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Visiting co-op youth helped senator take on challenges

One of the greatest pleasures of my job as a state senator is meeting with my constituents. I realized at a very young age how important it is to meet with folks and talk to them one-on-one.

As a teenager, a number of my siblings and I, walked door-to-door with my Dad as he helped campaign for a friend of his who was running for county office. That experience, a warm greeting and a solid handshake at each door, left a lasting impression on me. As I watched my Dad visit with folks on their front porches, I came to understand how important it is to create a bond with an individual, and that things are always going to be better if we can talk to one another and see each other face to face.

Many years later, when I became a state senator and involved with my duties in Springfield, I truly came to look forward to this one-on-one interaction at the capitol, especially on several very special days. Those days involved meeting students and young people from across Illinois who came to the capitol to experience a day of state government, both from current and historical perspectives. And no student group has caught my attention more than those coming with the Illinois Electric and Telephone Cooperatives on Youth Day hosted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives.

"Co-op Youth Day" brings nearly 300 students from electric and telephone cooperatives across Illinois to Springfield to visit with their elected representatives, and to view democracy in action. They are, to use an old-fashioned expression, the cream of the crop.

It is usually around the first of March every year when my Springfield office phone starts ringing with calls



from cooperatives from my district, and around the state, telling us to reserve a date for their April visit. Trying to keep a specific schedule is not a strong suit of the Illinois General Assembly, as anyone who has visited during a spring session knows, but "Co-op Youth Day" is not an event I would miss for anything.

My first year instructions were to set aside as much time as possible so that I could participate. I soon realized just how enjoyable that time would be. Their enthusiasm, sincere curiosity and refreshing smiles lit up the capitol as they asked pertinent questions about state government, job duties and, often times, how legislation affects them. This is all done in a respectful, considerate and professional manner, which always makes me feel so proud. These discussions are always upbeat, relevant to current issues and always over much too quickly for me.

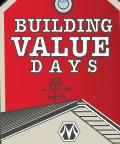
After an all too brief visit, the nearly 300 students are escorted from the Senate or House chambers to their buses and my day returns to dealing with what is, rather than what could be. But these visits always

rejuvenate and revive me. I feel ready to take on the serious challenges we face because I know I am doing it for these very students who came to share their day with me at the capitol. So, with a renewed sense of my duties and obligations, and a smile on my face, I'm ready to do my best for the state of Illinois.

As I finish out my fourth and final term as a state senator, "Co-op Youth Day" and seeing those young and enthusiastic faces will definitely be one of the events that I will greatly miss. The decision to not continue my public service with the state of Illinois was not an easy one, but I believe the right one for me and my family. And my experience with the AIEC Youth Day students and their chaperones is proof to me that the future is definitely in good hands. ☺

Senator Sullivan has been an important leader for rural Illinois, serving the 47th district since 2002. After recently announcing his retirement he said, "It is an honor to have earned the trust and support of so many people in Western Illinois and across the state. I will continue to work hard to represent and be a voice for my constituents in Springfield as I transition to the private sector."

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Cooperatives congratulate Senate on approving bill to strengthen cybersecurity

Following Senate passage of the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2015 (CISA) on October 27, Kirk Johnson, senior vice-president of government relations at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, thanked Chairman Richard Burr and Vice Chair Diane Feinstein for bipartisan leadership on a bill to promote multidirectional voluntary information sharing by the government and businesses in response to cyber threats.

"Cooperatives are committed to providing reliable power at the lowest cost to their consumer members and protecting the reliability and security of the bulk power system. Robust, voluntary information sharing between and among members of

the electric sector and government agencies will be absolutely vital to electric utilities, including America's electric cooperatives. We are grateful to Chairman Richard Burr and Vice Chair Diane Feinstein for their leadership in creating a foundation for effective cybersecurity that also, appropriately, protects individual privacy," said Johnson.

"The sooner this bill becomes law, the better. We urge Congress to move forward into conferencing their cybersecurity information sharing legislation and sending a bill to the President's desk."

NRECA works closely with its members to promote security and resilience against cyber-attacks.

- Over the last several years,

cooperatives have worked diligently with the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) and federal agencies to strengthen reliability standards including a significant set of cybersecurity standards to maintain and protect the reliability of the bulk power system.

- With funding from the U.S. Department of Energy, NRECA is producing a prototype security system that will rapidly identify network security threats and make it easier to keep networks safe. The Essence team includes Pacific Northwest National Lab, Honeywell and Carnegie Mellon University. The research project runs until March 2016. ♦

Lake Land College receives \$50,000 geothermal grant

Lake Land College recently received a \$50,000 GeoAlliance grant to help fund the installation of a highly energy efficient and environmentally friendly geothermal heat pump heating and cooling system in the college's Northeast Building, which is used for employee offices and student housing.

The GeoAlliance geothermal grant program, which is now closed, was funded through the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF), and administered by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC). During the 12-year, \$1.5 million program, 51 separate projects were funded for not-for-profit and public entities throughout the state. Lake Land College received a total of \$145,000 for three projects. In addition to the Northeast Building installation, projects in Webb Hall and the Athletic Center also received GeoAlliance grants.

GeoAlliance funding was passed down from the AIEC to Illinois electric cooperatives, which re-granted it



Pictured from left are: Josh Bullock, Lake Land College President, Nancy McDonald, Marketing Administrator, AIEC; Gary Cadwell, Lake Land College Board Chairman; Kim Leftwich, President and CEO, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative; and Sam Adair, Member Services Representative, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative.

to qualifying members who receive electricity from them. Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative is the electric provider for Lake Land College. Kim Leftwich, the cooperative's president/CEO, said the co-op is pleased to have been able to partner with the college on these projects and with the energy savings the college is realizing.

Nancy McDonald, marketing

administrator at the AIEC, stated that with the installation of the geothermal systems in the three buildings, the estimated annual savings is \$63,274.

The ICECF invests in clean energy development and land preservation efforts throughout Illinois. Information on the foundation's other grant programs can be found on its website at www.illinoiscleanenergy.org. ♦



Illinois pioneers of rural electrification

Abram E. "Abe" Becker

Abram E. "Abe" Becker, former manager of Menard Electric Cooperative in Petersburg was selected in 1942 to coordinate activities for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), while continuing his duties for the cooperative.

As the activities of the AIEC grew, the Petersburg native became its first full-time manager and oversaw construction of a new headquarters building in Springfield.

One of the first moves under Becker's tenure was the printing of a monthly newsletter, *Illinois REA News*, for members of all Illinois electric cooperatives. In addition, a comprehensive safety and training program was formulated, and an emergency work plan was developed to assist cooperatives repair and restore power after major disasters.

Seventy-five years later, these programs have grown and continue to be a vital part of the AIEC, and its member cooperatives.

In celebration of the AIEC's 75th anniversary, this is first in a series of profiles on Illinois' rural electric pioneers.



U.S. Rep. Cheri Bustos receives a golden hard hat and the 2015 Illinois Electric Cooperatives' Public Service Award. With Bustos are (l-r) Michael Hastings, President and CEO of Jo-Carroll Energy; David Senn, Chairman of the Jo-Carroll Energy board of directors; Duane Noland, President and CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives and Bill Dodds, President and CEO of Spoon River Electric Cooperative.

Rep. Bustos receives 2015 Illinois Electric Cooperatives' Public Service Award

Leaders from the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, Jo-Carroll Energy and Spoon River Electric Cooperative presented U.S. Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-East Moline, 17th Congressional District) with the 2015 Illinois Electric Cooperatives' Public Service Award. The award was made in recognition of her dedicated public service to all citizens of the state of Illinois and for outstanding contributions to the rural electrification program.

Bustos has been a strong advocate for Illinois electric cooperatives and their rural member-owners on a wide variety of rural issues, including: supporting the RUS electric loan program, supporting legislation which allows the continued use of large water heaters in demand response peak shaving programs, and sponsoring legislation to bring fairness to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster assistance program.

"Representative Bustos' support of issues important to not-for-profit electric cooperatives, and our rural member-owners, has been greatly appreciated," said Michael Hastings, President and CEO of Jo-Carroll Energy in Elizabeth.

"We appreciate her championing issues important to rural Illinois and electric cooperatives. Her district serves a wide swath of electric cooperative territory including not only Jo-Carroll Energy's territory but areas served by Corn Belt Energy, McDonough Power Cooperative, Rock Energy, Spoon River Electric Cooperative, Menard Electric Cooperative and Western Illinois Electrical Coop."

