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800-593-2432 • aieinfo@aiec.coop

**For address changes contact your
local electric co-op.**

President/CEO

Duane Noland

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Editor

John Lowrey

Assistant Editor

Valerie Cheatham

Contributing Editors

Ed VanHoose

Public Relations/

Business Development Manager

Lisa Rigoni

Advertising Coordinator/

Graphic Designer

Sandy Wolske

Graphic Designers

Jennifer Danzinger, Kathy Feraris,

Chris Reynolds

Circulation Coordinator

Connie Newenham

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A safe haven where troubled youth, rescue horses and Ranch President/Exec. Dir. Chris Daniels (cover) experience healing and find strength.

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Shaping enthusiasm for public service

Co-ops are making a valuable investment in youth

I can clearly remember the first time that I visited the Lincoln Memorial, and how the marble seemed to soften the sting of the sweltering heat. Monuments, and the history they represent, can make an indelible impression on an individual.

While almost twenty years have passed since I participated in the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives' Youth Day in Springfield and the Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., it is not surprising to me that both experiences are still vivid in my memory. Although some of the friendships that were ignited through those opportunities are still thriving today, these programs are much more than attempts to help youth meet new people.

My life is still being shaped by the enthusiasm for public service that I encountered and by the valuable lessons about government that I learned along the way. Cooperatives are making an important investment in an effective program that illustrates to youth how they can make a positive impact in their community and throughout Illinois.

I am convinced that what makes Youth Day effective is the "grass-roots" support it receives through each electric and telephone cooperative. Funding is always important, but even more important than financial support is the positive reinforcement each student receives from co-op employees and other community leaders who set a positive example and make time in their schedules to implement Youth Day. They serve as chaperones, chauffeurs, tour guides and mentors. They do whatever is necessary to make the trip a safe and memorable experience. It makes sense that the value of the experience increases when our youth are surrounded by role models who deeply care about the future of our communities.



Today, as the manager of four state historic sites in Springfield, it is a privilege for me to be part of the program for Youth Day. We welcome Youth Day participants to our historic sites, help them learn about the past and encourage them to reflect on what history offers to us today. It is our sincere hope they will feel inspired by what they encounter and motivated by what they learn. Some of the students who attend Youth Day have previously visited our state historic sites during a field trip, but many of the participants are visiting these important places for the first time thanks to a co-op community.

One of the highlights of Youth Day involves gathering participants at the Old State Capitol Historic Site in Representative Hall, the legislative chamber where Abraham Lincoln worked during the winter of 1840 in his fourth and final term as a state representative. Students not only visit the room where Lincoln worked, the setting for his famous House Divided speech in 1858, but they sit at the reproduction desks that furnish the historic room. We connect youth to

history in this way to help them feel closer to the past.

Although the program changes slightly each year, once the students are seated we typically discuss Illinois history and invite Youth Day participants to consider the power of their voice. During the last few years we have connected lessons in history to topics such as the skills politicians need to be successful, the issues that divide or unite our communities, the examples that participants set for younger individuals and the way they define their rivals. The topics vary but the discussions are always rewarding, enhanced each year by a handful of participants who hang around afterward to ask an additional question or make a final point.

Co-ops are engaged in politics to ensure a bright future for their members. Youth Day is not only a strategic investment in the political process but also an asset that enhances leadership development in our communities. As co-ops continue to reach important milestones, it is important to reflect on the remarkable value of Youth Day and the lives it has enhanced over many years.

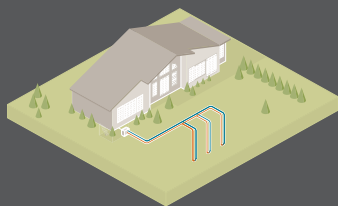
Visiting the Lincoln Memorial on the Youth Tour in 1994 was an awe-inspiring experience for me. Let me close by thanking the co-ops for sending me. I'll do my best to make sure our state historic sites continue to make a positive impression on those who attend Youth Day in Springfield. ■

Justin Blandford is the Site Manager for four state-owned historic sites in Springfield, Ill. He is responsible for an array of history programs that have attracted new audiences and sources of funding. E-mail justin.blandford@illinois.gov



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How to pick a fuel-sipping vehicle

The Energy Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on December 6 released the 2013 Fuel Economy Guide, giving consumers information to help them choose the most fuel-efficient and lowest greenhouse gas-emitting vehicles. The 2013 models include efficient and low-emission vehicles in a variety of classes and sizes, but notable this year is the growing availability of hybrids and the increasing number of electric vehicles (EV).

This year's guide gives consumers a broad range of information they can use to select their next fuel-efficient vehicle, whether they want to consider an EV or one that uses a more conventional fuel. For the first time, the EPA and the Energy Department have added a second top ten list of most efficient vehicles—separating advanced technology vehicles from conventional gasoline and diesel

vehicles. Electric and plug-in hybrid electric models are the most fuel-efficient and lowest-emission vehicles available and are becoming more common. At the same time, consumers may still look up the conventional gasoline and diesel models that offer superior fuel efficiency.

The overall highest-ranking vehicle was the Scion iQ EV, a minicompact with a 121 miles per gallon equivalent (MPGe) rating. Some of the other cars topping their classes are: the 2013 Ford C-Max Energi Plug-in Hybrid and 2013 Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid, which tied for best in the midsize class with 58 MPGe for use of both electricity and gasoline; the 2013 Tesla Model S (60 kilowatt-hour battery pack), ranked best in the large car class with a 95 MPGe rating; and the 2013 Toyota Prius v, which topped the midsize wagon class with a 42 miles per gallon rating. See more at the website www.fueleconomy.gov. ■

Prairie State Generating Company celebrates first year

Prairie State Generating Company celebrated its inaugural meeting May 2 at the Lively Grove energy campus that includes a state of the art 1,600-megawatt generating facility and coal mine. The facility is owned by nine member owners, including Southern Illinois Power Cooperative and Prairie Power, Inc., which are both not-for-profit, member-owned Illinois generation and transmission cooperatives. Six not-for-profit municipal power organizations are fellow member-owners.

Rep. John Shimkus (R, IL-15) spoke at the meeting and celebrated the jobs that were created and the national standards set by the cleanest and most efficient new coal-fired plant in nation. He said, "During the worst time in the economy people were employed here, and with construction finished we still have long-term, good paying jobs. It helps all my small towns with the multiplying effect and economic development."

Shimkus recognized the



bipartisan support for this project from retired Congressman Jerry Costello.

He said the Prairie State Generating facility is an important example for an "all of the above" energy policy that many

politicians talk about. A diverse energy source policy includes new sources such as wind and solar but doesn't exclude clean coal generating facilities that are critical to supplying dependable, low-cost base load generation.

"Coal is still a major source of energy for our country," said Shimkus. "We need to make sure that we have a diversified energy portfolio that includes nuclear, coal, hydro, natural gas, wind and solar. This facility continues to highlight the importance of coal as a cheap source of base load electricity generation for this country."

Shimkus shared that a visit to the facility helped enlighten Chicago-based Senator Mark Kirk on the importance of this downstate facility and the future of coal generation.

The Congressman urged the co-op

and municipal leaders to continue to educate members of Congress and their local consumers about the importance of affordable base load generation. "Most people think you get electricity by putting the plug in the wall," he said. "They don't follow the lines. It is just like this in agriculture. People think that their food comes from the grocery store. They don't understand it takes people that plant, harvest, process...that whole chain of food production."

Highlighting the cost advantage of the new plant, the 2012 annual report showed that even in its first few months of operation the Prairie State Generating plant produced heat energy that cost half that of natural gas even at record low natural gas prices. In 2011 a million BTU of heat cost \$5.01 for natural gas, \$2.41 for the average coal plant and just \$1.95 for the Prairie State facility.

On the environmental side, the facility already exceeds the projected Cross State Air Pollution Rule (CSAPR) regulations set for 2014. The owners invested \$1 billion in the most efficient and effective emission controls available today. ■



Seven students win electric co-op scholarships

Don Wood, Vice President of Government Relations for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, announced the names of the seven winners of the 2013 Thomas H. Moore IEC Memorial Scholarship in May.

