

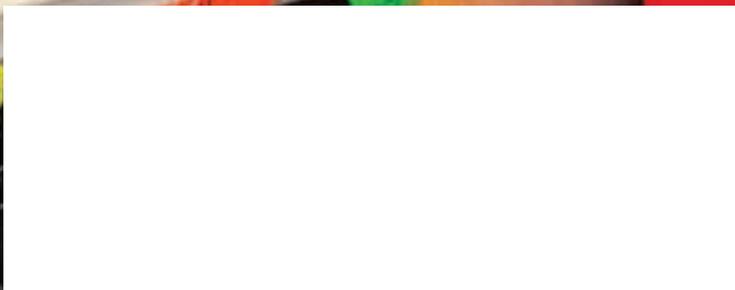
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Small town grocery stores, although dwindling in number, are one of the most important businesses in town and vital to a community's growth.

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Illinois is expanding broadband in rural areas

Building a world-class network will drive rural jobs and opportunity

Ultra high-speed Internet access is a key to success for rural Illinois, now and in the future. In order to remain competitive in today's digital society, Illinois must have broadband infrastructure that is second to none. Access to quality, high-speed Internet for all Illinois residents provides opportunities for a better education, better jobs, and ultimately better living here in the Land of Lincoln.

That's why we've invested more than \$71 million in broadband throughout the state as part of the *Illinois Jobs Now!* capital construction program. This investment has leveraged more than \$214 million in additional funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. More than 3,000 miles of fiber optic cable has been installed through these projects, and there is more to come.

These projects, and the companies that are undertaking them, are doing great things to keep Illinois connected. Clearwave Communications, a Harrisburg company, recently completed a high-speed connectivity project in southern Illinois. The project used \$11.3 million in state funds, as well as federal and private dollars, to install 751 miles of fiber in 23 counties, connecting 232 community anchor institutions.

The Illinois Century Network has leveraged \$62 million in federal funds with \$34 million in state and local funds to upgrade the state's research and education network to a 10 gigabit fiber network. The network upgrade has resulted in lower operating costs while more than tripling broadband speeds for K12 schools, higher education, libraries, museums and health care throughout 55 counties in Illinois.

Through *Illinois Jobs Now!* we also

established the Gigabit Communities Challenge, which seeks proposals from private and public organizations promising to deploy ultra high-speed broadband in communities throughout Illinois. Each project must connect at least 1,000 end users to Gigabit broadband speeds. Through this program, \$1.5 million was awarded to build an ultra high-speed broadband network in southern Illinois.

A partnership between Frontier North, Inc., the City of Carbondale, Southern Illinois University and Connect SI empowered Frontier to build a high-speed fiber optic network to Carbondale's businesses, schools, hospitals and neighborhoods. Gigabit broadband, which is up to 100 times faster than the speeds currently available, will help recruit new business to the region and enable Southern Illinois University's scholars, innovators and entrepreneurs to connect across the globe. Capabilities for telemedicine and telehealth through the university's school of medicine will also greatly impact citizens in underserved areas in southern Illinois.

Illinois is also the site of a federal pilot project that supplies qualifying customers from seven rural Illinois phone companies with a refurbished computer for \$50 and a year's worth of high-speed Internet access for as low as \$9.95 a month. The "Better Broadband, Better Lifeline" project, one of only 14 in the nation, targeted an urgent need in Illinois, where roughly four out of ten low income families still don't have access to the benefits of high-speed Internet.

The Citizens Utility Board assisted in the project along with phone companies spanning 35 counties in western and southern Illinois including: Adams Telephone

Co-Operative, Cass Telephone Company, Harrisonville Telephone Company, Madison Telephone Company, Mid Century Telephone Cooperative, Shawnee Telephone Company and Wabash Telephone Cooperative. The pilot project will last a year and help the FCC develop a plan for offering permanent broadband discounts to qualifying families in the future.

In addition to this project, Illinois' telephone cooperatives have been pioneers in bringing fiber optic broadband service to rural areas. And we should also recognize the work of electric cooperatives like Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, Illinois Rural Electric Cooperative, Jo-Carroll Energy, Shelby Electric Cooperative and recently Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, for bringing wireless broadband service to their rural service areas. Prairie Power, Inc., an Illinois generation and transmission cooperative, is also adding a fiber optic network that will provide smart grid communication capabilities and backbone broadband infrastructure for rural areas it serves.

The best part of Illinois' broadband initiative isn't about fiber optics — it is about a world-class community network built to drive jobs and new opportunities for rural Illinois. While we've made a lot of progress, our work isn't finished. Let's work together and continue building broadband infrastructure and new opportunities. ■

Governor Pat Quinn served Illinois as Treasurer and Lieutenant Governor before becoming the state's 41st governor. He has long championed the deployment of broadband.





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Gulley new CEO for Southern Illinois Power Cooperative

The Southern Illinois Power Cooperative board of directors recently named Donald L. Gulley as its next CEO. Gulley began his duties at year-end, upon the retirement of Tim Reeves, SIPC's long-serving CEO. Marion-based SIPC is the generation and transmission cooperative for seven distribution cooperatives and two wholesale customers in southern Illinois.

"Born and raised in the heart of Southern Illinois, I have a genuine concern for, and connection with, the people served by SIPC," said Gulley. "I also possess a good business working relationship with a few of the SIPC member managers and believe it will be a short transition period for me to get acclimated to the team at SIPC."

Gulley said there are many challenges ahead for SIPC. "I look forward to working with the hardworking and dedicated team of directors and employees that serve the member-owners."

Gulley has served as the Vice President of Regulatory & Market Affairs at Sunflower Electric Power Cooperative in Hays, Kan., since 2010. He has more than 25 years of diverse utility management and business operations experience. Prior to Sunflower Electric, Gulley served as the Director of Business Operations with Ameren Energy Marketing.



Donald Gulley has been selected by the Southern Illinois Power Cooperative's board of directors as the new President and CEO.

Sen. Koehler honored for co-op legislation

At Spoon River Electric Cooperative's November 25 board meeting, State Senator Dave Koehler (D-Peoria, 46th District) received the 2013 Illinois Electric Cooperatives' Public Service Award. The award was made in recognition of Sen. Koehler's dedicated public service to all citizens of the state of Illinois and for outstanding contributions to the rural electrification program. Of special significance, Sen. Koehler was the chief Senate sponsor of legislation that was approved by the Illinois General Assembly this past spring and signed by Governor Quinn. That new law will allow not-for-profit cooperatives to be

formed for the express purpose of owning and operating anaerobic digesters that can potentially assist livestock owners in, among other things, creating renewable power.

Sen. Koehler has been a supporter of Illinois electric cooperatives and their rural member-owners on a wide variety of issues. "From addressing local issues that arise, to meeting with our co-op's kids when they go down to Springfield for Co-op Youth Day, Sen. Koehler is always accessible and helpful, and that is incredibly important and much appreciated," said Bill Dodds, President/CEO of Spoon River Electric Cooperative.



State Senator Dave Koehler (D-Peoria, 46th District) was presented with the 2013 Illinois Electric Cooperatives' Public Service Award by Spoon River Electric Cooperative President/CEO William R. Dodds (right). Also congratulating Sen. Koehler November 25 at the presentation were Spoon River Electric board members (back row left - right) Bernard Marvel, Lyle H. Nelson, James C. Banks, Bob D. Lascelles, Gregory M. Leigh, Steve M. Pille, Jack L. Clark and Terry A. Beam.



Record number of organizations back passage of Farm Bill

The Agriculture Energy Coalition (AgEC), along with 25x25 and the Environmental Law & Policy Center, led a group of more than 100 organizations in sending a letter today urging Congressional conferees to adopt the Senate Farm Bill's Energy Title funding. If approved, this bill would provide \$900 million in mandatory funding for agriculture energy programs. Signatories include such

organizations as National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the National Farmers Union, the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), American Biogas Council, Biomass Power Association and others.