Bustos has a family history of supporting electric cooperatives. Her concern for rural issues and rural electric cooperatives started with lessons from her father Gene Callahan, who was chief of staff for Illinois Sen. Paul Simon, and her grandfather Joe Callahan. Her grandfather was an Illinois state representative and instrumental in passing state legislation that helped rural electric cooperatives survive "cherry picking" attacks by investor owned utilities when the cooperatives were just beginning to grow.

Bustos was elected to Congress in November 2012 and currently serves on the House Agriculture Committee and the Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure. ♀

IMEA presents award to Illinois cooperatives

On behalf of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, AIEC President and CEO Duane Noland and Senior Vice President of Government Relations Don Wood accepted the Illinois Municipal Electric Agency's Public Service Award at the agency's annual meeting and awards banquet held in Springfield on November 13.

The Illinois Municipal Electric Agency (IMEA) is a joint action agency made up of 32 Illinois municipal electric systems and one rural electric cooperative. Its primary function is to provide wholesale electricity to its municipal members and electric co-op customers. Those electric systems, in turn, provide electricity to their communities' homes and businesses.

Traditionally, the IMEA Public Service Award is given to an elected official who has provided outstanding support for the cause of public power in Illinois. But, said IMEA President and CEO Kevin Gaden, "This year the agency chose to do something a little different. But maybe really not so different. It's arguably impossible to find public servants who are more committed to the cause of public power than the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives."

"In some other states the munis and the electric co-ops are like nodding acquaintances - nice to each other



The IMEA presented its 2016 Public Service Award to the AIEC. The two consumer-owned utility associations work together to protect the interests of consumer-owned utilities in the state. From the left are AIEC General Counsel Norman Conrad, AIEC President and CEO Duane Noland, IMEA President and CEO Kevin Gaden, Senior Vice President of Government Relations Don Wood and Manager of Government Relations Nick Reitz.

but a little wary, just in case a border dispute crops up. Not so in Illinois," said Gaden. In presenting the award, Gaden related how the AIEC has often answered the call of the IMEA and its staff - offering advice and sometimes partnerships on such matters as safety training, administration of electric efficiency and geothermal programs, engineering issues and legal matters.

"But probably the most remarkable and beneficial relationship involves the efforts of IMEA and the co-ops in the arenas of state and federal legislation and regulation," said Gaden. He likened AIEC's Don Wood and

IMEA's Senior Vice President of Government Affairs Doc Mueller to a legislative tag team wrestling duo. "These guys share information on a daily basis, and often work together to meet with members of Congress, the Illinois General Assembly and the state and federal EPA on such issues as tax exempt finance, deregulation and environmental issues, such as the state implementation plan for the Clean Power Plan. It is common knowledge in Springfield and in Washington that public power in Illinois - both the munis and the co-ops - speak with one strong voice," he added. ♦

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TOGETHER WE SAVE

Is the doctor in?

Rural health care is a real challenge



by Les O'Dell

Many of the ingredients of rural life that make country living so appealing — things like wide open spaces, sparse populations and simple living — often can work against us when it comes time to seek medical care. It's a paradox of rural life. We like "being away from it all," but unfortunately that also means being far from physicians, hospitals and other health care facilities.

"To an urban resident, these scenarios may be unimaginable but for the majority of counties in Illinois, these are an everyday reality for rural residents," explains Margaret Vaughn, executive director of the Illinois Rural Health Association. "Imagine you are in an accident and you have to wait 30 minutes for an ambulance. Imagine further that there is only

one ambulance for your entire county. Imagine if your hospital did not have an obstetrician."

In much of Illinois' rural areas these situations are not imaginary, they are realities. Vaughn's association reports that even though 25 percent of Illinois' population lives in rural areas, those same regions are supported by just 10 percent of the state's physicians.

"There are many challenges," says Rex Budde, CEO of Southern Illinois Healthcare, a Carbondale-based regional health care company that serves 16 counties. "The challenges are economic because of the Medicaid burden and changes in the program, and there are access challenges that simply come from geography."

Economic challenges

Budde says that recent expansion of Medicaid to cover more patients is taxing to providers.

"Our Medicaid percentage has jumped significantly and we have a large segment of no-pay patients," he adds. "That makes for a challenge: we have to be able to generate enough profit to take care of all of these people. It's a real balancing act."

Christopher Merrett, director and professor at the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University says that rural health care is struggling economically.

"I would say one of the challenges confronting many small towns is reimbursement rates and the slowness of being reimbursed from the government," he remarks.

Merrett says that revenue for rural providers is often significantly lower than that of their urban counterparts, but many of the expenses are the same or higher.

"Issues include the movement to electronic medical records. That's a big expense. In the long term, there is efficiency, more transferability and fewer errors, but it is an enormous up-front expense that many rural facilities struggle with," he says.

Just having health care providers or facilities in rural communities is expensive.

"A physician is expensive and so is a mid-level provider," Budde adds. "When you have all of the other economic pressures, there is a balancing point as to how much care you can provide and where you can provide it."

Geographic pressures

Financial pressures have led to a reduction in care facilities in rural parts of Illinois, meaning many residents are further from care givers.

"Only about a dozen critical access hospitals in rural Illinois offer obstetrics," Vaughn points out. "You might have to travel two hours to see an obstetrician. It's all inter-related. For obstetrics, the insurance is so expensive for hospitals and it's not like some specialties where you can get by with just having one doctor; you have to have several. You can't just have one on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's very problematic."

Budde adds, "You'd like to have services as close to the population centers

as you can, but in areas like southern Illinois, a population center may be a community with just a few hundred people." Transportation can be an additional issue, especially for those in lower income brackets. "If people can't get services locally, it can be very difficult to travel any distance. Sometimes people have to choose between having enough money for food and putting gas in the car to drive a loved one for health care services. A lot of us are trying to expand many of our services so that people can get care locally, but it's really expensive to do that."

Budde says traveling for care or services can be intimidating all on its own, adding that studies have shown better outcomes when patients are treated close to home. Additionally, for some rural residents, traveling to communities such as Rockford, Peoria, Carbondale or Champaign for care can be as unnerving as trips to Chicago or St. Louis.

Provider shortage

The days of the small town or country doctor may be waning. One of the biggest problems is luring physicians to serve rural areas.

"It's hard to recruit back to the rural areas and keep physicians," explains Robin Rose, chief operating officer for Gibson Area Hospital and Health Services in Ford County's Gibson



Maple Grove Apartments, an assisted-living facility for patients with dementia and other cognitive issues, recently opened in Carthage, Ill., a town of 2,544.

City. "There are not enough primary care physicians — just not enough doctors. It's the wave of the future and it is a challenge."

It takes a conscious effort to bring physicians to smaller communities.

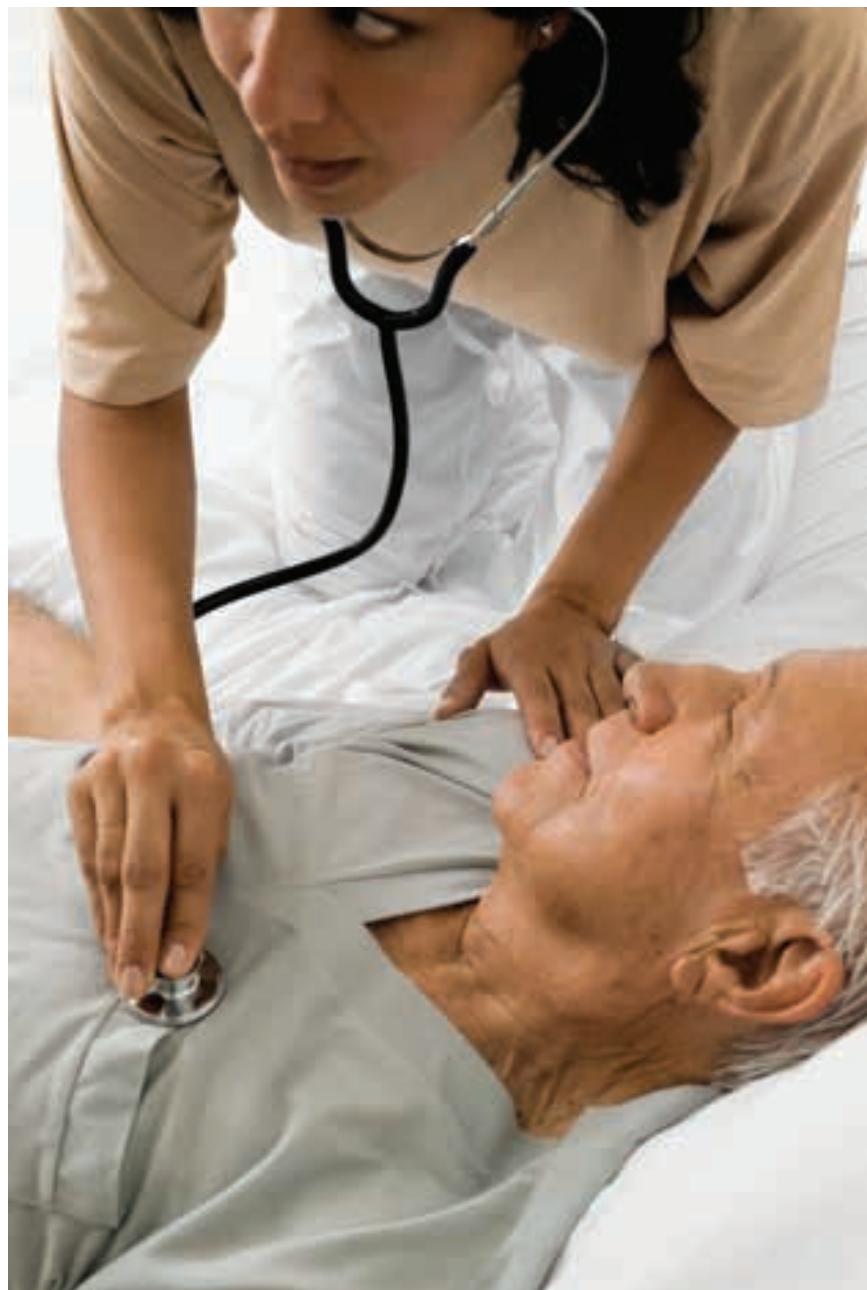
"We have to be very competitive with what we pay the physicians and we have to be very selective," Budde explains. "We have to make sure we're bringing in people who want to be in more rural areas. We look at potential physicians and if they've grown up or were educated in New York City or Boston or Los Angeles or their spouse has, we have to be careful because there's a good possibility they won't stick. We don't want to bring someone in and lose them after a couple of years. It's a big investment on our part and you want their life to work right, too."

