

OCTOBER 2021

Illinois Country Living

LINEWORK LEGACY

ANNUAL MEETINGS
Lessons learned

FIRST THOUGHTS
Learn. Lead. Leave.

GARDEN WISE
Fall into color

+
CO-OP
NEWS

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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.mascoutaheyecare.com

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Marianne McDaniel, O.D.

www.FoxValleyLowVision.com

1-800-341-8498

Located in Oswego, IL

Ronald Weingart, O.D.

Illinois Country Living is a monthly publication serving the communications needs of the locally-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives of Illinois. With a circulation of almost 191,000, the magazine informs cooperative consumer-members about issues affecting their electric cooperative and the quality of life in rural Illinois.

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Learn. Lead. Leave.

The following remarks were made by Phil Carson, Illinois NRECA and Tri-County Electric Cooperative director to the attendees at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives 80th Annual Meeting. Elected to the NRECA board in 2005, Carson was chosen to be an officer in 2013 and served a two-year term as board president from 2018-19. He is stepping down from that position upon expiration of his term in March 2022.

ENVISIONING TOMORROW IS THE theme for this annual meeting, so I want to challenge all of us this morning as we think about tomorrow. Specifically, when is it time to leave our current positions? I especially think of those who, like me, are directors serving on boards. I've been asking myself this question over the past 18 months with regard to the NRECA position. When do I leave?



Phil Carson is NRECA board president and vice president of the Tri-County Electric Cooperative board.

Sometimes our members tell us it's time to leave by voting us out. Sometimes health dictates that decision. More often than not, it is an internal decision that is made. Regarding the latter I've collected insights over the 30 years as I've served on a variety of boards. I remember Leland Luthy, a wonderful guy from Baldwin, who shared with me as he was leaving our telephone board, "Son, it's better to go too early, than to go too late." I've always remembered that.

Adam Schwartz, a name familiar in co-op circles, once shared with me three simple things to remember, all beginning with the letter L. When you step onto a board, "learn." Be like a sponge and soak it all in because there's a lot to learn. Then the time will come to step up and "lead" - whether in a committee position or in an officer position on the board. Last will be the time to

"leave." That's a good way to remember three distinct but important phases of life in a board position. Learn. Lead. Leave.

Marion Chesnut, a former director from Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, taught me that when it's time to leave, you will know. He said a wise man told him once that the "fire in the belly" begins to wane ... interest levels fall off ... that is a good signal that the time is nearing.

I had the privilege of speaking with Sheldon Petersen (just retired CEO of CFC) in the last days of his brilliant tenure at CFC. We were visiting and I shared that I was stepping away from my NRECA position. I told him that I was slowing down physically but still felt at the top of my game mentally. Sheldon responded, "But who would want to stay until they are diminished?" Yes! Exactly!

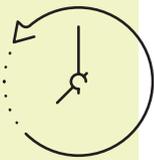
Recently I was reading a biography of Thomas Jefferson. He had made a statement during his lifetime, and I paraphrase, "It's important for one generation to make way for the new generation. One generation needs to be 'buried' for the next generation to properly sprout and grow."

There's so much more that I could say on this issue but let me leave you with a couple of summary thoughts. One, it is good to have a diverse mix on a board, a mix that includes gray hair as well as new blood. Leaving at the right time promotes that mix. Two, I am not claiming to be a guru who can tell anyone/everyone when it's time to leave. That is very much a personal decision. However, I am encouraging all of us to be thinking about these things. Learn. Lead. Leave - at the right time.

It has been a great honor and a great experience for me to serve as your representative to the national board. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. God Bless! 🙏

OCTOBER CHECKLIST

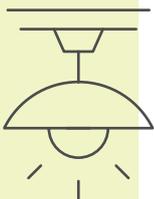
Fall back. When you change your clocks, replace the batteries in your smoke and CO detectors.



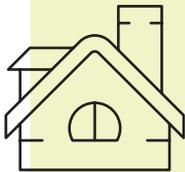
Pay it forward. Take a few minutes to engage in a random act of kindness.



Deep cleaning for fall? Start at the top with ceilings and light fixtures; floors should be last.



Tip of the month. Now is the time to get your chimney flue or woodstove pipe scrubbed before cold weather arrives.



2021 Lineman's Safety Rodeo

Seventeen teams and individuals from 13 electric co-ops, one municipal electric utility and a team of Lincoln Land Community College linework students participated in the annual AIEC Lineman's Safety Rodeo. Held Sept. 8, the rodeo highlights the skills linemen use to work safely and efficiently.

Line personnel competed in five team and individual events: a 40-foot speed climb, hurt man rescue, H-structure obstacle course, transformer banking and a head-to-head climbing challenge.

Scores for each event are based on completion time, proper execution of the task and safety. Deductions were made to a team or individual's overall performance score due to mistakes such as slipping when climbing poles, dropping tools or executing inappropriate procedures or methods.

Awards were presented to the top three places in both team and individuals in each event and an overall award to the top scoring team and individual. The Illinois Electric Cooperative, Winchester, team of Josh Davis, Kaiden Davis and Isaac Richard took the overall team award. The overall individual award went to Jared Wells, CWLP, Springfield. Dalton Spiller of SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative, Carrier Mills, was named the fastest and safest pole climber winning the head-to-head climbing challenge. 💡



Safety and Energy Conference

The annual Safety and Energy Conference, held Sept. 9-10, focused on safety and leadership in the energy industry. Attendees learned new solutions to industry challenges, strategies to strengthen safety culture, and relevant training to keep them informed.

Safety is utmost on the minds of electric co-ops and a core value. Conference sessions included influencing safety, creating a culture of safety and safety drift – becoming complacent in everyday work habits. Additionally, there were sessions focused on maintaining and increasing morale, learning from past utility accidents and navigating the Occupational Safety and Health Administration inspection process, and rights for employers. 💡



Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

Complete the grid so every row, column and 3x3 sub contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusive with no repetition. Solution on page 3

Level: Medium

		2	7	6	3		5	
			9			2	3	8
				2	8		6	
5						9	4	1
9	7	6						2
	2		8	1				
1	4	5			7			
	6		4	3	2	7		



Co-ops participate in nation's largest outdoor farm event

Electric cooperatives connected with thousands of individuals at the 2021 Farm Progress Show held Aug. 31-Sept. 2 in Decatur. The show has been held for more than 50 years and connects farmers with hundreds of exhibitors and industry experts. It alternates between its two permanent locations in Decatur and Boone, Iowa.

The Illinois electric cooperatives' tent featured a variety of activities including live line safety and pole climbing demonstrations. Co-op personnel were on hand to discuss electric vehicles, the Voices for Cooperative Power program and help spectators spin the electric trivia wheel to win prizes.