The Agriculture Energy Coalition (AgEC) and co-signers wrote that a strong, well-funded energy title is not only vital to the development

and commercialization of renewable energy, bioproducts, renewable chemicals and energy efficiency, but also crucial to maintain a robust and sustainable agriculture sector across the United States.

The letter said, "Many tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs are being created or saved in rural areas by our nation's expanding clean energy economy."

Co-op leader urges Congress to stop EPA

Low-income people in rural America will bear the brunt of federal limits on carbon dioxide emissions from coal-based electric generation, Tony Campbell, president and CEO of East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC), told Congress. Campbell earlier in his career was an employee of Corn Belt Energy in Bloomington, Ill. The EPA is preparing to propose carbon dioxide standards for existing power plants in June 2014.



Tony Campbell (center), President/CEO of East Kentucky Power Cooperative, brings concerns about pending EPA carbon dioxide rules to Congress. (Photo By: House Energy and Power Subcommittee)

"East Kentucky Power is very worried about the supply of electricity to its rural cooperative members and its cost," Campbell told the House Energy and Power Subcommittee Nov. 14.

EKPC has invested nearly \$1 billion in pollution control technology to curb emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from its three existing coal plants and spent another \$1 billion to build two coal units with state of the art emission reduction equipment. But Campbell said there is a current lack of commercially available technology to control a power plant's carbon emissions. EKPC would have to convert these units to natural gas, essentially wasting the extensive capital investments that have been made to lower pollutants.

Campbell said he supported draft legislation from subcommittee Chairman Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., and Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va. The proposed bill would not allow EPA

rules in this area to take effect unless Congress enacts a law specifying an effective date. To obtain that date, EPA must submit a report to Congress on the economic impacts of the rule, including how electricity ratepayers may be affected.

"This bipartisan bill is badly needed to ensure EPA does not promulgate a rule that jeopardizes the country's energy future, puts electricity reliability at risk, and severely harms the economy," Campbell said.

You may not be able to testify before Congress like Campbell did, but you can voice your concerns about the impact of EPA rules on energy reliability and cost. Raise your voice through the Cooperative Action Network at www.action.coop. Tell the EPA we need an all-of-the-above energy strategy.

Source: Electric Co-op Today

Co-op adds 154 MW of renewable methane power

Hoosier Energy, a generation and transmission co-op serving more than 300,000 co-op members in Indiana and Illinois, recently celebrated the official startup of the Livingston Renewable Energy Station at the Livingston Landfill - a 4,604-acre, Republic Services site just north of Pontiac.

The 154-megawatt generating facility will use methane gas from the landfill. "Landfill methane generation projects such as these are truly a winner for all concerned," said company Board Chairman James Weimer who was joined by Chief Executive Officer Steve Smith.

Landfill gas occurs naturally from decomposing waste. Landfill generation projects help destroy this methane, a potent greenhouse gas and offset the use of other fuels such as coal, natural gas and oil. It also provides reliable 24/7 power that solar and wind energy can't match.



From the left, Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives President/CEO Duane Noland, Hoosier Energy Board Chairman Jim Weimer, Hoosier Energy President/CEO Steve Smith, Republic Services Environmental Manager Eric Dippon, and AIEC Sr. Vice President of Government Relations Don Wood cut the ribbon to the new 154 MW methane gas generating facility near Pontiac.



Co-ops start Philippines typhoon relief fund

To help bring the power back after Typhoon Haiyan, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) has launched a fund-raising campaign for the Philippines. There are 119 electric cooperatives in this nation, and at least 30 have been affected.

NRECA International and several of our member co-ops have a longstanding relationship with the electric co-ops in the Philippines dating back to 1966. At that time only one in 10 Filipinos had electricity. America's electric cooperatives have helped turn that around.

For example, ten years ago the electric co-ops of Illinois organized a used equipment donation for the sister co-ops in the Philippines and sent enough equipment to supply three small villages.

If you can donate, join us in our commitment to help the people of the Philippines. All your donations are tax deductible, NRECA International Foundation is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. To donate go to www.nreca.coop/philippine-typhoon-relief/

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rowing up in a small town, I remember the local grocery store, a place where everyone seemed to know each other's names. It was a social place where conversation was part of the experience. You could catch up on local happenings, visit with friends and neighbors in the produce aisle and, once finished shopping, someone sacked your groceries and carried them to your car. Imagine that!

If you live in a rural community, a grocery store is one of the most important businesses in town. More than just an easy access to food and toiletries, grocery stores provide jobs and generate tax revenue that support the local community. A grocery store is an anchor institution and helps attract residents as do a school, post office, church and restaurant.

The lack of a grocery store means residents, especially the elderly, have little access to fresh fruits and vegetables and may be left to purchase more expensive, and less healthy items, at a convenience store.



Ownership of a small-town grocery store can be challenging depending on the size of the community and the inventory carried. Just meeting the minimum buying requirements of a distributor can be a major hurdle to keeping the doors open. Across the country many rural grocery stores struggle to survive, while others thrive. What makes the difference? It seems to be the size and support of the local community.



Edgewood Store is home away from home

Carla Sowers purchased the 117 year-old Edgewood Store, in Edgewood, Ill., population 434, a little over a year ago through a CEFS Economic Opportunity Corporation (www.cefseoc.org) small business revolving loan program. CEFS is a not-for-profit community action agency that helps assist economically – and socially-disadvantaged people attain greater self-sufficiency in Christian, Clay, Effingham, Fayette, Montgomery, Moultrie and Shelby counties.

The Edgewood Store building was in need of immediate structural repair which Sowers' sons were able to do. She also had to paint everything and make much needed repairs to the ceiling.

According to Sowers, "Six months into purchasing the store, I could see that it was just barely going to make it. Everything that came in went right back out." She started looking for ways to increase her sales. While her fresh meat case and daily lunch specials bring people in, it just isn't enough. She has added pizzas, movies, hunting and fishing licenses, and is in the



process of getting the licensing to put in video gambling machines, all in the hopes of finally earning enough to be able to take a break now and then.

Currently, Sowers is at the store about 70 hours a week and usually has the help of one employee. On Sundays, she handles everything herself but it is getting busy enough she may need help then as well.

Sowers says, if she hadn't already worked for the previous owner, she never would have tried to buy it. She already knew many of the customers and says they are always thanking her for keeping the store open.

"I've made a lot of friends," she says. "They are pretty much like family and some of them even worry about how many hours I'm working, but I tell them I'm fine. I treat everyone that walks in the door like family. This is my home away from home."

Delivering groceries and unity in Germantown

Glenn and Wanita Gebke purchased Germantown Groceries almost two-and-a-half years ago. Glenn was actually a bag boy at the store when he was growing up. He was in the process of retiring as a correctional officer when he purchased the store, which was preparing to close. Both Glenn and Wanita



Glenn and Wanita Gebke

grew up in Germantown, population 1,294, and that played a part in them buying the store. They say the store helps unite the community because you are regularly talking to customers and you understand the town.

According to Glenn, a lot of elderly residents shop at Germantown Groceries, and they have a variety of regular shoppers from those buying everything they need to those running in for a few basics. Customer service is utmost on their minds. "We even deliver to some of the elderly who can't get out," says Wanita. "When we know someone is recovering from an operation we will offer to deliver their groceries. We even have a few regulars who will call and we'll deliver to them."

One of the biggest challenges the Gebkes have is keeping up maintenance of outdated equipment, and other capital projects. They recently put new lighting in the refrigeration and freezer units and have 1960s paneling and flooring that needs to be replaced. Their current priority is getting updated registers that will help them track and control inventory.

They cut their own meat and have a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. And if customers don't find what they are looking for, all they have to do is ask and they do their best to fulfill the request. Customers continually thank them for their devotion to keeping the store open, and they find the work rewarding. The Gebkes enjoy pleasing customers and the community loves them back. You can hear the



hometown pride in their voices as they talk about their community.