To help combat the shortage, the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford established the Rural Medical Education Program in 1993 to specifically train physicians to practice in rural areas. The program has graduated nearly 300 students since its inception.

Rose says her hospital is trying to build relationships with future doctors early in their programs of study to help entice them to practice in rural areas. She's working with students in other medically-related programs as well.

"We try to encourage high school kids to go into health programs. There is a shortage of everything and you have to build the infrastructure," she explains. "We have to start working on it now and grow our own."

Gibson Area Hospital and Health Service has helped establish high school classes that also offer college credit in areas such as medical terminology and nursing to help fill gaps. Vaughn adds that it is not just traditional medicine facing shortages. She says 62 of Illinois' 102 counties have been named Federally Designated Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas.



"We're also seeing 'mom and pop' pharmacies in small towns confronting challenges," Merrett says. "It's very difficult for them to find replacements when pharmacists retire or these single-location operations shut down."

Another issue facing rural areas is changing demographics. "The more rural the county, the higher the average age," Merrett adds. "You have a 'grayer' population and that means there is a very certain set of medical needs that includes assisted living centers, doctors

that specialize in geriatrics and access to prescriptions."

"We have an aging rural population with more needs," Vaughn adds.

Solutions

The diagnosis for rural health care is not all gloom-and-doom. Health care leaders, however, say that providing quality medical services to rural Illinois will require some new prescriptions. One new approach is telemedicine. This system, as described by

the Illinois Rural Health Association (IRHA), provides access to care through two-way, real time interactive communication between a patient and a health care professional at a distant site. Similar to video conferencing over high-speed Internet connections, telemedicine is especially effective in psychiatry, dermatology, hematology and other specialties.

"I think that telemedicine will expand significantly," Budde says. "We've already started it in our stroke network and we are absolutely saving lives because of it. Doctors and patients do not have to be in the same room. They can still have visual contact and communicate. It's proven to be an effective tool."

Vaughn adds it is a little more challenging to get older patients to "buy in" to telemedicine, but "if they are open to that, it works well for many specialties and it doesn't require a trip to St. Louis or Chicago."

Programs like Gibson Area's that work to recruit area young people into medicine and allied careers are another answer. Vaughn says the IRHA is providing scholarships to students who study medical billing and record coding. Increased efforts by programs such as the Rural Medical Education program and newer rural pharmacy and rural nursing initiatives will be important as well. Telepharmacy programs where pharmacy technicians in underserved areas dispense medication under the direction of remote pharmacists show promise, Merrett explains.

Budde says increased cooperation among physicians, hospitals, home health agencies, nursing homes, county health departments and communities will be necessary. He adds that rural providers must work with larger health care systems.

"You have to have partnerships with larger providers in metro areas," he adds. "These are critical if you are

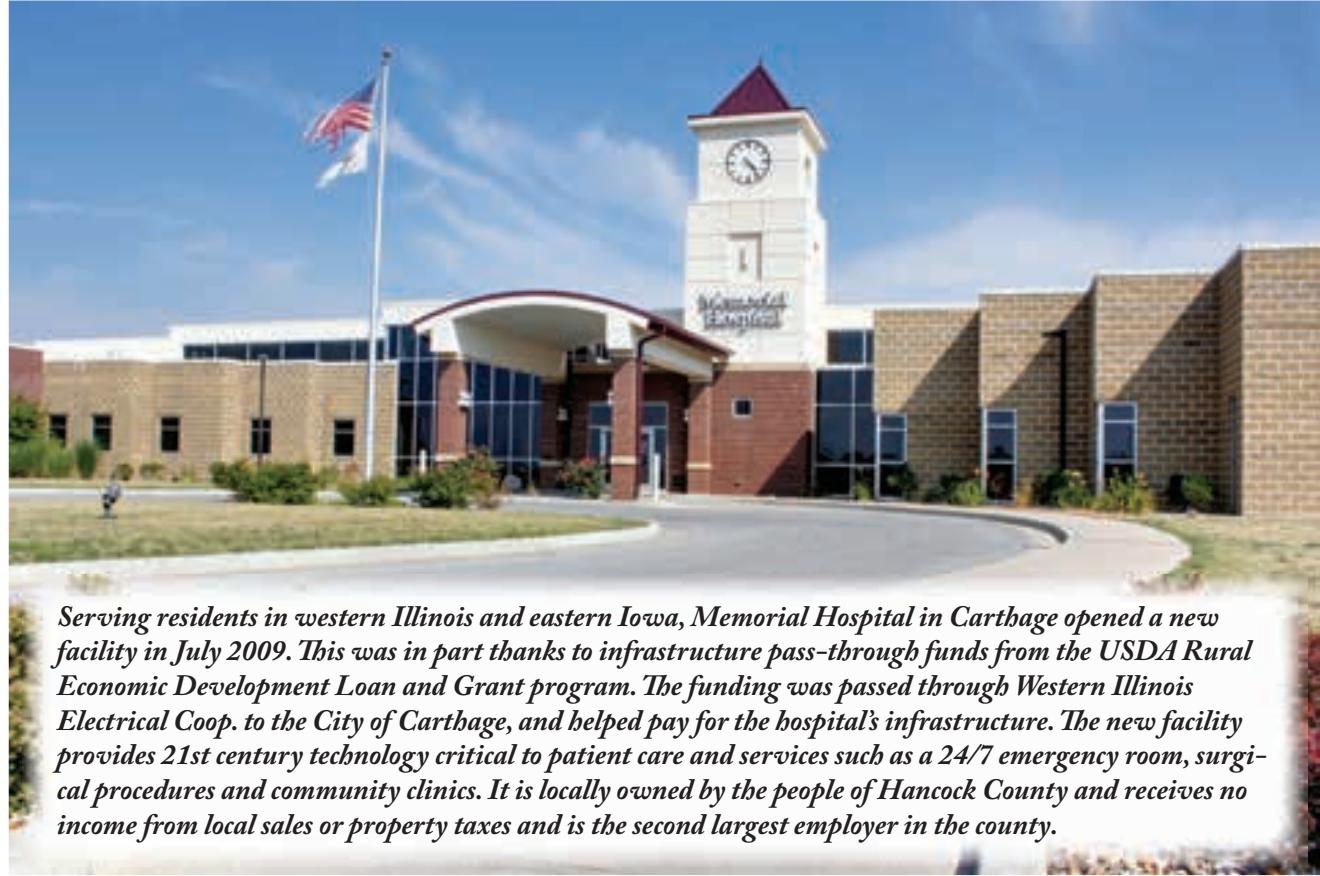
serious about making life easier for people who live in your region.

