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FEATURES

- 10** Love is the mane thing
Dogs aren't the only therapy animals around. See how some special tiny horses have trotted into people's hearts.
- 22** Filling the holes in memories
- 28** Social security Q&A

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IC When you see this symbol, it means there's more content online at www.icl.coop!

DEPARTMENTS

- 4** Commentary
- 6** Currents
- 14** Safety & Health
- 16** Yard & Garden
- 18** Finest Cooking



- 20** Energy Solutions
- 24** Powered Up
- 25** Marketplace
- 30** Datebook

Is \$15 million enough? The case for FEMA reform

On Feb. 29, 2012, tornadoes swept across the Midwest and an EF4 tornado leveled much of Harrisburg, Ill., killing eight people and causing millions in damages. Kentucky and Indiana received federal assistance but Illinois was denied.

In the fall of 2013, a rare storm system ripped through Illinois uprooting trees, destroying homes, and devastating Gifford and Washington. Despite millions in

damages, Illinois was again denied assistance by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Just days after Christmas, flooding swept Central and Southern Illinois in 2015 taking the lives of 10 people and causing an estimated \$15 million in damages throughout 21 counties. Federal assistance was once again denied.

These three disasters alone show our small towns have not been given fair

consideration by FEMA. Just as other Americans, Illinois taxpayers contribute to the Disaster Relief Fund and should receive the same consideration when asking for help after a disaster. I'm fighting to make this happen.

For years, FEMA has relied heavily on an arbitrary, population-based formula to determine a state's need for federal assistance. The magic number for Illinois is \$18.1 million whereas Kentucky could be eligible for assistance after \$6 million. We've seen our neighboring states, impacted by the same storms, qualify for federal assistance while Illinois communities are denied. This formula unfairly punishes small communities in highly populated states like Illinois.

During my first term in Congress, I introduced legislation to change this flawed formula. And this past February, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed FEMA reform legislation that included my provision to make this process fairer. My provision simply requires FEMA to give greater consideration of the localized impact of a disaster, and rely less on this arbitrary formula.

This change is long overdue. I hope our senators in Illinois will urge their leaders to bring this important legislation for a vote before another disaster strikes. It's time to give our small and rural communities the fair consideration they deserve. 📍



**U.S. Representative
Rodney Davis (R-13)**
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Co-ops Vote campaign to help rural voters

This year, electric cooperatives across the country are working to buck the trend of diminishing votes from rural America by fanning out across the country to encourage co-op members to register to vote, and get to the polls on Election Day.

The Co-ops Vote campaign is a nonpartisan effort to educate rural voters on issues that affect them, and then encourage those voters to choose candidates that they believe will take a favorable stand on those issues.

“We want to get people excited about voting,” said Laura Vogel, National Rural Electric Cooperative



Association (NRECA) senior political affairs advisor.

Co-ops Vote is a national initiative, with boots on the ground in states where rural voters can make a real impact. NRECA’s efforts also will focus on critical issues for electric co-ops. They include broadband service, federal regulations on water, renewable energy, LIHEAP, cybersecurity and hiring veterans.

NRECA interim CEO Jeffrey Connor said, “We electrified the countryside. We unified our diverse members. And we made electricity a great ambassador for America around

the globe. We’ve always chosen to do the right thing over the easy thing. So now we can continue that tradition by doing something to change the tone ... something to make our country politically strong again.”

Visit the Co-ops Vote web site, WWW.VOTE.COOP. The web site will give you information on your elected officials and candidates, the voter registration process, election dates and locations, and background about eight key co-op issues including: rural broadband access, hiring and honoring veterans, low-income energy assistance, cybersecurity, water regulation, rural health care access, affordable and reliable energy, and renewable energy. ♻️

Source: ECT Cathy Cash

USDA and Norris Electric Cooperative offer job-creating loan

Colleen Callahan, USDA Rural Development Director for Illinois, presented Norris Electric Cooperative with a symbolic check for \$102,845 to promote rural economic development in Cumberland County. The funds will be loaned at zero percent interest to business start-up Ag Underground.

Ag Underground is owned by Justin Holsapple, who grew up on a farm in Cumberland County and returned after college with a goal of running his own business. Holsapple has recently taken on a dealership with Channel Seed, branched out into the pesticide and nutritional markets, and started Ag Underground as a way to market these products.

Many rural communities recognize the value of “growing their own” businesses as an alternative to attracting outside companies. Holsapple’s Ag Underground, like many businesses looking to start-up or expand, needed financing. Norris Electric Cooperative and the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan Program (REDL) were able to help.

“Today we have the privilege of recognizing two valuable, local businesses whose presence helps strengthen our rural communities,” said Callahan. “We also have an opportunity to highlight the additional strength that is generated for the future when a cooperative like Norris



Electric and an entrepreneur like Justin Holsapple work together.

USDA’s Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) program provides zero-interest loans and grants to utilities that in turn, lend funds to local businesses for projects to create and retain employment in rural areas. These revolving loan funds broaden the REDLG program’s reach and create a multiplier effect for its impact. ♻️



Illinois pioneers of rural electrification

Raymond W. Rusteberg

Raymond W. Rusteberg played a vital role in rural electrification in Illinois. As President of the Board of Directors of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives from 1964-1969, Rusteberg was part of the cooperatives' negotiating team on the Electric Supplier Act legislation.

Illinois House Bill 2105 was designed to end disputes between the state's electric cooperatives and public utilities, and protect co-op territory from public utility encroachment. It set up the mechanics for orderly settlement of territorial disputes.

The legislation passed unanimously in both the House and Senate, was signed by Gov. Otto Kerner on July 2, 1965, and became effective immediately.

In addition, Rusteberg was on the board of directors for Monroe County Electric Co-Operative, Inc. from 1956-1977, represented Illinois on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association board from 1968-1978, and was an incorporating director of the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation from 1969-1973.

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

Electrifying Africa Act passes Congress

You don't hear much about bipartisan support on anything these days, which makes passage of the Electrify Africa Act one bright spot. The U.S. House of Representatives in February passed S. 2152, the Electrify Africa Act, with strong support from electric cooperatives and the NRECA. The Senate passed the legislation unanimously and the bill was signed by President Obama. It encourages public-private partnerships that will bring electricity to 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa and help lift impoverished African communities out of subsistence living.



NRECA International Volunteer lineman Phil Hogan from Habersham EMC in Georgia takes a break from wiring new utility poles and is surrounded by children from Sudan.

NRECA Interim CEO Jeffrey Connor said, "This bipartisan bill makes it possible for 50 million people in Africa to have access to electricity by 2020. With the continued support of America's electric cooperatives, we look forward to expanding the benefits of power to rural areas around the globe." ♡

Fixing Illinois' loss of jobs

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and business stakeholders are forming a newly-formed private, non-profit organization focusing exclusively on increasing Illinois' competitiveness for job creation and investment.

