

YOUR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S

Illinois Country Living

JULY 2018 • ICL.COOP



ONE CASE AT A TIME

The story of Excel Bottling



Association of Illinois
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PLUS

Summertime recipes p. 20a

The popularity of popcorn p. 22

To some, sunglasses are a fashion accessory...

But When Driving, These Sunglasses May Save Your Life!

Drivers' Alert: Driving can expose you to more dangerous glare than any sunny day at the beach can... do you know how to protect yourself?

The sun rises and sets at peak travel periods, during the early morning and afternoon rush hours and many drivers find themselves temporarily blinded while driving directly into the glare of the sun. Deadly accidents are regularly caused by such blinding glare with danger arising from reflected light off another vehicle, the pavement, or even from waxed and oily windshields that can make matters worse. Early morning dew can exacerbate this situation. Yet, motorists struggle on despite being blinded by the sun's glare that can cause countless accidents every year.

Not all sunglasses are created equal.

Protecting your eyes is serious business. With all the fancy fashion frames out there it can be easy to overlook what really matters—the lenses. So we did our research and looked to the very best in optic innovation and technology.

Sometimes it does take a rocket scientist.

A NASA rocket scientist. Some ordinary sunglasses can obscure your vision by exposing your eyes to harmful UV rays, blue light, and reflective glare. They can also darken useful vision-enhancing light. But now, independent research conducted by scientists from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory has brought forth ground-breaking technology to help protect human eyesight from the harmful effects of solar radiation



Slip on a pair of Eagle Eyes® and everything instantly appears more vivid and sharp. You'll immediately notice that your eyes are more comfortable and relaxed and you'll feel no need to squint. The scientifically designed sunglasses are not just fashion accessories—they are necessary to protect your eyes from those harmful rays produced by the sun during peak driving times.

light. This superior lens technology was first discovered when NASA scientists looked to nature for a means to superior eye protection—specifically, by studying the eyes of eagles, known for their extreme visual acuity. This discovery resulted in what is now known as Eagle Eyes®.

The Only Sunglass Technology Certified by the Space Foundation for UV and Blue-Light Eye Protection. Eagle Eyes® features the most advanced eye protection technology ever created. The TriLenium® Lens Technology offers triple-filter polarization to block 99.9% UVA and UVB—plus the added benefit of blue-light eye protection. Eagle Eyes® is the only optic technology that has earned official recognition from the Space Certification Program for this remarkable technology. Now, that's proven science-based protection.

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Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. If you are not astounded with the Eagle Eyes® technology, enjoying clearer, sharper and more glare-free vision, simply return one pair within 30 days for a full refund of the purchase price. The other pair is yours to keep. No one else has such confidence in their optic technology. Don't leave your eyes in the hands of fashion designers, entrust them to the best scientific minds on earth. Wear your Eagle Eyes® Navigators



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For address changes contact your
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Morning in America

Across the country, things are looking up. More Americans are working, starting new businesses or going back to school to get the skills they need for our 21st Century workforce.

Through smart fiscal policies, like rolling back government red tape and simplifying the tax code, Congress and President Trump have been laser-focused on helping small businesses, entrepreneurs and farmers grow our economy and create more opportunity for all Americans.

These efforts have paid off. Since the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act became law, over 500 companies have given their employees bonuses and/or additional benefits. In my district, employees at the Fiat Chrysler plant in Belvidere were part of the nearly 60,000 nationwide employees who received a \$2,000 bonus earlier this year. Throughout the 16th Congressional District and across Illinois, retailers like Walmart, Kroger, T.J. Maxx and Home Depot have given out bonuses, hired new employees, and/or increased employee wages.

Next year, 85 percent of Illinois workers will see a tax cut because of the new tax code. This economic growth is leading to thousands of previously unemployed Americans finding new jobs. This month, the Labor Department reported that, for the first time in twenty-years, there are more job openings in America than job seekers. This is good news for our economy; it means more opportunities and lower unemployment, as well as higher wages, better benefits and more training for existing employees.

On top of all that, this Administration has made repealing outdated and overly burdensome government regulations a central focus. The President directed federal agencies to repeal two old regulations for

every new one issued and put them on a budget, meaning new, costly regulations must be offset by reducing burdens elsewhere.

This incredible growth in our economy is palpable, and whether I'm in Washington, D.C. or home in Illinois, the renewed sense of national optimism is showing signs of hope for great opportunities ahead. It reminds me of Ronald Reagan's promise to build a prouder, stronger, better America, and in this moment, it certainly feels like "It's morning in America again."

As we know, with this renewed optimism and flourishing economy, we cannot lose sight of the challenges we face as a nation. Every day, more than 115 Americans die from an opioid overdose. This is the most severe drug epidemic we've ever faced, and it's hurting families and communities nationwide. Congress has significantly increased funding for public awareness and treatment of substance use disorder, and we are committed to continuing those efforts to combat this crisis. One of those ways is through legislation, like the bipartisan legislation I introduced in April 2018 to make Medicaid and Medicare more flexible and finding new innovative ways to help end these opioid abuses.

Another area we must work on is giving support to our rural areas. It's 2018 and yet only 65 percent of Americans in rural communities have access to high-speed internet. This digital divide makes it more difficult for businesses to compete in the global economy, for students to access the vast educational resources on the web, or for folks to email their representatives in Washington, D.C. to share their comments and concerns. As co-chair of the House Rural Broadband Caucus, expanding broadband access to rural and underserved communities is a key

issue we're focused on addressing.

In addition to broadband issues, our rural communities are facing a devastating strain within the farming economy. The USDA predicts that farm income will decrease once again in 2018, nearly 6.7 percent and bringing net farm income to the lowest level since 2006. The agricultural industry generates around \$19 billion annually for Illinois' economy through corn, soybeans, and pork, among others. Our farmers, who are among the most productive in the world, need greater certainty to continue providing food for America. I fully support the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill. A strong agriculture and farming economy is important to our economy and our rural communities, but also critical to American families across the country who rely on the agriculture industry to provide them with healthy, affordable food.

As a Member of Congress, and Illinois resident, I remain committed to fighting for rural and small-town America. When our rural communities are strong and healthy, our entire country thrives. For generations, Americans have shown strength and resilience, and an undeterred ability to rise to the challenges we face. This great nation was built on the backs of the hard-working men and women before us, and I know that in good times and bad, we will continue to strive for a prouder, stronger, better America for generations to come. 📍



Representative Adam Kinzinger represents the 16th District of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives. He resides in Manteno. www.kinzinger.house.gov

AHEAD OF THE CURVE



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Damascus steel forged to throw them for a curve at only \$79

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As we celebrate our nation's freedom, the electric cooperatives of Illinois thank the courageous men and women who are dedicated to preserving it.

CMEC initiates avian protection plan

Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative (CMEC), Mattoon, is one of two cooperatives in the U.S. bringing new meaning to the line “information is power,” by using newly developed technology to proactively protect birds from negatively interacting with electrical facilities.

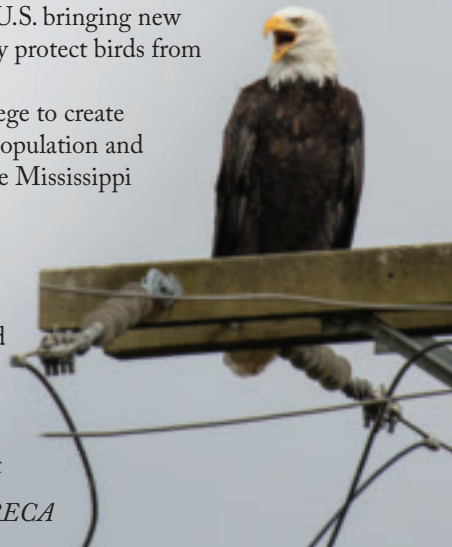
The cooperative, which serves 9,500 members, called on a partnership with Lake Land College to create an Avian Risk Assessment Tool. CMEC and the college teamed up to do a study of its avian population and analyzed the risk for every pole in the co-op’s service territory. Its service territory intersects the Mississippi flyway, an area where more than 325 bird species migrate annually.

CMEC also partnered with Eastern Illinois University (EIU) to develop ways to engage the community. EIU included the Avian Studies in its Earth Day events in April.

Avian interactions with power lines have prompted many utilities to develop solutions to address the problem. Equipment damage, outages and other issues are a concern and associated costs include power outages, lost revenue and equipment repair. It is estimated that utilities lose \$15 million to \$18 million annually from bird- and other animal-caused power outages.

Coles-Moultrie CEO Kim Leftwich said that one objective of the Avian Protection Plan is to “engage the community, not simply one time, but with an on-going community event that provides education and understanding of our region’s environment.”

Source: NRECA



NRECA encourages Senate to oppose rural broadband restrictions

When it comes to rural high-speed internet, federal funding should not impose restrictions on where broadband can be built nor limit who can provide that service. That’s the message National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Jim Matheson delivered to the Senate Agriculture Committee that is drafting the 2018 Farm Bill.