“We might not be able to beat some stores on prices,” says Glenn. “But we can beat them on friendliness and hospitality. That’s the hometown feel.”

Citizen-saved store in Washburn

In Washburn, a small 1,150 bedroom community of Peoria, the citizens initiated the Washburn Community Foods Project in 2000 to save its local grocery store. By selling shares they raised \$100,000 of seed money needed to keep the local store open.

“There were 360 shareholders when we started, says Tim Schoon, vice president of Washburn Community Bank. “It was local folks and relatives, family and friends of people who lived here that bought the shares. There were a lot of \$50 and \$500 shareholders and the largest single shareholder was the bank at \$10,000.”

According to Schoon, the grocery business has gone through many challenging changes. It’s a high volume, low margin business, and it’s really hard to maintain volume and margin in a small town community where one-third of the people are elderly and don’t have the ability to leave the community to shop.

“You try to do something for those people, maintain property values and

sustain whatever business you can in a rural atmosphere,” says Schoon.

Through the efforts of the community, the group was able to sustain the store for the past 13 years. From the first day, the store operated with volunteers and was managed by a board of 16 directors. Volunteers helped unload the trucks, mark items and stock the shelves. Anytime there was a special need for extra people it was done with volunteers. They hired a manager and a couple of employees to help customers.

Profit was always an issue - they continued to stock the shelves, but when it came to capital improvements the community had to raise funds through a variety of charity auctions, golf outings, etc. In 2005, the group decided to convert the store to a co-op. Original shareholders converted to co-op membership and contributed money each year for a discount on their groceries. That gave the store a regular influx of cash.

But the Washburn Community Foods building needed too many capital upgrades - things were wearing out. The store started cutting down on the inventory, but as inventory declined, so did sales and they were caught in a Catch 22 situation.

In the end, it was just too much. The board decided it was time to give someone else a fresh start with their own ideas. They found a private owner who had a few other stores and was willing to take on the store. They

signed over ownership in late summer of 2013.

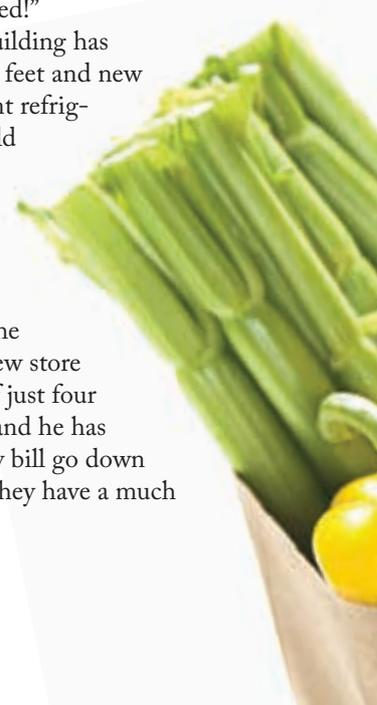
For those communities looking for ways to hold onto their grocery store, Schoon says, “You need a strong sense of community pride and leadership with everyone coming together for a common cause. And, it is ongoing, not a onetime thing. If you don’t have the community commitment and the people commitment, it’s probably not viable.”

Finding the secrets to success at Windsor Foods

As you drive east on Route 16 through the small town of Windsor, population 1,180, you will come across Windsor Foods owned and managed by Bob Peadro. He is a lifelong resident of Windsor and has a long background in the grocery business, beginning when he was young and sacked groceries at a store in nearby Sullivan. After being drafted in the Army, Peadro returned to his grocery roots and, in 1988, purchased the business.

The original 5,000-square-foot store was a block off of the highway, but three years ago Peadro built the existing store and business has tripled. “I didn’t expect that,” says Peadro, “but I’m pleased!”

The new building has 12,600 square feet and new energy efficient refrigeration. The old store had 16 refrigeration/freezer cases, each with its own compressor. The units in the new store have a total of just four compressors, and he has seen his utility bill go down even though they have a much larger space.



Building a business on bratwurst

Peadro says, "In a small grocery store you have to find a niche. There are no restaurants in town so we put in tables and booths for customers. Now when they pick up a hot breakfast or one of our popular lunch specials they have a place to sit." They do a brisk business with area residents and those traveling through on their way to work.

The meat department, run by son Daric, is their strongest department. "You can go anywhere and buy groceries, but you can't buy the burger patties or other meats he has," explains Peadro.

Daric has come up with 33 varieties of burgers, either pork-, beef- or chicken-based and customers come from as far away as Bloomington, Decatur and Champaign. He also came up with his own barbeque sauce, Daric's Original Smoke Shack BBQ Sauce, which is so popular it is now bottled and labeled for them by Country Bobs. It is only available at Windsor Foods.

The secret of his success, Peadro says, is customer service. He learned it from his "hero" Elsworth Lehman, a name well-known to those in the area. Lehman owned and operated the IGA in Sullivan for many years and Peadro was impressed from a young age with how Lehman knew the names of his customers and was sure they had a good shopping experience. He has carried that customer service over to his own store.

"I'm not strictly about dollars and cents," says Peadro. "You can go anywhere and sack your own groceries, and probably buy them cheaper than you can here, but our customer service is great. The little things haven't changed, we still sack them and carry them out."

When was the last time your supermarket did that for you? ■



John Jones hand trims meat.

Stepping into Jones Boys Market in Ashland is a bit like stepping back into time. The fourth-generation meat market has roots back to the 1800s, when it was a dry goods store. Original fixtures are still part of the ambience of the store along with its brick walls and uneven floor.

Current owners and operators, John and Beth Jones, along with son Dan, have expanded their offerings and gone into local farmers markets in Springfield and Decatur.

Known for their many varieties of bratwurst, customers flock to their booth at the Illinois Products Farmer's Market on the Illinois State Fairgrounds and to the Richland Community College Farmers Market in Decatur. Once the farmer's markets are over for the season they see an influx of folks from out of town who stop into the store to stock up.

They offer personal service, cutting your meat to order, and have more than 40 different varieties of bratwurst from their most popular Apple Brats to Dill Pickle, Chicken Bacon Ranch and up to 32 of which you can find in their freezer, depending on the season.

Dan says, "We have seen a boost in business in the last four to six years as people are looking for local food and have become more interested in where it is coming from and what is being put into it. We use no preservatives and although not organic, it is all natural. We tell people they need to use the brats within six to eight weeks because they aren't full of preservatives. But that also brings them back to buy more." Everything they sell is USDA approved, as is required to be a retail outlet.

Jones Boys Market has always sold its meat to local restaurants and is hoping to expand into even more farmer's markets including the one at the Peoria Riverfront. Find out more on the Jones Boys Market Facebook page.



Damage control after the storm

Tornados and winter storms leave behind more than debris

In mid-November our state was hit by EF3 tornados that swept across 15 counties and federal disaster assistance was approved for Champaign, Douglas, Fayette, Grundy, Jasper, LaSalle, Massac, Pope, Tazewell, Vermilion, Wabash, Washington, Wayne, Will and Woodford counties.



At Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, Director of Communications Jerri Schaefer said, “The tornado destroyed 29 homes on Unionville Road near Brookport, Ill., changing the lives of some of our members forever. There were two fatalities. In one family a husband and wife were ripped out of their home. The husband landed in a pond 200 feet away and had a broken leg and dislocated hip. His wife did not survive.”

Growing up in Oklahoma watching tornados is almost a sporting event, but we knew when that siren went off, or mom or dad yelled “get to the cellar,” you better go that second. In school we knew where to go and we prepared with tornado drills. In Oklahoma we knew tornados were a threat just about any time of year.

In December we were hit pretty hard again in southern Illinois with an ice storm. While ice storms can cause larger and longer lasting power outages, they both can leave behind a very dangerous situation.

After any storm you have to be very observant of any lines on the ground or hanging very low. You should consider any power line you see as energized. Don't touch it. Don't go near it until your utility gives you a clear communication that it is safe to return to a

disaster site.

