the days when we would cut the bad away and use the good.

Gone are also the days when we would realize that if it all ended up as applesauce, what was the need for the perfect fruit. Blemishes can be removed with a sharp cut of a knife without throwing the whole fruit or vegetable away.

Low-input still may produce top quality produce, but it may not. However, low-input doesn't just apply to produce.

Years ago, many of us were happy with a lawn filled with dandelion and crabgrass. Growing up on a farm, I remember folks saying that at least the weeds were green during the summer and who could tell at 50 miles per hour, though it's more like 70 miles an hour down the rural roads these days.

Low-input gardening takes us back to those days.

We have to accept that a few dandelions don't spell the end of the earth. We get out the dandelion fork

if we're not happy. We fence in the yard and allow sheep to roam, though that may be difficult in some urban areas.

Low-input gardening may take some practices such as layer after layer of mulches or saving manures for fertilizer and using them instead of weedkillers or man-made fertilizer. Call it garden recycling.

You may think “Hey, I've been doing low-input gardening my whole life.” In many cases, you probably have. It's possible you're looking at a new fancy term that is nothing more than a common sense approach to gardening.

This isn't to denigrate the phrase. Anything that can cut our dependence on man-made chemicals is bound to be good not just for our gardens but the environment. ■

David Robson is Extension Specialist, Pesticide Safety for the University of Illinois. drobson@illinois.edu



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The truth about heat pumps

A cost-effective way to staying warmer

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about heat pumps. I know this for a fact because I regularly receive calls about them. Those calls are either about comfort or high utility bills. Write this down. A properly-sized and properly-installed heat pump system, including ductwork, will provide total affordable comfort. I have performed energy analyses on 100s of house plans and have recommended that heat pumps be used for every single one of them. I have not recommended a gas furnace for a new house in more than 20 years. And, to the best of my knowledge, I do not have a single dissatisfied customer. My mother would say that the proof is in the pudding. And yes, before you even ask, many of them are in northern states. So why would some folks be unhappy with their heat pumps?

There are two types of heat pumps: 1) The air-to-air heat pump that has an outdoor unit and 2) the water-to-air geothermal heat pump that has no outdoor unit. While both types are excellent systems, the geothermal is my No. 1 choice for most houses. Be aware that a heat pump is special only in the heating mode. In the cooling mode it is just electric cooling like other air conditioning units. It is special in the heating mode because it provides heat at a high efficiency. An air-to-air heat pump uses one unit of electricity but gives 2.5 units of heat. That's why we say that it is 250 percent efficient.

A geothermal system can provide heat at 400 percent efficiency. Most gas furnaces are rated at 80 percent efficiency. I always ask folks if they want 80 percent or 400 percent efficiency. My wife and I chose 400 percent more than 18 years ago and she will tell you that I am careful with our money. In either case, a heat pump can nearly always provide heat for less money



than a gas furnace. Well, if this is true, why would anyone choose not to use a heat pump? It is very simple. It is called "Horror Stories of the Past." In the last 30 years, I have heard them all. Let me see if I can teach this two-week course in two paragraphs.

1. If the ductwork design and installation are correct, the air-to-air heat pump can provide air that is about 20 degrees warmer than the room temperature. If cool 67-degree air goes into the heat pump, 87-degree air will come out. If a room is 87 degrees, it would be plenty warm; but 87-degree air blowing across your skin feels cool. Blow real hard on your hand. That is about 93-degree air, but even that feels cool. However, if you could blow enough 93-degree air into the room, the room would soon be too hot to enjoy. So 93-degree air is hot but it can feel cool if it is quickly moved across your skin. Now, let's simply turn the thermostat up to 73 degrees. Now it is 73-degree air into the heat pump and 93-degree air into the room. Now say "aaahhh" very slowly on your hand. Wow, it is nice and warm.

The supply air temperature supplied by a geothermal heat pump

will be about 30 degrees warmer than the air going into the unit. If the thermostat is set on 73 degrees, the air going into the room will be about 103 degrees. Well hot diggity dog. That's even better ... and cheaper too.