Matheson voiced strong opposition to adding provisions that would prevent the use of Rural Utilities Service funds to deploy broadband in areas that have received support from the Federal Communications Commission’s Universal Service Fund, even in areas where systems deliver substandard internet service.

“Unfortunately, there are policy proposals being disseminated that are designed to simply protect the status

quo and will leave parts of rural America with second-class broadband service for decades to come,” he told senators.

“A new approach to broadband deployment is needed to ensure that rural America does not continue to be relegated to ‘good enough for rural’ service standards,” said Matheson. “The people we serve in rural America recognize that without access to modern, high-speed broadband on par with their urban counterparts, rural competitiveness, productivity and quality of life will suffer.”

The Senate committee was expected to finish writing a farm bill in June. The fate of the multiyear legislation to address agriculture is uncertain this year as Congress nears its August recess.

Source: Cathy Cash, NRECA



Forestry School

More than 50 linemen/forestry men from 20 Illinois and Indiana electric cooperatives and municipal utilities, and 20 employees from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Corps of Engineers attended the annual Line Clearance Forestry School conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. This year's school was held at Wayne Fitzgerrell State Park in Whittington from May 21-25 with permission from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). The forestry school assists both experienced and inexperienced employees to become more proficient in line clearance/right of way management thru hands-on experience. Topics covered included chainsaw safety and maintenance, hazards of storm damage to power lines, cutting and rigging to clear power lines safely, tree felling and cutting techniques and practical uses of knots. ♡



On Wednesday, May 23 IDNR Director Wayne Rosenthal (r) was on hand to visit with attendees. He is seen here with Jim Miles, AIEC manager of safety and loss control.

Illinois Lobby Day



More than 70 Illinois electric cooperative directors, managers and staff visited the Illinois State Capitol on Tuesday, May 15. They spoke with their districts' senators and representatives regarding issues of importance to their members.

Carmi farmer named administrator of USDA Risk Management Agency

Martin Barbre, a Clinton County Electric Cooperative, Inc. member, was recently sworn in as the new U.S. Department of Agriculture Risk Management Agency administrator. Barbre is known for his leadership roles with the Illinois Corn Growers Association and the National Corn Growers Association and as a member of USDA's Illinois Farm Service Agency State Committee. ♡



Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue with Martin Barbre (center) and his wife Gayla.



Youth to Washington

Seventy-one students and eight chaperones, representing 27 Illinois' electric and telephone cooperatives, departed the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) on June 8 for the annual Youth to Washington tour. The group traveled by bus and spent one week visiting various

Washington, D.C. memorials and landmarks and speaking with their respective U.S. senators and representatives. ♡

Information will power grid of the future



The foundation of a smart grid combines two-way communications with advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and other technologies to provide electric cooperatives with near real-time oversight of their systems. It depends on a reliable, secure, distributed and intelligent broadband network.

Automatic meter reading (AMR) units that send data from the meter to the cooperative office once a month place little pressure on communications networks. But the latest AMI meters read in near real-time and can generate more than 1 GB of data each month. When you factor in the thousands of components on cooperative lines, it's clear movement of information will "power" the grid of the future.

Additionally, electric cooperatives are leveraging new technologies to inspect and monitor assets. Some are piloting drones to perform tasks that used to call for a truck roll as well as deploying new security and surveillance measures. Virtually every part of the generation, transmission, distribution and consumption of energy will soon be monitored and managed, making the grid reactive and flexible to real-time changes in conditions. ♡

Source: CFC

Beat the Extreme Heat

During periods of extreme heat, hot weather mixed with outdoor activities can lead to dangerous situations. According to the CDC, people can suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to properly cool themselves. During extreme heat, follow these guidelines to protect yourself and your loved ones.



Stay informed: Check local news for extreme heat alerts.



Stay cool: If you do not have access to an air-conditioned space, visit a shopping mall or public library for a few hours. Call your local health department to locate heat-relief shelters in your area.



Stay hydrated: Drink (nonalcoholic) fluids regularly, regardless of your activity level. Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.



Don't leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle



Do check on elderly friends and neighbors.



Heat Stress: Who's At Risk?

Adults over the age of 65, children under the age of four, individuals with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, and those without access to air conditioning.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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Legal or not, fireworks are too risky for amateurs

Permanent scarring, loss of vision, dismemberment – these are too often the harsh realities of amateur fireworks use. To keep the public safe from fireworks-related injuries and deaths, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) urges everyone to treat fireworks, whether legal or illegal for consumers, as suitable only for use by trained professionals.

According to NFPA, amateur fireworks use endangers not only the users, but also bystanders and surrounding property and structures. Pyrotechnic devices ranging from sparklers to aerial rockets cause thousands of fires and serious injuries each year.

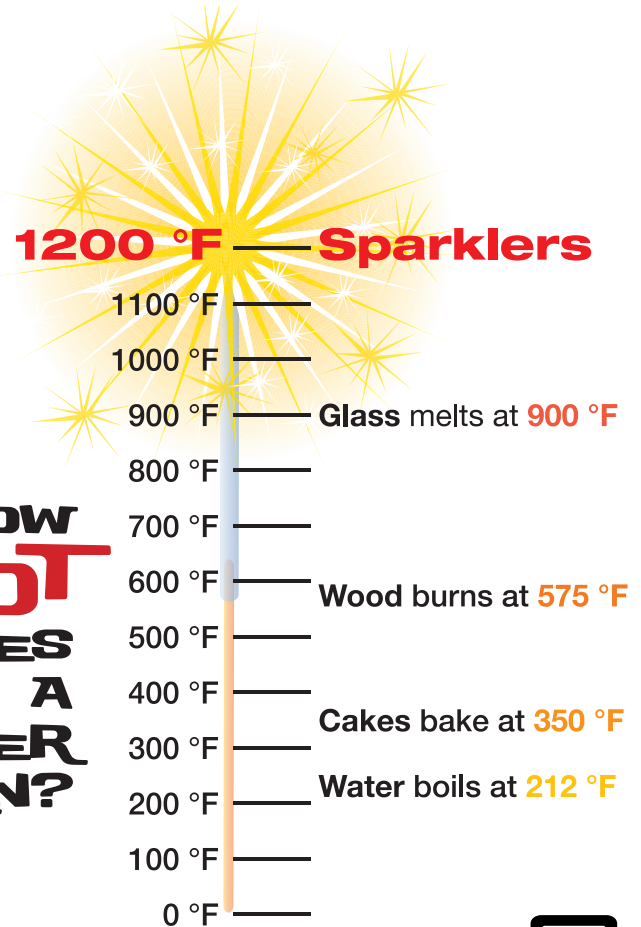
“There are no such things as safe fireworks,” says NFPA Vice President of Outreach and Advocacy Lorraine Carli. “The power and danger of fireworks should not be underestimated.”

In recent years, fireworks have been one of the leading causes of injuries serious enough to require hospital emergency room treatment. Fireworks can result in severe burns, fractures, scars or even disfigurement or death. The thousands of serious injuries each year typically harm the eyes, head or hands, and are mostly reported in states where fireworks are legal.

“In the hands of amateurs, fireworks are especially dangerous,” says Carli. “Fireworks are unpredictable. They can lead to catastrophe, causing injury, permanent scarring, or even death.”

Wooded areas, homes, and even automobiles have become engulfed in flames because of fireworks. Fireworks-related fires have typically caused at least \$20 million in property loss each year. A substantial portion of the structure fire property loss due to fireworks typically involves bottle rockets or other fireworks rockets. These can land on rooftops, wedge within certain structures and retain enough heat to cause a fire.

“For most people, family and home represent security and safety, a haven to share our hopes, dreams and struggles,” says Carli. “Imagine risking all of that for a few seconds of entertainment. It’s not worth it. Avoid fireworks injuries



**HOW
HOT
DOES
A
SPARKLER
BURN?**

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and damage by playing it safe. There are safer alternatives to using fireworks on the Fourth of July or at any other time.” Public fireworks displays are one of those alternatives. Conducted by trained professionals, these displays are the smartest and safest fireworks alternative for anyone because they are established under controlled settings and regulations. After these displays, or any other time, children should never pick up fireworks that may be left over. Fireworks that have been ignited and fail to immediately explode or discharge can cause injury because they may still be active. Children should always tell an adult if they find fireworks rather than picking up smoking or charred fireworks themselves, which is just too risky.

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Navigating emerging efficiency technologies

By Kaley Lockwood

Investing in energy efficient technology is becoming an increasingly attractive way to cut costs for homeowners and renters alike. This rings true especially in the deep heat of summer. Hotter days often result in higher energy bills, partially due to A/C units working overtime to keep homes cooled and comfortable.

New and emerging technologies are continuously offering innovative ways to effectively manage and reduce a home's energy consumption. Smart thermostats, for example, have proven their worth in shaving 10 to 15 percent off an average home's electric bill. These thermostats, in time, will effectively pay for themselves which make them an attractive option to many. Unfortunately, not all technologies can live up to their hype and some even come with side effects that can arguably overshadow their benefits.