Keep others away from downed or low-hanging lines, especially children who may not understand the danger. Even if a line is lying on the ground it may not arc and spark or appear energized. If it is lying on snow, snow can actually provide a little insulation and may look de-energized, but

be very deadly. Storms also create a lot of moisture in areas near electricity, further increasing the danger of electrocution.

A line may be down and de-energized by your utility, but someone with a generator could backfeed energy onto the line you are near. If you are going to use a generator after a storm outage, do not plug it directly into your home's wiring system unless you have installed a transfer switch. Also, follow all the safety rules for fueling and providing ventilation for the generator. It should be used at least 15 feet from your house and never in the garage. Carbon monoxide is a silent killer and 755 lives were lost between 1999 and 2011 from generators alone.

We have a long winter still ahead of us and many of the dangers are out on the roads. If you are ever in an accident involving a downed power line on your vehicle, please, please, please stay in the vehicle until help arrives. Don't let good Samaritans get near the lines or your car until linemen cut the power to the line. It is easy to panic. Don't!

Before the next storm or winter road disaster take some time to prepare your disaster kit with:

- ❖ Water – stock up on bottled water for consumption.

- ❖ Food – have enough non-perishable food items to last at least three to seven days.
- ❖ Utensils – include a non-electric can opener, cooking tools, paper plates and plastic utensils.
- ❖ Blankets, pillows and warm clothing items.
- ❖ First aid kit, medicine and prescription drugs.
- ❖ Flashlight and batteries – be sure to include extra batteries.
- ❖ Radio and clock – use battery-operated radios and clocks; also consider purchasing a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio.
- ❖ Telephone – keep cell phone chargers (wall, car and/or solar) on hand and, if you have a landline, a traditional (not cordless) telephone set.
- ❖ Supplies for alternate heating methods, such as a fireplace or wood-burning stove, and a fire extinguisher.
- ❖ For your car, stock it with a flashlight with extra batteries; first aid kit; water and non-perishable snacks; blankets; windshield scraper and brush; booster cables; sack of sand or kitty litter; tool kit; and shovel. The items can be packed in a backpack or rubber tub.

For additional information on emergency preparedness, and current storm information visit the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov ■

Ken Macken is the Manager of Safety and Loss Control for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. kmacken@aiec.coop.



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New Year's resolutions for your garden

Some resolutions are tough to keep, but these are easy

The New Year brings new resolutions. If you go the healthy food and exercise route, you probably will break the resolution two weeks into the new year, if not sooner.

Gardening resolutions have the advantage of lasting longer, but only due to the fact that it's too cold to do much gardening until April or May. And by then we can blame short-term memory loss, global warming or the alignment of the planets for any promises broken.

Resolutions probably fall into one of three categories.

The first is the promise of "not to use as many bad chemicals" in the landscape. This one is relatively easy as you can justify any action by using safer products, less of them or moving to the desert where there are fewer pests.

Over the years, chemical use has dropped. We no longer have the desire to be totally pest-free. And as regular readers of this column know, the more you plant and diversify your yard, the fewer the pests. Getting rid of large chunks of lawn is a great start, though fencing it in and raising sheep and goats is another option of cutting chemical use. And you can use the livestock.

Do check with local ordinances. It's sad to state but some communities have ordinances against raising livestock within municipal limits.

Reduced pest problems with diversification is a fact. The more different plants you have, the fewer pests. Part of the reason this works is you have fewer specific plants the pests will go after. The other part is you bring in beneficial creatures such as birds and insects.

Nature can have the final laugh. For example, say you plant fennel and dill to attract swallowtail caterpillars



and by extension the butterflies when the larva pupate. On top of that, you should still have some fennel and dill for cooking if you plant enough.

But then, the cardinals that have stuck around all year due to the seeds on the trees, shrubs and perennials, discover the tastiness of the caterpillars. Wham! No swallowtails. Sigh. But at least the cardinals are proliferating instead of the pigeons.

Another resolution is to "garden more." It's also one of those that just about anyone can say they achieve at the end of the year. Who is to argue? And how would you measure any outcome.

Now, gardening is akin to exercising, so if you say "get more exercise for 2014," consider modifying the statement to "get more exercise gardening." It also gets you out in the fresh air.

This goes back to the diversification statement. Garden more by planting different plants, including trees and

shrubs. Manicured lawns have their place including golf courses, but require a significant input in time, money and chemicals.

On the other hand, massive lawns are one means of getting one spouse out of the hair of the other.

The third resolution is the one that usually is broken faster than any other; it's the promise of "not planting as much as I did last year" and the sub-promise of "I'll not buy as much stuff." I never get it planted until mid-September anyway and letting it sit around until then could look like hoarding."

We all fail with this pledge but with good intentions. It's like choosing that one piece of candy. Everything looks good and we want to try everything.

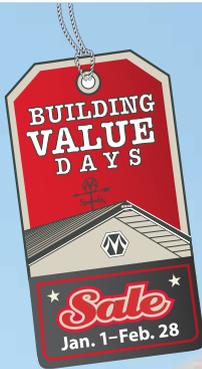
Blessed are those with unlimited garden space. Cursed are the rest of us with neighbors who allow us to encroach somewhat but within limits.

One of the best ways to limit your buying next spring is to use cash. Don't take the credit cards. Don't take the checkbook. Set a budget, put that money in an envelope and stick to it. This could also be combined with another resolution like the more exercise more gardening combo. You could get bonus points.

But don't get too frugal and drop that gym membership just because "you're going to lose those pounds gardening more." ■

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





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Energy efficiency advice for the New Year

The more things change, the....

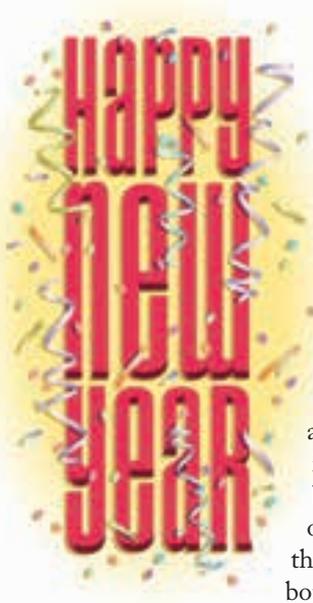
Yes, you know the rest; the more they remain the same. It is unbelievable, isn't it? Another year has passed. Well HAPPY NEW YEAR again. As I was thinking about this column and the ways that we could best help you in this New Year, I also reflected on the past.

I thought about many of the ways the world has changed since I wrote my first column. I also thought about how much faster and busier life seems to be with the technology revolution. Then I thought about the great opportunity we have had to help so many people have more energy efficient and affordable houses.

Just last evening a man said to me, "Y'all have done a good job teaching folks about energy construction. I walked through several houses under construction recently and all of them were using Marathon electric water heaters and cellulose insulation. I believe that they learned to do that from y'all."

With further discussion, I learned that "y'all" was referring to the electric co-ops and me. Well, I love to hear comments like that.

What we teach is good for the consumer, good for the environment and good for our nation. I have never had a single person say to me that teaching energy efficiency is a bad thing. So we will continue to teach in 2014, and we will try to do our best ever. We will use several methods to help you have a more energy-efficient house including this column, seminars and www.smartenergytips.org.



As I thought about the ways things have changed through the years, it occurred to me that energy efficiency, as relating to houses, has remained the same. I believe if we made a list of every item that affected the energy efficiency of both a 30-year old house

and a brand new house, the two lists would essentially be the same.

Of course, we would expect the new house to be the most energy efficient of the two, and, in most cases, it would be — but not always. If the owner of an older home has corrected the house's energy inefficiency issues, it could easily be more energy efficient than a newer one.

I often get a call at the office where the caller starts by saying, "I live in a 50-year-old house and ..." I can tell by the sound of the caller's voice that he or she has doubts as to what can be done, or if there is even anything feasible to do that will make the older house more energy efficient. Well, the answer is nearly always, yes.