"Illinois is at a critical crossroad," Illinois Department of Commerce Director Jim Schultz said. "We have among the best assets in the world, including unparalleled access to global markets with our five international airports, seven Class I railroads, the third largest interstate highway system in the country, the third largest intermodal port in the world, and more. We have over 200 higher education institutions around the state, a growing innovation ecosystem, a diverse and dynamic workforce, along with an abundance of natural resources. There is no reason Illinois should not have a thriving economy."

Yet we continue to lag behind other states and national averages,

and we are losing a steady stream of businesses, jobs and residents to other states. Last year, Illinois lost an average 250 jobs a month and ended 2015 with 3,000 fewer jobs, in stark contrast with overall national growth.

Schultz said, "The rigid structure and suffocating bureaucracy of the Department of Commerce hinder our ability to attract businesses to Illinois and to drive economic development. A mere 14 percent of Department of Commerce staff is dedicated to economic development activities, limiting the resources to attract and to retain business, which is a disservice to Illinois businesses and taxpayers."

The Illinois Business and Economic Development Corporation (ILBEDC), modeled from best practices of other successful state and local economic development organizations, will focus on sales, marketing and exceptional customer service.

For additional information on the ILBEDC, please visit www.ilbedc.org ♡

Electric co-op leaders meet with Rep. LaHood

Congressman Darin LaHood (left) discussed rural Illinois issues with electric co-op leaders including Dennis Fredrickson, Corn Belt Energy Electric Corporation director and Vice Chairman of the AIEC Board of Directors; and Warren Goetsch, Menard Electric Cooperative director and Secretary of AIEC Board of Directors. LaHood, one of the newest members of Congress, brought Congressman Mike Conaway from Texas with him to the meeting. Rep. Conaway is Chairman of the Agriculture Committee.



“The backbone of this district is agriculture,” said LaHood. “I’m diving into the issues on the federal level that impact agriculture. Whether that is crop insurance, Waters of the U.S., or our transportation system – those are all important issues to us, and I’m trying to be a strong advocate on the federal level.”

In addition to discussing preparation for the reauthorization of the Farm Bill in 2018, the two congressmen talked with the co-op leaders about FEMA reauthorization and continued support for USDA electric loan and rural economic development programs.

Illinois Electric Cooperative General Manager Bruce Giffin told

the congressmen that RUS funding is critical to the co-ops that need to rebuild lines constructed nearly 75 years ago. “For us, the RUS electric program is absolutely vital,” said Giffin. “We are also able to use the RUS economic development programs through the USDA office in Champaign. We have a loan out to a health care facility in Pike County and we have loaned to a small manufacturer to help create jobs.”

Giffin also said the USDA has helped fund renewable energy projects that would not have otherwise been feasible. He added that a new economic development planning grant will help the co-op catalog the infrastructure in its service territory, which is crucial for future rural

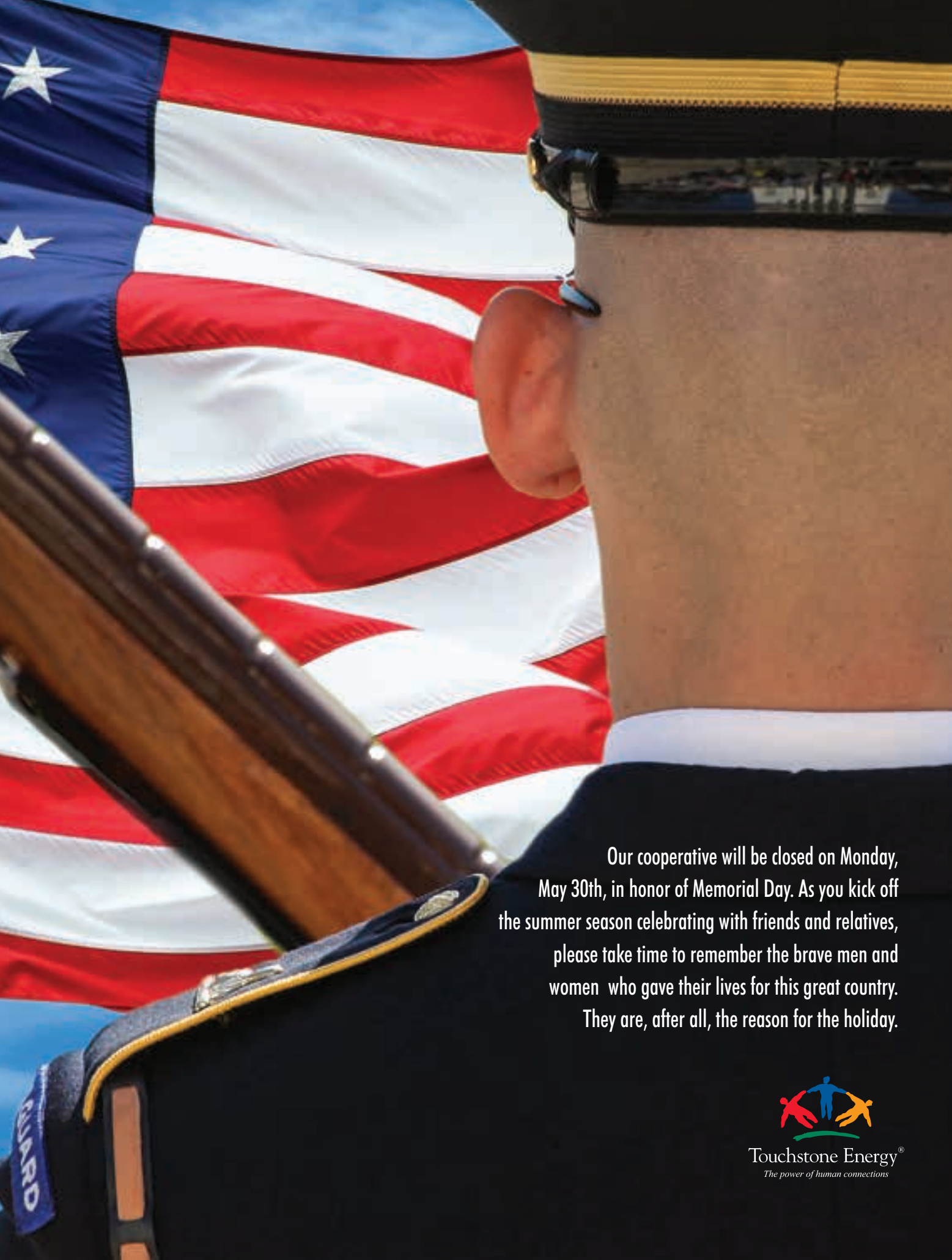
economic development projects. He added that more long-term funding is needed for rural broadband infrastructure.