Participating cooperatives were: Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Mattoon; Corn Belt Energy Corporation, Bloomington; Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, Paxton; EnerStar Electric Cooperative, Paris; Illinois Electric Cooperative, Winchester; Jo-Carroll Energy, Elizabeth; M.J.M. Electric Cooperative, Carlinville; Menard Electric Cooperative, Petersburg; Norris Electric Cooperative, Newton; Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative, Auburn,

Shelby Electric Cooperative, Shelbyville; and Southwestern Electric Cooperative, Greenville. Other participants were the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, Springfield; Dairyland Power Cooperative, La Crosse, Wis.; Prairie Power Inc., Springfield; and Wabash Valley Power Alliance, Indianapolis, Ind.

USDA invests \$464 million in renewable energy infrastructure

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the department is investing \$464 million to build or improve renewable energy infrastructure and to help rural communities, agricultural producers and businesses lower energy costs.

USDA is financing \$129 million of these investments through the Rural Energy for America Program to help agricultural producers and rural small businesses purchase and install renewable energy systems and make efficiency improvements. It is financing \$335 million through the Electric Loan Program to help build or improve 1,432 miles of line to strengthen reliability in rural areas. The loans include \$102 million for investments in smart grid technology, which uses digital communications to detect and react to local changes in electricity usage.

In Illinois, Prairie State Solar, LLC will use a \$95 million loan to construct a 99-megawatt solar photovoltaic farm in Perry County. It has a 27-year power purchase agreement with Wabash Valley Power Association, Inc. to sell and deliver the electricity produced. Wabash Valley provides wholesale power to 23 distribution cooperatives in Illinois, Indiana and Missouri including Corn Belt Energy Corporation, Bloomington; EnerStar Electric Cooperative, Paris; and M.J.M. Electric Cooperative, Carlinville.

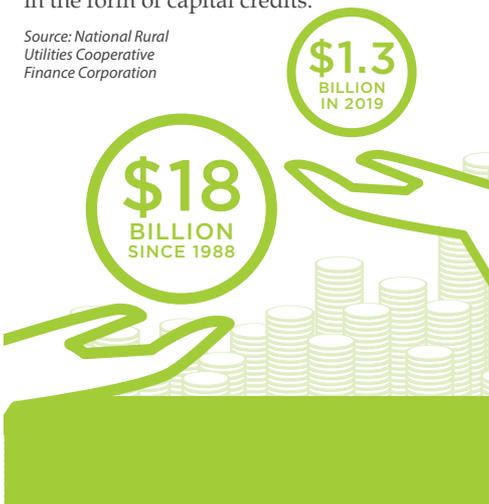
Additionally, grants totaling \$169,000 were awarded to 12 individuals and small businesses to purchase solar arrays to help power farms, businesses and grain dryers.

Source: USDA

Did You Know?

Electric cooperatives have retired \$18 billion to members since 1988 – \$1.3 billion in 2019 alone. Because electric co-ops operate at cost, any excess revenues (called margins) are allocated and retired to members in the form of capital credits.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation



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ADVENTURE.



Spend the fall in Carbondale, Illinois sipping wine with friends on the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, hiking and biking the trails of Giant City State Park and the Shawnee National Forest, unwinding with live local music, food and drinks downtown, and enjoying cozy nights in at a cabin in the woods!

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IDOA announces expansion of farmer mental health initiatives

Illinois Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello II announced a grant award of \$500,000 to increase farmer stress-related mental health initiatives statewide. The department applied for the grant in coordination with Southern Illinois University (SIU) Medicine Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development and University of Illinois Extension.

In 2019, the Farm Family Resource Initiative (FFRI) was established in Illinois to specifically address mental health needs of the farming and agricultural communities. The FFRI Committee consists of members from government, commodity groups, academic institutions, healthcare and industry. Led by SIU School of Medicine, the FFRI launched a six-county pilot program to provide resources to Christian, Logan, Macon, Macoupin, Morgan and Sangamon counties through a telephone hotline connecting farmers with mental health resources and providers. This grant will allow for the expansion of the pilot program to the entire state.

Additional plans for grant funding include:

- Text and email communication options (in addition to telephone hotline),
- increased marketing of helpline,
- voucher program for professional behavioral health services,
- agricultural literacy training for mental health providers to increase knowledge of agricultural community, and
- further Mental Health First Aid trainings for agricultural community members.

“Small farms are the core of our state’s economy, and farmers are on the front lines to provide food for our communities. The reality of this pandemic is that a new layer of stress has been put on farmers and farm families,” said State Senator Scott Bennett. “These additional funds for the Farm Family Resource Initiative will give farmers the support to help recognize and navigate these unprecedented times.”

The Farmer Assistance Helpline is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week at 1-833-FARM-SOS. ☎



EnerStar board director Jeff Zimmerman, right, presents a check to Hindsboro Community Fire Protection District Chief Ed Yoder, left, and Oakland Community Fire Protection District Chief Anthony Bennett. Each district received \$1,428.57.

EnerStar, CoBank donate to area volunteer fire departments

For the 10th consecutive year, EnerStar Electric Cooperative, Paris, has awarded the CoBank Sharing Success matching grant. The grant’s purpose is to help cooperatives support causes and organizations important to the communities they serve. To date, EnerStar and CoBank have partnered together to donate \$125,000 to charitable organizations.

This year, 14 volunteer fire departments throughout the co-op’s service territory shared the \$20,000 grant with each department receiving \$1,428.57.

“Each department decided how they could best use the funds based on their specific needs,” said EnerStar’s Angela Griffin. She explained funds were being used for items such as a thermal imaging camera, a new heart defibrillator and a 40-hour grain bin rescue class.