2. You are already thinking that it will cost you more if you turn the thermostat to a higher setting and you are right. But it probably isn't nearly as much as you might think. It is estimated by some that it will cost about 2.5 percent more for each degree that you raise the thermostat setting. Let's just say that it takes \$75 average per month to heat a particular house. If you raise the thermostat from 68 degrees to 73 degrees, which is cool to warm, you might increase the heating cost by \$9.38 per month. For the cost of a pizza, you can now be warm and comfortable for the whole month. **REMEMBER, IF YOU TURN THE THERMOSTAT UP 3 DEGREES OR MORE AT ONCE, THE HEAT STRIPS MAY COME ON AND THE UTILITY BILL WILL BE HIGHER.**

By next month you will have totally forgotten about winter but you will have the same concerns about comfort and utility bills. Therefore, I know that you will jump for joy to know that I have one more article to write on this subject and it will include cooling. See you in May. ■

Doug Rye can be heard on several different Illinois radio stations. You can go to Doug Rye's Web site at www.dougrye.com, e-mail him at info@philliprye.com, or call 501-653-7931.





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The Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives salutes ...

Cooperatives in Illinois that provide telecommunication - ITCA

Just as the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 brought power and lights to rural homes, an amendment in 1949 was passed “to assure the availability of adequate telephone service” bridging the way for rural families and friends to hear one another across lines for the very first time. Of course a lot of work ensued to make that happen.

While cities and towns had already established those lines, in the early 1950s, eight telephone cooperatives were formed to provide modern, dependable service to approximately 25,906 access lines in all or parts of 25 Illinois counties. Those eight make up the Illinois Telephone Cooperative Association (ITCA).

Today’s challenges for telephone cooperatives mirror in number many of the obstacles faced in those early days. With landline telephones giving way to cell phones and the need for fast computer connections growing every day, telephone cooperatives are making a fundamental shift in operations to become true telecommunications providers.

Restructuring the backbone of the operation is costly and funds are limited. What was once communication by copper line, which uses sound waves to transmit, is slowly being replaced by fiber optic (transmission by light) lines and towers in order to enhance speed of service.

The fundamental shift is vital to keeping cooperatives viable. Bill Buchanan of

McDonough Telephone in Colchester speaks to the changes.

“Our world has changed significantly in the past few years. With those changes, the rural telecommunications cooperatives have changed too. We are now full service companies that not only connect folks by voice, but also through broadband and video,” Buchanan says.

“Our investments in fiber networks give rural consumers the speed and quality they need to live and work in any community. We are committed to continuing to evolve to meet our members needs for a broadband future.”

The cooperatives represented in the ITCA include: Adams Telephone Co-Operative, golden; Egyptian Telephone Cooperative Association, Steelville; Flat Rock Telephone Co-Op, Inc., Flat Rock; Hamilton County Telephone Co-op., Dahlgren; McDonough Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Colchester; Mid Century Telephone Co-operative, Fairview; Oneida Telephone Exchange, Oneida and Wabash Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Louisville.

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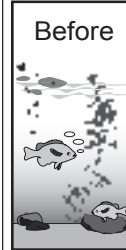


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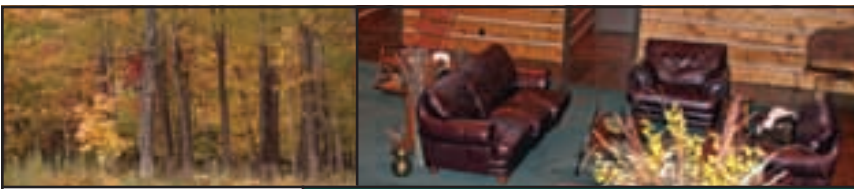
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Guacamole

Guacamole (above)

4 Haas Avocados, ripe
1/4 red onion, finely chopped
1/2 C. cilantro, chopped fine
6 T. fresh lime juice

2 tsp. kosher salt
1 jalapeno, seeded and finely chopped
Garlic salt, to taste

Cut avocados in half and remove pits, and keep one. Scoop out avocados with a spoon into a medium bowl; mash. Add onions, cilantro, lime juice, salt jalapeno and garlic salt. Press reserved pit into the guacamole to keep it from browning. Serve with tortilla chips.