"There were hundreds of applications received this year and, as always, a large number were extremely qualified applicants," said Wood. The amount of each scholarship is \$1,500.

Anyone interested in next year's scholarship should contact their local electric cooperative or local high school guidance counselor.

In the "son or daughter of an electric cooperative member" category, the four winners are:

- Sydney Tefft of Salem - Sydney's family receives electricity from Tri-County Electric Cooperative.
- Summer Robbins of Coffeen - Summer's family receives electricity from M.J.M. Electric Cooperative.
- Katlyn Gealow of Oglesby - Katlyn's family receives electricity from Corn Belt Energy.

- Alex Ourth of Carthage - Alex's family receives electricity from Western Illinois Electrical Coop.

In the "son or daughter of an electric cooperative employee or director" category, the winner of the "Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship" is Sarah Bradbury of Mattoon. Sarah is the daughter of Coles-Moultrie Service Representative Carla Bradbury.

The two winners of the scholarships reserved for use at an Illinois community college are:

- Johnathan Finegan of Gilman - Johnathan's family receives electricity from Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative.
- Stephanie Dearwester of Paloma - Stephanie's family receives electricity from Adams Electric Cooperative.

The 2013 winner of the program's eighth scholarship, the new "LaVern and Nola McEntire Lineworkers Scholarship," will be announced soon. ■



Ground breaking held for new cooperative solar facility

On May 10, Illinois Rural Electric Cooperative held a ground breaking for its 500-kilowatt solar facility that is being built south of Winchester on Illinois Highway 106, next to one of the substations that serves the co-op's 7,800 members.

The complete solar array will cover four acres. At full capacity, it could provide enough electricity for about 170 homes on the hottest day of the year.

"We very much appreciate the support of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and its grant through the Renewable Energy Business Development Program," said Robert A. Brown, President of the co-op's board of directors. The DCEO grant will cover \$500,000 of the total \$1,800,000 cost. "We couldn't have undertaken this project without DCEO's help," said Brown.

With this solar project, the co-op's wind turbine and its share of Prairie Power's wind resources, Illinois Rural Electric will have renewable resources equal to more than 14 percent of the co-op's peak demand. "Our renewable portfolio gives us the diversity which we believe to be critical for the long-term," said Brown. ■



National Lineman Appreciation Day

The U.S. Senate in recognizing April 18, 2013, as National Lineman Appreciation Day passed a resolution honoring lineworkers for their efforts at keeping power flowing.

Across the nation, more than 19,000 men and women maintain 2.5 million miles of line for electric co-ops, public power districts and public utility districts. A bill introduced by U.S. Sens. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) "recognizing linemen, the profession of linemen, the contributions of these brave men and women who protect public safety" was passed by unanimous consent. The declaration resolves that these workers...are steeped in personal, family and professional tradition; are often first responders during storms and other catastrophic events, working to make the scene safe for other public safety heroes; work with thousands of volts of electricity high atop power lines 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to keep electricity flowing; must often work under dangerous conditions far from their families to construct and maintain the energy infrastructure of the United States; and put their lives on the line every day with little recognition from the community regarding the danger of their work. ■



Central Illinois Autism Therapeutic Services receives geothermal heat pump grant

A \$4,533 GeoAlliance grant was presented in April, to Central Illinois Autism Therapeutic Services (CIATS). The grant will help to offset the cost of the highly energy efficient geothermal heating and cooling system that was recently installed in the facility.

The grant was from GeoAlliance, a collaboration between the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) in Springfield and Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation in Chicago (ICECF). The grants are available for any facility operated by a government or non-profit organization, and served by an Illinois electric cooperative. Eligible facilities, such as schools, community centers, libraries and churches, may apply for a grant of up to \$50,000 to help offset the higher initial cost of geothermal system installations.



Pictured from left are: Calvary Baptist Church Pastor Michael Loy, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative Marketing Services Specialist Sam Adair, AIEC Marketing Administrator Nancy Rhoads McDonald; CIATS Board President Dustin Brown; City of Charleston Mayor-Elect Larry Rennels, Basham Electric Owner Dick Basham and CIATS Founder and Executive Director Vivian Skelley.

Vivian Skelley, CIATS Founder and Executive Director, said that since the geothermal system was installed CIATS has seen monthly electric bills drop from as much as \$1,000 during the highest months to just \$187 last month. Skelley said, "We were to the point where we nearly couldn't pay our electric bills. This grant has made all the difference in the world."

Geothermal heat pump systems use the earth's natural energy

and that's why they are so efficient and inexpensive to operate. Geothermal heating and cooling systems are considered the most energy efficient available today, saving 30 to 70 percent on energy costs.

The ICECF invests in clean energy development and land preservation efforts throughout Illinois. Facilities not serviced by Illinois electric cooperatives can apply

directly to ICECF for geothermal system funding. Information on the foundation's other grant programs can be found on their website at www.illinoiscleanenergy.org.

For more information about the geothermal grant program, contact your local electric cooperative or Nancy Rhoads McDonald at 217-241-7954 or nmcdonald@aiec.coop, or visit www.aiec.coop. ■



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Who rescued whom?

A story of hope and salvation

By Nancy Rhoads McDonald

Tranquility. Peace. Love. Like a warm blanket on a cold day, you're immediately enveloped by it as you head up the dusty lane to Refuge Ranch, near Pawnee. With a menagerie of horses, ponies, goats, sheep and even a pig milling about, this may look like just another small ranch that dots the Illinois landscape, but it's so much more. This is a safe haven where healing occurs on so many levels for so many reasons.



Refuge Ranch Co-founder and Executive Director Chris Daniels greets everyone with a wide smile and unmistakable warmth. Radiant and relaxed, you'd never guess that her life took some devastating twists and turns to prepare her for the journey to build the ranch.

Refuge Ranch is faith-based and primarily serves "at-risk" children from ages 5 to 18 and their families, and focuses on mental, physical, emotional and functional healing. Much of the therapy is done through work with horses, many of which were rescued from abusive and or neglectful situations.

Starting with just four children in the beginning, the ranch is now in its sixth year. It serves nearly 40 kids, including almost 80 percent of the original ones, and that number is expected to grow. "We have been amazed," says Daniels. "We were really concerned the first couple of years that kids would get disconnected and not come back, but we've been blown away by the retention rate."

The kids come for 90-minute therapy sessions, and the frequency of visits depends on need. Daniels explains, "We want sessions to look like what the child needs. The kids start coming once a week or a couple of times a month and experience a lot of growth in that first year. Then, the next year they may come only once a month, or they may come out and volunteer a little more often and just come for therapy every now and then." Staff and volunteers will pray with the children if they're comfortable, but Daniels doesn't ever want to make anyone uncomfortable because of it. The kids learn to ride and care for horses but are asked to give as well as take. The chores they're asked to do help teach them responsibility and self-worth. Daniels explains that ideally, as the kids grow into maturity and their ability to cope increases, the goal is to plug some of them in as junior mentors, then into mentors to help other kids. They work directly with an adult or mentor for that entire time, always one-on-one.



Just as a saddle horn is there for small hands to securely grasp, Refuge Ranch is a safe haven for its young visitors.

Much of what the children are dealing with is very private in nature and it's one of the reasons one-on-one mentoring is so important. The ranch provides a place of intimacy and safety, and freedom to share. "A lot of the kids who come here have trouble attaching and building relationships, so having the same mentor fosters an environment that's a little safer for them," says Daniels. "These kids need adults who love them and are willing to come and walk alongside them for the long haul." She explains that especially with kids who really struggle with relationships, working shoulder to shoulder makes it a little easier to talk. Adults can't always just ask them what's going on in their lives. It's much too intense for them.

Salvation

And Daniels has been in their shoes and knows all too well what it's like to be at rock bottom. She was once an at-risk teen who saw the father of two of her children sent to prison for murder. She truly thought her life was too broken to be rescued, and that's why she's so passionate about the work done at the ranch.