On the other hand, preventative medicine efforts of rural health clinics and county health departments are equally important. "They are a great resource for us and for their regions in the wellness, prevention and check-up type of services as well as in follow-up care."

Merrett says cooperation will be key to fixing what ails rural health care.

"It's going to take local leadership," he says. "It's going to take local businesses, local leaders, area health care providers and we're going to have to be innovative.

Rose adds, "Solutions won't happen as quickly as we'd like, but it will happen if we all pull together."



Serving residents in western Illinois and eastern Iowa, Memorial Hospital in Carthage opened a new facility in July 2009. This was in part thanks to infrastructure pass-through funds from the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program. The funding was passed through Western Illinois Electrical Coop. to the City of Carthage, and helped pay for the hospital's infrastructure. The new facility provides 21st century technology critical to patient care and services such as a 24/7 emergency room, surgical procedures and community clinics. It is locally owned by the people of Hancock County and receives no income from local sales or property taxes and is the second largest employer in the county.

Don't get left out in the cold

Winter storms can bring chilling winds, ice and snow - and cause power outages. Already this winter an ice storm hammered Oklahoma electric cooperative members leaving many in the dark for days.

Generators can help keep the electricity on until power can be restored. However, those who use generators must be mindful of risks such as electric shock and toxic exhaust. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), more than half of the annual accidents with generators occur between November and February, the coldest months of the year.

Improper use of a standby or portable generator can lead to injury or even death. Help keep yourself and others safe by learning about important safety measures.

Since generators come in a variety of sizes, capacities, and power sources, begin by reading and following all manufacturer instructions.

Since generators come in a variety of sizes, capacities and power sources, begin by reading and following all manufacturer instructions. Before you use a generator, inspect it for damage. If no damage is found, prepare it for use in an area outside of the home and away from dangerous or wet conditions.

During cold weather conditions the thought of setting up the generator away from the warmth of one's home

can seem unpleasant. Yet, it is a necessary safety step. According to CPSC, the most dangerous generator hazard during the winter months is carbon monoxide emissions, which contribute to 85 percent of annual toxic gas accidents, aside from house fires.

Because carbon monoxide is invisible and odorless, you should always run the generator outdoors, as carbon monoxide levels may be fatal within minutes in enclosed areas. Avoid using generators inside a house, shed, crawlspace, basement or garage. Even with a fan or ventilation, carbon monoxide can build up inside and be toxic for hours afterward.

Be aware of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, which include headaches, dizziness, confusion, fatigue and nausea. If you suspect that someone has been exposed to carbon monoxide, move them into fresh air immediately. It is also a good idea to install carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Follow the instructions in the manufacturer's guide for proper placement, and test the batteries regularly.

In 2015, USA Today reported that four young people and their dog had been found dead as a result of carbon monoxide. A generator had been running in the basement of their Maine cabin, and before it ran out of gas, the odorless, colorless gas tragically poisoned and killed those inside the house. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on average there are 430 deaths from carbon monoxide each year.

Carbon monoxide produced by generators is not the only hazard from generator use. Backfeed is a situation where a generator is feeding electricity back through the electrical system



and meter into the power lines. This jeopardizes the safety of linemen attempting to restore power, as well as anyone who may be near downed or sagging lines that become energized.

To prevent backfeed, standby generators should have a transfer safety switch installed by a professional. This device automatically separates your home system from the utility system. Portable generators should never be plugged directly into a home outlet or electrical system; use a heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord to plug appliances into an outlet on the generator for power. Your generator should have more output than the wattage of the electronics you will plug into it.

Be sure to keep pets and children a safe distance away. When the generator needs a refill on gasoline, first reduce flammability by turning off the machine for at least 10 minutes.

For more information on winter safety, visit SafeElectricity.org or your local electric cooperative. ☀



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

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Menard Electric Member Wins Holiday Ballot Contest

November's edition included a ballot for readers to select one of the Illinois bed and breakfasts, cabins or unique lodging destinations shown in the publication. Gail Adamski was randomly selected as the winner for this contest. She selected Timber Ridge Outpost & Cabins located just minutes from Garden of the Gods and Rim Rock. For more information on Timber Ridge Outpost & Cabins visit www.TimberRidgeOutpost.com.

Thank you to everyone that entered the November contest! Watch out for our future contests in other editions. You could be the next person to win a give-a-way or gift certificate.

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True gardeners are never completely happy, or finished

Wow! Another year has passed, and there's still too many plants I haven't tried growing. There are too many plants that should be removed to make room for the untried, but it's difficult getting rid of something that does perform, if only half-heartedly, but ultimately isn't doing that much harm. (Insert your own political statement here based on that last sentence!)

There's still too little land to plant everything and not enough time to take care of all of it to my standards.

Ultimately, the New Year's resolutions are to plant more, plant less, take care of it better, and just go with Nature's flow. The competing resolutions probably make it difficult to achieve success.

Years ago, when I first moved in, I wanted to tame my yard, which wasn't difficult since there were only three trees and a yew hedge. That was it, plus the lawn.

One of the trees was a large oak which shaded the garage and part of

A true gardener is never happy. They'll keep tinkering and trying new plants, getting rid of the older ones.

the backyard, but not the house. It up and died one winter, which caused me to shed a tear or two, but then made me realize I had a large space to plant some smaller trees, and of course some understory shrubs, ferns, bulbs, hostas, etc.

The other trees were walnuts that



were leaning precariously toward my neighbor's house. The oak died and the walnuts were removed for safety sake.

Unfortunately, with perfect 20-20 hindsight, I replaced the walnuts with a clump river birch, which has fared well, though all the limbs it drops every day of the year is a little annoying. It's one of two mistakes over 20 years, which isn't too bad.

The other mistake was accepting a groundcover from a friend who said "I think this will fill in nicely in your yard." It was Houttuynia or chameleon plant, and something to be avoided unless you can contain it with walls of concrete three feet deep in the ground. I'm still pulling the plants out every month. Don't be fooled by its look of innocence.

It took 20 years to finally remove the yew hedge. That was after four severe prunings to keep it short and manageable. But ultimately, it was taking up too much room, and since there is no law you must have a yew hedge in the front of your house, contrary to what it appears in most landscapes, it was removed with a

shovel and backhoe.

Now, my trees number into the twenties if you count all the immature Japanese maples. The shrubs number about twice that, and the rest of the plants about 10 times that amount. Though, some of them are dwarf plants, which don't take up much space and grow under the larger ones.

All this is essentially to make a couple of points.

A true gardener is never happy. They'll keep tinkering and trying new plants, getting rid of the older ones. Plants will be moved here and there. Over the years, I've used the term "exterior decorating."

Two, a landscape is never finished. Plants grow too tall, take over, or die. Or they sit there like lumps and never do anything.

Your expectations change, your love for a specific plant can diminish. Success breeds confidence, so you try those plants you don't think you should or could grow. And when they do, you leap around in your mind like a giddy little kid.

There is always next year. And this is last year's next year. Start planning. ☺

Six innovative small business models in small towns

Small towns in Illinois don't have to settle for business as usual. And entrepreneurship is the best way to support small towns. When local people start their own businesses and prosper, they help their towns to prosper, too.

Rural entrepreneurs are exploring new shapes, new locations and new ways of doing business. Here are six innovative ways people are building businesses in small towns today.

1. Pop-ups

These are temporary businesses that may last from just one day to several months.

You've seen short-term vendors setting up tents and booths around special events, and this extends the idea to all kinds of businesses. You can experiment and gauge demand in a small town before committing to a more expensive permanent business. Pop-ups can be as small as a booth, or as big as a full-size building rented just for the holiday season, or anything in between. Pop-ups are a good fit for: restaurants, retail stores, and artists.

2. Trucks and Trailers

Food trucks are a hot trend in urban areas, and now all kinds of business from retail to service are going mobile. With a truck or trailer as a base, there's no need for a building. Mobile businesses can also build their market by taking advantage of neighboring small towns' special event crowds. Instead of having to set up and tear down a booth every time, the whole thing is ready to go in the trailer. Trucks and trailers are a good fit for: specialty foods and retail.

3. Business-in-a-business

In a small town, there may not be enough demand for a single business to fill up an entire building, office or retail space. Rural innovators are now borrowing and sharing space with several different businesses under one roof. A restaurant may pop-up inside a retail space. A single retail store may include half a dozen different vendors or mini-shops inside. You can even make a business of subdividing your building, like an old-school antique mall or an upscale version with separate small spaces. Business-in-a-business is a good fit for: small retailers.