Regarding FEMA disaster funding, the problem has been in states with high population centers like Chicago. The current FEMA funding formula can make it difficult for rural areas of Illinois to meet the current damage threshold numbers for FEMA funding. LaHood was well aware of the problem because of tornado damage in Washington, Ill. in 2014. “That is one of the first bills I co-sponsored,” said LaHood. “We had a devastating tornado in November of 2014. They tried twice to get federal FEMA funding and didn’t get it.”

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Our cooperative will be closed on Monday, May 30th, in honor of Memorial Day. As you kick off the summer season celebrating with friends and relatives, please take time to remember the brave men and women who gave their lives for this great country. They are, after all, the reason for the holiday.



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Love is the mane thing

By Nancy Rhoads McDonald

A sunbeam illuminates an elderly woman's snow-white hair. Sound asleep in her wheelchair, her tiny frame lists to one side. A cheerful nurse in brightly colored scrubs leans over and whispers in her ear, "Guess who's here?" The 107-year-old woman's eyes fly open, bright with anticipation, and she sits up in her chair. The clip-clop of tiny hooves grows louder, signaling the arrival of three miniature horses from Heartland Mini Hoofs, a mini equine visiting program.

One of the horses is ushered to her, and she is transfixed. Patting the horse's face and running her fingers across his smooth hair, she chatters excitedly. She drinks up every minute of the experience. But, when the horse

leaves, the woman retreats back into her thoughts where she'll be until the next visit from her tiny-hooved friend. The woman never speaks to any of the nursing home staff, but when the horse visits, something stirs deep inside her, and she feels a connection to him.

This type of scenario has played out for Andra Ebert many times. She and her family run Heartland Mini Hoofs, a not-for-profit entity that provides therapeutic visits to hospitals, rehab facilities and schools. She'll go anywhere people can be transformed by the joy and connections the tiny horses generate.

Ebert, a teacher, licensed social worker and registered nurse with a master's degree in gerontology, uses all she's learned to develop a meaningful visiting program designed to reach into the hearts and minds of those served by the program. Ebert says, "That's the beauty of these guys. They open doors to conversation between the residents, and residents

and their families. For some people it's a memory that it brings back, and for some it's just the uniqueness of it. It's a special part of a day. People who don't normally come out of their rooms will come out to see these guys."

Although the Eberts' daughter Morgan has two standard-size horses that live on their farm in rural Stonington, bringing miniature horses into the fold had never been considered until Andra saw a newspaper article about the benefits of therapy through horses. It took a couple of visits with Kate Bashor at Legacies of Hope Initiative in Kansas City and witnessing the impact the horses had on nursing home residents during a few facility visits, and she was hooked.

A few weeks later, two miniature horses, Jasper, who is a deep rust color, and Bailey, a pinto, became permanent members of the Ebert family. Four-month-old Winnie, a buckskin with dark socks, followed soon after. While Winnie and Bailey are registered thoroughbreds, Jasper is more of a hybrid

One hundred-year-old resident Dorothy Spence softly serenades Jasper during his visit to Pleasant Hill Village in Girard.

variety, and according to Andra, the orneriest of the bunch.

The Ebert's horses have only been going on visits for the past 17 months. Every visit is special in its own way, but some really stand out in Andra's mind, such as Winnie's first visit to a nursing home. At Primrose Senior Care Facilities in Decatur, Clayton Mees fell in love with Winnie. In fact, as he petted her, she fell asleep with her head in his lap. "I could tell just by the way he handled her that he knew horses," said Andra. "I asked what kind of horses he'd owned. He says, 'POAs (Ponies of America), and I miss them.'"

The story could have ended happily then, but Andra had a golden opportunity to make a good thing even more meaningful. Shortly after the Primrose visit, she received a call from Mees' daughter, Janeen Mees Daftary, who said, "This may sound weird but your horse was with my dad in Decatur and fell asleep on him." Andra immediately knew she was referring to Mees. Janeen explained that his 90th birthday would be on March 26, and the one present he really wanted was to see Winnie again.

When he opened the door, there was Winnie, who trotted into the house and back into his heart.

Through careful coordination a secret plan was hatched. Just after Mees and his family arrived home from his birthday dinner, the doorbell rang. When he opened the door, there was Winnie, who trotted into the house and back into his heart. He patted her and softly stroked her face and head until her eyes closed in contentment and she fell asleep on his lap. "I am the happiest man in the world today. This is the best birthday present I've ever received," Clayton proclaimed, with a wide smile.

Andra also recalls visiting Matthew's Kids in Springfield where kids who are predominantly homeless can safely gather after school and do

homework. "When we were done with our presentation to them, the students were petting the horses, and a group of 6-10 girls gathered around and asked if they could braid Bailey's hair, and I said 'yes.' They surrounded her on all sides and started braiding her tail

and her mane, and by the time we left her hair was a mess. It took about a half hour when we got home to brush it out." She adds, "These kids had a ball, and that's the kind of thing you can't put a price on. Most of them had never been around a horse before. The



Clayton Mees of Forsyth is joyfully reunited with Winnie.



Bailey, left, and Jasper delight pre-schoolers at Stonington Elementary School.

big ones can be scary, but our small horses are more manageable for people.”

The mini horses have been to many nursing homes. On a recent visit to Pleasant Hill Village in Girard, the horses were all introduced to 100-year-old resident Dorothy Spence. She kissed the horses, and even sang to them. It truly brightened her day.

“Pet therapy is so important. It helps with sensory response; the smell of the animal, the feel of their soft fur, and the sound of their hooves clicking on the tile floor. It gives them happiness, brings back memories, puts smiles on their faces, and nurtures love and warmth,” says Ann Johnston, Community Relations Director at

Pleasant Hill Village. Johnston adds that therapy animals can also improve resident behavior. She explains, “When they hug an animal, their mood is much better, and they’re happier.”

Mini horse visits are also popular at schools. Andra doesn’t feel they should just take the horses for a play date at a school, but use the opportunity as an educational tool. She says, “Horses’ teeth are so gross. I always show kids their teeth and say, ‘this is what’s going to happen if you don’t brush your teeth twice every day, and they’re like, ‘ewwwwwww!’”

And school visits are about to become more interesting. Andra and Morgan recently self-published a 24-page book, called *Winnie the Mini*,

detailing Winnie’s first day at the farm and how she learned to become a therapy horse. This children’s book is for ages Pre-K to eight, and is now available to accompany Winnie to schools. Winnie will even be able to “autograph” the books. Her hoof will be placed on a special pad and pressed on a page, leaving a bona fide horse signature.

Although some people may refer to these animals as “ponies,” the appropriate term is “miniature horse,” and according to the American Miniature Horse Association, they can stand no taller than 34 inches. But don’t let their small size fool you. From the 1800s to the 1930s, these tiny powerhouses worked in the coalmines, pulling carts of coal to the mine surface. After the 1930s, miniature horses were replaced in the mines with mechanized machinery, and interest in them waned. In the 1960s and ‘70s, their popularity resurged with hobby farmers, and as pets.