Like many of the kids who come to Refuge Ranch, Daniels was an angry,

scared young woman who had seen the hard side of life and had severe trust issues. It took years and a lot of coaxing from her brother, but slowly she began to open the door and let God into her life. She was amazed how she and her children were embraced by people at the church—people she had thought would judge her for her former lifestyle. It was truly her salvation.

Daniels met her future husband, Stephen, when he was a youth minister in Chatham. And through this nurturing partnership, her faith grew. They soon married and headed to Chicago where Stephen became a minister; Chris worked at a large animal shelter and they both worked with at-risk kids. Together, they vowed to make a difference. They lived in a predominantly African-American neighborhood where kids were always playing outside. They dreamed of starting a summer camp and spent the first two weeks trying to build a relationship with some of the kids, but none of them would come near them. They later learned that their neighbors thought they were undercover police officers.

Daniels' "aha" moment occurred one day when she took her African Gray

parrot outside to get some sun. She had him on her hand and that's what brought the kids around. They didn't know what he was, so they crowded in to see and were full of questions. Daniels says, "I just sat there amazed that this little parrot managed to accomplish in 10 minutes what we'd been trying to do for weeks. It really crystalized for me the ability that animals have to break down walls with people." Chris and Stephen learned from bringing rescue dogs home from the shelter that stories about the abused and neglected animals really resonated with the kids, many of whom were experiencing similar circumstances at home.

Exhausted after five intense years of working with kids in Chicago, Daniels and her husband moved back to central Illinois where they bought a farm and a couple of horses. Starting a ranch then wasn't at the top of their list. But, one day a friend told them

about a book she'd read called "Hope Rising" that chronicled stories from kids at a ranch in Oregon that provided therapeutic services for thousands of at-risk kids each summer, and something clicked. "I met my husband at the door sobbing, saying, 'This is what I want to do when I grow up,'" says Daniels. There is a network of ranches around the country providing similar services, so there was a template that could be customized based on need. Daniels says it was like all the puzzle pieces were snapping into place. And because of her experience with animal rescue, the fact that the ranch in Oregon used rescue horses really intrigued her.

Daniels and her husband knew that making the ranch a reality and maintaining it would require a lot of help, especially from volunteers. The ranch's volunteer program has different niches based on the individual's strengths and interests. Volunteers

help to train the horses, do basic chores and administrative tasks or work with people from the community who do special projects for the ranch. And some people work directly with the kids as mentors. "We require volunteers working in the mentoring program to be here for at least a year in that capacity, so we can get to know them well before we put them in with kids. And those volunteers who have been here long-term have been through our training process," says Daniels.

Redemption

Horses for the mentoring program come to the ranch through various avenues. A few horses have been purchased; some have been donated, but the bulk of them have been rescued from abusive or neglectful situations. Those horses have been brought to the ranch to be rehabilitated so they can be "re-homed" at another location or integrated into the mentoring program. As safety allows, the kids who visit the ranch work to help the horses recover from their unique circumstances of abuse or neglect, which is a healing experience for both. The horses used in the mentoring program go through years of extensive targeted training to ensure they're gentle enough for children to ride.

Daniels explains with sadness about her experience with horse rescues. In 2011, she received a call that some horses were in trouble about two hours from the ranch. She arrived to a horrific scene—the worst thing she said she'd ever seen. The rescue mission involved 39 horses—some already dead, and the rest in various stages of starvation. The ranch was able to rescue a horse they named Redemption, or Remi. Daniels says the horse was like a walking corpse and would have needed to be euthanized without some quick help. Thanks to extensive help from ranch staff, volunteers and the kids, Remi experienced an amazing recovery. After having lived isolated in a stall for years, he is now



Though the ranch primarily uses horses in its mentoring program, smaller animals that might be less intimidating are always ready for a handout and a warm nuzzle.



The kids have put up walls, and where people can't necessarily tread, horses are allowed in.

from the relationship between the horse and the child. At that point, the healing begins, and faith is a big part of that healing.

Transformation

A strong faith is what brought Daniels to where she is today. Looking back at her life, she knows that all the parts of her life, including those really dark days, were all part of God's plan. He gave her the strength and courage to build this amazing ranch that is creating hope for so many people. "We often say that among the horses, God and the mentors, we just try to stand back and make sure nobody gets hurt. They do all the work," says Daniels. But, as the ranch has grown and the healing of the kids and the horses continues, she's had her own transformation. As you look at the amazing work done at Refuge Ranch, the real question remains, "Who really rescued whom?"

learning to live in a herd and just "be a horse." He still has issues, and the kids are helping to socialize him, but Remi's "redemption" is sweet.

Canyon, is another one of Rescue Ranch's success stories. About four years ago, he and a filly were seized by Douglas County Animal Control. Both were near death, and the filly was too weak to make the trip to the ranch standing. Eventually, both horses were nursed back to health at the ranch. The filly was adopted by Henson Robinson Zoo in Springfield for their petting area. But, the economy, especially for horses, turned sour and no one was interested in adopting Canyon, who wasn't pretty or flashy.

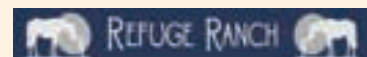
During Canyon's recovery, the staff and volunteers at Refuge Ranch began to see signs of a great personality, and he just blossomed. "He's the best little horse," says Daniels. "Even though he's not the prettiest, he works his way into the kids' hearts and is one of their favorites." Daniels explains

that Canyon loves people so much, that they have to love him back. He is always the first at the fence or gate to greet people, and if he's not the first, he muscles his way to the front of the pack. Canyon went through extensive training and is now a member of the ranch's mentoring program. Daniels says, "I wouldn't sell him for a million dollars. He was just meant to be here."

"I think the component of the horses that have been rescued and their stories really resonate with the kids," says Daniels. She continues, "The horses have built this bridge for kids who are having a really hard time with intimate connections with anyone. What they've learned in their lifetime is that they can't risk trusting anyone because they'll just be hurt, so they don't." The kids have put up walls, and where people can't necessarily tread, horses are allowed in. So this bridge is built and the mentors can come in through the back door and build a foundation that originated



Refuge Ranch is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays this season. You're welcome to visit those days, but if you would like to chat with a volunteer or take a tour it's best to make an appointment. For more information visit www.refuge-ranch.org or call 217-498-7679.



A boating accident you never thought about

Check your boats and docks for electrical hazards

July 2012 saw some horrific fatal accidents near boats and boat docks. A 26-year-old woman was swimming with family in the Lake of the Ozarks and was electrocuted when she touched an energized dock ladder. Also at Lake of the Ozarks, a 13-year-old girl and her 8-year-old brother received fatal electrical shocks while swimming near a private dock; officials cited an improperly grounded circuit as the cause. In Tennessee, two boys ages 10 and 11, lost their lives as they were shocked while swimming between houseboats on Cherokee Lake, a result of on-board generator current apparently entering the water through frayed wires beneath the boat.

An important step in helping prevent such tragedies is to ensure proper installation and maintenance of electrical equipment on docks and boats. Take time before the boating season starts to inspect all of the electrical systems on or near the water. You wouldn't put your boat in the lake with a leak in it, so make sure all other aspects of the boat and its operations are safe.

Safe Electricity in conjunction with the American Boat and Yacht Council and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers/National Electrical Contractors Association recommend taking these steps before boating season begins:

- At a minimum, all electrical installations should comply with articles 553 (residential docks) and 555 (commercial docks) of the 2011 National Electrical Code which mandate a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) on all dock receptacles. A GFCI measures the current in a circuit. An imbalance of that current, such as a discharge into the water, will trip the GFCI and cut off power.
- The GFCI should be tested at least once a month or per the manufacturer's specifications. The GFCI should be located somewhere along the ramp to the dock so it can be easily found and tested by local fire departments as needed.
- The metal frame of docks should have "bonding jumpers" on them to connect all metal parts to a ground rod on the shore. That will ensure any part of the metal dock that becomes energized because of electrical malfunction will trip the GFCI or the circuit breaker.
- Even if your dock's electrical system has been installed by a licensed electrical contractor and inspected, neighboring docks can still present a shock hazard. Be sure your neighbor's dockside electrical system complies with the National Electrical Code and has been inspected.
- All electrical installations should be performed by a professional electrical contractor.
- Because docks are exposed to the elements, their electrical systems should be inspected at least once a year.