4. Tiny business villages

Groups of tiny houses or dressed-up sheds are popping up on empty lots and unused green spaces, filled with extra-small businesses. The smaller spaces encourage lower-risk experiments, and all the businesses together draw a critical mass of visitors to the village. The key



factor is to bring a number of them together. One tiny business on its own is lonely; groups of tiny businesses are a draw. Individual crafters or artisans who couldn't fill an entire store get a chance to fill a tiny space. Agri-tourism businesses like wineries or maple syrup, which couldn't justify renting an entire downtown storefront, can easily support a tiny storefront. Tiny businesses are a good fit for: super-specialty retail.

5. Rural-sourcing

It's usually cheaper to live in a small town than an urban area. Now freelancers and specialist rural-sourcing companies use the small town cost of living as an advantage to compete for big-city contracts. Online marketplaces like Upwork let people work from anywhere and deliver services digitally. Some professional services, including web designers, writers, programmers, creative artists, marketers, consultants and virtual assistants, may not be able to make their entire living from local customers, but can easily score work from out-of-town clients. Rural-sourcing is a good fit for: service providers, creative professionals, online services.

6. Omni-local

Instead of waiting for customers to walk in the front door, smart rural retailers are using the same omni-channel tactics as big retailers. The low cost of cloud-based tools allows them to reach local customers in multiple new ways. It's easier and more affordable than ever for small town business to use e-commerce to take orders online, mobile-friendly websites to connect with customers on the go, and subscription boxes to delight customers monthly. Omni-local is a good fit for: existing small brick-and-mortar retailers looking to reach more customers.

Source: Becky McCray owns a store and cattle ranch in a small town in Oklahoma. Download her 20 Small Business Ideas for Small Towns at <http://smallbizsurvival.com/news>

FINEST

Cooking



Apple Nachos

Ingredients

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 4 lg. Granny Smith apples, sliced | 1 T. evaporated milk |
| 35 lg. marshmallows | 1/4 c. mini chocolate chips or |
| 1/4 c. butter | chopped nuts |
| 35 caramels | 1 T. chocolate syrup |

Directions

Arrange apple slices onto a platter. In saucepan, melt marshmallows and butter. Set aside. In microwave safe dish, melt caramels with milk stirring every 30 seconds. Set aside. Pour marshmallow cream over apples, followed by caramel sauce. Drizzle with chocolate syrup and sprinkle with chocolate chips/nuts.

Thomson Sesquicentennial Cookbook

Who: Thomson Sesquicentennial Committee

Cost: \$20 includes shipping

Details: Soft-backed, spiral bound

Pages of recipes: 220

Send checks to: Thomson

Chamber of Commerce,

Attn: Luanne Bruckner,

1110 Locust St., Thomson, IL
61285 or call 815-259-3168.

Potato Chowder with Green Chiles

Ingredients

- | |
|----------------------------------|
| 1 lg. red bell pepper |
| 4 lg. Poblano chile peppers |
| 5 c. chicken broth |
| 1 lg. potato, peeled and cubed |
| 1 lg. onion, chopped |
| 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and |
| chopped |
| 1 tsp. salt |
| 1/4-1/2 tsp. fresh ground pepper |
| 1/4 c. butter or margarine |
| 1/3 c. flour |
| 1 tsp. dry mustard |
| 2 c. half & half |
| 1 c. milk |
| 1 c. (4 oz.) shredded cheddar |
| cheese |
| 6 bacon slices, cooked and |
| crumbled |
| 1 bunch green onions, chopped |

Directions

Broil bell pepper and Poblano pepper on an aluminum foil lined baking sheet 5 inches from heat for 5 minutes on each side until peppers are blistered. Place peppers in a heavy duty Ziploc bag. Let stand 10 minutes to loosen skins. Peel peppers, remove and discard seeds. Coarsely chop peppers. Bring chopped roasted peppers, chicken broth, potato, onion, jalapeno pepper, salt and pepper to a boil in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes or until potato is tender. Melt butter in a heavy saucepan over low heat. Whisk in flour, 1 tsp. salt, dry mustard and 1/2 tsp. ground pepper until smooth. Cook 1 minute, whisking constantly. Gradually whisk in half and half. Stir flour mixture and milk into broth mixture. Cook over medium heat 8-10 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Sprinkle each serving with cheese, bacon and green onion. Yield: 9 cups.

Visit www.icl.coop to see more Illinois Country Living recipes.

Raw Vegetable Salad

Ingredients

- | |
|------------------------------|
| 1 med. head cauliflower |
| 1 med. bunch broccoli |
| 1 bunch radishes |
| 2 bunches green onions |
| 1 c. mayonnaise |
| 1 c. sour cream |
| 3 tsp. celery seed |
| 1 pkg. dry cheese and garlic |
| dressing |

Directions

Cut up vegetables and mix with remaining ingredients.

Spanish Rice

Ingredients

- | |
|-------------------------------|
| 4 slices bacon, fried |
| 1 1/2 lbs. hamburger, browned |
| 1 onion, chopped |
| 1 green pepper, chopped |
| Garlic salt to taste |
| Salt to taste |
| Paprika to taste |
| 1 c. regular rice |
| 3 c. tomato juice |

Directions

Combine all ingredients and place in a 9x13" pan. Cover with foil. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Uncover and bake another 15 minutes.



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



Favorites from Our Table

Who: St. Augustine Altar & Rosary Society

Cost: \$18 includes shipping

Details: Soft-backed, comb bound

Pages of recipes: 189

Send checks to: St. Augustine Altar Society, Attn: Barb Lathom, 100 Mahoney Rd., Ashland, IL 62612 or call 217-473-4760.

Oh So Good Pizza Dip

Ingredients

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 8 oz. cream cheese, softened | 4 T. chopped green pepper, optional |
| 1/2 c. sour cream | 4 T. black olives, sliced |
| 1/2 c. mayonnaise | 1/2 c. onion, chopped |
| 2 c. mozzarella cheese, shredded | Fresh mushrooms, sliced |
| 1 c. Parmesan, shredded | 1/2 to 1 lb. ground beef, cooked and drained |
| 2 c. pizza sauce | Tostitos or pita chips |
| 1 T. oil | |
| 4 oz. pepperoni, sliced | |

Directions

Mix cream cheese, sour cream, mayonnaise, 1 cup mozzarella cheese and 1/2 c. Parmesan cheese and place in a 9x13" ovenproof dish; top with pizza sauce. Add 1 T. oil to skillet and saute pepperoni, onions, green pepper and mushrooms for 5 minutes; add to dish. Add olives and ground beef and top with 1/2 c. Parmesan cheese and 1 c. mozzarella cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-35 minutes until golden around edges. Serve with Tostitos or pita chips.

Twice Baked Potato Casserole

Ingredients

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 6 med. golden potatoes, unpeeled and cooked | 9 c. rice Chex |
| 1 lb. bacon, cooked and crumbled | 1 1/4 c. white chocolate chips |
| 4 c. sour cream | 1/4 c. butter |
| 2 c. mozzarella cheese, shredded | 4 tsp. lemon peel zest |
| 2 c. cheddar cheese, shredded | 2-3 tsp. fresh lemon juice |
| Salt and pepper to taste | 2 c. powdered sugar |
| 2 green onions, chopped | |
| 1/4 to 1/2 c. half & half | |

Directions

Bake potatoes until cooked. Let cool until warm. Fry or bake bacon, crisp and crumble. Mix sour cream, cheeses, onion, salt, pepper and half and half together. Cut potatoes into 1-inch pieces. Layer half of potatoes in a 9x13" casserole dish, then half of cheese mixture, the rest of the potatoes and the rest of the cheese mixture. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-30 minutes.

Lemon Crunch Mix

Ingredients

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 9 c. rice Chex | 1 1/4 c. white chocolate chips |
| 1/4 c. butter | 1/4 c. butter |
| 4 tsp. lemon peel zest | 4 tsp. lemon peel zest |
| 2-3 tsp. fresh lemon juice | 2-3 tsp. fresh lemon juice |
| 2 c. powdered sugar | 2 c. powdered sugar |

Directions

Place Chex cereal in large bowl. In microwave, melt white chocolate chips and butter until melted, stirring every 30 seconds. Add lemon juice and zest; quickly stir to combine. Pour over cereal and coat well. Toss powdered sugar into large brown paper bag or large bowl. Mix or shake in bag until coated. Spread on baking sheets to dry, about 1 hour.

Visit www.icl.coop to see more Illinois Country Living recipes.

Calling all cookbooks!