Taking horses out for visits would be fun, right? Well, yes, but according to Andra, it’s also a lot of work. “I’m sure it sounds ridiculous, but for a one-hour visit, it takes the whole day,” she explains. “With the guys’ help, we get them ready, clean them up and groom them. You drive them (the horses) there, then you get them out and brush them again. We put on their vests and poop bags and clean their feet with a hydrogen peroxide mix.” More work follows once the horses return home.



The horses now ride in style with a new custom trailer, complete with their glamour shots.

Heartland Mini Hoofs has only been in operation since 2014. In 2015, their first full year of operation, they conducted more than 110 visits, and put more than 8,000 miles on Andra's vehicle. And although it costs less to feed a horse than a dog, boarding and transportation costs are another consideration. To avoid paying boarding fees, Andra's husband Bill and son Brendan care for the horses during the week. On weekends, they, and a small team of volunteers, rotate duties with her. Andra is retired, and the program relies on the volunteer workers and donations, so raising money is a fundamental necessity to keep the program running.

When they needed a trailer to transport the horses, the Eberts staged a "Wheels for Winnie" fundraiser at the Walmart store in Taylorville. Stationed at the store entrance, Winnie and Bailey became unofficial Walmart greeters. They raised about \$1,000 in donations in three hours and entertained the shoppers. Andra was amazed by the impact the horses had on both the girls and the boys who had plenty of questions, especially the teenagers. She says, "They're all about the selfies, and took plenty with the horses."

Andra sits on the newly created American Miniature Therapy Horse Association (AMTHA) board of directors. The association has grown out of PetPartners, which focuses on dogs as service dogs. "We felt that in order to really truly make sure horses were represented, we needed an association that is based out of horses. Dog heads and horse heads are totally different. They have different mind-sets," says Andra.

On most Sundays, the board, whose members hail from across the country, chat on Facebook, or communicate via email to set policy. The ANTHA board is planning a "meet and greet" this summer near Branson, Mo., where members will bring their horses and meet face-to-face for the first time.



Springfield's Timberlake Senior Living resident Arice Brown can barely contain her excitement when Winnie arrives.



Pleasant Hill Village resident Virginia Schafenberg shows Winnie some love as the miniature horse makes her rounds.



The American Disability Act truly only lists dogs as service animals. "These guys (the horses) can be listed as service animals. The only difference is that they can't sit their behinds down. It displaces their hips. They can do anything a dog can do. They can open doors, and they can do lights." But while dogs might only have 10-12 years as a service animal, a miniature horse could have a 30-year career. They can be potty-trained and are the perfect size for a child who has a condition such as cystic fibrosis and has balance issues. They will stand perfectly still at a school desk until their services are needed.

The excitement generated and joy brought to the many people who have met the miniature horses during

visits through Heartland Mini Hoofs are proof of the program's worth. Despite all the time and effort required to run the program, Andra says she wouldn't change a thing. She explains, "This is our ministry. I never believed it would be as big as it is, and that it would take as much time as it does on our part."

For Andra it's simply a labor of love, and that's the "mane" thing.

For more information about bringing Heartland Mini Hoofs in to delight your patients, residents or students, contact Andra Ebert via email at barnmom50@gmail.com, or by phone at 217-825-3747, or you can follow the organization's activities on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/HeartlandMiniHoofs/>

Don't forget safety when considering the addition of solar

If you are considering adding solar to your home or business, the Energy Education Council and its Safe Electricity program encourage you to first do a thorough assessment so that you can make an informed decision based on goals, energy needs and safety.

The cost of solar installations has decreased in the last 10 years. There may also be federal, state, and local tax credits and subsidies available to help lower the cost helping support the increased installation of solar systems.

Many electric co-ops across the country and in Illinois are also adding community solar farms as a way to diversify their energy supply and add renewable energy. They are also helping advise co-op members on individual projects.

“A renewable energy system is a long-term investment,” says Mike Ashenfelter, Safe Electricity Advisory Board member. “Homeowners and small business operators should do some good hard looking before leaping into one to ensure they will get value for their investment.” Talking to a salesperson is not enough, adds Ashenfelter. Talk to professionals that can advise you on the economics, engineering and safety issues.

The local utility should be consulted to make sure the solar system will be safely interconnected with the utility grid. Any generator that can feed electricity back on to the grid needs to follow the specifications of the utility to ensure public and line worker safety.

To help homeowners and small business operators make more well-informed decisions, the Energy Education Council has developed a

checklist of questions and resources to take into consideration prior to starting the installation process of a renewable energy system.

The second part of the checklist provides questions that will help the homeowner or small business operator



once they begin to look for qualified installation professionals. These questions may help the purchaser determine the feasibility of installing a system as well as the type of system that may fit their needs. The checklist can be found at EnergyEdCouncil.org/checklist.pdf.

Because a correctly sized, sited, installed and maintained PV system is essential for maximizing its energy performance, and minimizing the chance of injury, the installation of residential solar panels should always be done by a professional contractor.

Periodic and routine maintenance is also an important consideration. Most tasks are do-it-yourself and require relatively little experience, but for major issues, professional help should be used. The Fire Protection Research Foundation (FPRF) suggests maintenance procedures to help prevent fire or damage, including:

1. Visually inspect the equipment and connections for signs of damage or degradation.
2. Visually inspect electrical junction boxes and raceways to see if

conductors are damaged and in need of repair or replacement.


3. Visually inspect string conductors to identify physical damage that is in need of repair.

For homeowners, solar systems are commonly mounted on the roof for easy access to the sun and to save space. Make sure your roof's structure is strong enough to hold the additional weight of a solar system. It is also important to provide easy and safe access to the roof in order to allow for effective inspection, maintenance and repair for the solar system.

Also be aware that roof-mounted panels could cause some issues in the case of a fire.

The FPRF explains that solar panels cannot always be easily shut down, so electric shock is a primary concern for emergency responders like firemen. On roofs where solar panels take up a large amount of space, it can inhibit the use of vertical ventilation, where a hole is cut through the roof of a building to release smoke and increase visibility of victims.

Solar panel equipment can also pose tripping, slipping, and snagging hazards, and broken panel glass can cause cutting hazards to first responders and residents alike.

For more information on using energy safely, visit SafeElectricity.org. 



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



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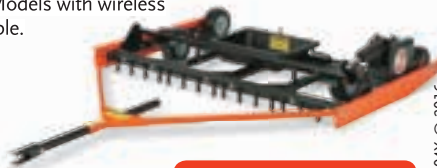
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Tricks to dividing and conquering spring chores

May is the month of flowers and planting. Farmers are, hopefully, in the fields and gardeners are busy setting out petunias and tomatoes. There is a great re-birth and re-invigoration of the body and mind. Well, until that evening or the next morning when the muscles respond.