Safe Electricity reminds all swimmers that if they feel a tingle, avoid metal ladders and objects, and get out of the water as soon as possible—the best and quickest way you can. When boating or fishing, be aware of your surroundings and potential electrical hazards. "Always check the location of nearby power lines before boating or fishing," advises Hall. "Contact between your boat and a power line could be devastating." Maintain a distance of at least 10 feet between your boat and nearby power lines. Always lower masts of sail boats before using

boat ramps to exit the water.

When it comes to your boat's electrical system, particularly those with onboard generators, keep these tips in mind:

- If you are unsure about how to install something, do not call your neighbor/electrician friend. Call an ABYC Electrical Certified Tech. There are some big differences between your house and your boat.
- Household wire is not suitable for use on boats as houses are motionless and generally dry. Even marine-rated wire that is not supported along its length will break with constant motion stress.
- Do NOT use wire nuts or splice connectors! Wire nuts are for solid conductor wire, which should never be on a boat, and splice connectors cut wire strands.
- Fuses are rated to protect the wire, not the stereo. If a fuse blows continuously, it should NOT be replaced with a larger one just to keep it from blowing again—something else is wrong.
- Have your boat's electrical system checked at least once a year. Boats should also be checked when something is added to or removed from their systems.

Learn more at SafeElectricity.org and www.abycinc.org. ■

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



Vinegar, Better than Prescription Drugs?

Thousands of years ago ancient healers trusted apple cider vinegar, and modern research shows - *vinegar truly is a wonder cure!*

In fact, apple cider vinegar's biggest fans believe this golden liquid can help solve the most troublesome of human afflictions.

Since even the earliest of times a daily vinegar cocktail was used to help control appetite to lose weight and continue good health.

And now after years of continued research all across the globe, over 1000 new vinegar super-remedies and tonics are available in the brand new 208-page *Vinegar Anniversary Book* by famed natural health author, Emily Thacker.

Author of the very first book of its kind since the 1950's, Ms. Thacker brings her unique wisdom, experience and down-home flavor to this complete collection.

From the Bible to Cleopatra to the fierce Samurai warriors of Japan, vinegar has been documented as a powerful tonic to ensure strength, power and long life.

In China, the health system that has been in place for thousands of years recognizes the value of vinegar. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) oversees the health of millions of Chinese – not with modern drugs – but with proven remedies that include vinegar.

Today's research studies and scientific reports continue to praise the healing powers of vinegar to maintain good health and well being.

Even grandma knew that her old remedies worked even if she wasn't able to explain why. And scientific research confirms this.

For instance, grandma said putting diluted vinegar in the ears would ward off infections. The American Academy of Otolaryngology's doctors – who specialize in treating infections like swimmer's ear - now recommend using a vinegar mixture as a preventative.

The Yale-New Haven hospital uses vinegar as a hospital disinfectant. When after-surgery eye infections became a problem, their Department of Bacteriology solved it with vinegar.

Food poisoning? Some doctors suggest that regular vinegar use can prevent it!

The 208-page *Vinegar Anniversary Book* will amaze you with its over 1000 natural remedies, secrets, tonics and cure-alls for a healthier, happier life. You'll get easy recipes that mix vinegar with other common household items to help:

- Calm an upset stomach
- Ease leg cramps
- Soothe sprained muscles
- Control appetite to lose weight
- Relieve coughs
- Banish nausea
- Arthritis pain
- Make hiccups disappear
- Cool a sunburn
- Boost memory
- Reduce sore throat pain
- Relieve itchy skin
- Lower blood pressure & cholesterol
- Eliminate bladder infections
- Chase away a cold
- Treat burns
- Reduce infection
- Aid digestion
- Improve memory
- Soothe sore feet
- Treat blemishes & age spots
- Remove corns & calluses
- Replace many household cleaners

And that's just the beginning of the over 1000 new and improved hints and tips that you'll get.

50 years ago a daily dose of an apple cider vinegar and honey tonic was used to ease arthritis. During the last 30 years or so, many wonder drugs have replaced this time-tested home remedy. Now vinegar, along with countless other old-time tonics, have new supporters including many medical professionals. *The reason?* Almost everybody has experienced the negative side of some of the powerful new drugs.

Strep and Staph infections? Vinegar is a powerful antiseptic and kills even these dangerous bacteria on contact.

Headaches will fade away with this simple vinegar concoction.

Feel good and look good with these hair and skin-friendly vinegar remedies.

You'll learn when you should *and should not* use vinegar.

Can apple cider vinegar really do all this? The answer is yes because it is such a marvelous combination of tart good taste, germ-killing acid and an assortment

of important vitamins and nutrients.

Join readers like L.S. of Monroe, N.C. who says "*Thanks, this book is wonderful. A real life saver for me!*"

Find different ways to combine vinegar with common foods like lemon juice, blueberries, onion, strawberries, garlic, honey, ginger and more to create recipes to help improve health and quality of life.

All new ideas to put vinegar to work around the home to clean, disinfect and eliminate mold and mildew. Great for those with allergies or asthma!

Save money as you put Emily's latest discoveries to the test!

There's even 365 additional tidbits to take you through the year beginning with January's winter snows through the dog-days of summer and into the golden leaves of autumn.

Yes that's over 1000 tried-and-true remedies and recipes in this handsome collector's edition and it's yours to enjoy for 90-risk free days. That's right, you can read and benefit from all 208-pages without obligation to keep it.

To get your copy of the *Vinegar Anniversary Book* direct from the publisher at the special introductory price of \$19.95 plus 3.98 shipping and handling (total of \$23.93, OH residents please add 6.25% sales tax) simply do this:

Write "Vinegar Anniversary" on a piece of paper and mail it along with your check or money order payable to: James Direct Inc., Dept. VA2102, 500 S. Prospect Ave., Box 980, Hartville, Ohio 44632.

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From water famine to feast

Reducing watering needs and other tips

Water in the form of rain can be a blessing or a curse. We've certainly seen the extremes in the last two years.

Life, and in this case nature, has a way of slapping us across the face without leaving a mark, waking us up to the reality that we can't control a darn thing as much as we think we can.

We want lush growth. We just don't want to water during the summer, allowing nature to take care of that for us. We got bit, and bit hard, last summer.

There are ways we can reduce our watering needs during the summer.

First, don't grow anything. It's the easiest. Don't try for a lawn; allow the weeds to take over. Mow them occasionally to keep them the same height. Remember, if you live in the country, few folks can tell the difference between turfgrass and weeds at 60 miles per hour, unless the plants are blooming.

Avoid planting a vegetable garden. It sucks up water like nobody's business. Same with fruit trees. Think grocery store and farmers markets.

Flowers? Forget it. Only the permanent botanicals (a fancy way of saying plastic or silk) can live without watering. They'll look good until the sun fades them just like the real ones.

There's not much we can do about trees and shrubs if they're already there. We can hope they have a dense enough root system that we don't have to worry about them. Most of them recovered during the winter when moisture levels encouraged roots to re-grow. Hooray for them!

Most evergreens are a little tougher, though as we saw last year, arborvitaes (evergreens from the cypress family) are wimps. Quite a few gave up during the drought.



Of course this entire laissez faire attitude flies in the face of what we want.

Seriously, when sticking a plant in the ground, consider its water needs. If it would thrive in a rice paddy, it's probably not a wise candidate for the Midwest.

Is there a water source handy? Dragging a hose to the plant is better than thinking "Gosh, I wish I could drag a hose to the plant." As the realtors say: "location, location, location."

Think about the surrounding plants. If one is a water sponge and the other can tolerate dry conditions, don't put them side-by-side. Put similar plants next to each other.

A few other quick tips:

- ◆ Water in the morning. 5 a.m. is a great time. Less water evaporates and more absorbs in the soil. Morning watering cuts down on diseases. Can't handle the early dawn? Get some programmable

timers for less than \$25 at a hardware store.