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



Jalapeno Cheese Monkey Bread

Ingredients

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 12 Rhodes frozen dinner rolls, thawed but cold | 1 1/2 c. grated mozzarella cheese |
| 3 T. butter, melted | 3/4 tsp. dried oregano |
| 3/4 c. drained jalapeno slices | 3/4 tsp. garlic powder |

Directions

Cut rolls in fourths. Dip 16 roll pieces in butter and layer in bottom of a greased loaf pan. Sprinkle dough with 1/2 c. mozzarella cheese, 1/4 c. jalapeno slices, 1/4 tsp. oregano and 1/4 tsp. garlic powder. Dip 16 more pieces in butter, layer over first layer. Repeat layers. Do NOT put cheese on top of last layer. Cover pan loosely with sprayed plastic wrap and let rise until doubled, 1 hour or so. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle with remaining 1/2 c. mozzarella. Bake 5 minutes longer until cheese is melted. Remove from pan to cool a little. Serve warm.

How to detect the silent killer in your home

What if I told you that baking cookies could be bad for your health, would you believe me? Along with the wonderful aroma of fresh baked cookies wafting throughout the home could also be carbon monoxide (CO). I can tell you first hand, you will never know when you are overcome with CO. In my 15 years of testing in homes and buildings, I have passed out cold from CO poisoning twice and almost a third time. The only thing that saved my life both times was that I fell on the floor where there was fresh air. So I take CO poisoning very seriously.

Let's talk carbon monoxide detectors. Whether you are a homeowner, renter or landlord you should read the *Illinois Carbon Monoxide Alarm Detector Act*. This informs all parties what their responsibilities are regarding the installation and maintenance of residential carbon monoxide detectors.

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, two-thirds of all accidental CO poisoning deaths involve automobiles, and one-third from faulty heating appliances, improper venting or unvented space heaters. Gas heating systems, especially older systems, should have routine maintenance checks by a qualified service technician. Mark it on your calendar.

IMPORTANT! Those most at risk for CO poisoning are: infants or small children, women who are pregnant, elderly, and anyone with heart or lung disease or other respiratory problems. Side note - small animals will be affected first due to their minimal lung capacity.

Most people are unaware that there are two types of CO detectors, high and low level. All the detectors at local retailers are high level CO detectors and sell for \$10-\$40. High level CO detectors must meet the UL-2034 standard for use in homes. This standard was developed to reduce false

alarm calls for first responders. The problem with this standard is that you can suffer from low level CO poisoning (less than 30 ppm) and be very sick. This is not a good standard for people that are considered to be "high risk" or if you don't leave home often.

UL-2034 High Level Carbon Monoxide detector thresholds:

- 30 ppm or less, no alarm before 30 days
- 70 ppm 1 - 4 hours
- 150 ppm 10 - 50 minutes
- 400 ppm 4 - 15 minutes

Low level detectors cost more, \$150-\$250, but will alarm starting at 10 ppm instead of 70 ppm. If anyone in your family may be considered high risk and you would like more information on low level CO detectors, *CO-Experts* are the low level CO detector pioneers. Go to www.coexperts.com.

Installation and maintenance:

Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for the location and number of detectors you need. Replace the batteries once a year, and be aware of the "*End of Life Notification*." This is your detector letting you know it has reached the end of its life and is no longer protecting you.

All electric homes: I believe there should be at least one CO detector in every home to detect CO that comes from outside the home such as attached garage, charcoal or gas grills, lawn mowers, gas powered equipment or portable generators. Far too many fatalities occur during power outages from the improper use of portable generators. To learn more on the proper use of portable generators please visit www.safeelectricity.org.

Prevent CO poisoning: Never use ventless heaters in the home (except electric) and never use your oven for heating. Annually, have your water heater and furnace serviced by a qualified technician, inspect fireplaces, woodstoves, flues or chimneys and clean the dryer vent. Never heat



your garage with the same furnace as your home. Be aware of CO when using portable power equipment or generators and if you are high risk consider installing a low level CO detector.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, tasteless toxic gas produced by incomplete combustion of natural gas, propane or wood. Early symptoms of CO poisoning can mimic the flu including: headache, nausea, vomiting and dizziness. More significant poisoning symptoms are: throbbing headache, drowsiness, confusion, heart irregularities. If you think you might be experiencing CO poisoning do not hesitate. Get everyone out of the building to fresh air and call for help.

For more information go to:
Illinois Department of Public Health – www.dph.illinois.gov
Illinois Poison Center –
www.illinoispoincenter.org/carbonmonoxide
COSA – Carbon Monoxide Safety Association – www.cosafety.com?



Have questions?
Brian Kumer can
be contacted at
brian_kumer@yahoo.com

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about your social security

By Becky Whitlow, Social Security District Manager, Springfield

Before standing in line at your local Social Security office, you may find that the answers to your questions are only a click away on your computer. At socialsecurity.gov you can learn about disability coverage, review your online earnings statement, and get a personalized estimate of your future benefits. Here are just a few answers to common questions, but you can find much more by going to our website.

General

Question:

I can't seem to find my Social Security card. Do I need to get a replacement?

Answer:

In most cases, knowing your Social Security number is enough. But, if you do apply for and receive a replacement card, don't carry that card with you. Keep it with your important papers. For more information about your Social Security card and number, and for information about how to apply for a replacement, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber. If you believe you're the victim of identity theft, read our publication *Identity Theft and Your Social Security Number*, at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs.

Question:

I own a small business. How can I verify employees' Social Security numbers?

Answer:

Employers can use our Social Security Number Verification Service to verify the names and Social Security numbers of current and former employees for wage reporting purposes. For more information, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/ssnv.htm.

Retirement

Question:

What can Social Security do to help me plan for my retirement?

Answer:

Social Security has some great online financial planning tools you can use to make an informed decision about your retirement. Social Security's online *Retirement Planner* and our online *Retirement Estimator* are both tools you can access at any time. These will let you compute estimates of your future Social Security retirement benefits. They also provide important information on factors affecting retirement benefits, such as military service, household earnings, and federal employment.

You can access our *Retirement Planner* at www.socialsecurity.gov/retire2. And, you can use the *Retirement Estimator* at www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator.

Question:

How do I earn Social Security credits, and how many do I need to qualify for benefits?

Answer:

We use your total yearly earnings to figure your Social Security credits. The amount needed for a credit in 2015 is \$1,220. You can earn a maximum of four credits for any year. The amount needed to earn one credit increases automatically each year when average wages increase. You must earn a certain number of credits to qualify for Social Security benefits. The number of credits you need depends on your age when you apply and the type of benefit application. No one needs more than 40 credits for any Social Security benefit.

Question:

What is substantial gainful activity?

Answer:

We use the term “substantial gainful activity,” or “SGA,” to describe a level of work activity and earnings. Work is “substantial” if it involves doing significant physical or mental activities or a combination of both.

If you earn more than a certain amount and are doing productive work, we generally consider that you are engaging in substantial gainful activity. For example, the monthly SGA amount for 2015 is \$1,090. For statutorily blind individuals, that amount is \$1,820. You would not be eligible for disability benefits. You can read more about substantial gainful activity and if your earnings qualify as substantial gainful activity at www.socialsecurity.gov/oact/cola/sga.html.

Question:

Will my disability benefits be reduced if I get workers' compensation or other public disability benefits?

Answer:

If you get either workers' compensation or public disability benefit payments, we may reduce Social Security benefits for you and your family.

Public disability benefit payments paid under a federal, state, or local government law may affect your Social Security benefit. This includes civil service disability benefits, temporary state disability benefits, and state or local government retirement benefits based on disability. Disability payments from private sources, such as a private pension or insurance benefits, don't affect your Social Security disability benefits. However, in some cases, private disability insurers may require you to apply for Social Security disability benefits before they pay you. You may want to check to find out about your private insurer's policy.

We reduce the Social Security disability benefits you and your family get if the combined total amount, plus your workers' compensation payment, plus any public disability payment you get, exceeds 80 percent of your average earnings before you became injured or ill.

See the publication *What You Need To Know When You Get Social Security Disability Benefits* at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs for more information.

Supplemental Security Income

Question:

What is the difference between Social Security disability and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability?

Answer:

Social Security is responsible for running two major programs that provide benefits based on disability. Social

Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is based on prior earnings. SSDI is financed through the taxes you pay into the Social Security program. To be eligible for an SSDI benefit, the worker must earn sufficient credits based on taxable work to be “insured” for Social Security purposes. SSDI benefits are payable to eligible blind or disabled workers, the widow(er)s of a disabled worker, or adults disabled since childhood.

SSI disability payments are made based on financial need to adults or children who are disabled or blind, have limited income and resources, meet the living arrangement requirements, and are otherwise eligible. SSI is a program financed through general revenues. For more information, visit www.socialsecurity.gov.

Question:

What is a Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)?