It should be obvious by now that a list is important. And what is on that list? Well, it needs to identify the energy efficiency needs of your house only. That list should be based on facts and not guesses. In the 2014 columns, we are going to do our best to help you know what needs to be on that list and to teach

What we teach is good for the consumer, good for the environment and good for our nation.

you how to make improvements so that you can start reducing the number of items on the list. We encourage you to not only read the columns, but to save them for further references. So, since it is already 2014, let's get started.

Without a doubt, the best way to know about the energy efficiency of any house is to obtain a detailed energy audit.

I often tell folks that you will learn more about your house in a couple of hours with a good energy audit than you will learn in years without one. If your house has comfort problems or high utility bills and you are a member of an electric co-op, I suggest you call your electric co-op and request an energy audit. And the sooner you call, the better because the audit will almost always reveal air infiltration problems. And that is what we will cover in the column next month.

Trust me, you will be glad that you called your co-op. And as always, you can call me at 501-653-7931 for other energy efficiency help. ■

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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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

Loose Saggy Neck Skin - Can Any Cream Cure Turkey Neck?

DEAR DORRIS: I'm a woman who is 64 years young who suffers from really loose skin under my chin and on my lower neck.



I hate the term, but my grandkids say I have "turkey neck" and frankly, I've had enough of it! I have tried some creams designed to help tighten and firm that loose, saggy skin, but they did not work. Is there any cream out there that Might help my loose neck skin?

Turkey Neck, Rockford, IL

DEAR TURKEY-NECK: In fact, there is a very potent cream on the market that is designed to firm, tighten and invigorate skin cells on the neck area. It is called the **Dermagist Neck Restoration Cream**.

This cream contains an instant-effect ingredient that aims to tighten the skin naturally, as well as deep-moisturizing ingredients aiming to firm the skin and make it more supple. Amazingly, the Dermagist Neck Restoration Cream also has Stem Cells taken from Malus Domesticus, a special apple from Switzerland.

These apple stem cells target your skin's aging cells, and strive to bring back their youthful firmness, and elasticity. As an alternative to the scary surgeries or face lifts that many people resort to, this cream has the potential to deliver a big punch to the loose saggy skin of the neck. **The Dermagist Neck Restoration Cream is available online at Dermagist.com** or you can order or learn more by **calling toll-free, 888-771-5355**. Oh, I almost forgot... I was given a promo code when I placed my order that gave me 10% off. The code was **"ILN2"**. It's worth a try to see if it still works.

HEALTH

EMILY THACKER
Author

JAMES VICTOR
Publisher

Jane King
Editor/Research



Ask Emily

By Emily Thacker

Dear Emily: I'm allergic to perfumes, chemical smells plus many other things. Cleaning has gotten to be a problem as manufactures seem to think everything has to have a fragrance in their product. Can you recommend to me a natural way to freshen my room and air?

— B.A., Newport, PA

Dear B.A.: Vinegar is the cleaner of choice for those with allergies, asthma or a sensitivity to harsh chemicals. Cleaners you make yourself cost pennies, instead of the dollars supermarket cleaners cost. And, what is much more significant, the compounds you put together are safe, natural and easy on the environment.

I will give you my natural Fresh Air freshener from page 134 of my latest book *The Vinegar Anniversary Book*. Put the following into a pump spray bottle: 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1 tablespoon white vinegar and 2 cups of water. After the foaming stops, put on the lid and shake well. Spray this mixture into the air for instant freshness.

Hello Emily: I have a situation that I need additional guidance on and am hoping you will be able to assist me. I have a natural limestone walled shower and a natural slate shower floor. I also have very hard water that leaves behind white powdery mineral deposits that stain the stone. The mineral deposits do not come up with steam, scrubbing or with natural stone cleaner. I've read many very conflicting reports on the use of vinegar on natural stone. Any suggestions, resources or insights that you can offer would be very much appreciated. Thank You,
— C. A., King of Prussia, PA

Dear C.A.: Yes, vinegar could eventually etch the limestone and slate. And, yes it will do a very good job of removing the powdery mineral deposits in your shower. You will probably find that anything that will dissolve the mineral deposits will also dissolve the limestone, as they are both composed of the same material. You might find that a quick rinse with vinegar, followed by a thorough rinse with lots of cool water will minimize the damage it could do. You may also want to look into the benefits of a water softener to minimize the problem.

Emily Thacker is the author of over 17 books. Her best-selling books about common household products have appeared in newspapers and publications across the U.S. including USA Today, USA Weekend, Parade Magazine, The History Channel Magazine and The Saturday Evening Post.

Send Questions to: Emily Thacker C/O James Direct, Inc., 500 S. Prospect Ave., Box 980, Hartville, Ohio 44632.

If interested in Emily's latest book and a FREE Special Bonus please see the articles on the next two pages titled "Vinegar, Better than Prescription Drugs?" or "Why Diet? Try Vinegar!"

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Vinegar, Better than Prescription Drugs?

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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.

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.

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!

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.*

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.

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To prove that you can eat great and feel great while losing ugly, unhealthy pounds the natural Vinegar way, you're invited to try the program for up to 3 months on a "You Must Be Satisfied Trial."

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What's the secret? Modern research combined with nature's golden elixir.

Since ancient times apple cider vinegar has been used in folk remedies to help control weight and speed-up the metabolism to burn fat. And to also aid overall good health.

Now-- for the first time -- Emily has combined the latest scientific findings and all the weight loss benefits of vinegar into a program with lifetime benefits-- to melt away pounds for health and beauty.

If you like food and hate dieting, you'll love losing pounds and inches the Vinegar way.

Suddenly your body will be energized with new vigor and zest as you combine nature's most powerful, nutritional foods with vinegar to trim away pounds while helping the body to heal itself.

You'll feel and look years

younger shedding unhealthy pounds that make one look older than their age.

According to her findings, staying trim and fit the Vinegar way also provides preventive health care against the curses of mankind-- cancer, heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and blood pressure and other maladies.

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LETTERS

Dentist Recommends Vinegar

I have some useful advice that others may be interested in. When I got my Dentures several years ago, the Dentist told me use vinegar to get the plaque off them. So - about once a week I soak them in the wonder liquid and Presto - they sparkle.

I have since gotten implants - Since I am not fond of the hygienist scraping the posts for cleaning - I clean them with Vinegar before going for my check-up. On my last visit to her, she couldn't believe how clean they were and praised me for it!

I then asked the Dentist that put the implants in if the vinegar would harm the metal posts and he informed me it is OK to use it.

- D. L., *New Braunfels, Tx.*

Vinegar Heals Ear Ache in 2 days.

I have been plagued with an itchy ear for several months. It then developed into an earache. I was able to cure both the itch and earache in two days.

- J. D., *Jacksonville, Fl.*

Vinegar Diet helps mother of the Bride

This is kind of embarrassing, but here goes.

My name is Sarah Pierce. I am 58 years old, and through the years (in my mind's eye) I always thought I looked pretty decent.

Especially so when our second daughter was married. I really considered myself a rather 'smashing' Mother of the Bride.

That is, until the wedding pictures came back. I just couldn't believe it.

Here I am, definitely portly - not lean and svelte like I thought. Unfortunately the camera doesn't lie.

Since then, I heard about Emily Thacker's Vinegar Diet and decided to give it a try. What surprised me most was how much I could eat yet I was losing weight and inches. It was like I was getting thin, thinner and thinner yet with the Vinegar Diet. I just thought you should know.

- S. P., *N. Canton, Oh.*

NEWS & RESEARCH

Simple Vinegar used to reduce cervical cancer deaths by 31%

The latest study about vinegar, shows it will prevent an estimated 72,600 deaths from cervical cancer each year.

This according to a study released at the American Society of Clinical Oncology annual meeting in Chicago, IL.

The results were based over a 12 year period tracking 150,000 women in Mumbai, India, between the ages of 35-64 years.