The Mistbox Air Conditioner Cooler is one such technology. Mistbox claims to save its customers between 20 to 38 percent on their electricity bills. This technology requires a simple installation to a home's outdoor A/C unit and works by spraying a mist to precool the air around the unit. In using this evaporative cooling method, your A/C unit theoretically doesn't have to work as hard to pump cool air into your home. This may be beneficial when air temperature is at its highest. In the short term Mistbox may work, but there are some real caveats that need to be considered.

A primary point of concern is that an A/C unit is not designed to be sprayed down with such frequency. Although the Mistbox system comes with a water filter, the company only recommends using its technology if

your home's water has a hardness less than 500 parts per million. This automatically rules out anyone who uses well water. Even if you do have a home with the required water hardness, the filtration system can't completely prevent your system from rusting. Corrosion will occur resulting in a damaged unit.

Electric cooperatives know it's important to help our members navigate these emerging technologies and provide the most cost-effective and beneficial energy management solutions.

If you're interested in taking steps to become more energy efficient, we recommend these tried and true tips:

Clean and change the filters on your HVAC system regularly to make your unit run more efficiently, keeping your house cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.

In spring and summer months, set your ceiling fans to turn in the counterclockwise direction to create a cool breeze. In autumn and winter months, set your fan to turn in the clockwise direction. This will redistribute warm air throughout the room.

Add caulk or weather stripping to seal air leaks around leaky doors and windows.

Insulation is important. Properly insulating your home reduces heating and cooling costs, and improves comfort.



New and emerging technologies are continuously offering innovative ways to effectively manage and reduce energy consumption. Unfortunately, not all technologies can live up to their hype. Your local electric co-op can help you navigate these emerging technologies and provide the most cost-effective and beneficial energy management solutions.

Remember, there are easy steps you can take now to improve the energy efficiency of your home.

To learn about additional ways to save, visit www.touchstoneenergy.com.

Kaley Lockwood writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation's landscape.



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Joseph Priestley, the 18th century English scientist who discovered oxygen, also discovered how to carbonate water. On tasting it, he wrote about how it seemed to refresh him. Within a few years, effervescent water, often with minerals dissolved into it as an aid to digestion and general health, was being marketed to the public.

Excel Bottling history

A hundred years later in America, almost every pharmacy had its own soda fountain where the pharmacist could dispense carbonated water. Flavored syrups, often of the pharmacist's own creation, were added to enhance the enjoyment – and the sales of the water. Soon, enterprising businessmen realized that bottling these formulations allowed distribution far beyond the pharmacy, and so America's soft drink industry was born. It produced giants like Coca-Cola and Pepsi, but it also produced thousands of “mom and pop” bottling companies, small enterprises that served their town, city or community. Some dealt in strictly local brands, while others, under license, produced a regional or national brand in addition to their own. During the 1960s and 70s, massive national marketing and promotional campaigns by Coke and Pepsi drove most of these small bottlers out of business – most, but not all.

One bottler that survives, and thrives, is Excel Bottling of Breese. On the corner of South Broadway and Clinton in a modest brick building, it has been bottling soda since 1936. That was the year Edward “Lefty” Meier and his wife Catherine took the reward money that Lefty had earned by helping to capture a bank robber in Germantown, bought a used bottling machine and installed it in a portion of their home that had been used as a dry goods store. According to Bill Meier, Lefty's grandson and current general manager of Excel Bottling, it was a gamble.



ONE CASE AT A TIME

The story of Excel Bottling

By Jerry McDonald





From left to right, Paul, Catherine, Lefty and Joseph Meier



Bill Meier, Lefty's grandson and current general manager

He explains, “There were already two bottlers in town, one bottled a chocolate drink. My grandfather had actually worked for him and another who bottled soft drinks. The guy who ran the soft drink plant came by and told my grandfather, ‘You’re never going to make it; there isn’t enough business for both of us. You will be out of business in a couple of years.’ Then in a couple of years that guy came by and said, ‘I was wrong and I’m the one who is closing.’”

Excel has always been a family business. Lefty and Catherine ran it for years, and when Lefty’s health deteriorated, their son Paul came home to take over. But Catherine, who passed away at age 99 in 2009, continued to keep the books by hand until she was 97. Today, Paul’s children oversee day-to-day operations – Bill is general manager, David is sales manager and Kathleen is inside sales manager. The books are now done on computer. Even though the bottling equipment has also modernized, all Excel bottled sodas are still made with pure cane sugar, and most of them are still bottled in returnable glass bottles.

Cane sugar was once the sweetener for all sodas, but that changed in the 1970s with the introduction of high fructose corn syrup (HFCS). HFCS was cheaper than cane sugar and easier to handle and store. So, many bottlers began mixing it with the sugar, and soon they were using HFCS exclusively. In spite of the economic advantages, Excel has stuck with cane sugar.

Meier explains, “I don’t have a problem with those who use high fructose

corn syrup, but we’re committed to never use it. Our name is Excel. Our goal is to make an excellent product, and we just feel that cane sugar makes a better product. If you compare a Ski soda made with high fructose corn syrup with one of our bottles made with sugar, ours just has a fuller more robust taste.”

Why has Excel stayed with returnable bottles? Meier says, “On a local level, it is a really green packaging – the cleanest, most efficient thing you can do is to use that container again. You don’t have to worry about adding to the landfill or the cost of recycling because we sanitize it and reuse it.”

Returnable bottles are not without their issues. The life of an average returnable bottle, allowing for breakage, chipping, non-returns, etc., is estimated between 20 and 30 uses. However, reading the codes on the bottom of many of Excel’s bottles reveals that they were made in the 70s, 60s and even some from the 50s.

While most of local sales are in returnable bottles, economics and other factors have led Excel to offer their sodas in non-returnable bottles and in 20-ounce plastic bottles. Still, most locals and some long-distance customers stick with those in returnable glass bottles. They insist that the soda just tastes better out of glass and buying returnables just makes good economic sense. A case of soda in non-returnable bottles is \$14, the same soda in returnable bottles, after deposit, is \$8.50.

Like most bottlers of their day, Lefty and Catherine began with their

own brands and expanded their product line by purchasing the franchise to produce other brands. In the late 1930s, they began to bottle Life, a citrus-based beverage, and Frostie root beer. They added Lucky Club Cola, a St. Louis-based beverage in the 1940s, and in 1961 Lefty acquired the franchise that was to change the soft drink habits of southern Illinois.

Ski and specialty sodas

In 1956, Double Cola Bottling Company got a new formulation from a bottler in Wisconsin, and in 1958, they trademarked the soda under the name Ski.

Ski is a citrus-based soda, and citrus-based sodas were nothing new. 7 Up and Upper 10 had been around for decades. Coca-Cola had just introduced Sprite, and Excel had been making Life, its own citrus soda, since the late 30s. While all of these sodas were lemon-lime based, Ski was lemon-orange based. For some reason, southern Illinoisans took to it like a duck to water. Today, it has achieved near cult status in Clinton County and surrounding counties.

How popular is it? Every business with a soda fountain, local groceries and even some area Walmarts carry Ski. Some area residents will tell you that children of the area go directly from mother’s milk to Ski and will add, “I’m only half joking.” There are

even a number of local folks who say they start their day with a Ski instead of coffee.

On Saturday morning, there's usually a line of cars on Clinton Street as "the regulars" come in to trade their empties for a fresh case of Ski. A local car dealership makes a weekly run to pick up several cases for its mechanics, and Excel's Marketing Manager Carla Baublitz jokes that she took the job to have easy access to Ski.

In terms of sales, Bill Meier says that if you factor in the bagged syrups for fountains, Excel sells about one million cases of soda a year. Of those, approximately 400,000 are Ski.

Excel offers 18 sodas grouped into four lines, and Ski is part of Excel's Nostalgia line. Other lines include Excel Originals, Million Dollars and a Taste of Breese.

The Taste of Breese line, developed about seven years ago, was Baublitz's brainchild. "I always thought Breese sounded refreshing, and it tells you where it comes from. So I sketched out a little cartoony logo and took it to Bill," she explains. "Well, actually, like a little kid, I put it on his refrigerator."

Meier picks up the story, "Carla's idea was to use our Life soda as a base to make some flavorful sodas with no caffeine and a little less sugar. For our first one, we used real blueberry extract, and that became Blueberry Breese; then we added Strawberry Kiwi Breese and Cherry Breese. All are good, but our Blueberry is still the most popular."

From time to time, Excel bottles a specialty soda. In 2017, a few months before the eclipse occurred, they came out with Darkest Hour Black Cherry. Meier says, "It came out and people are saying, 'this is great,' and they are ordering it for school parties and eclipse viewing parties. Then one Walmart called, and then 30 Walmarts

wanted it. NBC's Today Show was doing a show on eclipse-related products, so we were featured on national television. The only bad thing was we weren't prepared. We would bottle it, sell out, and hustle to get more labels and bottles; bottle it, sell out and start again. We were shipping it out of here in trailer truck loads. For a little while, it practically took over our bottling operation."