- ◆ Water deeply once or twice a week. Daily waterings only lead to shallow roots, which need more watering. Force the roots to go deep where it's cooler.
- ◆ Mulch with 3 to 4 inches of material. For trees and shrubs, mulching out to the drip line is ideal, though that might cut down the quality of the grass. Use a ruler, don't guess. Most people are wrong.
- ◆ Place a value on plants if water is limited. Water trees first followed by the shrubs. Next comes the fruit trees. Further down the list are the perennial flowers. That's it. Forget the vegetables, which can be purchased at the store along with annual flowers. Grass, as we saw last year, can fend for itself.
- ◆ Start collecting rain. Rain barrels are great but most people need about 10 instead of the feel-good one or two. In the olden days there were cisterns which were great reservoirs of water. If there's an old one, see if it's usable.
- ◆ Use drip irrigation hoses to place water where it really is needed and not where it won't do any good.

Finally, any communications with any type of higher being of your choice can't hurt. ■

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



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Tips to cut your utility bills

The science of radiation

I am writing this column at 5:45 a.m. as I watch the beautiful sun rise. Yes, the amazing sun. As you may recall, we have discussed previously how all energy comes from the sun and how heat travels by three methods. We have already discussed conduction and convection, and will now discuss what I consider to be the most interesting form of heat transfer of the three, radiation.

Webster's dictionary defines radiation as, "The process in which energy in the form of rays of light, heat, etc., is sent out from atoms and molecules as they undergo internal change."

Radiation is the only mechanism of heat transfer that can move energy across empty space. Radiation from the sun travels to earth by the visible spectrum, such as white light, which we can see, and by the invisible spectrum, which we can't see, as in the form of radio waves, microwaves, infrared waves, ultraviolet waves, X-rays, gamma rays and who knows what other waves or rays that might be discovered in the future. This form of heat transfer can actually affect our mood, attitude and happiness.

Suppose that it has been really cold and we haven't seen the sun in days. Suddenly, the sun comes out and we all, including our pets, hurry outside or to a window to absorb the sun's marvelous heat rays. If we live in a northern state, we may dream of heading to the Gulf Coast to bathe in the sun. Of course, those same marvelous rays can ruin that trip and be very painful if we absorb too many of them.

Do you sometimes dream, as I do, about being in a log cabin in the mountains on a snowy day with a big

fire burning in a stone fireplace? Can anything be better than backing up to that fire and feeling that heat on your backside? Of course, your front side is cold while the backside may be overheating, so you turn around fairly often. Less I be misunderstood, as much as one might enjoy this event, a wood-burning fireplace is almost never an efficient way to heat one's entire house. I can almost see some of you wanting to argue with me right now, but we will save that for another time. But remember that the wood you are burning is stored energy from the sun, which made rain, warm soil and green leaves possible.

As mentioned before, examples of all three types of heat transfer may be present at the same location. In the fireplace, the fire heats the air [convection], the stone absorbs the radiant rays [radiation], and anything that touches the stone or hot coals gets burned [conduction].

Well, I could write many pages about conduction, convection and radiation. And I would enjoy doing so. But our goal is to help us all better

understand how heat transfer relates to energy efficiency and energy usage, which relates to comfort and utility bills, which is what we most care about anyway, right? Probably so, but you must admit that it is neat to be able to better understand anything relating to energy efficiency.

As I have enjoyed writing these three columns, I have thought of so many examples that I want to share with you. And that is exactly what we plan to do in the future columns. But you know, one should not be surprised at so many possibilities since all energy comes from only one really big object, the sun, which I am now watching set in the western sky. See you next month. ■



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





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Humane investigator SHAREs her stories of equine salvation

By Valerie Cheatham

Horse ownership is a huge responsibility that cannot be taken lightly. It is time-consuming and expensive. On average a horse can live to be 25 years of age and according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners, “the average minimum cost of care is \$1825 annually” and that doesn’t include expenses like the veterinarian, farrier fees and boarding. As horses age, and become ill or injured the expenses rise. Sometimes the horse’s disposition can be difficult.

So, what happens to those animals when the owners either can no longer afford, or in some cases, have lost the will to care for them? The options are limited.

Sadly, many of these horses are neglected or abused and not all can be saved in time. That’s how Linda Hewerdine, of rural Dewey, found one such horse she was looking to buy in 1998. The horse was starving because the owner was feeding it straw, due to the high cost of hay. Hewerdine brought it home, started asking around and learned there were a large number of horses that weren’t being cared for properly.

That experience spurred her to contact the Hooved Animal Humane Society (HAHS) located in Woodstock. She took the test to become a humane investigator for the equine shelter and volunteered for several years, but discovered there were so many horses being rescued in northern Illinois there wasn’t room for more. The Department of Agriculture needed a central Illinois facility and, as it turned out, Linda and her husband were the only ones with the land and buildings necessary to hold such an operation.

In 2003, the Society for Hooved Animals Rescue and Emergency (SHARE) was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) rescue operation. SHARE is a non-profit humane society that provides housing, care and training for rescue horses and has seven investigators. It sits on 200 private acres and has grown quite large – currently holding 66 horses.

In order to become a humane investigator, you must be sponsored by a humane society/shelter, complete training and pass the test, and have experience in the species being investigated. Although certified by the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) Bureau of Animal Health and Welfare, investigators represent the shelter, not IDOA. When called with a complaint, investigators are looking for sufficient quantities of food and water, shelter adequate for the weather conditions and any signs of disease, injury or mistreatment.

According to Hewerdine, when called in to investigate, they can write violations and ask for impounds and relinquishments. Investigators are there to support the Humane Care for Animals (HCA) Act. While not representatives of the



Dew is a pinto mare from a Munie, IL rescue. She is blind and underweight, but will hopefully have surgery for cataracts once she picks up weight.

◀ *Dew when first rescued.*



IDOA, they do have the authority to present investigation findings to the county state's attorney for consideration of prosecution.

"When there are legitimate concerns, we try to educate the owner on what they should do to take care of the animal," says Hewerdine. "We ask them to comply with the law, write a violation and make them aware of the penalties, which can be up to two years in jail and a \$10,000 fine. I usually give them up to 48 hours to comply, but I have only given 30 minutes in a case where it was 90 degrees and the horse had no water. Usually, we tell them what's wrong and ask them to have a veterinarian inspect the animal and make recommendations. We aren't veterinarians and don't want to overstep our boundaries."

Not all complaints are legitimate ones, and all they can do is enforce state law. For example, they received a complaint about a horse that was too thin, but upon investigation found plenty of hay and water, but the horse was 35 years old and just couldn't keep on weight.

If an investigator comes upon an extreme situation, they can call the IDOA and ask for recommendations. Hewerdine tries to get the owner to relinquish the animal. If they relinquish it there are no more legal proceedings; she can remove it and care for it, which is the best case scenario. If they have to impound the animal then a court proceeding is involved, which can be very lengthy. During this time, SHARE is feeding and caring for the horse but can't geld, stud or adopt it out.

"It can be very difficult when going on an investigation. You just have to put your emotions aside," says Hewerdine. "I have a little black pony that was so thin and had been beaten. Every time anyone went in his stall he would run in the corner and cower and wait. Who would hit a little pony? I just don't understand it at all."

Several years ago some University of Illinois (U of I) students set up a club to help SHARE. The group does benefits, and six nights a week volunteers carpool out to feed, water and brush the horses. It's a big help with 66 horses to care for. Most of the horses SHARE receives have never been trained, and several U of I veterinary students train them.

While a few of the horses are sanctuary horses and will live out their days at SHARE, there's a real need for adoption. And while they wait, some horses go to foster homes. These are horse lovers that have the room and are willing to care for them. Sometimes they end up adopting the horse themselves.

SHARE is always looking for donations, and volunteers are needed to help feed and care for the animals.

For more information on SHARE or to see adoption requirements and download an application go to its website at www.s-h-a-r-e.net or you can check them out on Facebook at facebook.com/pages/Society-for-Hooved-Animals-Rescue-and-Emergency-Champaign-County. You can also view the horses currently up for adoption and read success stories.