The conclusion, a simple vinegar test significantly reduces cervical cancer deaths. Immediate plans are to implement this simple and successful screening test in developing countries.

The study had been planned for 16 years, but after the results were analyzed and found to be conclusive it was stopped at 12 years.

Vinegar has always been used for its versatility in home remedies, cooking and cleaning. And now scientific and medical findings are showing its a simple, low cost, non-invasive and safe for the patient.

Scarlett Johansson confesses her apple cider vinegar beauty secret

When celebrity beauty Scarlett Johansson needs to keep her skin looking beautiful and glowing one would think she would turn to high priced beauty creams.

Not so, according to an article in the February 2013 issue of Elle UK. She uses simple apple cider vinegar and its natural pH balancing properties to keep her skin looking amazing.

Cooking

AIEC employees share favorite soups



• Chicken Tortilla Soup

Chicken Tortilla Soup (above)

By Jennifer Sours, Executive Assistant to Duane Noland

- | | |
|--|---|
| 8 - 6-inch corn or flour tortillas | 2 - 14-1/2 oz. cans diced tomatoes, undrained |
| 1 c. chopped onion | 2 - 4 oz. cans chopped green chilies, undrained |
| 6 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves | 8 tsp. chopped fresh cilantro |
| 2 garlic cloves, pressed | 1 c. shredded reduced-fat cheddar cheese |
| 1/2 tsp. chili powder | 8 wedges fresh lime (optional) |
| 1/2 tsp. ground cumin | |
| 4 - 14-1/2 oz. cans chicken broth | |

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut tortillas into 1/2 inch strips. Place flat on baking sheet and bake 7-8 minutes or until crisp. Meanwhile chop onion. Cut chicken into 1/2 inch pieces. Heat saucapan over medium-high heat, coat with cooking spray and add chicken. Cook and stir 3 minutes. Add onion, pressed garlic, chili powder and cumin. Cook and stir 2 minutes. Stir in broth, tomatoes and chilies. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Chop cilantro. Put tortilla strips into bowls and ladle soup over tortillas. Top with shredded cheese and sprinkle with cilantro. Garnish each bowl with a wedge of lime to squeeze into soup, if desired.

Vegetable Beef

By Kristin Banks, Coordinator of Workers Compensation and Youth Programs

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1-1/2 lbs. beef, chopped into small pieces | 1 - 10 oz. pkg. frozen corn or 1 - 14 oz. can of corn, drained |
| 1 T. oil | 1-1/2 c. cubed peeled potatoes |
| 4 - 14 oz. cans beef broth | 1 c. frozen cut green beans or 1 - 14 oz. can |
| 1 tsp. dried oregano | 1 c. sliced carrots |
| 1/2 tsp. dried basil | 1 c. sliced celery |
| 1/4 tsp. black pepper | 1/2 c. chopped onion |
| 2 bay leaves | 1 can lima beans, drained |
| 2 c. chopped peeled tomatoes or 1 - 14 oz. can diced tomatoes, undrained | 2 T. chopped fresh parsley |

Saute meat in oil on medium-high until browned. Put everything in large pot. Bring to a boil over high heat. Cover pot and reduce heat to simmer and cook for 45 minutes or until vegetables are tender.

Chicken and Rice Soup

By Sandy Wolske, Advertising Coordinator/Graphic Designer

- 2 T. olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 leek, white and light green parts halved lengthwise, sliced thin and washed thoroughly; dark green part chopped coarse and washed thoroughly
- 2 celery ribs, chopped
- 1 (2-1/2 lb.) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones reserved for stock, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)
- 6 c. low-sodium chicken broth
- 4 c. water
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 carrots, peeled, quartered lengthwise and sliced 1/4" thick
- 1/2 c. short-grain white rice
- Salt and pepper
- 1 c. frozen peas
- 2 T. minced fresh parsley

Heat 1 T. oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion, dark green leek part and celery, and cook until just beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Add chicken skin and bones, broth, water, thyme and bay leaves and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, loosely covered, for 30 minutes. Strain stock through fine-mesh strainer into large bowl, pressing on solids to extract as much liquid as possible; discard solids and set stock aside. (You should have about 8 cups of stock. If you have less, add water to equal 8 cups.) Wipe out now empty Dutch oven with paper towels and heat remaining 1 T. oil over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add white and light green leek parts and carrots and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add rice and cook stirring frequently, until edges of rice become translucent, about 2 minutes. Add stock and 1 tsp. salt and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until rice is tender, 12 to 14 minutes. Stir in chicken and peas and cook until heated through, about 5 minutes. Stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

 Reply Online

Tried a recipe?
Tell us what you think at icl.coop
Click on *Finest Cooking*

Nancy's Paradise Corn Chowder (below)

By Nancy Rhoads McDonald, Marketing Administrator

1 pre-cooked small chicken breast, cubed	(preferably fresh, but frozen will work too)
1 stick butter	3 c. Kitchen Basics chicken stock
1 small onion, diced	2 c. half and half
1 large carrot, diced	1 T. ground nutmeg
1 large celery stalk, diced	1/8 tsp. ground red pepper
2 cloves garlic, diced	2 T. Riley's all-purpose seasoning
1/2 c. all-purpose flour	Salt and pepper to taste
3 c. shoe peg (white) and yellow corn	

Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add carrots and celery and cook for about 5 minutes. Add onion and garlic and simmer for 8 minutes. Add flour and stir to make a roux. Cook until roux begins to brown (this will take a while, so be patient). Once roux has browned, take pan off stove and let roux come to room temperature. Pour half and half into small saucepan and warm it slowly. Once roux has cooled, mix corn and chicken stock in another large saucepan and heat until boiling, then turn temperature down and simmer for 8 minutes. Carefully and slowly pour corn and stock mixture into the pan with the roux. Mix continuously. It will become very thick. Add half and half to the thickened mixture and stir. Add diced chicken, nutmeg, red pepper, Riley's seasoning and salt and pepper to taste. Cook long enough for the flavors to meld. Be careful not to overcook the soup or the chicken and corn will become rubbery.



• Nancy's Paradise Corn Chowder

Creamy Chicken and Corn Soup

By Nick Reitz, Manager of Government Relations

3 fresh ears corn on the cob	and finely chopped
2 T. canola oil	2 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon
1 onion, finely chopped	Salt to taste
2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced	Pepper to taste
2 c. reduced-salt chicken stock	2 strips smoked bacon, fried and trimmed of visible fat, to garnish
2 c. milk	Fresh tarragon leaves to garnish
1/2 lb. cooked chicken breasts, skinned	

Remove the green husks and all of the "silk" from the corn. Holding each cob upright on a chopping board, cut the kernels from the cob. (You should end up with about 1-1/2 cups loose corn kernels.) Set the kernels aside. Heat the canola oil in a large saucepan, add the onion and fry over medium heat until softened, but not browned. Add the potatoes and corn kernels to the pan and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Pour in the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer gently for 5 minutes or until the potatoes are just tender. Stir in the milk and the chopped tarragon. Season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, for another 2-3 minutes. Pour half of the mixture into a food processor or blender and blend to a coarse texture, not to a purée. Return the mixture to the pan. Add the chicken and stir to mix. Set the soup over a low heat to warm through. Meanwhile, cook the bacon until it starts to brown. Drain on paper towel, then finely chop. Ladle the soup into bowls, scatter on some bacon and a sprinkling of tarragon leaves, and serve.