“These organizations play a critical role in the rural communities that EnerStar serves, and we are thankful to the individuals who volunteer,” said Griffin. She added that as a not-for-profit electric cooperative, EnerStar is guided by seven cooperative principles, which include “Cooperation Among Cooperatives” and “Concern for Community” and this donation is well-suited to those principles. ☎

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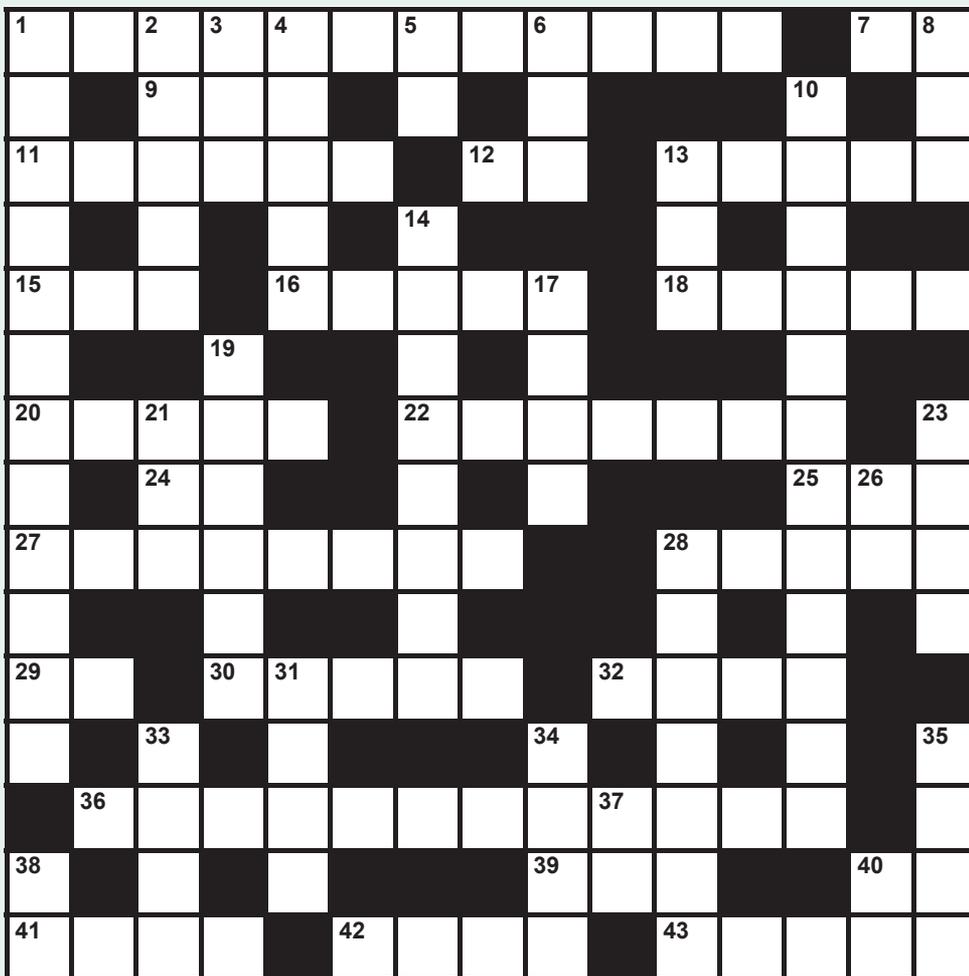
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Across

- 1 Halloween shout (3 words)
- 7 Street, abbr.
- 9 Moved fast
- 11 “___ the 13th” movie
- 12 Higher
- 13 You have to wear a costume for this Halloween get-together
- 15 Biblical suffix
- 16 Black wood
- 18 Bottled spirit
- 20 Snake
- 22 “Twilight” character
- 24 Dorothy’s aunt in “Oz”
- 25 Cpl. or sgt., abbr.
- 27 They are carved up at Halloween
- 28 She’s lazy in the kitchen?
- 29 Former partner

- 30 Frightening
 - 32 Vampire’s attack
 - 36 Halloween lighting (3 words)
 - 39 Fjord country, briefly
 - 40 Title for Evil or No
 - 41 Nightfall
 - 42 A bad omen, when they’re black
 - 43 Get scared
- Down**
- 1 Halloween treat (2 words)
 - 2 Lucky nationality
 - 3 Awful guy
 - 4 Jack
 - 5 Touring vehicle, abbr.
 - 6 ___ Van Winkle
 - 8 Frisbee, e.g.
 - 10 Horror movie monster

- 13 Golden animal for the Chinese
- 14 Keepsake
- 17 Sweet potatoes
- 19 Lures into evil
- 21 Rep’s opposite
- 23 Part of a skeleton
- 26 Golden state, abbr.
- 28 They can cause screams at Halloween
- 31 Angel ___ dessert
- 33 Halloween fliers
- 34 Night stay places
- 35 Like the night
- 37 Head ___ head
- 38 Required to open a bank account
- 40 Gala

Solution on page 37.



Dairyland seeks to acquire natural gas plant

On Aug. 26, Dairyland Power Cooperative, announced it entered into a purchase agreement to acquire the RockGen Energy Center, a 503 megawatt (MW) natural gas power plant located in Cambridge, Wis. The acquisition is subject to customary conditions, including regulatory approvals and is expected to close by the end of 2021.

“RockGen will help meet our members’ power supply needs as we transition to more renewable resources,” said Brent Ridge, president and CEO. “Safely delivering reliable and sustainable electricity to our members is critical as we continue to diversify Dairyland’s energy portfolio and lower carbon intensity. With the closing of our coal-fired Genoa Station #3 this year, the availability of this existing, low-cost and reliable facility in Wisconsin is both timely and a good strategic fit for our power supply portfolio.”

Jo-Carroll Energy, Elizabeth, is a member of Dairyland Power Cooperative. 💡

OCTOBER **Datebook**

LET'S GO!

For more information, a complete listing of events or to submit an event, visit icl.coop/datebook.



October Quilt Celebration

OCTOBER

1-2

The "Life's a Stitch" Quilt Show will kick-off on Friday at 10 a.m. The judged show will feature a quilt raffle and many vendors selling their quilt related wares.

Free handicapped accessible parking is available.

Oct. 1-2, 2021; Fri. 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sat. 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

● Church of the Nazarene, 1411 N. Walnut St., Olney

Cost: \$5

Olney Quilt Guild on Facebook

Wabash Valley Wine & Art Festival

OCTOBER

2-3

Sample or purchase wine from 15 Illinois wineries.

Browse local retail establishments and visit art and craft vendors selling handmade wares. The festival

features live music, food vendors and a Sunday car show.

Visit our website for savings on advance tasting tickets.

Oct. 2-3, 2021; 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

● Palestine Development Association, 100-300 S. Main St., Palestine

Cost: Free

Palestinewinefest.com



Voices and Votes: Democracy in America

OCTOBER

9

NOVEMBER

13

This Smithsonian Institution exhibit features informative displays, interactive media and historical objects. Special programs will

demonstrate how important our voices and votes are in our government and in every American's life. Donations appreciated.

*Contact Savanna Museum and Cultural Center for all days and times.

Oct. 9-Nov. 13, 2021; Noon-4 p.m.*

● Savanna Museum and Cultural Center, 406 Main St., Savanna

Cost: Free

815-275-1958 or savannamuseum.org



Rochester Fall Festival

OCTOBER

23-24

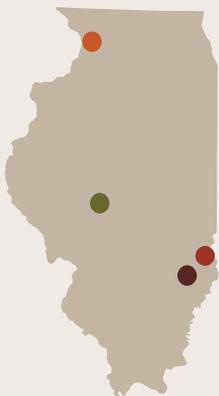
Sponsored by Rochester Public Library District, visit our vendors, food truck, free games, inflatables and activities, and enjoy live music, local author story times and more.