Ginger was very underweight and pregnant when rescued.



Ginger's healthy colt born March 10, 2013.



Spinach-Craisin Salad

Spinach-Craisin Salad (above)

2 bunches fresh spinach
3 fresh apples, unpeeled and cubed
1 (6 oz.) bag Ocean Spray Craisins

1 bottle Lonzerotti's Sweet Italian Dressing
1 c. walnuts or nuts of choice, chopped big

Tear cleaned spinach into bite-sized pieces. Mix with apples and Craisins in a large bowl. Add nuts and dressing just before serving. Mix well. Serve chilled.

Spaghetti Pie

6 oz. spaghetti
2 T. butter
1/2 c. Parmesan cheese
1 egg, beaten
1 c. ricotta or cottage cheese
1 lb. Italian sausage or hamburger

1 small jar pasta sauce
Onions, green peppers, mushrooms (optional)
1/2 c. shredded mozzarella cheese
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste

Cook and drain spaghetti. Stir in butter, egg and Parmesan cheese. In a greased, deep dish pie pan, press spaghetti mixture into a crust. Cook meat and mix with pasta sauce and any optional vegetables. Spread ricotta or cottage cheese over crust. Pour cooked sauce with meat on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes. Remove and sprinkle top with mozzarella. Return to oven and bake for 5 more minutes. Remove from oven and let rest for 5 minutes. Slice into wedges and serve.

Crockpot Western Omelet Casserole

1 32 oz. bag frozen hash brown potatoes
1 lb. bacon, diced, cooked and drained
OR 1 lb. ham, cubed
1 med. onion, diced
1 green bell pepper, diced

1-1/2 c. shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
1 dozen eggs
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper, or to taste
1 c. milk

Place a layer of frozen potatoes on the bottom of the crockpot, followed by a layer of meat, then onions, green pepper and cheese. Repeat the layering process 2-3 more times, ending with a layer of cheese. Beat the eggs, milk, salt and pepper together. Pour over layers in crockpot. Cover and turn on low. Cook for 10-12 hours. Serves 12.

Photos by Valerie Cheatham

Recipes Worth Adopting

Who: Benld Adopt-A-Pet, Benld, IL

Cost: \$15 including shipping

Details: soft-backed, spiral bound

Pages of recipes: 154

Send checks to: Charlotte Smith,
3816 Indian Lands Lane, Springfield, IL 62711
or call 217-793-0459

Cream Scones with Cranberries

2 c. all-purpose flour
3 T. sugar
2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 c. Craisins or other dried fruit
1-1/3 c. heavy cream
Milk, for brushing
Decorative or sparkling sugar

Preheat oven to 400 degrees and place rack in middle position. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or spray with cooking spray. In a medium bowl, thoroughly whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Stir in the fruit until evenly distributed. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and pour in the cream. Stir until everything is moistened and a soft dough is formed. Scrape the dough onto a lightly floured counter and knead a few times, shaping it into a fat log about 8 inches long. Cut in two, then gently shape each half into a smooth disk about 1 inch thick. With a sharp knife, cut each disk into 4 pieces. Arrange the 8 scones on the baking sheet, leaving as much room as possible between them. Brush with milk, then sprinkle with sugar. Bake for 7 minutes, then reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake 15 minutes longer. Let cool on wire rack, then serve.

Parmesan Potato Wedges

1/2 c. oil
1/2 c. grated Parmesan cheese
1 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. garlic powder
1/2 tsp. paprika
1/4 tsp. pepper
8 lg. unpeeled baking potatoes, washed and cut into wedges

Arrange potato wedges, peel side down, in 2 shallow baking pans. Mix remaining ingredients and brush over potatoes. Bake in 375 degree preheated oven for 45 minutes or until potatoes are golden brown and tender. Brush occasionally with oil mixture. Makes 8 servings.



Blueberry Pancakes

Apple Pumpkin Muffins

2-1/2 c. flour
2 c. sugar
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
1/2 tsp. ginger
2 eggs
1 c. pumpkin
1/2 c. vegetable oil
2 c. finely chopped apples

Combine first 7 ingredients in large bowl. In small bowl, combine eggs, pumpkin and oil. Stir into dry ingredients until moistened. Fold in apples. Fill muffin cups 2/3 full and bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes. Yield: 1-1/2 dozen.

Blueberry Pancakes (above)

2-3/4 c. cake flour
1 T. baking powder
3 T. sugar
1 egg
1 egg white
2 c. skim milk
2 T. canola oil
1-1/2 c. blueberries tossed in 2 T. flour

Sift together dry ingredients. In a separate bowl, beat eggs, then mix in milk and oil. Lightly stir the liquid mixture into the dry. If fresh blueberries are not available, drain canned blueberries or defrost frozen berries in sieve. Lightly fold drained blueberries into batter. Cook on hot griddle sprayed with nonstick oil. Flip to cook on other side when light golden brown. Serves 6.

Spinach Pasta Toss



Favorite Recipes

Who: White County Home and Community Education, Norris City, IL

Cost: \$10.75 including shipping

Details: soft-backed, comb-bound

Pages of recipes: 188

Send checks to: Ruth Norris, 163 Co. Rd. 700N, Norris City, IL 62869 or call 618-378-3891

Lemon Grilled Chicken

1 lemon
2 T. olive oil
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 T. chopped fresh parsley
plus extra springs for garnish
1/4 tsp. dried thyme
1/4 tsp. dried marjoram
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. black pepper
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
(about 6 oz. each)

Use a peeler to remove strips of zest from half of the lemon, then trim into fine strips with a small knife. Reserve and set aside. Grate the other side of the lemon to make 1 T. zest. Finally, squeeze the juice from the lemon into a large bowl. Add the lemon zest, oil, garlic, parsley, thyme, marjoram, salt and pepper and mix. Add the chicken breasts to bowl and spoon the marinade over the chicken until well coated. Cover and chill for 30 minutes or overnight. Preheat the griddle, grill or broiler to medium heat. Put the chicken pieces on the griddle, reserving marinade. Cook chicken until cooked through, about 10 minutes on each side, brushing with reserved marinade 2 to 3 times. Discard marinade. When done, sprinkle with reserved lemon strips and serve immediately garnished with parsley sprigs.

Spinach Pasta Toss (left)

1 (14-1/2 oz.) can Italian-style diced tomatoes, undrained
2 c. multi-grain penne pasta, uncooked
1 c. water
1 sm. pkg. baby spinach leaves
1 c. cooked and shredded chicken breast
1 c. shredded Italian three-cheese blend

Bring tomatoes, pasta and water to boil in large saucepan; stir. Cover and simmer on medium-low heat for 10 minutes. Uncover and simmer 1 minute or just until pasta is tender. Add the chicken, stir, add the spinach and let simmer 2 minutes until wilted. Serve topped with cheese.

Computer shopping 102

Last month, I wrote about which processor to choose when buying a computer. This month's column will focus on the next major piece of hardware you should consider when making a computer purchase - your hard drive.

Before we get started, I want to be as specific as possible. When I refer to a "hard drive" I don't mean the entire computer sitting there at your desk. So many times, people talk about the system unit, calling it a hard drive. The hard drive is actually a piece inside the system unit, on which is stored all of your data. Those pictures you took of the grandkids at Christmas or that giant fish you caught on vacation are stored there along with your digital tax records, school work and (in my case) copies of a certain monthly column.

So, this is a pretty important device right?

Now, I know some of you out there have a working knowledge of RAID configurations, have a NAS running at home, etc. But, for the purposes of this article, let's keep it to two categories when discussing hard drives: storage capacity and performance.

First, there's storage capacity. It's amazing how inexpensive hard drives are these days. When one of the first hard drives, IBM's Model 350, came out over 50 years ago, it could store 5 megabytes of data and cost around \$185,000. Add photo of IBM hard drive being loaded on plane. (As you can see by the photo, it was also the size of a modern copy machine!) To contrast that with today's hard drives, you can now easily purchase a 1 terabyte hard drive for under \$100. Since 1 terabyte is equal to 1,048,576 megabytes, you can see just how far we've come in storage capacity. But, how much do you need?