• 3x3x3 Chili

3x3x3 Chili (above)

By Edward VanHoose, Digital Communications & IT Manager

2 c. chopped onions
2 c. chopped green pepper
2 c. fresh chopped tomato
2 - 15 oz. cans diced tomatoes, undrained
1 - 15 oz. can black beans, undrained
1 - 15 oz. can dark red kidney beans, undrained
1 - 15 oz. can cannellini beans, undrained
1 lb. ground beef
1 lb. stew meat, cut into small pieces
9 oz. skinless smoked sausage, cut into small pieces
2 tsp. seasoning salt
8 T. chili powder
2 tsp. garlic powder
2 tsp. onion powder
2 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper
2 tsp. dried oregano
4 tsp. paprika
4 T. ground cumin
6 tsp. sea salt
8 tsp. black pepper

Brown sausage, stew meat and ground beef together in large skillet with seasoning salt. Do NOT drain. Set aside. Combine onions, green pepper, and fresh tomatoes in another skillet and cook until most juice is gone. Set aside. Combine remaining seasonings in small bowl and set aside. In large crock pot combine canned tomatoes, cooked meat, cooked vegetables and canned beans. Stir to mix ingredients. Add seasoning mix and stir. Cook on high for 1 hour. Turn to low and cook for additional 4 hours, adding water if needed. Can add hot sauce to taste for extra spice, if desired.

Recipes prepared, tasted and photographed by Valerie Cheatham. For more recipes and photos go to www.icl.coop. Questions? Email recipes@aiec.coop.



Hands off!

You had to know it was coming. With the ban on texting while driving put in place just a few years back, it was inevitable that a ban on cell phone use would soon follow. This month Illinois sees that new law take effect to ensure motorists are safe on the roadway; but there are exceptions.

For instance, law enforcement using cellular devices in the line of duty are exempt, as are drivers using their phones in hands-free or voice-operated mode. For quite a few people, the hands-free option means simply connecting their phone to the Bluetooth in their radio. However, for others, a device will need to be added to their car to enable such a function.

For the past month or so, I have been examining some options when it comes to hands-free Bluetooth devices, and I'm going to tell you about them here.

First, there is the Plantronics Voyager Bluetooth headset. The Voyager is a single ear device that fits behind the lobe of your ear. Plantronics bills the Voyager as an "Office System" meaning it can switch between all the phones you use. So, if you have a Bluetooth enabled office phone, home phone and cell phone, this headset can be a unified point for you to talk on all three (although obviously not simultaneously.) I have to say, the Voyager did live up to the specs listed. It "knew" which device I was receiving a call on, and automatically answered.

The Voyager also had some great noise-canceling quality. Even when I was outside in the wind, people I spoke with said they didn't notice. The battery was good, and it didn't weigh very much. However, I did find it irritating to constantly have to figure out which button to press to answer a call. You see, you have to reach up to your ear and blindly push one of three potential (rather small) spots in order to effectively use the Voyager. I

suppose given enough time I would have been able to grow accustomed to that particular motion, but if you have any fine motor issues, the Voyager would certainly give you trouble. For the most part though, it lived up to the hype and was a good device.

You can purchase the Plantronics Voyager headset online directly from Plantronics' site at www.plantronics.com, or through quite a few large online electronics retailers.

The second device I tried was the Jabra Freeway. Unlike the Voyager, the Freeway is not a headset. Rather, this device is an in-car speakerphone that fits nicely on your visor. Because I was using a demo unit, I had a little bit of difficulty setting it up, but I am confident that if you get a new one, you won't experience those issues.

The Freeway has some really neat features. It turns itself on and off automatically because it has a built-in motion sensor, so it saves battery life greatly. I was able to run it for a full week without a single recharge! Also, it can be paired with two phones, so my wife and I were both able to use it. In addition, it allowed me to use my phone's built-in GPS and still gave voice turn-by-turn through the speakerphone. My wife even used it to play music from her phone, and I used it to listen to an audio book while on a long drive.

In addition, the button to push to call, and hang up, is large and easy to reach. Alternatively, you can also set it up to place and answer calls using just voice commands. I did find a slight delay in doing that, but I was surprised at how easy it really was. Of course, there is the drawback that when you use the device you have no privacy from anyone else in the car, but I didn't find that too much of a burden.

Just like the Voyager, you can purchase the Freeway directly from Jabra



at www.jabra.com, Verizon Wireless stores or at most large online electronic retailers.

So, to sum up: If you enjoy having a Bluetooth headset that travels with you from the office to the car and then to home, the Voyager is probably for you. If, however, you are satisfied with just enabling Bluetooth in your car, the Freeway is a great device to use!

Reply Online

What have some of you done? Visit www.icl.coop and click on Powered Up to let others know. If we get enough, I'll even include them in a future column.

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



evanhoo@aiec.coop

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CASEY'S GENERAL STORE

COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACE, SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS



By Lisa Rigoni

In rural communities across the Midwest, you are likely to spot a Casey's General Store, sometimes even more than one in the same community. Illinois is Casey's second largest state, only behind Iowa, where you'll find the corporate offices of the convenience store chain. Second is still impressive considering there are 1,770 stores in 14 states and Illinois has 410 of them, with a large percentage in electric cooperative areas.

Rural areas oftentimes don't have a local grocery store, restaurant or gas station. Having a Casey's can help meet those needs. While there

are a couple of different types of Casey's stores, there are two things that you'll find are standard – pizza and gasoline. And in some areas, the pizza can now be ordered and delivered, a new option that has been successfully implemented. "Our prepared foods makes up only about 8 percent of our revenue, however it is about 32 percent of our gross profit, so it is a very important part of our business," says Casey's Vice President of Finance/Corporate Secretary Brian Johnson. "We are focused on driving sales to this category which is why you see expanded coffee bars, made-to-order subs and testing of

miscellaneous initiatives, like pizza delivery, in some of our larger communities.

"Given our small town business model, repeat business is critical to our ongoing success. To do that we focus on keeping a clean, well maintained store and high quality food service," explains Johnson. "It doesn't matter if you live in a large metropolitan area such as Chicago, or a rural community like Athens, people are busy and have a need for convenience, particularly when it comes to food service. Fortunately, we have a made-from-scratch product that is made fresh at every store.

“Approximately half of the stores are in communities where the population is under 5,000, and we take a lot of pride in having a rural focus.” Athens falls into that easily with a population of 1,988, according to the 2010 census.



“Approximately half of the stores are in communities where the population is under 5,000, and we take a lot of pride in having a rural focus.”

*Brian Johnson,
VP of Finance/Corporate Secretary,
Casey's General Stores*

Local flavor

Athens store manager, Trish Halleck, who hails from Petersburg says, “We have regulars who come in every day. It’s a group of four or five men, mostly retired, who have been coming here probably since the store opened 20 years ago. They hang out in the back talking and drinking their coffee.”

Halleck has seen the group often over the past eight years she has worked there. She began as a cook on the lunch shift, advanced to assistant manager and was promoted to manager a few months ago. The Athens Casey’s has 20 employees and is open 24 hours a day. What is the most popular product? “Pizza!” says Shannon Brink, a Menard Electric customer who has worked at the store for a total of almost two years. “And they really like the new brisket sandwich we have, too.”

When school dismisses, Halleck says the kids start coming in. “The school is just across the street. They

stop by for their Gatorade and snacks from the kitchen.”

In asking the employees on site why they work at Casey’s, the answers were unanimous and enthusiastic. Stacy Maxim who lives only six blocks from the store is the newest employee. With a smile, she says, “I work here because it’s close to home. I already knew and liked everybody and had experience at gas stations.” Halleck adds, “People are friendly. They joke around with us. They help us out by telling us what they need. The best part is seeing the familiar faces every day, neighbors.”

Riley Fisher has lived in Athens for 10 years, and considers himself a regular. “I come in every Sunday,” and as he grabbed lunch out of the warmer, said, “I also come in and grab lunch or a snack sometimes.”

Expansion and economics

Johnson says, “There are a little more than 6,000 people employed by the stores in Illinois and more than 27,000 employees chainwide.” In 2014, the plans are to add 70 to 105

additional stores (4 to 6 percent of the business base.) The growth is expected across the company’s 14 states (Arkansas, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin.)