Oct. 23-24, 2021; 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

● Rochester Community Park, Wild Rose Lane, Rochester

Cost: Free

217-498-8454 or rochesterlibrary.org/fallfestival



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— J. Fitzgerald, VA



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Which heat pump option is right for my home?

Dear Pat and Brad: I've heard heat pumps can be a good alternative for heating my home, but it looks like there are several types available. Can you explain a few of the most common options? – Brett

DEAR BRETT: I THINK it's a good idea to consider a heat pump for

existing duct system. Like your furnace, the temperature is controlled through one main thermostat. This is a solid solution if your system has quality ductwork that heats and cools every room evenly, which is rare.

Long supply runs provide little air to some rooms, and it's typical for some to lack return air registers. If leaky ducts are located in unheated areas such as crawl spaces or attics, it will increase your heating and cooling costs. Poor ductwork will render any kind of central heating or cooling system much less effective. Some HVAC contractors can repair ductwork problems if it is accessible.

Heat pumps vary in efficiency, and this is measured in two ways. The Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) rating mea-

sures heating efficiency and the Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) rating measures cooling efficiency. The minimum ratings for a new heat pump are HSPF 8.2 and SEER 14. Heat pumps with the ENERGY STAR rating are significantly more efficient than the minimum standard.

Mini-split heat pump

If your home does not have ductwork or it is poorly designed or leaky, a ductless mini-split heat pump might be your best bet. With a mini-split heat pump, tubes connected to the outside compressor carry refrigerant to one or more air handlers, which are mounted high on a wall to distribute air. Thermostats regulate each air

handler, providing control of different zones in the home.

In climates that don't experience extreme cold, a ductless heat pump could supply all the heating and cooling in a small home. They are often used in combination with a central heating and cooling system. Ductless mini-splits are an excellent option if you don't have central air ducts, your ducts are leaking or you only want it to heat or cool part of the home.

Geothermal (or ground-source) heat pump

Several feet underground, the temperature remains constant year-round, typically between 45 degrees and 75 degrees F, depending on latitude. Heat is transferred into or out of the ground by pipes buried in a loop 10 feet underground or drilled up to 400 feet into the earth. The pipes carry water to a compressor, which uses a refrigerant to transfer the heat to or from your home's ducts.

A geothermal heat pump system is extremely energy efficient since the earth's temperature is warmer than the outside air in winter and cooler in summer. This efficiency comes with a high price tag, which is the initial cost of installation.

Check with your local electric co-op for additional information and guidance. If you have a qualified energy auditor in your area, an audit could be a great next step, especially if it includes a duct leakage test. Then you'll be ready to reach out to contractors and request a few quotes. 💡



Ductless heat pump Photo Credit: Marcela Gara, Resource Media

your home. The technology has improved a lot over the past 10-20 years and is likely to be at least 20 percent more efficient than what you have now.

Newer models can operate effectively in sub-zero weather, but sometimes do so by switching to electric resistance mode, which is much less efficient. In a colder climate, it may be worth investing in a dual fuel system where propane or another fuel provides supplemental heat on extremely cold days.

Ducted heat pump

If your home has a forced air furnace, a centralized air-source heat pump can work well. A compressor that looks like an A/C unit is connected to your home's

This column was co-written by **Pat Keegan** and **Brad Thiessen** of Collaborative Efficiency. For more information on heat pumps, please visit: collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips.

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To the nth degree in IT

IF YOU'RE CONSIDERING A career path in information technology, also known as IT, then you may want to research common education options and how they pertain to the IT field.

If furthering your education to advance in the technology field, you may find yourself trying to strike a balance between time and resources. Once you identify the specific area in IT that interests you, decide what type of degree or education you will pursue. Is certification enough? Will an associate degree get me in the door? Do employers require a bachelor's degree? Is a master's degree worth the extra time and money? Does a doctorate degree even exist in IT?

Let's look at each to have a better understanding of how they apply to the real world.

Certifications can be applied during any point in your career. They serve as a competency litmus test and show you have devoted time and energy to familiarize yourself on a specific subject. Certifications can be acquired in a relatively short period of time and

are inexpensive. Certifications alone are usually not enough to qualify you for a position. Most employers will want to see some work experience to go along with your certifications.

Associate degrees are a good place to start if looking to enter the workforce sooner rather than later. Those who have earned an associate degree can expect to be considered for entry level IT jobs such as help desk technician, desktop technician and IT support analyst. While these positions may not be your end goal, they will allow you to gain valuable experience needed to be considered for that next level position.

Bachelor's degrees are likely the preferred minimum education most employers require for mid to high level IT positions. Many employers are now revising job descriptions accepting an equivalent amount of work experience in lieu of a bachelor's degree. Experience is valuable to employers and sometimes more than a degree. Obtaining a bachelor's degree will position you to be considered for that dream job with a competitive salary.

Master's degree programs are fewer compared to other degree programs. A master's degree shows employers you are willing to take on extra in order to be qualified for advanced projects and executive level positions. A master's degree may not equate to a better job or higher pay, but it affords you the opportunity to speak with authority on the given subject. If your goal is to be regarded as highly knowledgeable in a specific area of expertise, you may want to consider obtaining your master's degree. Note that few jobs in the IT field require a master's degree, and you need to be willing to dedicate the extra time and money to acquire it.

Doctorate degrees are rare. I know many people in the industry and few have a doctoral degree. Those who do usually pursue a career in academia, government or high-level research projects. It is not an easy or inexpensive route, but if you are interested in becoming a professor or leading a university's research project, this may be the path for you. 💡



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

The energy industry seeks digital experts

Renewable energy trends and a smarter grid create new energy careers

KEEPING YOUR LIGHTS ON has always been a high-tech job, but now it's gone even higher. Take a look at new job titles electric co-ops are wanting to fill, like data scientist and cybersecurity analyst.

Lineworkers are adding to their skills as more homeowners install solar panels and sell the excess electricity back to the co-op—along power lines that used to only carry electricity in one direction.

“When lineworkers go out to fix a problem, they need to make sure they understand where the rooftop solar is so they can operate in a safe manner,” says Venkat Banunarayanan, vice president of integrated grid business and technology strategies with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

Banunarayanan describes a workforce evolution in electric co-ops resulting from two powerful trends—new patterns in the flow of electricity and the explosion of digital technology.