Looking ahead

While Excel began with only two employees on a machine that turned out about a bottle a minute, today it employs about 30 people, and the line runs at 200 to 300 bottles a minute. But in many ways, things are just the same. There is a family atmosphere, where an employee's name is more important than the title, and a customer can step in off the street and buy a single bottle of Ski, a case or even several cases.

In a time when everyone wants to be the biggest and best, Bill Meier's outlook is refreshing. "Our goal is not to be a national soda company," he says with a pause and a smile. "It's to be a regional soda company and to stay in business."

Excel now delivers to all southern Illinois and in St. Louis and St. Charles County, Missouri, but its region may be growing. St. Louis Barbeque chain Sugarfire Smokehouse carries their products and has opened a restaurant in Indianapolis. So, a whole new group of people are going to be exposed to Excel sodas and beer.

Catherine Meier was once quoted as saying, "Eddie and I built our business selling one case at a time." That's how it was 82 years ago, and that's how it is today.

The King of Ski

Dairy King, currently owned by Brad and Michele Maue, has been serving Breese for 67 years, and for more than 40 of those, Ski has been featured on their soda fountain. It was the popularity of the Cherry Ski that prompted Double Cola (and Excel) to begin bottling Cherry Ski in 1996.

In addition to cherry, Dairy King offers orange, grape, blue raspberry and lime – a veritable rainbow of flavors. It also offers a Rainbow Ski, which is all of those flavors combined, and it's one of the biggest sellers. Need more fruit in your diet? Dairy King will add your choice of strawberries, cherries, black raspberries, pineapple or even a spritz of chocolate to your Ski.

With a variation for every palate, just how much Ski does the Dairy King sell in a year? Between its two locations, Breese and Trenton, last year's total was a whopping 700,000 drinks, that's enough to provide every man, woman and child in Breese (population 4,511) with 155 cups of Ski.



And they also brew

In 2012, the Meier family created Excel Brewing Company and began crafting beer. Six years later, they've made a name for themselves with a wide array of ales, lagers and seasonal and specialty beers. In a nod to their heritage, one of their signature beers is Lefty's Lager.

Additional resources

To learn more about Excel's sodas and beers, go to www.excelbottling.com. For information about bottling companies that still use returnable bottles, go to www.GlassBottleSoda.org.

Learn more about Ski soda by going to www.myskisoda.com.

FINEST

Cooking

Summertime is in full swing and a wide variety of vegetables are available at your local farmers market or in your garden. Readers submitted many light recipes just right for picnics and summer get-togethers. All are easy to put together for a quick dinner or a 4th of July picnic. For more recipes go to our website at icl.coop and click on Recipes.

Chicken and Spinach Pasta ▼

Submitted by Cathy McGavic, Shelby Electric Cooperative

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1/4 c. oil-packed sundried tomato halves | 1/2 c. light Caesar dressing |
| 2-1/2 c. hot cooked bowtie pasta | 1/4 cup or more grated parmesan cheese |
| 1 c. cubed roasted, skinless, boneless chicken breast (about 1) | 1 - 10 oz. pkg. fresh leaf spinach |

Drain tomatoes in colander over bowl, reserving 1 T. of the oil. Combine tomatoes, oil and pasta. Add rest of ingredients and toss well. Serve.



Sunshine Salad ▲

Submitted by Kenna Rathai, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2 T. marmalade | 1 bag arugula |
| Juice from 1-1/2 lemons | 2 navel oranges, peeled and thinly sliced |
| 1/2 c. olive oil | 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced |
| Salt and freshly ground black pepper | 1/2 c. chopped hazelnuts, toasted
(I substituted walnuts) |
| 1 bag baby spinach | |

Whisk together the marmalade and lemon juice in a small bowl. Whisk in olive oil, salt and pepper. Toss greens with oranges and onions in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Top with hazelnuts. When ready to serve, toss with dressing (may not need all of dressing).

Feta Cucumber Salad

Submitted by Amy Lingle, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2 medium to large cucumbers | 2 T. lemon juice |
| 1/2 t. salt | 1 T. olive oil |
| 1/4 c. chopped green onions | 1/8 to 1/4 t. ground pepper |
| 1 c. (4 oz.) crumbled feta cheese | |

Peel cucumbers and cut in half lengthwise. Scrape out seeds and cut into pieces (about 1/2 inch). Put cucumbers in bowl, add salt and toss to coat. Add onion and set aside. In separate bowl, combine feta cheese, lemon juice, oil and pepper. Drain cucumbers and add to cheese mixture. Chill for at least 1 hour.

Thunder and Lightning Salad

Submitted by Betty Davis, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 3 tomatoes | Splash of white vinegar |
| 3 cucumbers | 1 T. sugar (optional) |
| 3 green bell peppers | Hot sauce to taste |
| 3 sweet onions | |

Chop vegetables into small chunks and put in a bowl. Add remaining ingredients, toss and chill. Serve cold.





Corn and Black Bean Salad ^

Submitted by Sarah Cannon, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 2 c. fresh or frozen corn, thawed | Dressing: |
| 1 – 15 oz. can black beans,
drained and rinsed | 2 T. sugar |
| 2 lg. tomatoes, chopped or
1-14 oz. can diced tomatoes,
drained | 2 T. white vinegar |
| 1/3 of a sweet onion, chopped | 2 T. canola oil |
| 1/4 c. minced fresh cilantro | 2 t. lime juice |
| 2 garlic cloves, minced | 1/4 to 1/2 t. salt |
| | 1/4 t. pepper |
| | 1/4 t. ground cumin |

In a large bowl, combine first 6 ingredients. In a small bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients. Pour over corn mixture and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Stir before serving. Can also be served as a salsa with corn chips.



Orange Charlotte >

Submitted by Rita Schackmann, Norris Electric Cooperative

- | | |
|---|---|
| 3 envelopes unflavored gelatin | 1-1/2 t. grated orange peel |
| 3/4 c. cold water | 1-1/2 c. sugar, divided |
| 3/4 c. boiling water | 2-1/2 c. heavy whipping cream |
| 1-1/2 c. frozen orange juice
concentrate | Red (2 drops) and yellow
(3 drops) food coloring |
| 2 T. lemon juice | 1/2 c. mandarin oranges, drained |

In large bowl combine gelatin and cold water; periodically stirring for 10 minutes. Add boiling water; stir until gelatin dissolves. Add juices, orange peel and 3/4 c. sugar. Set bowl in ice water until mixture is syrupy, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, whip cream until soft peaks form. Gradually add remaining 3/4 c. sugar and beat until stiff peaks form. Don't overbeat. When gelatin mixture begins to thicken, fold in whipped cream and food coloring. Lightly coat a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Pour mixture into pan; chill overnight. Just before serving, run a knife around edge of pan to loosen. Remove sides of pan. Garnish with oranges, cherries and mint leaves in the shape of flowers. *Editor's note: I did not use the food coloring.*

WE NEED RECIPES! Upcoming monthly topics include recipes using eggs, pork, potatoes and honey. Please email submissions to finestcooking@icl.coop or mail them to Finest Cooking c/o Illinois Country Living, P.O. Box 3787, Springfield, IL 62708. Please include your name, address, phone number (for questions), and the name of your electric cooperative. Recipes not included in the magazine can be found on our website at icl.coop/finestcooking.



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.

A milkweed for every location

While the name “weed” in any plant name scares many gardeners, milkweed plants add beauty to the garden and are essential for providing habitat for monarch butterflies. Monarch butterflies will only lay their eggs on the leaves of milkweed plants, and then the larvae feed only on these leaves. These larvae then go through metamorphosis to transform into an adult Monarch butterfly.

Milkweeds of any kind make a great addition to the garden, and there is a species for just about any type of growing condition that you may have.

Asclepias tuberosa, **Butterfly Weed**, grows easily in average, dry to medium, well-drained soils and is my favorite milkweed for the landscape. It was actually named the 2017 Perennial of the Year by the Perennial Plant Association!

Butterfly weed prefers full sun and is also drought tolerant, which makes it really low maintenance. It grows 1 to 2.5 feet tall and will spread about 1 to 1.5 feet. It has clusters of bright orange or yellow-orange flowers from June to August. The attractive flowers of butterfly weed attract many species of butterflies besides monarchs.

Asclepias incarnata, **Swamp Milkweed**, prefers to grow in medium to wet soils in full sun. This species of milkweed is native to swamps and wet meadows as its name suggests, and it works well in rain gardens. It grows 3 to 4 (sometimes 5) feet tall and will spread about 2 to 3 feet. Its clusters of flowers can be white, pink or mauve, and it also attracts many species of butterflies in addition to monarchs.

Others include the **Common Milkweed** (*Asclepias syriaca*) which tolerates moist, well drained soils to dry soils, **Whorled Milkweed** (*Asclepias verticillata*) which is white flowered and tolerates dry soils, or **Balloon Plant** (*Asclepias physocarpa*) which



has unusual round seed pods, among others.