Well, that answer isn't necessarily the same for everyone. You're going to have to think about your own personal use. Do you take lots of digital photos, or maybe even video? If so, you'll



This is what a typical computer's internal hard drive looks like.



need more space to store those things. If not, you can settle for something a little smaller. Of course, you also need to take into account the second category before making your final decision - performance.

Up until very recently, performance was pretty easy to pick in hard drives. I would simply tell people that for home computers they should purchase a 7200 RPM hard drive, with as much cache as possible and call it a day. Now, however the game has changed.

We now have solid-state (SSD) hard drives available. They are built using a similar technology to those little thumb drives everyone has. SSD drives are an exponential leap in performance over traditional hard drives because they eliminate the need for a spinning disk. As an example, I can start up my older computer (with a standard hard drive), and my new one (with a SSD) at the same time and the new one will be on and ready to go a good 2 minutes before the old one.

And the benefits just keep adding up. Every application opens faster, documents are retrieved faster, searching is faster. It's just faster all around.

Of course, there's a downside - price.

These drives are still relatively new to the market, so they cost more. They're also not standard in most computers you buy "off-the-shelf" at retail locations. The bigger ones are so much that for most people they're cost prohibitive. But, there's a definite work-around.

Here's what I suggest. If you're in the market for a new computer, or just want to upgrade your old one, get a 120GB or 250GB SSD hard drive (depending upon your budget.) At the same time, purchase yourself an external 1TB or larger hard drive and use it to store all of your data. Now, you have the best of both worlds. Applications will load faster. Your computer will boot faster, and you'll

still have plenty of room to save all those family vacation photos.

Next month, I will finish up this series on computer shopping with a discussion on all of those "other" parts. In the meantime, if you're purchasing a computer, remember - it's not about brand, it's about what's inside the box. ■



Reply Online

Have a technology issue and want some advice? Visit www.icl.coop and click on Powered Up to respond. Your response might even be included in a future column.

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



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Delivering business success

Post office essential to rural businesses

By Marilyn Jones

When Steve Givan and his wife Jana started Spencer's Books in their home nearly seven years ago, they didn't realize how quickly it would grow. The couple now operates their Internet business from a warehouse in Plainfield - a small community at the crossroads of historic Lincoln Highway and Route 66.

"The post office is essential to what we do," said Givan. "The main reason is that 70 to 75 percent of all our shipments are shipped Media Mail. Most of the large Internet retail platforms like Amazon, eBay, Half.com, Alibris and so on give sellers like us an average shipping credit of \$3.99 for each item. That allows us to get products to our customers in the stated delivery timeframe, at or close to, a breakeven standpoint.

"If the Postal Service didn't offer the Media Mail product, dealers like Amazon would have to raise the pricing they charge their customers," Givan explained. "Media Mail is an outstanding product for customers who don't have to have their merchandise right away since delivery times are two to 14 days. Last month we sent several thousand packages out all over the United States and our average delivery time for Media Mail was four-and-a-half days."

The Postal Service has long been a champion of small businesses like Spencer's Books and recently announced a new marketing campaign to promote easy-to-use and affordable shipping service and direct mail advertising.

Dave Symons, warehouse manager of Phoenix Leather Goods, agrees and says he uses Priority Mail and First-Class Mail to ship the products his company sells online.



Phoenix Leather Goods warehouse team members Grace Lezondra and Ron Forsberg pack products for shipment by using free Priority Mail envelopes and boxes.

"We are an e-commerce company that sells leather goods, travel items and personal products on five different Internet market places," Symons said. "We have two websites - Beltoutlet.com and GoInStyle.com. We also sell our products on Amazon, Buy.com and eBay.

"Our company has been in business 15 years," said Symons. "We ship approximately 250,000 packages annually and 90 percent are shipped using the Postal Service. They have been a reliable service for our company from the very beginning. They pick up our shipments every day, Monday through Saturday, and we

can always depend on them."

In both cases the Postal Service took into consideration the customer's needs, goals and expectations. And with these criteria came a team of postal professionals.

"Spencer's Books had been using our competitor and they were looking to find a carrier that would offer reliable delivery while reducing costs," said Postal Service Shipping Solutions Specialist Stan Karcz. "I worked with Delivery Supervisor Annette Crain. We focused on the customer's needs and were able to provide the products and services that this company was looking for."

For Symons and his e-commerce business, Karcz identified a Priority Mail opportunity that would meet his expectation as well as reduce the bottom-line cost.

"The customer was looking for an economical way to ship ties, belts and other clothing accessories," said Karcz. "I presented a Priority Mail International solution for some of his shipments by developing transportation and logistics plans based on his needs. He was impressed with our efforts and made a commitment to switch carriers and begin shipping his products with the Postal Service - domestically and internationally."

Postal programs

Not only is the Postal Service reaching out to small businesses to provide reliable and affordable shipping solutions, but they are also providing businesses serving local clientele the opportunity to get the word out about their products and services.

"Every Door Direct Mail is designed for small businesses," said Paul Vogel, President and Chief Marketing/Sales Officer, U.S. Postal Service. "For less than 15 cents apiece, our customers can send fliers, menus, brochures and advertisements in highly targeted ways. By using a simple Web-based service, small businesses can send advertising to new and existing customers without the need for names or addresses.

"The mailings can be dropped off at a local Post Office," he continued. "The Web tool is free and easy to use, enabling restaurants, doctors' offices and other small businesses to map their coverage areas online, so they can really zero in on the streets and neighborhoods they want to reach."

Every Door Direct Mail was launched two years ago and has proven successful for small businesses as well as the Postal Service.

"Small businesses are the backbone of the American economy, and the Postal Service plays an important role in enabling their growth and commercial success," Vogel continued.

"We are providing a suite of mailing and shipping services tailored to the needs of small businesses to help them compete for customers and run their operations more efficiently.

"The key to helping small businesses prosper is being innovative and responsive to their needs and ensuring that our products are not only simple to use and affordable, but also offer our customers a way to generate positive return on investment from their marketing campaigns," said Vogel.

Often employees help identify businesses in the community that might benefit from what the Postal Service can offer says Plainfield Postmaster Cindy Lyons.

"Small businesses are the backbone of the American economy, and the Postal Service plays an important role in enabling their growth and commercial success."

"Customer Connect is a program for city carriers and Rural Reach is for rural carriers," she explained. "We have four city routes and 45 rural routes. That's a lot of employees out in the community delivering mail to businesses just starting out and ones that are established, but using another delivery service. When I get a lead from an employee I turn it into our Business Service Network."

When ATC Supply Company was located in Naperville, for example, Letter Carrier Pensky Chen approached its owner and asked if he would like to find out what the USPS could offer. ATC Supply is a distributor and wholesaler of replacement laptop batteries.

Eight years and two moves to larger facilities later, ATC President Tim Xu says he is very pleased with his experience dealing with the Postal Service. "We are now located in a 16,145 square foot facility. Ten people handle orders every working hour and more than 97 percent of our customers are very satisfied with our shipping," he said. "We use Priority Mail and First-Class Mail services.

"The Postal Service also provides free Priority Mail and Express Mail packaging to its customers," Lyons added. "There is no charge for package pick-up either - no matter how big or small an order."

Always looking to improve

"There are three things about the Post Office that are better than when we first started using them," said Givan. "Same day pickup has really been a blessing for us. Our business is somewhat seasonal so at certain times of the year it's really a benefit to have them come to us versus us going to them. As a small business there are only so many hours in a day and you want to use every tool available to you to maximize those hours.

"The second thing they have done - which is again recognizing a customer need - is come up with more flat rate mail boxes that accommodate different product sizes," said Givan. "Lastly, when you sell on the Internet there is a vacuum between you and your customers as far as knowing they really did get their product. Being able to use automated tracking is really essential because it allows us to know if something has been delivered."

"We want small businesses to make the U.S. Postal Service their shipper of choice," said Vogel. "We are doing that by developing smart tools and product offerings that help businesses grow - both theirs and ours."