The radical idea of rooftop solar owners selling electricity back to the utility is just one of the new dynamics affecting the nation's grid of electric poles and wires. The rapid rise in renewable energy complicates utility planning when solar power suddenly stops at sundown or calm weather cuts wind farm energy generation.

Electric co-ops are also preparing for the effects of more people charging up electric vehicles at home as every major car company has announced plans for electric cars and trucks.

If coordinating this new world of electricity sounds impossibly complicated, the almost-as-new world of information technology offers a solution.

It's called the smart grid.

Over the past couple decades, power lines have been increasingly carrying not just power, but tons of data. The meter at your home is more sophisticated at recording and reporting your energy use. Attached to overhead power lines are tennis-shoe-sized boxes called sensors that monitor the performance of the wires and send that info back to your co-op.

Investments to develop the smart grid in the U.S. more than doubled the past six years, from \$3.5 billion in 2014 to \$7.8 billion in 2020, according to the analysis company Statista. That figure is expected to nearly double again by 2024 to \$13.8 billion.

That money means new jobs. A report by the Energy Futures Initiative found that energy jobs grew at twice the rate of the overall economy from 2015 to 2019.

Parts of the smart grid rely on the internet, so that means growth in jobs related to cybersecurity. Specialists are needed to guard against internet hackers, not only to protect co-op member and business information, but to ensure the electric supply is safe and secure.

The new role of a data scientist determines how to use all that information coming in from the smart grid. Reports of electricity use coming into the co-op's computers could reveal several members plugging in their electric vehicles to charge every day around 5 p.m.

That puts extra demand on the utility when it's already at peak use. A data scientist looking at those numbers could recommend a special rate to encourage those electric



vehicle owners to start charging after 10 p.m. when overall energy use isn't so high. Or they might recommend updating the utility's transformers to handle the heavier use.

Those new careers—and yes you can go to school for a degree in data analytics—will also mean changes in other parts of the co-op. Managers of these new employees will be supervising more jobs that can be done remotely, and at any time of the day or night.

NRECA's Banunarayanan says that adapting to a different workforce will mean a new era for co-op management as well, as they recruit and supervise not just a new generation of workers, but a new generation of work. 💡

Emerging energy trends also mean new skillsets for lineworkers, particularly for servicing homes that include rooftop solar panels. Photo Source: Kelly Hester, Carroll EMC



Paul Wesslund writes on cooperative issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

Protecting water pipes? Use heat tape with care



BELOW-ZERO TEMPERATURES WILL BE upon us soon and can cause pipes to freeze and burst, resulting in a huge mess and expensive repairs. One way to help prevent pipes from bursting is to use heat tape, a product that uses electricity to generate heat.

Although not adhesive, heat tape acts as a heating pad for exposed pipes. There are two installation methods. The first and less common method is when the tape is hardwired to a home's electrical system and has its own breaker(s). In this case, the tape should be installed by a licensed contractor.

The second installation method uses heat tape that plugs directly into a GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) outlet. This type of tape typically allows you to control the temperature.

If considering installing heat tape, extra care should be taken.

- Due to its potential to overheat and cause a fire, only use for exposed pipes, such as those in your crawl space or outside your home.
- Select the right kind of tape for your pipes. If you use tape designed for PVC on metal pipes, it will not be as effective; if you use heat tape designed for metal on PVC pipes, it can melt them.
- Always purchase heat tape that is backed by a reputable testing lab, such as UL (Underwriter Laboratories), and do not use tape, cords or plugs that are damaged or worn.
- Unplug the heat tape in the spring.

Once you have the right tape for the job, installing it is straightforward, according to Huncker.com:

- 1. Clean the pipe.** Remove any insulation and brush off any dirt or cobwebs with a stiff brush. This is an important step because any dirt on the pipes could smolder or catch fire.
- 2. Wrap the tape.** Many brands are designed to simply wrap around the pipe, but some need to be attached using electrical tape. Follow the instructions provided on the packaging or insert. Avoid crossing/doubling the heat tape over itself when wrapping, as this can produce areas of excessively high heat.

- 3. Insulate the pipe.** Cover the pipe with foam insulation after you have wrapped the heat tape around it. This prevents heat from dissipating and saves energy. If pipes are outside or in a location that could get damp, use waterproof insulation.
- 4. Leave enough slack at the end of the tape to reach a GFCI outlet without the need for an extension cord.** If the tape is not long enough to cover the entire pipe, follow manufacturer's directions. Sometimes the tape strands are designed to connect one to another, but make sure that is recommended before doing so. Some come in different lengths.
- 5. Let the heat tape go to work for you.** Once the tape is plugged in, the thermostat monitors the pipe temperature and turns on the heat when needed.

Heat tape is not a must for everyone, but if you have had an issue with exposed pipes freezing in the past, it might be worth considering.

Since heat tape involves plugging in something in an area that could become wet, never step into a flooded or damp area that could have an electrical current running through it. Always use caution with heat tape since it runs on electricity. While installing the specialized covering may help prevent freezing pipes, always follow the instructions provided for installation and use.

For more information about staying safe around electricity, visit SafeElectricity.org. 💡



As Executive Director at Safe Electricity, **Erin Hollinshead** has a profound passion for saving lives through education. She holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Illinois and a grad certificate in management of nonprofit organizations.

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Our Aussie friend would approve of our rendition of his "knife." Forged of high grade 420 surgical stainless steel, this knife is an impressive 16" from pommel to point. And, the blade is full tang, meaning it runs the entirety of the knife, even though part of it is under wraps in the natural bone and wood handle.

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This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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Fall into color

THE INTENSE BRIGHT RED color, corky ridges on the branches, and bright orange or red berries on your neighborhood burning bushes may entice, but remember planting and growing them can lead to

plant out by 2023. A species of concern in Illinois, burning bush should be avoided by gardeners and landscapers.

Other landscape shrubs have dazzling fall colors or an explosion

summer. The fruit display is more impressive in full sun but this plant can grow in part shade, even under coniferous trees. Fruits remain on the plant well into the winter, months after the foliage has created a nice backdrop of yellow fall color. The bright purple fruits are eaten by birds. Berries are not poisonous for humans but are bitter.

Dwarf fothergilla is one of the few shrubs that is content growing in shade. This compact 2- to 3-foot shrub blooms fragrant, small, white whorled flowers in April or May, followed by black berries and ending the season with an explosion of brilliant yellow, orange and red fall color. It is a must have shrub for backyard birders.

Oak leaf hydrangea grows about 6 feet tall and wide in a mound shape. The shrub has large cone-shaped blooms that add color starting in May. The blooms last to the end of summer and transform from white, to purplish pink, to brown. It is adaptable and can be grown in full sun and boasts large dark green leaves that turn rusty red in fall, reminiscent of oak leaves.