Years ago, a good garden club friend told me her tricks of the trade.

First, go slow at first. Treat gardening like exercise. You don't do 100 sit ups the first time - or maybe ever after a month. You build up slowly.

After being more slug-like all winter, it takes time for the body parts to loosen up and acclimate to physical activities such as bending, kneeling and stretching.

Just like you would do with exercise, don't overdo it.

My first trick is to divide chores into 15 minute increments. After 15 minutes, either with an internal clock, a kitchen timer, or the alarm function on the smartphone, move on to something else. If you've been digging and planting for that quarter hour, go rake leaves, turn the compost pile, water or put down some mulch. Anything to use a different set of muscles.

Of course, if you realize you only have one or two more transplants to stick in the ground, do it. But only one or two, not more, otherwise you'll keep saying "only one more," and then you'll be sore.

Trick 2: Don't visualize the garden as a single entity, but a bunch of different areas. That way you can focus on one area and do everything you want, whether it's planting, pruning, fertilizing, mulching or something else.



What you achieve is an area you can say "well, that's done!" and feel satisfied. View it sort of like cleaning one room of your house at a time, and then moving on to the next. Soon, you'll have everything clean and it won't be so overwhelming.

That "overwhelming"-ness can be detrimental. It's daunting. You spend more time fretting about how you will get it all done.

Trick 3: Make lists. Of course, as you age, you find that making lists is a great trick for EVERYTHING. But it does help.

Divide the yard (Trick 2) into small tasks (Trick 1) and list them all on a piece of paper. If you are a bit obsessive compulsive (and I'm not faulting that one bit due to that adage of people living in glass houses) color code them in priority. Modern printers are great for doing that, but colored highlighters do the trick. Make sure to put little boxes or open circles so you check off your accomplishments.

As you can see, if you look at something as small tasks, it's easier on the

mind and the body. Don't try to rush everything.

Trick 4: Work early in the morning before it gets hot. Don't work in your pajamas unless you are in the country. It's surprising how much you can accomplish between 6 and 8 a.m.; just don't run noisy equipment that would wake your neighbors.

Trick 5: Drink lots of water. Of course, if you drink enough, Trick 1 comes into play as you rush inside, or if in the country, find that exclusive bush or stand of trees.

Trick 6: Have lots of children and grandchildren and get them to do the labor while you sip a cool refreshment from the glider. This one is my favorite! 💡



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





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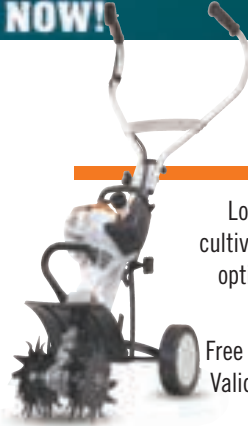
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1125 Grand Oak Dr.,
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618-549-3121.▼ *Mexican Corn Dip*

1 – 15 oz. can Mexican or Fiesta corn, drained	1 c. shredded Monterey Jack cheese
1 small can diced green chilies, drained	1 c. shredded fresh Parmesan cheese
1 c. mayonnaise	1 t. cumin
	Paprika

Mix drained corn and chilies with mayonnaise, 2 cheeses and cumin. Spread into glass casserole dish and sprinkle some paprika on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes until bubbly. Serve warm with tortilla chips.

▲ *Up North French Potato Salad*

1-16 oz. pkg. sliced bacon	1/4 c. beef consommé, undiluted
3 lb. small red potatoes, unpeeled, cut into 1/4-inch slices	1/2 c. chopped green onions
1 lb. fresh green beans, in 2-3 inch pieces	1/4 c. chopped parsley
	1 small clove garlic, crushed
	1 t. salt
	1 t. dry mustard
Dressing:	1/2 t. basil
1/2 c. olive oil	1/2 t. tarragon
1/4 c. tarragon vinegar	Freshly ground pepper

Cut bacon in 1-inch pieces; cook until lightly browned. Drain. Cook potatoes in water to cover for 8-10 minutes, until fork tender. Drain. Cook beans in 1/2-inch water, salted, 8-10 minutes. Drain. Combine dressing ingredients, stir well. Combine potatoes and beans. Pour dressing over and add bacon. Toss gently. Let sit 2-3 hours, covered. Stir gently and serve. Yield: 8-10 servings.

Monterey Spaghetti

8 oz. spaghetti, broken into 2-inch pieces	2 pkg. frozen spinach, thawed and drained
2 eggs	1 can French fried onions, divided
2 c. sour cream	1 t. garlic powder
1/2 c. grated Parmesan cheese	
4 c. shredded Monterey Jack cheese	

Cook spaghetti according to package directions. Meanwhile, in medium bowl, beat eggs. Add sour cream, Parmesan and garlic powder. Drain spaghetti and add to egg mixture with Monterey Jack, spinach and half the onions. Pour into greased 9x13" pan. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until heated through. Top with remaining onions and return to oven and bake uncovered 5 minutes or until onions are golden brown.

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Vidalia Onion Pie

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 large pie crust | 2 c. shredded Gruyere cheese
(<i>may substitute with Swiss</i>) |
| 2 large Vidalia onions,
thinly sliced | 1/4 c. basil leaves |
| 2 T. olive oil | 2 large tomatoes, sliced |
| Salt and pepper to taste | 3 T. freshly grated
Parmesan cheese |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Toss the onion slices with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Arrange the onion slices on the bottom of the pie crust. Spread the cheese on top of the onions. Layer on the basil leaves and arrange the tomato slices on top. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Bake for 45-60 minutes until crust is golden brown. Cool slightly before slicing. Serve warm or at room temperature.

♥ Greek Chicken

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 roasting chicken | 1-3/4 t. oregano |
| 3/4 c. olive oil | Salt and pepper to taste |
| Juice of 1 lemon | Butter |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Rinse chicken, pat dry and place in shallow roasting pan. Salt and pepper chicken and pat with butter. Bake for 30 minutes. While chicken is baking, add the lemon juice and oregano to olive oil and mix. After baking 30 minutes, reduce heat to 350 degrees, basting chicken with lemon oil mixture, repeating every 20 minutes, until chicken is thoroughly cooked.