Milkweeds take a little manipulation to start from seed, but once they germinate, they thrive and frequently self-sow in the garden. Milkweed seeds need to go through a period of cold to germinate, which is called cold stratification. This process is a natural instinct of the seed to prevent it from germinating during winter when the seedling would not survive. Due to the need for cold stratification, there are two ways you can plant your milkweed seeds:

1. Sow the seeds about a fourth inch deep directly into the soil in the fall so the seeds experience the natural cooling and warming of winter and spring. Make sure to label where you planted your milkweed so that you don't pull it from your garden when it comes up in spring!
2. If you want to start your seeds in the spring, you can cold stratify the seeds inside about a month before you want to plant the seeds. You can do this by mixing the seeds into moist planting

media. Then place the mixture in a sealed and labeled plastic bag and place it in the fridge for about 30 days. Keep an eye on the seeds to make sure they do not germinate in the bag, and if they do, plant immediately. After the seeds have gone through the period of cold in the fridge, you can sow them into your garden about a fourth inch deep.

Milkweeds are a great flower to add to the garden, but they can get a bad rap for being slightly aggressive. To prevent milkweeds from self-sowing throughout the garden, simply collect the seed pods before they split open freeing their seeds. You can then collect the seeds to add them elsewhere in the garden or to pass along to friends to attract butterflies to their gardens.



Candice Hart is a Horticulture Educator with University of Illinois Extension serving DeWitt, Macon and Piatt counties. She is also a Certified Floral Designer, Illinois Certified Professional Florist and is an award winning floral designer.

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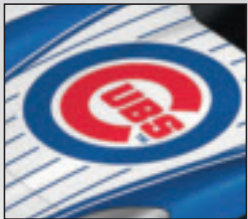
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The popularity of POPCORN

By Karen Binder

There's nothing bite-size about the popcorn business in Illinois.

As one of the top corn producing states, it's no surprise that Illinois is also a top popcorn producer as well. In fact, the largest popcorn producing county in the state is Mason County, which has 18,522 of the state's entire 28,000 acres dedicated to the snack, according to the last U.S. Agriculture Census.

Mason County growers tend to raise popcorn and sell it to a variety of wholesalers representing nationwide brands as bagged popcorn seeds, microwave popcorn or prepared popcorn, or they self-market it to local grocers or at farmers markets.

But let's consider specialty popcorn producer Black Jewell in Lawrence County which grows an average of 3,000 to 4,000 pounds per acre.

Black Jewell

Last year, the producer had a "very good" harvest, says Black Jewell Operations Manager Ken Delap. In fact, he says they hit their record year last year.

"We, like many producers, actually planted fewer acres of popcorn this year versus last to rebalance inventory levels. Our yields

vary by variety but are typically in the 3,000 to 4,000 pounds per acre range," he explains.

The "Original Black Jewell" seed was first grown and sold in 1963 as a unique and proprietary heirloom strain of black kernel popcorn. While its kernels pop white and virtually hull free, the company claims its flavor is distinctive from yellow or white popcorn. The company has passed hands twice, most recently in April 2013 when current owner Johnson Ventures, a family-owned business, bought it. Today, it employs 17 people, including three fulltime and seven part-time in Illinois.

Rebranding and new marketing goals have refreshed the business with new packaging and more varieties that include crimson popcorn, microwave options and non-genetically modified organism verification. Its wholesale

target is now nationwide and can be found in many large chains such as Publix, Ingles,

Meijer, Schnucks, Wegmans, The Fresh Market, Albertsons, Hy-Vee and Rural King.

The new ownership has also meant a shift in business operations. The plant remains in St. Francisville, but the corporate office is in Columbus, Ind. Consumer sales for home consumption is in the fall and remain high throughout the winter months before tapering off during the spring and summer, according to the Popcorn Institute. It also states that 90 percent of popcorn sales are as unpopped popcorn for home use as opposed for movie theaters, stadiums and schools.

What are differences in processing popcorn?

There are four kinds of corn – dent or field corn, flint or Indian corn, sweet corn and then there's popcorn, which is a special kind of flint corn that's edible.

While field planting and production methods are similar with field corn, there's extra care with the processing. The seeds are smaller, so Johnson said planting may require different plates, but generally the process is the same. The differences come in what they do with the popcorn after harvest and to prep for packaging.

First, there's the pre-cleaning process to filter out debris. Then the popcorn is further cleaned, and moisture tested one batch at a time. The moisture content ranges from 13 percent to 14.5 percent.



Black Jewell Popcorn, which is a long-time Illinois brand of popcorn is now owned by an Indiana company.

Another quality factor that's measured for popcorn is the minimum expansion ratio and is used to determine "popability" – 35 to 38 to one.

Of course, marketing direct to consumers demands a need to brag on the snack's nutritional values. Black Jewell's website is quick to mention antioxidants not present in yellow and white popcorns.

But other health attributes are literally a mouthful: whole grain, gluten free, cholesterol free and disease-fighting phytochemicals.

Here's what the Popcorn Board, a national grower marketing agency, says about it:

One serving can provide about 70 percent of an individual's recommended daily intake of whole grain. It contains only 100 to 150 calories in a serving of five popped cups. It also contains a number of essential vitamins including: folate, niacin, riboflavin, thiamin, pantothenic acid, and vitamins B6, A, E and K. A serving of popcorn contains about 8 percent of the daily value of iron, with lesser amounts of calcium, copper, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium and zinc.



Andrew Bowman of Pilot Knob Comforts, is owner and grower of a new and independent brand of Knox County popcorn called Pilot Knob Comfort Popcorn. It's grown basically the same way as commodity corn, but the yield is much less, at about 100 bushels an acre instead of 260 bushels for row corn.

Everyone loves popcorn

America has never eaten as much popcorn as it did in 2016 when popcorn sales totaled a record 1,145,262,029 pounds, U.S. Department of Agriculture records state.

Other popcorn-producing states are in neighboring Indiana as well as Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska and Ohio, notes the Popcorn Board on its website. The United States feeds popcorn to

the world, providing 85 percent of global sales.

One of Illinois' best-known popcorn brands is Garrett's Popcorn, with corporate offices in Chicago and Hong Kong. Garrett's is famous for its cheddar cheese and caramel popcorn and ships it around the world.

Learn more about popcorn at www.popcornboard.org.

Karen Binder lives in Carbondale and buys popcorn wherever she can find it.



Pilot Knob Comfort Popcorn is grown on 32 acres and is distributed to 600 stores in the Midwest.

Suppress the surge

Tuesday, the day after Memorial Day, I came into the office like any other morning. I was looking forward to a short week and getting caught up on things after a long weekend. When I entered the building that morning, I knew my plans for a quiet, get-caught-up week were shattered.

I was greeted by several different types of beeping alarms, lights flashing and the smell of burnt electronics. I knew it wouldn't be good. It appeared that we were experiencing some sort of power issue, but the power wasn't completely off. After further investigation, we noticed a dead squirrel lying at the base of one of the power poles that was feeding power into our building and realized what had happened. A little while later, the power company was on site and restored power to normal operations. Now it was time to assess the damage.

I made sure all our servers were up and running properly, then proceeded to check all the computers in the office. Several computers were still not powering up. After troubleshooting a little further, we noticed the surge suppressor the equipment was plugged into had a burnt electronics smell. You know what that means – it was fried. One of the surge suppressors was so bad it melted the plastic casing and carpet directly underneath. Luckily, all our equipment was fine, and for all intents and purposes, the surge suppressors did their job. In total, we had six surge suppressors throughout the building burn up.

Did you know that surge suppressors can only protect against so many surges? That surge suppressor you have had for the last five to 10 years may not be capable of protecting your equipment. Surge suppressors work by absorbing excess voltage into a metal oxide varistor (MOV) so your electronics don't take the jolt. The MOV degrades over time based on how much it has absorbed. Once it



has reached its limit, it can no longer protect your equipment. It is even possible for one surge, if it is big enough, to deplete the capabilities of the surge suppressor.

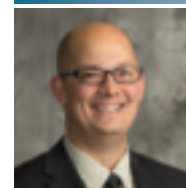
Unfortunately, it's not possible to completely know for sure if it's time to toss it or not. Some surge suppressors have a light that can indicate they are no longer providing protection. However, this isn't always reliable, especially if it's old. If you know your surge suppressor has taken a big hit, it's probably best to replace it. Also, if you can't remember when you purchased it, it's probably time to get a new one. It's a small price to pay to protect your expensive electronics.

There are many opinions about how often you should replace your surge suppressor. The factors to consider are the quality of the surge suppressor and how often you experience power quality issues. My recommendation would be somewhere around every three to four years, assuming you have not had any lightning strikes, brown outs or serious power quality issues.

I will replace all the surge suppressors in the office. It's just not worth the damage that could be caused if not protected. If you think about it, having a squirrel, or any animal for that matter, get caught up in the power lines is not an uncommon occurrence. It's even likely that the last power outage you had was caused by a similar situation to what we experienced here. Be safe and take the time to replace the surge suppressors that protect the valuable equipment you have plugged in. It may even prevent the possibility of a house fire. 💡

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Dan Gerard, CISSP, is the Chief Technology Officer for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in Springfield.