Chicken and Wild Rice Casserole

2 C. chicken, cooked and chopped
2 C. French green beans, drained
1 can cream of celery soup
1 C. mayonnaise

1 sm. chopped yellow onion
1 box Uncle Ben's original wild rice,
prepared as indicated on box

Mix chicken, green beans, soup, mayonnaise, onion and rice together. Pour into a casserole dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Family-Pleasing Sloppy Joes



Presbyterian Possibilities

Who: First Presbyterian Church of Carthage, IL

Cost: \$14, including shipping

Details: soft-backed, spiral-bound

Pages of recipes: 168

Send checks to: Diana Belknap,
2225 E. Co. Rd. 1200, Carthage, IL 62321
or call 217-357-2545

Calzones

1 tube refrigerated pizza crust
1/2 C. Ricotta cheese
2-oz. sliced pepperoni
1 C. cooked ham, diced
1 C. Mozzarella cheese, shredded
Optional: small amount of basil
and Parmesan cheese
Marinara sauce

Unroll pizza crust, stretching into a 14x11-inch rectangle. Spread Ricotta cheese on half of the dough lengthwise to within 1-inch of edge. Sprinkle pepperoni, ham and Mozzarella cheese. Fold unfilled side of dough over filled half and press edges together. Transfer to greased baking sheet. Bake at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes. Sprinkle with basil and Parmesan cheese, if desired. Slice, serve with marinara sauce for dipping.

Family-Pleasing Sloppy Joes (below)

2 lbs. ground beef
1 lg. yellow onion, chopped
1-1/4 C. ketchup
1/2 C. water
1 T. brown sugar
1 T. white vinegar
1/2 tsp. chili powder
Buns

Cook beef and onion over medium heat until meat is no longer pink; drain. Add ketchup, water, brown sugar, vinegar, salt and chili powder. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 30 minutes or longer. Serve over toasted buns.

Photos by Catrina McCulley Wagner

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



Creole Jambalaya

Creole Jambalaya (above)

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 T. butter | 1 lb. smoked sausage, sliced |
| 2 lg. yellow onion, chopped | 1 (8-oz.) can tomato sauce |
| 1 green pepper, chopped | 1/2 tsp. salt |
| 8 green onions, chopped | 1/2 tsp. black pepper |
| 2 ribs celery, chopped | 1/4 tsp. red pepper |
| 3 C. cooked ham, cubed | 5 C. rice, cooked |

Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion, pepper, green onions and celery, saute until tender. Add ham, sausage, tomato sauce and spices. Cook, stirring occasionally for 20 minutes. Stir in rice, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes over low heat.

Oreo Ice Cream Cake (below)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 30 Oreo cookies, crushed, reserving
1/2 C. for top | 1 (14-oz.) can sweetened condensed
milk |
| 1/4 C. melted butter | 1/2 gal. vanilla or cookies and cream
ice cream |
| 1 (16-oz.) can chocolate syrup | 1 lg. ctn. Cool Whip |
| 1 stick butter | |

Combine Oreos (except for reserved) and 1/4 C. melted butter together. Press in the bottom of a 9x13 inch casserole dish. Freeze. Take ice cream out of freezer to soften. Melt chocolate syrup, 1 stick butter and condensed milk in a pan. Bring to a boil and cool. Spread ice cream over cookie crust. Freeze for 2-3 hours. Pour chocolate mixture over ice cream layer. Freeze until firm. Spread Cool Whip over the chocolate layer and sprinkle with reserved cookies. Freeze until firm. Serve.

Oreo Ice Cream Cake



If You Can't Stand The Heat...

Who: Pleasant Hill 4th of July Committee and Fire Department

Cost: \$13 including shipping

Details: soft-backed, comb-bound

Pages of recipes: 72

Send checks to: Jessica Vetter,
RR1 Box 169, Hamburg, IL 62045
or call 618-232-1447

Beef Noodle Casserole

- 1/2 (8-oz.) dumpling egg noodles, uncooked
- 1 lb. hamburger
- 1/2 C. red or green pepper, chopped
- 1/2 C. onion, chopped
- 1 (10-oz.) pkg. frozen peas and carrots
- 1-1/2 C. milk
- 1 (8-oz.) ctn. sour cream
- 1 C. Cheddar cheese, shredded

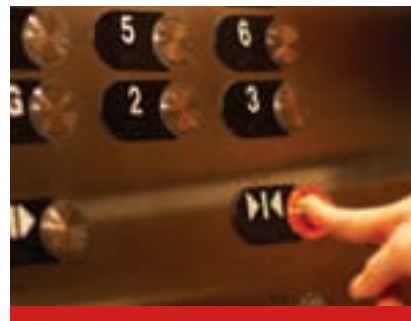
Cook noodles according to package directions. In a skillet, over medium heat, brown hamburger; drain. Add pepper and onion, cook until tender. Stir in noodles, vegetables, milk and sour cream. Cook and stir until heated through; top with cheese. Serve immediately. Can be served with a can of sliced water chestnuts, drained for more crunch.