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

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



^ Mother's Caramel Cake

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 c. sugar | Caramel Butter Icing: |
| 1-1/2 c. milk, scalded | 1 c. unsalted butter |
| 3 c. cake flour | 2 c. dark brown sugar |
| 3/4 t. salt | 1/4 c. whole milk |
| 4 t. baking powder | 6-8 c. sifted powdered sugar |
| 3/4 c. shortening | 2 t. vanilla |
| 4 eggs | |

Caramelize 1 cup of sugar by stirring constantly in a heavy pan over low heat until liquefied and golden brown. Slowly stir in hot milk; cooking over low heat until smooth, stirring constantly. Measure mixture – should be 1-3/4 cups. Add more milk if necessary; cool thoroughly. Sift flour, baking powder and salt together. Cream shortening; gradually add remaining 1 cup sugar, and cream until light and fluffy. Add unbeaten eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly after each addition. Add dry ingredients alternately with caramel milk, stirring only enough after each addition to blend thoroughly. Do not beat. Pour into two greased 9-inch or three 8-inch layer pans. Bake at 375 degrees for 25-30 minutes. When done, cool completely. To make icing, melt butter in a large saucepan and add brown sugar. Bring mixture to a boil, stirring frequently, about 1 minute until thickened. Remove from heat and add milk. Beat with wire whisk until smooth. Add vanilla and beat again. Add enough powdered sugar until icing is pourable. Pour a third of icing over the first layer and let sit for 15 minutes. Place second layer on top and pour remaining frosting over and let sit until icing sets. (Divide icing in thirds if making three layers.)

A home as a system

Are you unhappy with the “performance” of your home? Do you have cold floors, cold rooms, your home feels drafty, high humidity in the summertime, low humidity in the winter or just high utility bills? Before you pick up the phone to invite someone into your home to sell you something you think you need, STOP! Put down the phone, take a deep breath and dip yourself a big bowl of ice cream and think about what you doing. Ok, ice cream always helps me think. How about looking at your “home as a system”?

As I have mentioned in past articles, you, the homeowner, are the general contractor of your home. You hire and fire contractors, tell them what you want done (right or wrong) and you have control of the check-book. Yep, you’re the boss!

Many issues in your home may involve several different home systems. You may fix one problem and create another. There are dozens of different systems in a typical home that are codependent on each other: furnace, a/c, ducts, thermostat, water heater, water pipes, drains, exhaust fans and ducting, roof, attic, insulation, appliances, radon system, sump pump, lighting, wiring, flooring, gutters, windows and doors, and the list goes on and on. All systems in your home need to work together. Here are a few examples of systems NOT working together.

What could happen if you had your home air sealed and insulated without considering how these improvements might impact other systems in your home?

During the first cold snap of the season, after having your home air sealed and insulated, you cannot see



out your new windows because of all of the condensation on the inside of them. “What happened? This has never happened before.” No one checked the airflow through the bathroom exhaust fan that was moving very little air. The crew did such a good job of air sealing, the home is now draft-free and the moisture from inside the home has no place to go, and the humidity increases and condensation forms on the windows. Not good!

Suppose your furnace only runs about two minutes at a time and turns off. “Now what’s going on with the furnace? It usually runs a lot longer.” Now that your home is properly air sealed and insulated, your furnace is significantly oversized because the home doesn’t lose as much heat as it once did, so the furnace short cycles causing comfort issues.

It’s summer and again you notice that the air conditioner only runs about a few minutes at a time. Yes, you guessed it, the air conditioner is oversized for the home, just like the furnace. The home cools easier now, but it cannot dehumidify because the system does not run long enough to remove the moisture from the air resulting in a swampy cool feeling.

If that’s not bad enough, since the air sealing crew did such a good job,

your gas water heater is now back-drafting all the time! Oh, joy!

Are you asking yourself if this can happen to a home in the real world? Absolutely, I have seen it many times. Does it happen on every home that is air sealed and insulated? No. These were some examples of systems not working together. It’s like messing with Mother Nature. If you upset the balance of nature, there may be a problem down the road.

If you are wanting to upgrade your heating and cooling systems with a conventional furnace and A/C, or even a geothermal system, here are some questions to ask yourself: How’s the insulation in my walls, floors or ceilings? Is my home drafting and in need of air sealing? Are my bath and kitchen exhaust fans working properly? Are we going to install new siding and windows in the near future? This opens up some cost effective insulation opportunities if you are. Do we have a natural draft water heater or furnace that could back-draft?

Remember, if you are planning energy upgrades to your home, you should address the building shell and ventilation systems first. Then the heating and cooling systems because they are sized to the heat loss and heat gain of the building shell. This will keep your home’s systems working well together. 💡



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





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Filling the holes in memories

Reminiscence program helps engage those with dementia

By Meredith Bollinger

History is important. Through time it has taught us lessons and embedded momentous occasions deep within our memories. However, we still take for granted what the past means to us through our local or personal histories. Generally speaking, we can remember what toys we used to play with, what clothes we used to wear, as well as the places we may have visited on a regular basis. But what about those who can no longer recall such things?

Those affected by Alzheimer's deal with holes in their memories, struggling to piece fragments together to form a complete image or thought. When the sight of a family member was once enough to bring them back, it is now another face among strangers.

So what do we do? We campaign; we get together to fundraise further research in hope of finding a cure. Even so, these actions focus only on the hope to aid future victims while ignoring those dealing with Alzheimer's today.

Several institutions, such as nursing homes and assisted living centers, have specialized in patients suffering with varying forms of dementia, providing them with an enriching environment and specific programs that exercise their cognitive abilities. However, one institution has found a unique way to engage these seniors.

The McLean County Museum of History offers its Senior Reminiscence Program as a tool to use their historical artifacts to improve the lives of seniors who struggle with dementia. This free program uses historical objects and photographs to engage and provide intellectual stimulation for those suffering from memory loss. It grants participants an opportunity to recover fragments of their past lives in and outside McLean County, as well as share these invaluable recollections with interested parties.

Although there are art museums located in Chicago that have programs for seniors with dementia and cognitive disorders, the McLean County Museum of History's program differs. Museum Director of Education Candace Summers says, "we feel our program is unique in that we utilize cultural artifacts and photographs, from throughout our local history, to stimulate the memories of program participants and encourage them to share those memories with each other during these sessions."

Recognizing the need for the inclusion and care of one of the largest and most under-served

populations in the country, the museum regularly travels throughout central Illinois serving over 1,000 seniors each year. Since its start in 2005, nearly 460 Senior Reminiscence programs have been presented. Those with dementia and other cognitive disorders struggle to access their short term memory, however the program targets the long-term memory through older artifacts specific to the participant's region. Providing seniors with the tools to help them remember the people they used to be can greatly benefit them as human beings today.

Activity directors from two senior care centers in Bloomington, Ill., gave insight into what it was like to witness their residents during the program. They were



Candace Summers, Director of Education, shares a 1920s flapper dress in the Well Dressed Folks About Town program with participants at Blair House, Normal.

impressed with how using the objects, and allowing the residents to hold and manipulate them, triggered vivid personal stories. They could see the resident's eyes light up with happiness while watching the presentation and listening to the stories, and could tell they were reminiscing about their past/childhood and were enjoying it.

There are five workshops currently offered: Play it Again: The Toys and Games We Remember, Tools of the Trade, Well-Dressed Folks About Town, Photo Reminiscence, and What's Cooking? Gadgets from Around the Kitchen. These hour-long programs feature items utilizing a specific theme, whether it's tools that older farmers remember using, or perhaps remember their fathers using, or appliances from the kitchen and household.