Answer:

A PASS helps Supplemental Security Income disability beneficiaries return to work. It is a written plan of action for getting a particular kind of job or starting a business. In it, you identify:

- the job or business (this is your work goal);
- the steps you will take and the things you will need in order to achieve your work goal (for example: education or training, transportation, child care, or assistive technology);
- the money you will use to pay for these things (this may be any income, other than SSI benefits or assets, such as Social Security benefits, wages from a current job, or savings); and
- a timetable for achieving your goal.

For more information, visit our publication on the subject at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs.

Medicare

Question:

What can I do if my Medicare prescription drug plan says it won't pay for a drug that my doctor prescribed for me?

Answer:

If your Medicare prescription drug plan decides that it won't pay for a prescription drug, it must tell you in writing why the drug isn't covered in a letter called a “Notice of Denial of Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage.” Read the notice carefully because it will explain how to ask for an appeal. Your prescribing doctor can ask your Medicare drug plan for an expedited redetermination (first level appeal) for you, if the doctor tells the plan that waiting for a standard appeal decision may seriously harm your health. For more information, visit www.medicare.gov.

Ask Ed

I've received many e-mail questions lately and definitely appreciate hearing from you! I try to answer as many as possible, but if I don't get to you quickly, keep in mind you can always go to www.icl.coop to find the Powered Up section and leave a comment. In fact, that's an even better way to get an answer. That said, here are a few questions asked recently.

Q

Karl in Springfield writes, "I have a question pertaining to the use of Pineapple Software. My wife and I adopted the 'Keeper' software to store the new and unique passwords we have created. As a result we are always tapping into Keeper to remember (or retrieve) each of them. Often, this is done while we are out and using the free WIFI supplied by the retailer. Is this a mistake? With people using Pineapple Software, have we opened ourselves up to an attack? If someone were to capture the master sign-on password with Keeper, would ALL of our accounts be vulnerable and accessible to a cyber thief? If this is the case, can we stop this exposure by only accessing Keeper via our direct data connection only through AT&T?"

A

Well, Karl, I have not used the Keeper software you speak of, so I have to ask a couple of questions in order to answer you.

First, is it cloud-based or does it store everything on your local computer? If it's cloud-based, you may have some exposure. If it's stored on your local computer, someone using the Pineapple device shouldn't be able to see anything. The device specifically targets web traffic, so if the master password is only accessed locally, then there's no issue.

However, I'm assuming your software keeps the list of sites you visit and then automatically fills in the passwords for you? Don't be fooled by the passwords appearing as ****, instead of their actual letters. That's



just to protect you from someone looking over your shoulder. If someone is actually performing a man-in-the-middle attack, it's likely they can see the password in plain text.

Many sites today use encryption to help prevent this from happening, but if you use the same password on several sites, you're opening yourself up to a problem. Here's my best advice - if you have to access something sensitive, use your cellular plan. Additionally, use a different password for that kind of access. If you're just browsing the Web, using the free Wi-Fi is probably Ok.

Q

Peggy from Galena writes, "I received a duplicate friend request on Facebook and without thinking accepted the request. Now I'm afraid to use my computer for fear my keystrokes are being logged. My computer is a MacBook Pro. Is there any way to know if my computer has been compromised? What do I do now?"

A

If you didn't click on anything on the news feed from the new duplicate, "Friend" then you should be Ok. It's only when you download something on your computer that you are opening yourself up to a problem. If you DID click on something, a couple of different things could have happened.

1. You may have been asked to provide your account information, or to grant access to your account. If you did

that, immediately change your password so your Facebook account doesn't remain compromised.

2. You may have downloaded malicious software onto your computer. In this case, you will need to take your computer somewhere to have it checked out.

Also, as a matter of good housekeeping, make sure you delete the new "friend" and go ahead and change your password anyway.

I can't stress enough to make sure you are not using the same password for social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) that you are using for more important items such as banking or credit card management.

Until next month, be safe out there!

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 EVP/GM at Clay Electric Cooperative, Inc. in Flora

edv@ceci.coop

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N O M I N A T E A F A T H E R F O R



Father of the Year 2016

While every father is special, some are just extraordinary in their willingness to help their families and others. If your dad or another man in your community is deserving of this honor, nominate him. Tell us in 500 words about that special dad, what he does and why he deserves to win the title.

Just go to our website at www.icl.coop to fill out an entry and email your essay to vcheatham@aiec.coop. Be sure to include the information from the form below. Or, complete the following form and send it along with your essay.

Rules: The contest is open to any father served by an Illinois electric cooperative. No purchase is necessary. The winner will be selected by committee, and featured in the June or July edition of Illinois Country Living magazine.

All nomination letters submitted will be published on Illinois Country Living's Web site at www.icl.coop.



2014 recipient Ernie Sjuts



**\$100 gift certificate
and other prizes**

His Name

Address

City

State

Zip

In which Illinois electric cooperative territory he resides

Organizations to which he belongs

Person nominating him

Relationship to the nominee

Your phone number with area code

Nominee's phone number with area code (we would contact him only if he wins)

**DEADLINE TO SUBMIT:
Entries must be emailed or postmarked by March 18, 2016**

Valerie Cheatham, Illinois Country Living • P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708-3787 • vcheatham@aiec.coop

Co-op leaders discuss rural broadband and solar energy with Congressman Shimkus

U.S. Congressman John Shimkus (R-15th, Collinsville) discussed rural broadband and energy issues with electric co-op leaders on November 20. He also toured one of two recently opened 500 kW solar farms owned by Prairie Power, Inc. (PPI), a generation and transmission cooperative serving 10 electric distribution cooperatives.

Before touring the solar farm, the co-op leaders discussed rural broadband issues with Shimkus. Prairie Power, Inc. has upgraded its smart grid communication network from microwave to fiber optic cable. Robert Reynolds, PPI Vice President of Member Cooperative Services said, "We are building a fiber optic backbone and it is looped so it will be very reliable. The idea was we need it for business, but it could be a take off point for someone to provide rural broadband service. We see that as key to the economic development of rural areas, and key to keeping some of these kids in the country instead of going to the cities for jobs."

The fiber backbone is also helping Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Mattoon; Illinois Electric Cooperative, Winchester; and Shelby Electric Cooperative, Shelbyville, provide wireless broadband service to the rural territories they serve.

Shimkus, who serves on the Energy and Commerce Committee, said the committee met with FCC officials last week and they had a lot of questions focused on the need for better broadband access in rural areas. Shimkus said part of the solution is providing better market signals so there are incentives for building out more broadband infrastructure to rural areas.

Using Shelby Electric's wireless broadband network, the co-op can remotely monitor the local solar farm on a dashboard display in the office. During the meeting the display showed the solar farm was producing 91 kW. Reynolds said, "So that tells me we have cloud cover outside right now. Solar is a good renewable resource, but it is not a constant resource. You always need to have something else in your portfolio to back it up. That is why we went with a bit of solar, wind, coal and natural



Congressman John Shimkus toured the Shelby Solar Farm in November. Joining him on the tour were (l-r) Josh Shallenberger, President/CEO of Shelby Electric Cooperative; John Scott, Chairman of the Board for Shelby Electric, Kim Leftwich, President/CEO of Coles-Moultrie Electric; Shimkus; Robert Reynolds, PPI Vice President of Member Cooperative Services for Prairie Power, Inc.; Bob Hunsinger, President/CEO of Eastern Illini Electric; Duane Noland, President/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives; and Jim Matlock, Vice President of Engineering for Shelby Electric.

gas - so we have a balanced portfolio."

Shimkus asked how the power was managed when solar output dropped off. Reynolds said power production is handled by the Midwest Independent System Operator (MISO). "It is the air traffic controller for electrons in the grid. So when solar drops off, it sends the signal to the power plants to pick it up," remarked Reynolds.

That's different than it was 20 years ago, explained Reynolds. At that time coal plants were built and operated to come up to speed and run at their most efficient state. "Today, with wind and solar, you see power plants come up and go back and forth based on the signal they get from MISO as they manage the fluctuations. So it has created some up and down wear and tear and some challenges."

Shimkus also asked about the cost of solar power. Reynolds said, "This solar farm, which is a moderately sized solar farm, covers about five acres and has 2,052 solar panels, and it costs about 40 percent more than our standard portfolio running cost of power. So it more expensive today, but we felt that we needed to add to the wind energy we have to create a more diversified energy portfolio." He added that wind energy is still considerably cheaper than solar.

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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 manufacturers 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 108 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, Parade Magazine, The History Channel Magazine, Smithsonian 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 "Eliminate Belly Fat with Vinegar!"

Vinegar, Better than Prescription Drugs?