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You can't get bored with board games



By Les O'Dell

Most of us remember playing games when we were younger – games of Monopoly that lingered into the early morning hours, epic dice battles trying to win new territories in Risk, or evenings gathered around the dining room table, trying to out-answer one another in Trivial Pursuit. Perhaps we remember teaching our children to count by playing Hi Ho Cherry-O or even trying to figure out the perpetrator before other players in Clue.

While our classic board games may have found a place in our memories, as well as on a shelf in the basement, many new titles are leading a resurgence in the popularity of board games.

“Board gaming is hot right now,” says Russ Siler, owner of Vahalla Games in Effingham, one of about a dozen retail stores across Illinois specializing in board games. He says his store stocks hundreds of different board games.

“It is a very interesting time,” Nick Jones, owner of Titan Games in Springfield, Champaign and Peoria, explains. “Even though we have all of these phone apps and video games to choose from, it’s the board game industry that is growing.



Scott Thorne, owner of Castle Perilous Games and Books in Carbondale, straightens board games on his store's shelves. Photo by Les O'Dell

There continues to be more and more options, and games are simply better than ever before.”

“The lure of board games is simple,” says Scott Thorne of Castle Perilous Games and Books in Carbondale.

“The appeal is that people like to compete with each other and with themselves,” he explains. “We simply enjoy competition, and we enjoy banter – interaction with each other. We just like getting together and making each other laugh. It’s not about who’s going to win, it’s about getting around a table with friends and having fun.”

He says board games are finding new players. One of his customers, Lawrence Gaydos of De Soto is a perfect example. Gaydos says he first visited Thorne’s shop to get comic books for his sons.

“We went in there to look at comics and I saw all of these games. I was like, ‘What is this?’ because I didn’t expect it,” he recalls. “I had grown up with all of what I call the big box store games – Sorry, Monopoly, Risk and the like – that was all I knew. I never saw anything like these games. We spent an hour just looking at the boxes.”

Gaydos took home a few new games and soon was hooked. Today he has more than 100 board games in his collection.

“There are so many different games now and just as many reasons people play them,” Gaydos says.

Many experts say one reason for the uptick in gaming – believe it or not – is the proliferation of electronics.

“Over and over again, you will hear



people are getting tired of the digital age, and I think that's why these 'analog' games are so popular," Gaydos notes.

Siler agrees. "These games are social," he says. "You sit across from someone while you are playing. There is an extra level of interaction. In the middle of the game, you might stop and tell a funny story. You don't get that with online games."

"Board games are simply a way to get unplugged," Jones adds. "These are games you can sit down with your family or friends and really enjoy."

Thorne says there is a wide variety of games available, but most fall into one of two categories: competitive games where players compete against one another, and cooperative games where everyone works together. He says competitive games such as *Settlers of Catan*, *Ticket to Ride* and *Smash Up* are gaining national audiences. Cooperative games include *Castle Panic*, *Shadows Over Camelot* and *Forbidden Island*.

He adds that some sets are called "legacy games," where permanent changes are made to the way the game is played as participants take their turns.

"These games come with stickers for the board and secret envelopes you open at specific times, so you end up creating a customized version of the board game. In a few years, your version of the game will be very different than someone else's," Thorne adds.

He says the group funding website Kickstarter features about 14,000 new games at any one time. "We see about 80 to 100 new board games every month, but only a handful catch on. There's something for every taste."

Even with all of the new games, the classic titles are still relevant. Many of the newer games have ties back to the games of our youth, Siler says.

"Many of the core mechanics are the same," he explains. "Learning the new games is not that difficult because they have ties to some of the classic games."

Jones says people interested in trying new games should seek out others who are into board games and can



Lawrence Gaydos teaches his children Jackson and Lily to play "Robinson Crusoe: Adventures of the Cursed Island," one of the more than 100 board games he owns.

make recommendations.

"It's interesting to see how quickly people will play a new game and learn it. Then it opens their eyes to a whole new world of games," says Jones.

Even though he stocks as many as 300 different games, Thorne says he also keeps lists to help find players discover other games they may like.

Gaydos explains that new games even help him appreciate the old classic games again.

"When I first started back into board games, I'd find some of the old ones that I thought were boring and I began looking at them in different ways," he says. "It's opened me up to

nostalgia and second chances."

While Gaydos has rekindled his passion for older games, he loves the new offerings.

"There's more strategy in the new games, more creativity and there's a lot of effort into the art of board games now. It's all fascinating."

Siler adds that board games are all about getting together with others and taking on a new challenge.

"While some of the new games are difficult, many are very easy," he says. "Those are the ones people like – the ones with a personable element that are easy to learn and hard to master. It's all about being social."

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Owner Chris Engaldo

Bald Guyz Coffee & Bistro

By Valerie Cheatham

Owner Chris Engaldo of Bald Guyz Coffee & Bistro in Mount Carroll is, well, he's bald. But, that is not why he chose that name for his establishment. It actually dates back to when this small-town guy, born and raised in Savanna, managed a McDonald's restaurant for 10 years.

"There was this coffee clique that would come into the restaurant regularly," explains Engaldo. "If they didn't see me, they would ask, 'Hey, where's the bald guy?'" And the name stuck.

When he had the opportunity to move forward with a business of his own and was looking for a catchy name, Bald Guyz just made sense. He originally had a small 10-seat coffee shop in Savanna but was approached to take over the coffee shop on Main Street in Mount Carroll. The restaurant is in a historic building with high tin ceilings, massive windows and doors, and gives off an inviting feeling with its small tables, easy chairs and couch. It also contains a small gift shop.

Engaldo built the business through word of mouth and Facebook and has become known for his coffee and Italian beef, which is still his best-selling menu item. He started off

slowly with just a few different sandwiches in addition to his large variety of coffee drinks. As his business grew, he added other sandwiches and wraps to his menu and last year added a full kitchen in order to serve a full breakfast to his customers.

He was also offered the opportunity to run the café at the Savanna marina this year. His grandparents ran the establishment when it first opened years ago, and he says his mother went into labor with him while working there. He thought it just made sense to keep the history alive and honor his grandparents at the same time. The marina site is small with a take-out window and a pared down menu of coffee drinks and just a few of his most popular sandwiches.

Bald Guyz is a popular stop for tourists and locals alike. His biggest sellers, besides his Italian Beef, are the Cucumber Dill Beef (a sandwich of homemade dill sauce, freshly sliced cucumber and sliced beef on marble rye) and the Awesome Chicken Salad (named by local teachers). He also grinds beef daily for his variety of steak burgers and makes his own breakfast sausage. All menu items, other than the bread, are made from scratch and his soups are gluten free.



Engaldo has eight employees, three full-time and five part-time, and he is looking at possible expansion. He says he has been offered other possibilities, but food service is a balancing act with more tourist foot traffic in the summer from those visiting Timber Lake and the scenic area. Winter is a challenge as many of the local shops cut back their hours.

“It was always my dream to own my own business,” he says. “When it became a reality, I never expected it to branch out into so many different directions.” Bald Guyz on the Go, a food truck, will start operations in June and travel to auctions and large festivals. Engaldo is also looking at the possibility of opening a few locations in larger towns and focus on drive-thru for coffee and breakfast grab-n-go sandwiches.

While visiting Bald Guyz Coffee, we tried the Italian Beef and Awesome Chicken Salad sandwiches. The Italian Beef is flavorful and juicy with just the right combination of seasoning. The chicken salad is chock-full of white meat chicken served on oat nut bread with a nice dressing that doesn't overpower the flavor, along with lettuce, tomato and slivered almonds. My companions tried the chocolate oat bars for dessert and enjoyed every bite.

The Bald Guyz menu contains a variety of breakfast items including Apple Fritter French Toast, soups, salads, wraps, burgers and sandwiches. Menu items range from \$3.50 for a Chicago Style hotdog to \$3.90 for a breakfast panini and \$7.99 for the Italian Beef. If you are a coffee lover, they serve a wide variety of lattes, frappes, hot chocolate and tea, and have an expansive list of coffee syrups available.

If you are in the Mount Carroll area, stop in and relax. You'll be glad you did.

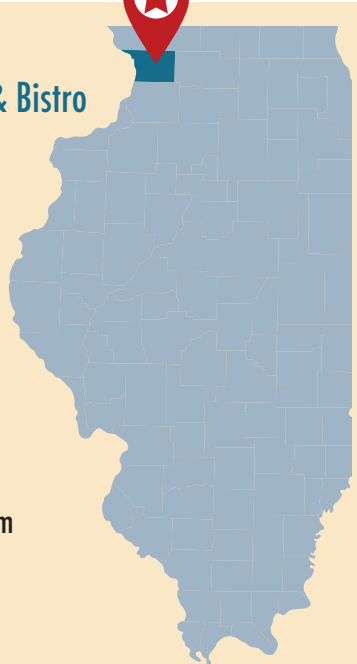


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Finding the homeplace

By Patty Gillespie

A rusty strand of barbed wire embedded in a tree trunk, a cluster of daffodils blooming in a pasture field, and a bit of blue crockery protruding from a creek's sandy edge, like whisperings of secrets, make me long to know. Who lived here before? What were their lives like?