The program offers its participants such an engaging and culturally rich experience that more often than not, it brings them back to reality. For those fleeting moments they are recalling fond memories, and perhaps smiling at their youth, as they flash before their eyes. The games they played and the people they played with come flooding back. Participants light up at the euphoric sensation the program brings to them as it reintroduces these men and women to who they are, by examining who they used to be.

Summers fondly recalls a moment after presenting a program at the Martin Health Center in Bloomington. After the program ended, one participant approached her as she was packing up. Taking Summers' hand in hers, she said, "Honey, you bring us back to reality, even if it is only for a little while."

"It was the most touching experience of my career at that point," recalls Summers, "and one that still brings me to tears, even to this day."

Summers and her co-workers in the education department do a phenomenal job connecting with the participants, helping them remember different parts of their lives as well as how their history can also contribute to the community.

Unfortunately, the museum cannot travel all over the state to present this insightful program, but through a how-to workshop (held at the museum on March 22 of this year), other institutions may be able to create reminiscence programs of their own.

"We know there is a need and desire for this type of program in other parts of our state," says Summers. "It is our hope, through the workshop we have created, to teach professionals from other historical sites, museums, cultural institutions, and

senior care organizations in Illinois, how to create their own programs."

It is the hope of McLean County Museum of History, that through these visits and educational efforts, the program will reach far beyond McLean County, bringing respect and care back to some of our most essential, and more commonly neglected, citizens.



Hannah E. Johnson, Education Program Coordinator, presents the Well Dressed Folks About Town program to a group of seniors at Advocate BroMenn Adult Day Services, Normal. Participants share their memories while Johnson displays a bottle of liniment.



Anthony Bowman, Education Outreach Coordinator with the McLean County Museum of History, presents the What's Cookin! Gadgets from around the Kitchen to a group of seniors at Luther Oaks, Bloomington. In this photo, participants share their memories while Bowman displays a Carnival Glass candy dish.

Which laptop should I buy?

Claburn from Norris Electric writes, “My laptop screen recently had an unfortunate accident. (I stepped on it!) So, now it won’t show anything on the screen. I can use an external monitor to use it temporarily, but I’ve been meaning to get a new one for a while now anyway. I mostly use the computer for browsing the Internet, and watching Netflix. I also like to play some games and still want a DVD drive as I occasionally watch movies on it. I would like a 17-inch monitor so I can see it better, but budget is an issue. What do you recommend?”

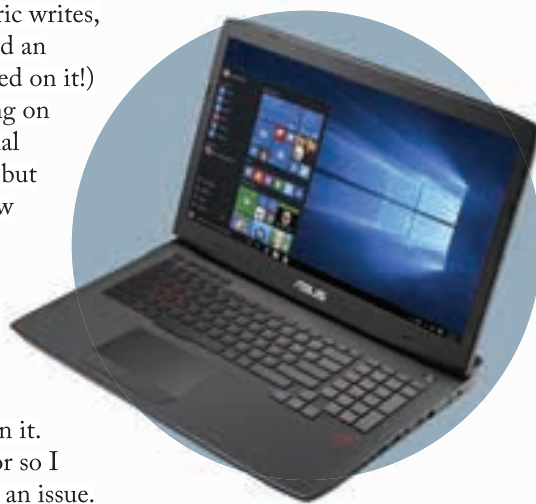
Sorry to hear about the “accident.” I know how it can get when you have an older computer and you’re just looking for a reason to upgrade! Keep in mind that if the laptop is still booting up and showing information on an external monitor, you can probably have the screen replaced and it will be just fine.

On the other hand, if you want a replacement, I do have a few suggestions. Of course, there are literally thousands of options out there, so the three I’m going to suggest aren’t by any means an exhaustive list. But, for their price points, I think they all have a lot to offer.

Let’s categorize these three suggestions as Good, Better and Best.

Good

The first one I am going to recommend is the DELL Inspiron i5759-4129BLK. You can purchase it from DELL directly, or shop around to see if you can find a better deal. The processor in this laptop is an i5, which packs enough power to get everything you want done, and it has enough memory – 8GB, to run most games you would play. One of the reasons it didn’t rank higher on my list is a common problem with many laptops out there. The hard drive is a standard



5400 RPM drive. That means everything you access that’s loaded on your computer is going to be a little slow. In fact, I would wager you’ll notice it gets worse as your computer ages. Even though the graphics card is integrated, it should still be able to do everything you listed, so long as you don’t get involved in games that put too high of a demand on your card.

Better

The next laptop I’m going to recommend is the ASUS X751LX-DH71(WX). You will note it is very similar to the first one. It has the same amount of RAM, and has the 17-inch monitor you requested. It even has the DVD player listed. It does have a better processor with the Intel i7, but the biggest difference between the two is the graphics card. Rather than using the RAM you have in your computer (the 8GB), this computer has a discrete video card, with its own 2GB of memory. That way, it can do a better job processing video. You will note that the hard drive is still a 5400 RPM drive, which explains quite a bit about the price of this laptop, but all-in-all it’s still a good deal at the prices I found. After looking a bit, it seemed to me the best deal I could get was direct from

the manufacturer at the ASUS store. You might look around some and see if you could find a better deal though.

Best

The final laptop I am going to recommend is the ASUS ROG G751JL-WH71(WX). Again, this one is similar to the last, but with a few upgrades. It still has the discrete video card, so Netflix and the games you play should run smoother, and it has the DVD option and 17-inch monitor. Like the last one, it also features an i7 processor. However, this one has 16GB of RAM, so you should notice an increase in performance, especially when multi-tasking. Additionally, this laptop lists an extra HDD bay. That means that even though it has the standard 5400 RPM hard drive, you can add another one and put in one of the new SSD drives so you get better speed.

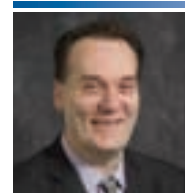
I tried to be budget conscious so I only listed computers if I could find them right around \$1000 or less. The first one was closer to \$600, and the second was around \$800. Of course, there are much more powerful options out there, but they’re also going to cost you quite a bit more.

Hopefully, this helps you with your decision.

Until next month, be safe out there! Have a question or comment?

Reply Online

Have a question or comment? 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

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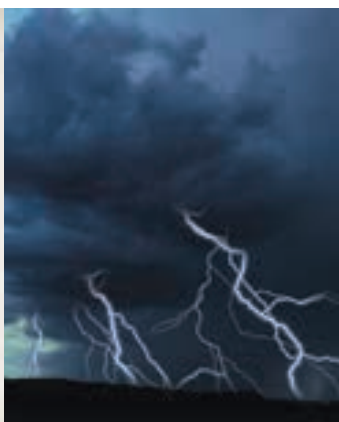
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Questions

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Answers

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about your social security

By Becky Whitlow, Social Security District Manager, Springfield

The answers to many of your social security questions may be only a mouse click away. Go to socialsecurity.gov to learn how to replace a card, find a retirement calculator, apply for benefits, change your address or set up direct deposit for your benefits. Here are a few answers to commonly asked questions.