Cream Cheese Quiche

- 1/2 (15-oz.) pkg. pie crust, refrigerated
- 1 T. butter
- 1/4 C. yellow onion, chopped
- 1 (8-oz.) pkg. cream cheese, cubed
- 3/4 C. milk
- 4 lg. eggs
- 1 C. ham, finely chopped
- 1 (2-oz.) jar pimiento, drained
- 1/4 T. dry Dillweed
- 1/8 tsp. pepper

Fit pie crust into a 9-inch quiche dish. Prick bottom and sides with a fork. Bake crust at 450 degrees for 12 minutes. Set aside. Melt butter in a small pan over medium heat, add onion and saute until tender. Add cream cheese and milk. Cook on low, whisking until cheese melts. In a separate bowl, whisk eggs, gently. Gradually add 1/4 of hot mixture into eggs to temper, then add egg mixture into the hot mixture, whisking constantly. Add in ham and remaining ingredients. Pour into prepared crust. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

'Hacking' real life



Let me start this month's column by saying, "Thank you!" to all those who continue to write in about their concerns and difficulties with finding recycling centers. I do appreciate your comments, and I do my best to forward them on to other interested parties. That said; let's move on to a new topic: how to hack real life!

Now, some of you may be wondering what exactly that means. How in the world can you "hack" real life? In a nutshell, hacking in this sense is just a way to customize and/or alter a situation, item or difficulty to make circumstances a little easier. So, here are some examples of ways in which you can hack your environment.

The flash freeze hack

Spring is here and your garden is well underway, but now you have more fruits and vegetables than you can ever eat! After you've cooked what you want, and given away all that you can, what can you do with the remainder? Here's a tip for preserving the fruits of your labor: flash freeze your produce yourself right at home! The process does take a bit of upfront time, but you'll love how easy it makes cooking later. You'll need a few things:

1. A cookie sheet that will fit into your freezer
2. Some zip lock bags
3. A Sharpie, or other marker

Ok, to start the process you will need to stop the ripening process. There are enzymes in vegetables that

cause them to ripen. An easy way to stop that process is to blanch the vegetables. (For a detailed list of blanching techniques and times, visit <http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=GHI503>). After you're done blanching your vegetables, cut them up and lay them out on your cookie sheet in a single layer. Then take a paper towel and pat them dry.

Once they're mostly dry, place the cookie sheet in the freezer for a few minutes. The leftover water will speed the freezing process and cause your veggies to flash freeze! You can then sort them into your individual bags, mark them with the date and keep them in your freezer as ready-made packages for cooking later.

The cell phone vibration hack

If you're like me, you charge your cell phone on your night stand while you sleep. Even with the phone on vibrate, the noise of an incoming e-mail/text/call can be quite startling in a really quiet room. So, aside from turning the phone off (which is probably the best idea, I admit), what can you do to quiet down the vibration?

Here's a tip - try putting a rubber band (or two) around the phone. The rubber will absorb the vibration causing less to transfer to the wood surface. You can also try setting your phone on an old mouse pad, or any other material that will act as a buffer. If you experience a similar problem on your desk at work, these tips work great there as well!

The elevator hack

Have you ever been in a hurry to get to your floor, but the 3 year-old you're sharing the elevator with has pushed all the buttons? Rather than visiting every single one of your hotel's 49 floors before reaching your room on the 50th floor, you can employ this simple little hack.

To skip to your floor, once the doors open simply press and hold the close door button while simultaneously pressing your floor. Most elevators will then skip the other floors and move straight to your desired location.

Do you have a tip for 'hacking' real life that you want to share with your neighbors? Send it to me, along with the name of your cooperative and your own name, and you may see it in a future issue. You can also mail them in if you like! The address is located just inside the cover.

Ed VanHoose is the Digital Communications Administrator/IT Manager for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in Springfield.



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80 gallon upright 2 stage air compressor, Ingersoll Rand, Type 30 Pro 4000, 5HP 220 Volt. 618-539-5357.

White aluminum overhead garage door, like new, 10-foot wide and 9 foot high, with low slung track. Can be made lower. 618-539-5357.

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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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Wellness resolutions check

How are you doing on your New Year's commitments?