Black Chokeberry is a 4- to 8-foot native shrub boasting multiple seasons of interest. It forms dense colonies but are categorized by slow to moderate growers. Small clusters of numerous white flowers with light pink stamens bloom in mid-May. The glossy black fruits form in late summer. The fall color can be bright yellow-orange, red and/or purple. In the landscape industry, black chokeberry is used as hedgerows or alternatives to invasive burning bush and barberry because it is adaptable, has beautiful fall color and is native. Its fragrant flowers are primarily visited by small bees. Fruit can persist into winter and serve as a food source for birds and other wildlife. 🍷



Oak leaf hydrangea

further degradation of the Illinois wildscape. The ornamental berries of this common landscape plant spread aggressively by birds and other wildlife in the understory of our forests and outcompete native plants.

Most who love this plant for its adaptability, prunability and impressive fall display will say they have never seen it loose in the wild or act as a weed on their property. However, they will take notice as soon as the brilliant red fall color starts to reveal itself.

Burning Bush is native to northeastern Asia and was first introduced into North America in the 1860s for ornamental purposes. It is still sold and planted as an ornamental. Minnesota just added Burning Bush to the state's noxious weed list requiring nurseries and growers to phase the

of berries. Gardeners have revealed that these shrubs have the most exciting fall display in the Illinois landscape and are coveted by gardeners for seasonal interest.

Brandywine possumhaw viburnum has an outstanding presentation of pink and blue berries in fall. Brandywine drupes are preceded by fragrant white flowers that appear in early summer. As the drupes ripen, they continue to intensify in color, peaking with a red-to-maroon display late in the fall. This shrub grows 5 to 6 feet tall and has a more impressive fruit display if planted in a group. The drupes are acidic, but edible.

Beautyberry has become a standout for the native fall garden with its vivid purple-magenta berries that populate the entire stem on these 3- to 6-foot shrubs. They follow small light pink flowers in late



Kelly Allsup is a horticulture educator with the University of Illinois Extension serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford counties. She is a Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and has a passion for ecological gardening.

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LINEWORK LEGACY

By Colten Bradford

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES OWN AND maintain 2.7 million miles of distribution lines in the U.S., according to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Men and women across the nation dedicate their lives to keep the lights on, rain or shine. For some families, power lines run through their veins.

The Johnson family

“We grew up in a bucket truck,” says Luke Johnson, a second-generation lineman and CEO at Clay

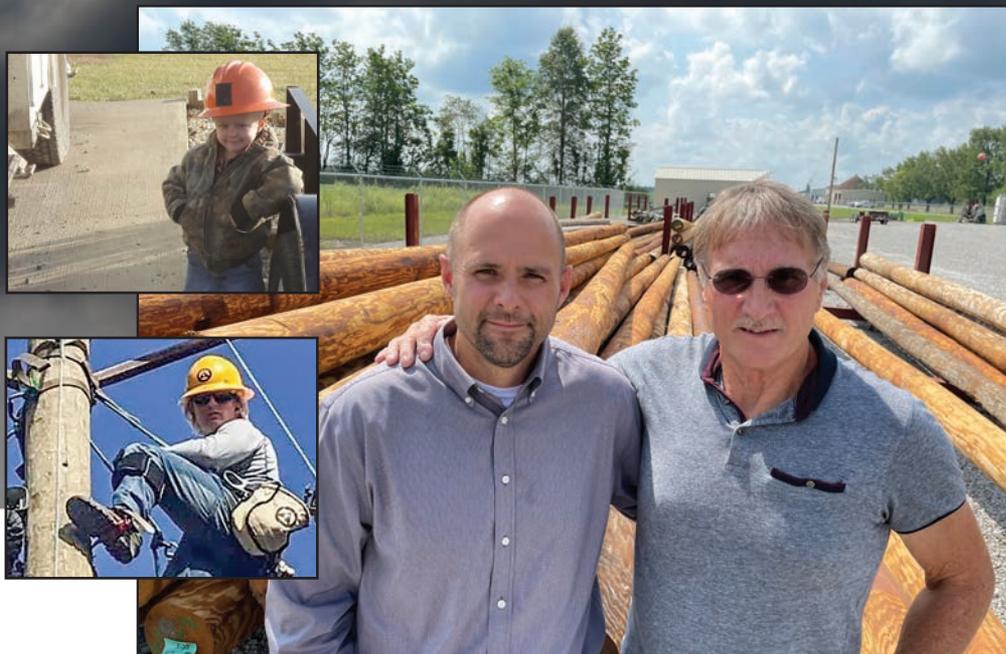
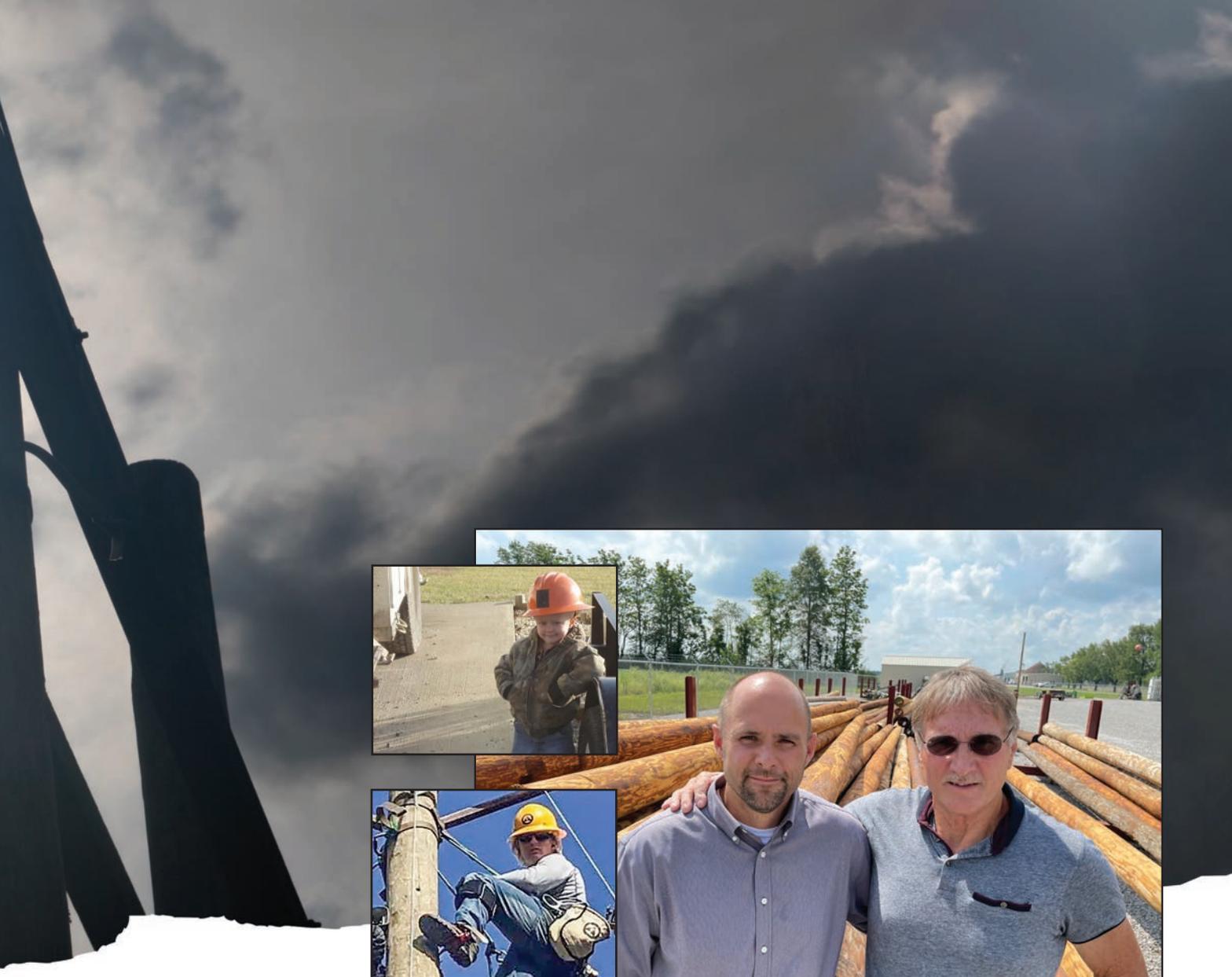
Electric Co-operative. That goes for his children too. His father, brother and eldest son are also lineworkers.