Thousands of years ago ancient healers trusted apple cider vinegar, and modern research shows — vinegar just might be 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 168-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 review 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.

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

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

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, disin-

fect and eliminate mold and mildew. Great for those with allergies or asthma!

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

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 168-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 \$12.95 plus 3.98 shipping and handling (total of \$16.93, OH residents please add 6.5% sales tax) simply do this:

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This was excerpted from an advertorial in Parade Magazine.

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If you want to lose weight and keep it off -- hate dieting and are tired of taking pills, buying costly diet foods or gimmick "fast loss" plans that don't work-- *you'll love the easy Vinegar way to lose all the pounds you want to lose. And keep them off!*

Today, the natural Vinegar weight loss plan is a reality. Written by noted vinegar authority Emily Thacker. Her just published book "Vinegar Anniversary" will help you attain your ideal weight the healthiest and most enjoyable way ever.

You'll never again have to count calories. Or go hungry. Or go to expensive diet salons. Or buy pills, drugs.

You'll eat foods you like and get a trimmer, slimmer figure-- free of fat and flab-- as the pounds fade away.

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."

Let your bathroom scale decide if the plan works for you. You must be satisfied. Guaranteed.

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 review of the findings and the opinion of the author, staying trim and fit the Vinegar way also provides preventive health care against the curses of mankind and other maladies.

In fact, the book's program is so complete that it also helps you:

- Learn secrets of ageless beauty and glowing skin
- Help build the immune system, to fight arthritis and disease
- Speed the metabolism to use natural thermogenesis to burn fat

PLUS so much more that you simply must use the book's easy Vinegar way to lose all the weight you want to lose--and enjoy all its other benefits-- before deciding if you want to keep it.

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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.

Date Book

For a complete listing of Events, visit our website www.icl.coop

JANUARY HIGHLIGHTS



JANUARY 29, 2016 @ 7:00 PM – JANUARY 31, 2016 @ 2:00 PM

The Wizard of Oz Musical

WHERE: Marion Cultural and Civic Center
800 Tower Square Plaza, Marion, IL 62959

COST: \$15

CONTACT: Kre8ive Fine Arts Academy

PHONE: 618-889-6500

EMAIL: michelle@getkre8ive.com

Kre8ive Fine Arts Academy presents the musical, The Wizard of Oz show dates are January 29 at 7 p.m., January 30 at 7 p.m. and January 31 at 2 p.m.

WHEN: JANUARY 23, 2016 – JANUARY 31, 2016

Bald Eagle Tours

WHERE: Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, 8588 IL-148, Marion, IL 62959

COST: \$5 adult, \$2.50/child

CONTACT: Corie O'Brien, 618-997-3344, corie_obrien@fws.gov

Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge will host guided eagle tours into the closed portion of the Refuge to potentially view active bald eagles and their nests. These tours are sponsored by the Friends of Crab Orchard, and are scheduled for January 23, 24, 30, and 31. Volunteers will lead three tours on each Saturday at 8 a.m., 11 a.m., and 2 p.m., and Sunday tours will begin at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Sunday tours at 9 a.m. are available for interested scout groups. The tour begins at the Crab Orchard Visitor Center with a short talk about bald eagles, followed by the tour which should last approximately two hours. The tours will stop periodically so visitors may get a closer look at wildlife, but little actual walking will be required. Fees will be collected in person the day of your reservation, so please arrive a few minutes early. Seating is limited, so please call 997-3344, extension 1 to reserve your seat.



WHEN: JANUARY 23, 2016 @ 7:30 PM

Illinois Symphony Chamber Orchestra – Sensational Strings

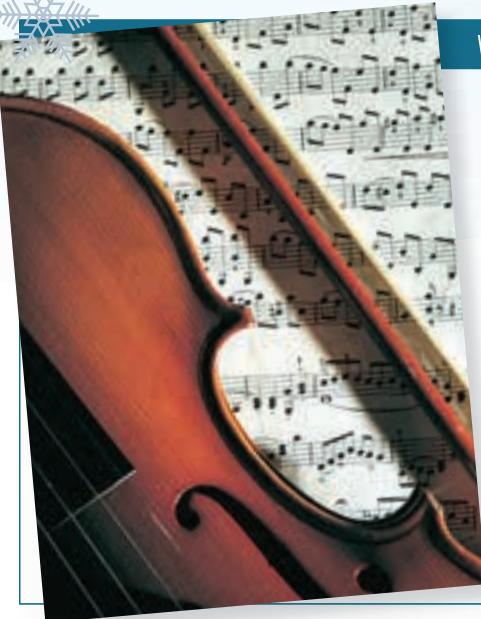
WHERE: Second Presbyterian Church
313 N East St., Bloomington, IL 61701

COST: \$20 per person

CONTACT: Illinois Symphony Orchestra
309-434-2777, info@ilsymphony.org

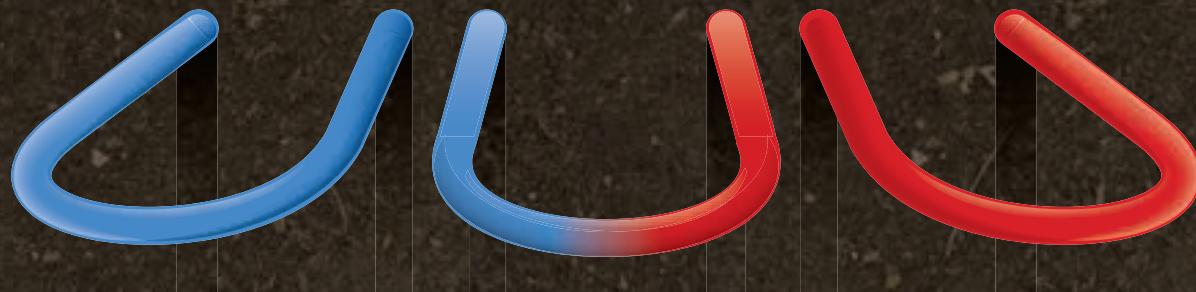
Enjoy the sensational sounds of strings in A Little Night Music! The night features Mozart's magical Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, the heavenly Musica Celestis of Kernis and Dvorak's sumptuous Serenade for Strings. A magical evening of music.

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Doctor Designed. Audiologist Tested. FDA Registered.

This Doctor-Invented Affordable Hearing Aid Changed My Life. *Here's How...*

“ It took me a LONG time to admit I had some hearing loss, even to myself. The signs were there: Shirley, my wife, “mumbled”, everyone complained that the TV was too loud, I hated going out to eat with our friends because it was too noisy to understand anything.

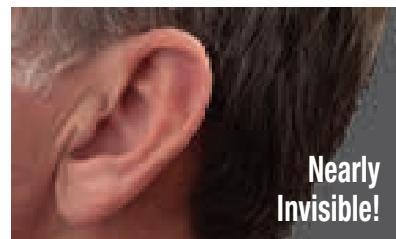
This began to take a toll. As much as I hate to admit it, I became a grump — depressed and withdrawn. My daughter, Susan, suggested a hearing aid might help. She had done some research and said, “You’ve got to try the MDHearingAid A/R. It was developed by a board-certified doctor and it costs less than my new cell phone.”

You have to hear it to believe it!

The **MDHearingAid® AIR** offers the same advanced technology and features of a \$3,500 hearing aid — for 90% less.

The next afternoon bowling, I told the guys what my daughter said. Rick chuckled, turned his head and said, “Like this?” That son of a gun was wearing one! None of us had noticed! After making his next spare, he told us all about his A/R — the sound is fantastic, the price is downright affordable, plus if he had questions, he just grabbed the phone to call their hearing aid professionals.

- ✓ People are **no longer mumbling!**
- ✓ Gave my **social life** a boost!
- ✓ Put the spark back in my **marriage!**
- ✓ I can **enjoy time** at church, with friends, and with my grandchildren!
- ✓ **Saved me** \$3,500!



Nearly Invisible!

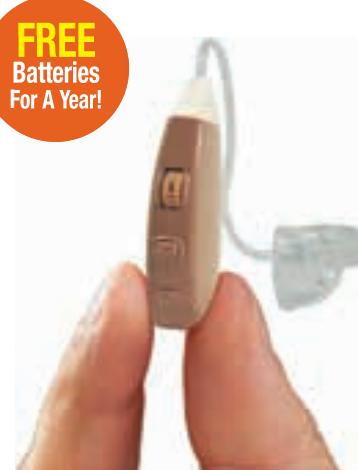
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4. Real Deal – not an inferior ‘amplifier’
5. 45-Day Risk-Free Trial
6. 100% Money-Back Guarantee
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