“We plan to replace 20 stores a year, and this year we plan to complete an additional 25 major remodels, which actually increases the size of the existing building and adds a walk-in beer cooler, expanded coffee bar and allows us to offer our made-to-order sub sandwich programs,” Johnson explains.

There are a few Casey’s in larger communities, as well. Bloomington is a prime example in Illinois. Corn Belt Energy serves those two businesses, according to Justin Stuva, Energy Advisor at the cooperative.

“At the end of the day if we have a clean store and quality food products, we should be able to attract people to our stores,” adds Johnson.

If you talk to the employees and customers at the Athens location ... he is right on the money!



Crystal Brockman makes a fresh pizza at Athen's Casey's.

1 Southern Illinois Spinners and Weavers Guild, Visitor Center at Ft. Massac State Park, Metropolis. Spinners and weavers are welcome to participate. 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m. www.southernmostillinois.com/events or 618-524-9321.

7 Astro-Overnights at the Adler Planetarium, Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum, 1300 S. Lake Shore Dr., Chicago. Calling all explorers! Spend an Evening Underneath the Stars. Don't miss your chance to spend a night at the museum. Can't spend the night? No worries, there is an evening only option available. Overnights are designed for children ages 6-10. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Overnight rate - \$60 per person, evening only rate - \$27.50 per person. 312-922-7827 or www.adlerplanetarium.org.

7-9 Civil War Weekend, Anna Arts Center, 117 W. Davie St., Anna. The 7th Annual Lincoln Legacy Dinner Friday at 6:30 p.m. will feature Bryon Anderson, Research Historian from the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum. 618-833-8745 for reservations at \$25 each. Saturday and Sunday includes speakers on local area during the Civil War, historic storytelling, authentic period music, art, food and reenactment. 618-833-6565 or www.southernmostillinois.com/events.

8 Living History Program, Fort Massac State Park, 1308 E. 5th St., Metropolis. Massiac Marines, French and Indian War period reenactors present a living history program. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. www.southernmostillinois.com/events or 618-524-9321.

15-16 Galesburg Historical Society Annual Chocolate Festival, Galesburg Antique Mall, 349 E. Main, Galesburg. Annual festival featuring homemade and commercially-made chocolate treats. It's an endless buffet of tortes, cakes, pies, cookies, candies, beverages and more. A chocolate lover's dream. \$8 per person. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. both days. www.visitgalesburg.com or 309-343-2485.

15-17 Masters of the Sky, National Great Rivers Museum, 2 Lock & Dam Way, Alton. Witness a birds of prey demonstration by the World Bird Sanctuary. See eagles, falcons, owls and other birds of prey at this educational and informational program. Admission: Adults \$5, Children 12 and under \$3, under age 3 are free. Show times at 11 a.m., 1 and 3 p.m. www.meetingoftherivers.org or 618-462-6979.

20-23 Illinois Beef Expo, Illinois State Fairgrounds, Springfield. Free admission. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. www.illinoisbeefexpo.com for a schedule of events or 217-787-4280.

21-23 Field & Stream 2014 Illinois Deer & Turkey Expo, Prairie Capitol Convention Center, 1 Convention Center Plaza, Springfield. The annual Field & Stream Outdoor Life Expo will feature trophy deer contests, photo contests, turkey calling championships, new products expo and trade show. Seminars will be held daily. Fri. 2-9 p.m., Sat. 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Sun. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. 217-788-8800 or www.deerinfo.com/illinois.

21-23 The Boat Show, Illinois State Fairgrounds, Orr Building, Springfield. See a wide variety of pleasure and fishing boats from several local dealers including

aluminum and fiberglass fishing boats, ski boats, pontoons, runabouts, cruisers and personal watercraft. Bring the whole family to see what new models and options are available. Regular admission \$5, children under 12 are free and parking is free. Fri. 2-9 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 217-341-1730 or www.theboatshowinspringfield.com.

23 Celebration of Stephen Mack's Birthday, Macktown Living History Center, 2221 Freeport Road, Rockton. Join us for a birthday celebration of Stephen Mack, Winnebago County's first white settler. Traditional foods, winter skills and games will be showcased. Re-enactors of Native Americans, settler and French fur traders will demonstrate early nineteenth century skills for survival in the harsh winter climate. Donations accepted. 1-4 p.m. www.macktownlivinghistory.com or 815-624-4200.

28-Mar. 2 Peoria RV Show, Peoria Civic Center, 201 SW Jefferson, Peoria. In its 28th year, this show features RVs, boats, ATVs, motorcycles, campgrounds from three states, RV products and repair dealers. Adult admission \$8, children 6-12 \$2, 5 and under free. Fri. 2-7 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Sun. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. www.eventsltd.org

28-Mar. 2 SAHBA 2014 Home Expo, Prairie Capital Convention Center, Springfield. Check out the latest innovations in the Building and Remodeling Industry. Attendees will be able to explore two floors of booths featuring local products and services. Admission \$6, \$1 off for those bringing canned goods to donate. Discounts of \$1 for seniors on Fri., heroes on Sat. and educators on Sun. Hours: Fri. 3-8 p.m., Sat. 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. www.BuilderEvents.com or 217-698-4941.

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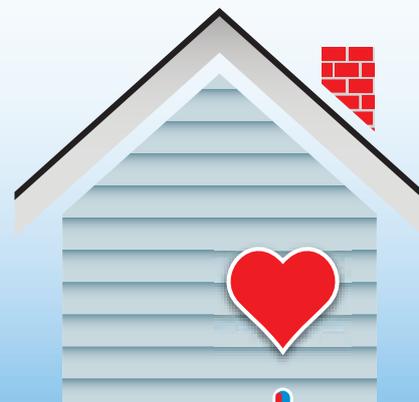
To be considered for inclusion, please submit events in the format used above. Preference is given to events sponsored by non-profit entities. Submitting an event is not a guarantee of publication. Photos are welcome, but will not be returned unless a self-addressed and stamped envelope is provided.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

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

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Breakthrough research reveals you can slow — even reverse — the aging process with certain foods and activities that our bodies respond to with vibrant good health!

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- ▶ Don't accelerate aging! Slow it down by getting enough of ... (it's not exercise!).
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- ▶ “Secret” healing foods in your local store! They're inexpensive and could prevent about 1/3 of all cancers!
- ▶ Lose more weight, fat, and inches while gaining energy? Eat this “greasy spoon” staple for breakfast!
- ▶ Easy, slow-motion exercise proven to improve balance, prevent falls, and increase physical performance.
- ▶ Reverse memory loss and have a younger brain! All-American powerhouse fruit is the key!
- ▶ Life-saving seasoning could reduce deaths from heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and stroke.
- ▶ “Natural face lift.” No expensive creams or surgeries. Yet it can smooth wrinkles and rejuvenate skin!
- ▶ #1 secret to fighting your body's aging process. Discover the best way to feel younger than your years.
- ▶ What can increase your risk of Alzheimer's or dementia by a whopping 80%? We'll tell you!
- ▶ Diabetes? This natural compound can improve — even reverse! — painful nerve damage in your legs and feet.
- ▶ Cures 90% of all sleep apnea patients! No sleeping masks and no surgery! It's free!
- ▶ This fruity, high fiber breakfast is a great way to keep your energy up throughout a busy morning.
- ▶ Have more of these and you could live up to 22% longer! (It's not food or exercise!)
- ▶ Almost all women make the mistake that leads to varicose veins and back problems.
- ▶ Keep eyesight keen with a fragrant tea loaded with nutrients.
- ▶ Slow your body's aging process at the cellular level with a simple, delicious fruit!
- ▶ Make your arteries smooth and bendy — not hard and brittle! Enjoy one soothing beverage!
- ▶ Fat cells self-destruct when you add this hot favorite to your foods!
- ▶ A stick of gum can save the cost of a day in the hospital!
- ▶ 4 must-haves for your spice rack! Together they protect you from almost all diseases of aging!

- ▶ Rev up your immune system without drugs! Graceful movements are the key!
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