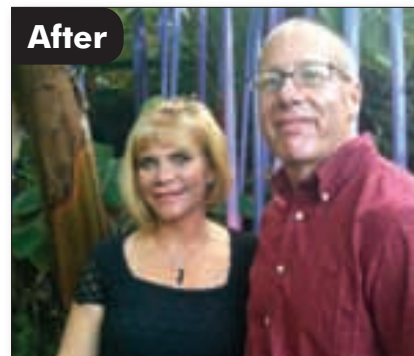
As we approach the end of the first quarter of 2012, have you taken a look at your health and wellness resolutions? You know, the ones you made in January: eat healthier, have better portion control, lose weight, prune your schedule, get in shape and exercise regularly. Any of those sound familiar?

One of the main resolutions that we typically make in the first quarter is to eat healthier. The National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association (NRECA) launched the Eat SMART (Simple Methods to Achieve Results Together) program in January. I have the privilege of leading that effort at your statewide association. I was asked partially because my husband, Mike, and I have incorporated a healthier lifestyle. We've "been there, done that." We eat more salads, less junk food. We drink more water, less soda. We exercise regularly. Mike has lost 80-plus pounds in the last three years and has kept it off. I have lost 30-plus pounds in the last two years and have kept it off. Easy? No way! Worth it? You bet!

Each of us had our own reasons for making changes. Mike is a physical education teacher and high school basketball coach, teaching his students



and players the importance of being healthy and fit. Yet, he was overweight, always tired and taking three blood pressure pills daily, and he had issues with sugar. Diabetes runs in his family. Plus, he did little-to-no exercise. It was an eye-opener when the doctor said to him, "You know what to do, Mike. You teach it to your students, you're setting the example." Ouch! That was all it took – the realization that he wasn't practicing what he preached, so-to-speak. He changed his eating habits, drastically cutting out fast foods and refined sugars, ate more salads and veggies and began going to the gym. Not surprising, he began to feel better, gain energy and lose weight. Now he only takes one blood pressure pill. Some things can be chalked up to heredity.



My issues included feeling tired all the time, no energy, headaches, grumpy and yes, a bit of vanity. My clothes didn't fit, and I refused to go to the next size. Anyone else have those issues? I had been at my heaviest and I'm only 5'2". I kept saying, "I'm not overweight, I'm under-tall." But who was I kidding? Mike inspired me to make changes – better food choices/exercise. It worked. I am about seven pant sizes smaller and overall, I simply feel better.

Lisa Rigoni is the Advertising Manager for Illinois Country Living and is a communications specialist and business development leader for the AIEC, ICL and Cooperative Design & Print. You can reach her at: lrigoni@aiec.coop.

As part of NRECA's Eat SMART program we are looking at the plans put together by the Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services. One of the main tools is www.choosemyplate.com, where you can learn more about healthy dietary guidelines.

Topics include:

- ✦ Making informed food choices
- ✦ Being physically active

The "healthy diet":

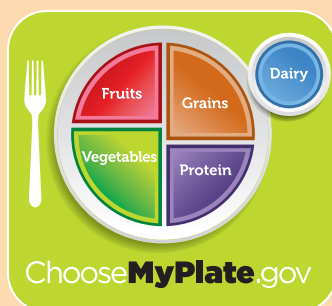
- ✦ Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- ✦ Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts
- ✦ Is low in saturated fats, trans fats,

cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars

- ✦ Shows you how to make smart choices from every food group

Suggestions:

- ✦ Find balance between food and physical activity
- ✦ Get the most nutrition out of calories
- ✦ Stay within daily calorie needs



The website will show you ways to adjust your lifestyle to best meet your health and wellness needs. Your changes can start out small. **NOTE:** As always, be sure and check with your physician before starting any new food or exercise plan. Your doctor knows your health issues best, and should be consulted.

Know how to stay safe *after* storms



Severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, and flooding can leave more than damage in their wake — they can leave hidden dangers as well. In some cases, more lives are lost after the storm than from the storm itself.

“When you’re dealing with storm cleanup or flood-damaged property, the prospect of an electrical accident is probably not top of mind,” says Safe Electricity’s Molly Hall. “But it’s the first thing you should think of before you go outside, step foot into a flooded area, or enter a storm-damaged building.”

When outside, stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard. Treat all downed or hanging power lines as if they are energized. Lines do not have to be arcing or sparking to be live. Warn others to stay away, and contact your cooperative.