Dave, the family patriarch, began his linework career with a contractor in Fairfield following his service as a communications electrician in the Navy. Five years later, in 1984, he was hired at Clay Electric.

“Growing up, we always helped Dad with electrical projects ... well, we probably got in his way more than anything,” Luke recalls. At home, Dave would take his sons

up in the bucket truck to look out. “Getting to experience that was always exciting.”

Luke and his brother Lee were constantly around linework, whether it was answering calls about outages or watching their dad work. Dave remembers a time he was called for an outage while home alone with Luke, who was sick. Dave loaded him in the truck and took him along. “He got rewarded by going to Dairy Queen,” Dave laughs.



“Living at home, when Dad would get called out, the phone would ring in the middle of the night,” Luke remembers. “You’d be on the phone with your friends or girlfriend and if you heard that beep, you better answer it ... it was always for an outage.”

Dave was the last lineman Clay Electric had hired in 15 years until he left to work for neighboring co-op Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative in 1999. Ten days later, Luke replaced him to become Clay’s newest apprentice lineman.

At that time, Dave’s eldest son Lee was working for Corn Belt Energy as an apprentice lineman. “I was glad for them,” Dave says

about both sons getting into linework. “They picked it on their own. They knew what to expect and how it worked.”

“I always wanted to be a lineman,” Luke says, who had been working for a heating and air sheet metal contractor at the time. “There weren’t many retirements back then, so after he resigned, I just came down and basically begged for a job.”

In 2015, Luke was promoted to operations manager, and was appointed CEO of Clay Electric in January 2019 after acting as interim CEO when the manager left in 2018.

Now that Dave is retired and Luke is no longer on the line crew, one thing they miss most about the job is working storms.

“Storms are a blast,” Luke says, calling it an adrenaline rush. “I really enjoyed hurricanes and ice storms. It was neat to get out and help people.”

“There is an element of daredevil to you,” Dave agrees. “It gives you a bit of a rush.”

A couple of benefits to being part of a linework family are the years of experience and advice passed on.

“I know the women in our family get tired of it, but when you get us

Left: Grant Johnson wanted to be a lineman ever since he was a kid. He is now a third-generation lineworker.

Right: Luke Johnson photographed with his dad Dave. Both men were lineworkers for Clay Electric Co-operative. Luke is now the co-op’s CEO and Dave is retired.



Two generations of lineworkers pose on a utility pole. Jordan Vonder Haar, left, is an apprentice lineman for the city of Breese and his father Doug has 30-plus years of experience as a lineworker.

together, we have something in common to talk about,” Dave says.

Luke agrees. “We have always had support with all of us being in it. We bounce ideas off each other and hash things out.”

At age 19, Luke’s eldest son Grant has started his career as a lineman at CenterPoint Energy in Terre Haute, Ind., alongside his uncle. Right out of high school, he went to line school at Southeast Lineman Training Center in Georgia and was hired as an apprentice lineman in February 2021.

“I’ve been around linework my whole life,” Grant says. “I knew what I wanted to do since I was young.”

He fell in love with the excitement of the profession. As a kid, when a storm would hit, his mother would take him and his siblings out to the work site to deliver food and watch the buckets in the air where his father was working to restore power. Grant remembers a 2011 ice storm in Flora when he got to watch both his father and grandfather in action.

Now that he’s a lineman, Grant can now participate in line talk with his family. “They still school me every time we talk,” he says. “It is

neat to understand what they’re talking about. ... The stuff Dad used to tell me is now starting to click.”

After nearly 34 years as a co-op lineworker, Dave retired in 2018. “I miss it, but I don’t dwell on it,” he says. “There’s just a time when your body can’t take it anymore. ... God has blessed me in so many ways I can’t even count.”

“If I had to go back to doing linework, I’d do it tomorrow,” Luke adds. “But I like where I’m at and making a difference here too as CEO. Feeling accomplished is my goal in life.”

As for Grant, he believes he made the right choice to become a lineman and looks forward to a long career. “My family taught me a lot,” Grant says. “It is cool to hear stories about what they did when they were linemen. I can’t say enough good things about those guys.”

The Vonder Haar family

For Doug Vonder Haar and his son Jordan, interest in linework happened similarly ... just years apart.

Doug grew up on a dairy farm on Clinton County Electric Cooperative (CCEC) lines. When he was younger and living with his parents, he was working outdoors. “The co-op was rebuilding a line on my dad’s farm,” he recalls. “I thought it was interesting seeing how they did it. That piqued my interest in linework.”

Years later, Doug was part of the CCEC crew rebuilding line on his own farm, and Jordan watched. “He’s my biggest influence,” Jordan says about deciding to become a lineman. “When they rebuilt that line by our house, I was outside watching. I was simply amazed.”