We had to take the boat to reach my husband's grandmother's homeplace (the farmstead of her childhood). Over 40 years ago, at the convergence of two creeks, a dam was built. Afterward, the acreage of the former homesite became isolated on a narrow peninsula surrounded by the waters of a power plant's cooling lake.

But it was actually many years before, sometime in the 1930s, when the homeplace was abandoned. Speculation about the reason for that abandonment points to one particular life-changing incident.

From my position at the bow, I scanned the shoreline. "There," I pointed. My husband Jim swung the boat toward shore and cut the motor. We climbed a gentle slope. At the apex, we noticed two lines of tall trees standing like sentinels, progressing eastward. Between those old trees lie a flat depression, overgrown by grasses and saplings. Here was the old roadbed which I had spotted from the boat.

As we walked upon it, we observed the surrounding woodland. Among a tangle of raspberry stems, a roll of weathered decorative woven-wire leaned against a big hollow fallen tree. "Hey, Jim, there's a roll of fencing," I said.

He looked and remarked with a chuckle, "I bet that fancy yard fence was meant for keeping livestock out, not pets or kids in."

A short distance beyond, a row of cheerful Easter flowers bloomed among the leaf litter of the forest floor. Had we found the homeplace?



Jim commented, "I think this is it, but I'm not sure. I remember during the summers of my late teens, I'd drive from the south along a dirt road and then turn westward." He told of passing the vacant old farmhouse and the dilapidated barn, still standing back then. "But at the creek there was no bridge, so I'd wade across. Over there was a wonderful woods for squirrel hunting!"

A few more steps and off to our right, we noticed evidence of the road from the south. Yes, this was the homeplace.

To our left loomed two huge concrete gateposts, surprisingly upright and rigid. The concrete of the posts showed very little sign of deterioration despite the many years of weathering. We skirted around them.

As we ventured farther off the roadbed, we paid close attention to where we placed our feet, which we are in the habit of doing anyway since we raise cattle. Here there was a good chance of finding a well. Hand-dug wells or cisterns often now exist as half-hidden deep gaping holes – very dangerous!

We found a few glass jars, a rusted-out metal washtub, and picked a few of the old-fashioned yellow daffodils for a bouquet.

As we were walking back to the boat, Jim stopped at a dip in the

roadbed and spoke quietly. "It is thought that this is the spot where my grandfather was killed – killed by his in-laws." Jim gestured back toward the homeplace and added, "In 1924."

"Oh! 1924 is when it happened," I gasped. "Your mother would have been just a little girl when she lost her father."

Jim added, "I don't know very much about it, really. I think that my mom didn't want me to know, but I've heard some. Apparently, a woman driving a horse and buggy along this road happened upon the scene immediately after the shooting and identified the men involved. On the internet, I discovered an old newspaper article. My grandmother's brother served time in the penitentiary at Chester and his father was acquitted."

When we reached the shoreline, Jim said, "Yet," as if trying to reconcile two opposing notions. "Up until the time of the incident, they were considered successful farmers, a wealthy family, supposedly."

As we motored away across the water, I looked back at the wooded peninsula. The homeplace had kept its secrets.

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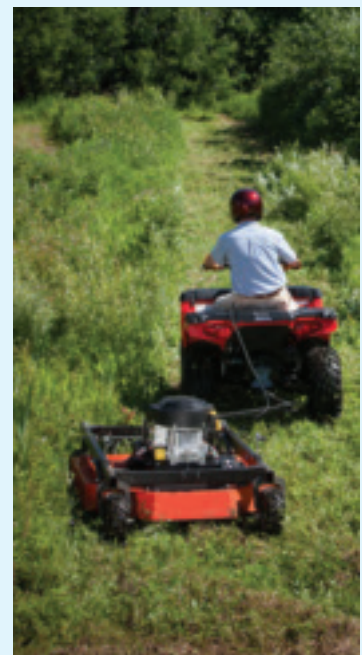
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Signs of summer

1 Shirley Valencia

Clinton County Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Eagle

2 Lisa Fesler

Illinois Electric Cooperative
Birding singing on top of a fence post

3 Short

SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Driving north headed to the annual Ridgway Popcorn Day Parade in the fall. Had our flag laying on the dash... Sure made a unique photo.

4 Wendy Vaughn

Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Motorcycle riding in southern Illinois

5 Don Wagner

Jo-Carroll Energy
Grandkid's day out, providing dinner

6 Joyce Kuergeleis

Monroe County Electric Co-Operative
Stone church in Maeystown, Ill.

**photo descriptions have been edited for clarity and space*

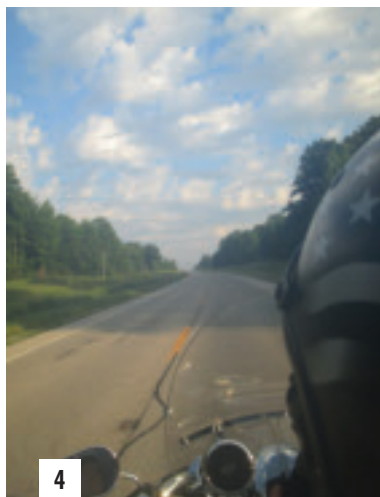
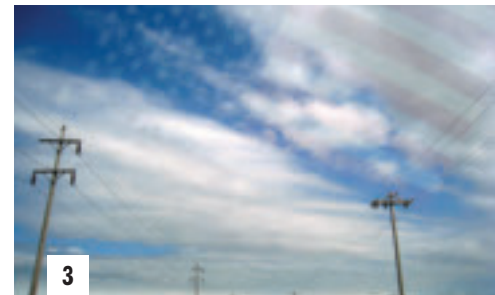
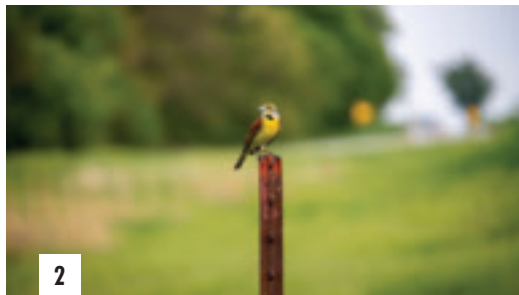
Upcoming themes

September – Man's best friend

October – Kids in costumes

November – Colors of the fall

December – The Holidays



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PO Box 3787
Springfield IL 62708

 **Rules:**

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Eye Doctor Helps Illinois Legally Blind To See

High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again



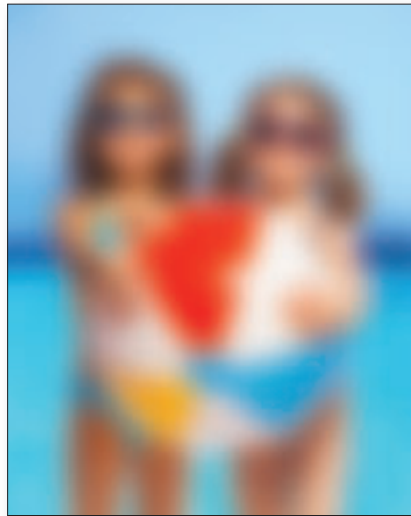
For many patients with macular degeneration and other vision-related conditions, the loss of central visual detail also signals the end to one of the last bastions of independence: driving. A Mascoutah optometrist, Dr. Marianne McDaniel, is using miniaturized telescopes that are mounted in glasses to help people who have lost vision from macular degeneration and other eye conditions.

"Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss," said Dr. Weingart, one of only a few doctors in the world who specialize in fitting bioptic telescopes to help those who have lost vision due to macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and other debilitating eye diseases.

Imagine a pair of glasses that can improve your vision enough to change your life. If you're a low vision patient, you've probably not only imagined them, but have been searching for them. Bioptic telescopes may be the breakthrough in optical technology that

will give you the independence you've been looking for. Patients with vision in the 20/200 range can many times be improved to 20/50 or better.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in people over 50. Despite this, most adults are not familiar with the condition. As many as 25% of those over the age of 50 have some degree of macular degeneration. The macula



A scene as it might be viewed by a person with age-related macular degeneration.

is only one small part of the retina; however, it is the most sensitive and gives us sharp central vision. When it degenerates, macular degeneration leaves a blind spot right in the center of vision, making it difficult or impossible to recognize faces, read a book, or pass the driver's vision test.

Nine out of 10 people who have macular degeneration have the dry form. New research suggests vitamins can help. The British medical journal BMC Ophthalmology recently reported

that 56% of patients treated with a high-dose combination of vitamins experienced improved vision after six months.

While age is the most significant risk factor for developing the disease, heredity, smoking, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure have also been identified as risk factors.

Macular degeneration accounts for 90% of new legal blindness in the U.S. While there is currently no cure, promising research is being done on many fronts. "My job is to figure out everything and anything possible to keep a person functioning, especially driving," says Dr. McDaniel.