Do not touch downed power lines, and do not touch objects or puddles of water in contact with those lines. There is no way to know if they are energized. Encountering these objects can be as hazardous as coming into contact with a downed power line itself.

As part of its “Teach Learn Care TLC” campaign, Safe Electricity urges parents and other caregivers to make sure children are aware of these hazards as well.

Safe Electricity offers other precautions following storms:

- If you are driving and come upon a downed power line, stay in your vehicle, warn others to stay away, and contact emergency personnel or

your cooperative. Never drive over a downed line, as it could pull down poles and other items along its path.

- Be alert at intersections where traffic lights may be out. Stop at all railroad crossings, and treat road intersections with traffic signals as four-way stops before proceeding with caution.
- Before re-entering storm-damaged buildings or rooms, be sure all electric and gas services are turned off. Never attempt to turn off power at the breaker box if you must stand in water to do so. If you cannot reach your breaker box safely, call your cooperative to shut off power at the meter.
- Never step into a flooded basement or other area if water is covering electrical outlets, appliances, or cords. Be alert to any electrical equipment that could be energized and in contact with water. Never touch electrical appliances, cords, or wires while you are wet or standing in water.
- Keep electric tools and equipment at least 10 feet away from wet



Storms leave a variety of safety hazards behind them—from downed power lines to fragile buildings. Be aware of your surroundings as you re-enter your home or property after a storm.

Source: Safe Electricity

If a storm brings down trees (above), it can also bring down power lines. Treat every downed power line as though it were still carrying electricity—you won't be able to tell if it's live.

Source: Safe Electricity

surfaces. Do not use electric yard tools if it is raining or the ground is wet.

- Electric motors in appliances that have been drenched or submerged should be thoroughly cleaned and reconditioned before they are put back into service. It may be necessary to replace them. Do not use any water-damaged appliance until a professional has checked it out.
- If, after a storm or disaster, the power to your home is out for a prolonged period, know important safety rules, such as never using a charcoal or gas grill to cook inside.
- If you use a portable generator, be sure a transfer safety switch has been installed, or connect appliances directly to the generator. This prevents electricity from traveling back through the home to power lines — what is known as “back-feed.” Backfeed creates danger for anyone near lines, particularly crews working to restore power. ■

Destructive Illinois tornado claims lives

Residents of Harrisburg and surrounding communities continue to piece their lives back together after a devastating tornado tore through the area in the early morning hours of Feb. 29.

Seven people died as a result of the storm, many others were injured and multiples homes destroyed along with businesses and landmark buildings.

The tornado's Enhanced Fujita Scale rating of EF-4 affected areas of Southeastern Illinois Electric Cooperative's (SIEC) territory outside the Harrisburg area. Around

4,200 SIEC members lost power, but it was restored within 24 hours according to personnel at SIEC.

An employee at SIEC and his wife were displaced from their home as a result of the tornado. As Greg and Lisa Thomas were seeking shelter in the lower level of the home, the roof was torn from the structure. Neither was injured.

Saint Joseph's Catholic Church in the town of Ridgway was also dismantled by the storm. A number of SIEC employees attend the large church and are involved in cleanup.

Education is the first step to being prepared

Answers to a list of frequently asked questions to problems occurring after a storm are posted on our website: www.icl.coop
Print and study them with children, friends and family.