General

Question:

I was told I shouldn't be carrying my Social Security card around. Is that true?

Answer:

We encourage you to keep your Social Security card at home in a safe place. Don't carry it with you. Even if you're going to a new job or to meet someone who needs it, all they really need is your number — not your card. Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in America, and the best way to avoid becoming a victim is to safeguard your card and number. To learn more, visit our Social Security number and card page at www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.

Question:

My husband and I are both entitled to our own Social Security benefits. Will our combined benefits be reduced because we are married?

Answer:

No. When each member of a married couple works in employment covered under Social Security and both meet all other eligibility requirements to receive retirement benefits, lifetime earnings are calculated independently to determine the benefit amounts. Therefore, each spouse receives a monthly benefit amount based on his or her own earnings. If one member of the couple earned substantially less than the other or did not earn enough Social Security credits (40) to be insured for retirement benefits, he or she may be eligible to receive benefits as a spouse. To learn more, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/retirement.

Retirement

Question:

How do I return to an online application for retirement benefits that I already started, but didn't finish?

Answer:

You should have received a "Re-entry Number" when you initially started the application. You'll need the "Re-entry Number" to get back into your application.

Follow these steps to return to your application:

1. Go back to the online application at www.socialsecurity.gov/retire/apply.html
2. On the first page of the application, click on "Return to Saved Application Process."

3. Enter your “Re-entry Number” and Social Security number. You will be able to continue completing your application.

For more information, visit www.socialsecurity.gov.

Question:

What is full retirement age?

Answer:

Full retirement age is the age at which a person may first become entitled to full or unreduced retirement benefits. Your full retirement age depends on your date of birth. For people born before 1938, it's 65. For those born after 1959, it's 67. If your birthday falls between 1938 and 1959, your full retirement age is between 65 and 67. (The age for Medicare eligibility is 65, regardless of when you were born.) For more information, go to <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/planners/retire/retirechart.html>.

Disability

Question:

How long does it take to get a decision after I apply for disability benefits?

Answer:

The time it takes to get a decision on your disability application can vary depending on:

- The nature of your disability;
- How quickly we can get your medical evidence from your doctor or other medical source;
- Whether it is necessary to send you for a medical examination; and
- Whether we review your application for quality purposes.

If you would like to apply for disability benefits, you can use our online application.

Applying online for disability benefits offers several advantages:

- You can start your disability claim immediately. There is no need to wait for an appointment;
- You can apply from the convenience of your home, or on any computer; and
- You can avoid trips to a Social Security office, saving you time and money.

For more information, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/disability.

Question:

Why is there a five-month waiting period for Social Security disability benefits?

Answer:

The law states that Social Security disability benefits begin with the sixth full month after the date your disability began. You're not entitled to benefits for any month prior to that. Learn more at our website: www.socialsecurity.gov/disability.

Supplemental Security Income

Question:

My grandfather, who is receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), will be coming to live with me. Does he have to report the move to Social Security?

Answer:

Yes. An SSI beneficiary must report any change in living arrangements within 10 days after the month the change occurs. If the change is not reported, your grandfather could receive an incorrect payment and have to pay it back, or he may not receive all the money due. Just as importantly, your grandfather needs to report the new address to Social Security to receive mail from us. You can report the change by mail or in person at any Social Security office or call Social Security's toll-free number at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY: 1-800-325-0778). You can get more information by reading the booklet *Understanding SSI*, at www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi.

Question:

How do Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments differ?

Answer:

The two programs are financed differently and have different eligibility requirements. Workers and employers fund Social Security retirement, survivors, and disability insurance through taxes on workers' earnings. Generally, we pay Social Security benefits to eligible workers and their families based on the worker's earnings. Meanwhile, general taxes fund the SSI program, which serves the needy. SSI eligibility depends largely on limited income and resources. Please visit www.socialsecurity.gov for more information.

Medicare

Question:

I found out that my son entered incorrect information about my resources when he helped me complete my *Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs*. How can I get my application changed now to show the correct amount?

Answer:

You can call 1-800-772-1213 and let us know. Or you can visit your local Social Security office (find it by using our office locator at www.socialsecurity.gov/locator). Information on your application will be matched with data from other Federal agencies. If there is a discrepancy that requires verification, we will contact you.

MAY 14, 2016 @ 11:00 A.M. – 10 P.M.



Jacksonville Mainstreet Downtown Celebration

WHERE: Downtown Jacksonville, 310 E. State St., Jacksonville, IL 62650

CONTACT: Jacksonville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

EMAIL: visitors@jacksonvilleil.org

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MAY 13, 2016 @ 6:30 P.M. – 9:15 P.M.

“Sunday Drive” Variety Show

WHERE: Little Grassy Lodge at Touch of Nature Environmental Center, 1206 Touch of Nature Rd., Makanda, IL 62958

CONTACT: The Gathering Place Off Broadway

PHONE: 618-965-3726 or 618-967-9926

EMAIL: cyndatanner@yahoo.com

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MAY 7, 2016 – NOVEMBER 5, 2016 @ 7:30 A.M.



41st Opening of the Downtown Evanston Farmers’ Market

WHERE: Maple Ave. & University Plaza, Evanston, IL 60201

CONTACT: Myra Gorman

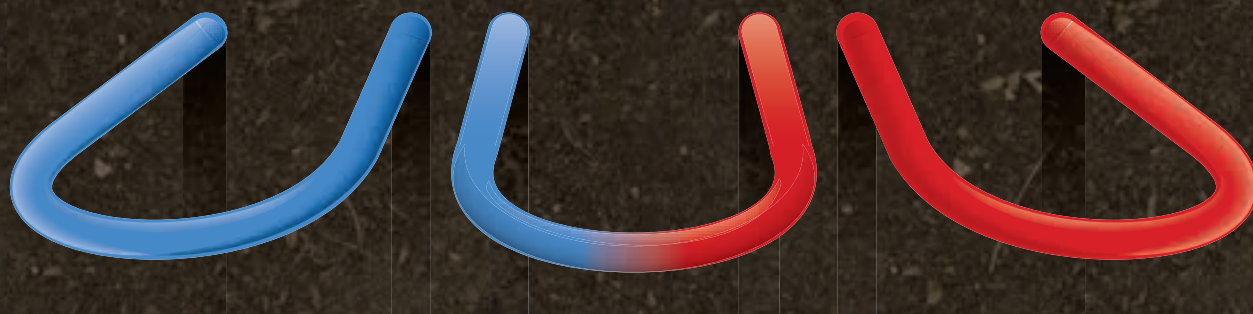
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