"Bioptic telescopes can cost over \$2,000," said Dr. McDaniel, "especially if we build them with an automatic sunglass."

"The major benefit of the bioptic telescope is that the lens automatically focuses on whatever you're looking at," said Dr. Weingart. "It's like a self-focusing camera, but much more precise."

To learn more about bioptic telescopes or to schedule a consultation, give Dr. McDaniel or Dr. Weingart a call. You can also visit our websites.

www.lowvisionofsouthil.com

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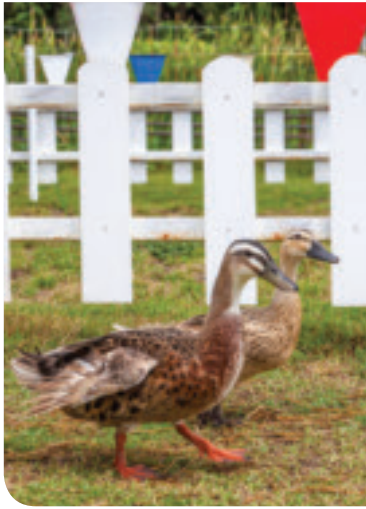
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Hardin County Heritage Festival



WHEN: July 7, 2018 – all day

WHERE: Main Street, Elizabethtown

COST: Free admission

CONTACT: 618-264-5854 or visit
http://www.hardincountyil.org/festivals_hardincountyheritage.htm

This festival celebrates the county's rich heritage and history. The event includes period entertainment and activities to fill your weekend including an 1800s outdoor play, pageant, quilt show, duck race, and area craft and food vendors. Festivities also include a period ball, a Regal Women's Tea and live entertainment.



Northwest Illinois Art & Jazz Fest



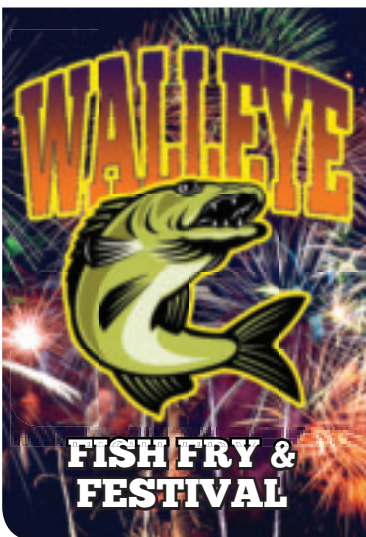
WHEN: July 21-22, 2018 – Sat., 10 a.m.-6 p.m.;
 Sun. 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

WHERE: 600 N. Pearl St., Stockton

COST: Free admission

CONTACT: 815-947-2878 or visit <http://www.nwiltartfest.com/>

Art and jazz collide at the 4th annual festival. Visit with regionally and nationally recognized musicians and wander among the art, join a class, watch a demonstration, listen to live entertainment, sample local wine and beer and taste local cuisine. A wall-sized mural will be painted downtown during the festival.



Findlay Walleye Festival



WHEN: July 28-30, 2018 – see schedule online

WHERE: East South 2nd, Findlay

COST: Free admission

CONTACT: 800-874-3529 or visit
<http://www.lakeshelbyville.com/events/walleye.htm>

Downtown Findlay comes alive with the Walleye Fish Fry and Festival. The yearly event has plenty of entertainment including an ice cream social, fireworks on Friday, games, a farmers' market, tractor pull, car, truck and motorcycle show and more. A parade starts at 10 a.m. on Saturday and there will be plenty of kid's games and activities.

Leading Acid Reflux Pill Becomes an Anti-Aging Phenomenon



Clinical studies show breakthrough acid reflux treatment also helps maintain vital health and helps protect users from the serious conditions that accompany aging such as fatigue and poor cardiovascular health

by David Waxman
Seattle Washington:

A clinical study on a leading acid reflux pill shows that its key ingredient relieves digestive symptoms while suppressing the inflammation that contributes to premature aging in men and women.

And, if consumer sales are any indication of a product's effectiveness, this 'acid reflux pill turned anti-aging phenomenon' is nothing short of a miracle.

Sold under the brand name AloeCure, it was already backed by clinical data documenting its ability to provide all day and night relief from heartburn, acid reflux, constipation, irritable bowel, gas, bloating, and more.

But soon doctors started reporting some incredible results...

"With AloeCure, my patients started reporting less joint pain, more energy, better sleep, stronger immune systems... even less stress and better skin, hair, and nails" explains Dr. Liza Leal; a leading integrative health specialist and company spokesperson.

AloeCure contains an active ingredient that helps improve digestion by acting as a natural acid-buffer that improves the pH balance of your stomach.

Scientists now believe that this acid imbalance is what contributes to painful inflammation throughout the rest of the body.

The daily allowance of AloeCure has shown to calm this inflammation which is why AloeCure is so effective.

Relieving other stressful symptoms related to GI health like pain, bloating, fatigue, cramping, constipation, diarrhea, heartburn, and nausea.

Now, backed with new clinical studies, AloeCure is being recommended by doctors everywhere to help improve digestion, calm painful inflammation, soothe joint pain, and even reduce the appearance of wrinkles – helping patients to look and feel decades younger.

FIX YOUR GUT & FIGHT INFLAMMATION

Since hitting the market, sales for AloeCure have taken off and there are some very good reasons why.

To start, the clinical studies have been impressive. Participants taking the active ingredient in AloeCure saw a stunning 100% improvement in digestive symptoms, which includes fast and lasting relief from reflux.

Users also experienced higher energy levels and endurance, relief from chronic discomfort and better sleep. Some even reported healthier looking skin, hair, and nails.

A healthy gut is the key to a reducing swell-

ing and inflammation that can wreak havoc on the human body. Doctors say this is why AloeCure works on so many aspects of your health.

AloeCure's active ingredient is made from the healing compound found in Aloe vera. It is both safe and healthy. There are also no known side effects.

Scientists believe that it helps improve digestive and immune health by acting as a natural acid-buffer that improves the pH balance of your stomach.

Research has shown that this acid imbalance contributes to painful inflammation throughout your entire body and is why AloeCure seems to be so effective.

EXCITING RESULTS FROM PATIENTS

To date over 5 million bottles of AloeCure have been sold, and the community seeking non-pharma therapy for their GI health continues to grow.

According to Dr. Leal, her patients are absolutely thrilled with their results and are often shocked by how fast it works.

"For the first time in years, they are free from concerns about their digestion and almost every other aspect of their health," says Dr. Leal, "and I recommend it to everyone who wants to improve GI health without resorting to drugs, surgery, or OTC medications."

"I was always in 'indigestion hell.' Doctors put me on all sorts of antacid remedies. Nothing worked. Dr. Leal recommended I try AloeCure. And something remarkable happened... Not only were all the issues I had with my stomach gone - completely gone - but I felt less joint pain and I was able to actually sleep through the night."

With so much positive feedback, it's easy to see why the community of believers is growing and sales for the new pill are soaring.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND ALOECURE

AloeCure is a pill that's taken just once daily. The pill is small. Easy to swallow. There are no harmful side effects and it does not require a prescription.

The active ingredient is a rare Aloe Vera component known as acemannan.

Made from 100% organic Aloe Vera, AloeCure uses a proprietary process that results in the highest quality, most bio-available levels of acemannan known to exist.

According to Dr. Leal and several of her colleagues, improving the pH balance of your stomach and restoring gut health is the key to revitalizing your entire body.

When your digestive system isn't healthy, it causes unwanted stress on your immune sys-

tem, which results in inflammation in the rest of the body.

The recommended daily allowance of acemannan in AloeCure has been proven to support digestive health, and calm painful inflammation without side effects or drugs.

This would explain why so many users are experiencing impressive results so quickly.

REVITALIZE YOUR ENTIRE BODY

With daily use, AloeCure helps users look and feel decades younger and defend against some of the painful inflammation that accompanies aging and can make life hard.

By buffering stomach acid and restoring gut health, AloeCure calms painful inflammation and will help improve digestion... soothe aching joints... reduce the appearance of wrinkles and help restore hair and nails ... manage cholesterol and oxidative stress... and improve sleep and brain function... without side effects or expense.

Readers can now reclaim their energy, vitality, and youth regardless of age or current level of health.

One AloeCure Capsule Daily

- Helps End Digestion Nightmares
- Helps Calm Painful Inflammation
- Soothes Stiff & Aching Joints
- Reduces appearance of Wrinkles & Increases Elasticity
- Manages Cholesterol & Oxidative Stress
- Supports Healthy Immune System
- Improves Sleep & Brain Function

HOW TO GET ALOECURE

This is the official nationwide release of the new AloeCure pill in the United States. And so, the company is offering our readers up to 3 FREE bottles with their order.

This special give-away is available for the next 48-hours only. All you have to do is call TOLL-FREE 1-800-746-3210 and provide the operator with the Free Bottle Approval Code: AC100. The company will do the rest.

Important: Due to AloeCure's recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back. Those who miss the 48-hour deadline may lose out on this free bottle offer.



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