For more information about small business solutions, contact your local Post Office.

3-31 Downs Village Market,

Southwest edge of Downs just off I-74. Every Wednesday through September 25th. Find locally grown and select regional produce, baked goods and honey, plants and flowers, quality crafts and handmade items. Master Gardeners are available to answer gardening questions. For info call Carol at 309-378-4223, Ruth at 309-378-4294 or email marketmaster610@gmail.com.

6-7 Heritage Festival and Duck Races

on the Ohio, 1st and Main, Elizabethtown. Fireman's BBQ, outdoor play, pageant, quilt demonstrations, entertainment and fireworks. www.hardincountyil.org.

10-14 20 Years of Walldogs, Downtown Kewanee. Professional sign painters, "Walldogs", have a tradition that has positively impacted more than two dozen towns across America. The Walldogs will converge on Kewanee and paint the town with 15 murals on area buildings. The murals will illustrate the town's history, heritage and traditions. During the three-day event, spectators can watch the artists work and even pick up a paintbrush and help. One mural will be painted by kids. Event includes live music, kids entertainment, food and much more. For info go to: www.KewaneeWalldogs.com.

11-14 Historic Farm Days, Penfield. Featuring Massey Harris, Massey Ferguson, Caterpillar, New Holland, construction equipment, yesterday's farm trucks, cars and equipment. Parade, entertainment, tractor pulls and field demonstrations daily. Saturday night will feature fireworks. Gates open at 7 a.m. www.antiquefarm.org.

12-15 World Rolle Bolle Tournament, Henry County and nearby Quad Cities in Illinois and Iowa annually host tournament. Location changes each day. Event attracts three-person teams from Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota and Canada. Contact Kenneth Sturtewagen at 309-936-7660 or www.visithenrycounty.org.

19-20 7th Annual Orange Power of the Past Working Show, Dale Haymakers Allis Chalmers Museum, Paris. Featured tractor - 100 Series. For info call Dale Haymaker 217-275-3428.

19-21 Stanford Good Old Days Festival, Downtown Stanford. Come see the biggest small-town fireworks. The festival includes a fish fry, music and vendors on Friday night; a 5K run/walk, kid's games, raffle, vendors, kiddie tractor pull, garden tractor rodeo, parade, etc. On Sunday is an antique engine show and tractor pull. Friday 4:30-10 p.m., Saturday 7 a.m.-9 p.m., Sunday 7 a.m.-3 p.m. 309-379-2251 or www.stanfordil.org.

20 Cruise to Mt. Carroll, Downtown Mt. Carroll. 7th annual cruise features brick streets and country charm with music, food and fun. 4-9 p.m. For more info contact Len Anderson 815-244-7875.

21 Art and Wine Festival, Mackinaw Valley Vineyard, 33633 State Rt. 9, Mackinaw. Featuring local and regional Midwest artists displaying and selling their artwork. The artists invited will specialize in ceramics, glass, wood, jewelry, oil painting and fiber. Live music and wine tasting will

be available. Free admission. 309-359-WINE or www.mackinawvalleyvineyard.com.

26-27 Findlay Walleye Festival, East South 2nd, Findlay. This yearly festival has plenty of entertainment, food and fun. There will be bands, an ice cream social, fireworks, kid's games, farmers market, tractor pull, a 5K and more. A large parade starts at 10 a.m. on Saturday and there will be plenty of kid's activities and games on both days. Friday 4 p.m. to midnight, Saturday 7:30 a.m. to midnight. www.lakeshelbyville.com/events/walleye.htm 217-756-3248.

27 Native American Prairie Day, 8642 IL Rt. 84 S, Hanover. Relive life on the prairie as it was 1,000 years ago with guided tours of the buried Indian village and ceremonial mound, demonstrations of weapons and local archeological collections. A Native American flute player, indigenous foods and face painting will keep everyone entertained. 1-4 p.m. 815-858-9100.

27 Cabela's King Kat Tournament, Ft. Massac State Park, 1308 E. 5th St., Metropolis. Bring your rod and reel and enter to win cash during this catfish tournament on the Ohio River. A free kid's tournament will also be held. For registration information go to www.kingkatusa.com or 270-395-6774.



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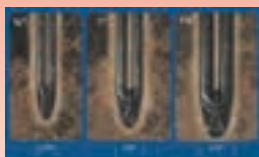
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**Advance Plbg. &
Mechanical LLC**
Monmouth, IL
309-734-7473

Affordable Htg.
Anamosa, IA
319-241-4520

Allenhouse Inc.
Macomb, IL
309-837-1554

AtoZ Htg.
Decatur, IL
217-620-3254

Albaugh PHC, INC
Tipton, IA
563-886-6247

Barrick Oltman Inc.
Washington, IL
309-444-4744

Basio Plbg. & Htg.
Galesburg, IL
309-297-6010

Bassett's Mechanical
Mt Pulaski, IL
217-792-5593

Beardstown E&M Corp
Beardstown, IL
217-323-4400

Bieri Plbg. & Htg.
Aledo, IL
309-582-2798

Birch Heath and Home
Dubuque, IA
563-556-4832

Borders HVAC Inc
Keokuk, IA
319-524-2665

Cedar Valley Htg.
Cedar Rapids, IA
319-365-2421

Colony Htg. & A/C
Cedar Rapids, IA
319-364-4755

Cordray Htg. & A/C
Ft Madison, IA
319-372-5063

Crawford Co.
Rock Island, IL
309-788-4573

Davis Electric
Rushville, IL
217-322-6677

E's Htg.
Decatur, IL
217-450-1630

Emberton Plbg. & Htg.
Fairbury, IL
815-692-3362

Fritch Htg. & Clg.
Peoria, IL
309-671-5360

G&B Mechanical
Pekin, IL
309-346-1140

Heat-CO Mechanical
Sterling, IL
815-625-0111

Hoveln Htg. & Clg.
Thomasboro, IL
217-643-2125

Hometown Building Supply
Beardstown, IL
217-323-4692

Isaacs Refrigeration
Pleasant Plains, IL
217-626-2833

JL Brady Co.
Moline, IL
309-755-5053

Kelly Htg.
Iowa City, IA
319-337-3520

Kelly Htg. & Plbg.
Muscatine, IA
563-264-1913

KNEAREM'S Commercial
Shelbyville, IL
217-774-4933

Kodiak Refrigeration Inc.
East Peoria, IL
309-822-8797

Liston Htg. & Clg.
Galesburg, IL
309-368-4431

MB Htg. & Clg.
Springfield, IL
217-544-4328

M & K Maintenance Solution
Peoria, IL
309-256-6129

**M&M Home Mechanical
Services**
Canton, IL
309-647-3481

**New Air Htg., Clg. &
Duct Cleaning**
Thayer, IL
217-965-5578

Oehl Plbg. & Htg.
Amana, IA
319-622-3636

Oye's Hardware
Arthur, IL
217-543-3348

Patterson Htg. & Clg.
Dubuque, IA
563-556-4587

Pete's Htg. & Clg.
Springfield, IL
217-525-2665

Redell's Htg. & A/C
Erie, IL
309-659-2535

R & S Htg, Clg. & Rfg.
Washburn, IL
309-868-0680

Sheeder Htg. & A/C
Stockton, IA
563-785-4669

Source One Htg. & Clg.
Erie, IL
319-721-9407

SubZero Htg. & A/C
Decatur, IL
217-972-5945

Sweeney Htg. & Air Inc.
Rochester, IL
217-498-2608

Tarter Brothers
Lincoln, IL
217-735-4117

The Lane Company Inc.
Blommington, IL
309-663-8412

Tonica Hardware
Tonica, IL
815-442-3415

US Air
Muscatine, IA
563-288-7247

Vandemore Plbg. & Htg.
Geneseo, IL
309-944-3354

Wisdom Htg. & Air
Erie, IL
309-659-7944

Woods Accu-Air
Ipava, IL
309-303-6141

*The Extreme inverter driven, air source heat pump eliminates the expense of installing a loop field in your yard.