- 1 Annual Iris Walk**, Wayne City. 618-895-2012. Continues through May 31.
- 1 Blessing of the Bikes**, Bald Knob Cross, Alto Pass. 618-893-2344.
- 4 Western United Cherokee Cultural Meeting**, Vienna Public Library. 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. 618-922-3273.
- 4 Cedarhurst School of Performing Arts presents Tales of Shimmering Sky** at Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, Mt. Vernon. 618-242-1236 or www.cedarhurst.org
- 4-6 Long Grove Chocolate Fest**, Long Grove. 847-634-0888 or longgroveonline.com
- 4 Carbondale Community Friday Night Fair**, Carbondale Town Square Pavilion, Carbondale. Live music. Continues every Friday, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. through Sept. 28. www.fairsandfestivals.net
- 4-5 Friends of the Mount Carroll Public Library Quilt Show**, Mount Carroll Church of God, Mount Carroll. 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. 800-244-9594.
- 4-5 Dutch Days Festival**, Fulton. www.cityoffulton.us
- 5 Evaluation of the Illinois Prairies 1815-1840**, Dixon Historic Center, Dixon. 815-379-2279.
- 5 Elizabeth Spring Fling**. Elizabeth. 815-858-2028.
- 5-6 6th Annual Illinois Route 66 Red Carpet Corridor Festival**. Twelve communities participate, from Joliet to Towanda. 309-728-2811.
- 7 First Saturday Walking Tours**, Quincy. 217-224-6873. Continues through Nov. 1.
- 7-8 Makanda Spring Fest**. Makanda Pavilion and Rainmaker's Garden. Art plus Jazz, Bluegrass, Blues and other music. www.hiddenlakebb.com
- 8 An Evening with Joe Bonamassa**. Sangamon Auditorium, Springfield. www.uis.edu/sangamonauditorium for tickets.
- 9 Play that Hot Fiddle**. Road scholar program about Southern Illinois Swing Fiddle player "Pappy" Wade Ray. Eastern Illinois University. Noon. 217-581-5114.
- 10-12 Annual Illini Safari** hosted by Two River Jeep Club. For 4 x4 vehicles on rough terrain in Pike County. Rodeos, dinners and more. Pittsfield. 630-717-5337 or www.trjc.com
- 12 Cache River Nature Festival**. Guided canoe tours through Buttonland Swamp. Cypress. 618-634-2231 or www.cacherivernaturefest.org
- 12 Wings of Spring Birding Festival**. Alton. 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. 636-899-0090 or www.riverlands.audobon.org
- 12 Lewis & Clark "Departure Days" Bicycle Ride**. Pedal the river route. Family event in Alton and Hartford. www.trailnet.org
- 12 7th Annual Mechanicsburg, Ill. Magic Car and Truck Show**. Uptown Village Park. Exit 114 on I-72. Registration 9 a.m. to noon. Rain date, May 27. 217-364-4888.
- 12-13 Massiac Marines Living History**. French and Indian War period living historians from the nation converge on Fort Massac State Park. Metropolis. 618-524-4712.
- 13 100 Years of Broadway**, Coronado Performing Arts Center, Rockford. 3 p.m. 815-968-0595 or www.coronadopac.org
- 17-20 Heyworth HeyDays Festival**. Heyworth. 309-473-2811 or www.heyworth-il.gov/heydays
- 18-20 Land of Lincoln PVA Bass Tournament** at Wayne Fitzgerald State Park Marina at Rend Lake, Whittington. 703-462-0504 or alane@pva.org
- 18-20 Belleville's Art on the Square**, Belleville. www.artonthesquare.com
- 19 17th Annual Galena Triathlon & Duathlon**. Apple River. 815-777-3557 or www.galena.org/triathlon
- 19-20 Sisters & Friends 17th Annual Afrocentric Fine Art Show** in Normal at Illinois State University Alumni Center. 309-663-4938 or www.sistersandfriendsartshow.com
- 24-28 World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest**. Peoria. Four Points by Sheraton, 500 Hamilton Blvd. Competitions Friday, Saturday and Sunday. OldtimePianoContest.org
- 26 Heritage Festival**. Elizabethtown. Duck races on Ohio, quilt demonstrations, music and more. www.hardincountyil.org
- 26 Strawberry Day**. Downtown Villa Ridge. Breakfast, car show, flea market and more. 618-342-6498.
- 26 Memorial Day Service**. Elaborate service with Civil War Re-enactors and more. Mound City National Cemetery in Mound City. 618-748-9041 or www.southernmostillinois.com
- 26 What's This Tree?** Heron Pond Trailhead, Belknap. 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Interactive hike. 618-657-2064.
- 28 Quad Cities Criterium Professional Bike Races**. Street sprints, in-line skate races, stunt performers and more. Rock Island. 309-788-6311 or www.ridistrict.com
- 28 Woodlawn Cemetery Memorial Day Service**. First organized Memorial Day service in Illinois held here. Honors all veterans. Carbondale. 618-529-4451 or www.cctb.org
- 30 to June 3 Christopher Homecoming**, Christopher. 618-724-7352.
- 31 "The Role of Steamboat in the Union Victory,"** Brian "Fox" Ellis, Illinois Humanities Council, The Windmill Cultural Center, Fulton. 6 p.m. 815-589-3160.

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: April 15 for July events. **Mail to:** Illinois Datebook, PO Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708. E-mail to: datebook@aiec.coop.

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