Doug has now been with CCEC for 31 years, starting as an apprentice in 1990 and working his way to journeyman lineman. Jordan works as an apprentice lineman for the city of Breese and has been there two years.

The summer before his senior year of high school, Jordan got a taste of what it was like working with linemen when CCEC hired him for extra help. This gave him the opportunity to see the job up close and learn lineman slang.

“That was a big learning point,” Jordan says. “That’s how I knew for sure I wanted to be a lineman.”

After graduating high school in 2018, he went to the North American Lineman Training Center in Tennessee and found his current job 5 minutes away from his family’s farm.

“Almost every day when we get home from work, we talk about job stuff. It is kind of neat,” Doug says. “Every once in a while, we will meet each other in the hall going to outages in the middle of the night.”

Although Doug is no longer on the line crew, having recently been promoted to leadman, he still gives Jordan advice about the job.

“You learn from your peers,” Doug says. “Me being the old guy, I try to pass on any knowledge I can. You always want to try to teach the young guys anything you know to keep them safe. I want them to get home to their families.”

Doug says safety and training has changed a lot over the three decades he’s been a lineman. For one, line school didn’t exist when Doug started.

“The way we did things 30 years ago isn’t the same as we do today,”



Doug says. “When linework [first began], the death rate was bad. There were no rules and no safety. I’ve been trained a lot, and Jordan is going through training. With this job, safety is a big thing.”

Doug adds that he has learned just as much talking to other lineworkers as taking safety courses. “You learn stuff from just talking to each other. It is a big brotherhood.”

Now that Jordan has joined that brotherhood, Doug couldn’t be happier.

“I was very proud and excited that he was willing to take a chance,” Doug says. “Knowing that he had such an interest in it, I knew he’d do well.”

Jordan says he 100 percent made the right decision to get into linework. “I like everything about it, and it makes for a nice living.”

What he likes most is helping people. “You really feel appreciated when you’re driving down the road after you’ve just turned the last line on and people are outside saying, “Thank you,”” Jordan says.

“Storm recovery is rewarding, especially after a major outage,” Doug agrees. “When you work all night, and you get that last line on

... you know people are waiting for their power to come back on. It makes you feel good.”

For those interested in getting into linework, here’s Jordan’s advice. “Put all effort into it. Show that you care. Show that you can work hard. Put a good line out for yourself.”

Bernice, Doug’s wife and Jordan’s mother, adds how important it is to be safe.

“I worry a lot,” Bernice says. “First, I was a wife of a lineman, and now I’m a wife and mother of linemen. OK guys, I don’t need sleep at all. ... I have a husband and a son out there in storms and they’re surrounded by lightning. It puts a toll on you. When they both come home safe, I thank God.”

“In my 30 years, I’ve seen some stuff happen. Sometimes things don’t go to plan, and sometimes you’re more lucky than good,” Doug says. “With all the safety we’ve been taught over the years, it definitely has helped me think more about safety.”

“I can’t stress enough, be careful,” Bernice says.

“I get that every time I leave in the morning,” Jordan smiles.

“She’s been saying that for 31 years,” Doug adds.

The Schafer family

“I’m putting hands on a pole coming out of the ground that Dad put in the ground 40 years ago,” says Bob Schafer, line foreman at Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative (CMEC). “It is a neat thing. I don’t think a lot of people have the opportunity to do the same things literally in the same places that their dad did.”

His dad Thom started working for CMEC in 1978 and retired in 2011. Half of that time was in the line department and the other half in engineering. He started as a groundman, worked his way to apprentice and then to journeyman lineman.

After Thom left the U.S. Air Force and moved back to the area to be with his girlfriend, who is now his wife, he attended Lake Land Community College. He got into linework because a college friend suggested he apply to work with him at the local electric co-op.

“I wanted the title of a journeyman lineman. I didn’t care about

Doug Vonder Haar and his son Jordan are lifelong members of Clinton County Electric Cooperative. Doug has worked for the co-op as a lineman for more than 30 years, and Jordan worked there as extra help before going into linework as a career.



Thom Schafer with his son Bob. Thom is now retired, but he worked as a lineman at Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative. Bob followed in his father's footsteps and is a lineworker at the same electric co-op.

anything else. I wanted to be a journeyman lineman," Thom says. "Two reasons, I loved doing linework and the smug factor. There aren't many linemen, and not everybody wants to be out there doing the job."

Thom remembers times being away from home due to power restoration after severe weather. "When everything was done, I'd have two sets of brown eyes when I got home looking at me and running through the house screaming, 'Daddy's home!' It was pretty cool."

"I grew up in these buildings," Bob remembers. "My mom would bring my brother and me by in the evenings when Dad was getting off work. Now, the minute I walk into the warehouse, the smell of all that hydraulic oil and diesel exhaust jogs me back to when I was a little kid."

After a small stint in high school as summer help for the co-op, Bob earned a bachelor's degree from Ohio State University. He worked five years for an engineering firm in Columbus, Ohio, doing line design. "I didn't like being in an office," Bob says. "I spent a lot of time outside, but it wasn't enough."

He got a call from Thom telling him a warehouse job was open at

CMEC. He was hired in 2010 and moved back home. Once there, he moved on to the tree crew, became an apprentice lineman and was later promoted to journeyman lineman.

"Growing up around it, [linework] somehow never took when I was a kid," Bob says. "I understood what he did, but I didn't really know the nuts and bolts of it. It is complex and yet it isn't rocket science. There are things behind the scenes that people don't see involved in linework and it intrigued me. After working the engineering job and realizing I couldn't work in an office or wear a suit, I decided this was what I needed to do."

"I was disappointed he didn't start four years before that, to be perfectly honest with you," Thom jokes. "I'm glad he got his degree. I am proud of him. I knew he'd be able to do this because he's had experience in the engineering side. He's always been mechanically inclined. He's always been good with his hands. I was 100 percent behind it."

For a while, Bob lived at home until he found a place of his own, so the father and son carpooled to and from work. Bob used the commute to his advantage by bouncing

questions off his dad. "It was a great opportunity to pick his brain without having to be the guy new on the job always running back and forth asking questions."

"It was nice to be able to drive and talk," Thom says. "I've been really close with both my boys. In our house, we could talk about everything."

Both men agree that restoring power after an outage is a highlight to being a lineworker.

Thom says it was especially satisfying to restore power to the co-op's charter members – the ones who signed up to become a member of CMEC in 1939. "When the power is out, it is cold and you throw the switch ... the lights come on and you see them in the windows waving at you or coming out to thank you," Thom says. "We in the cooperative business, we are kind of different. That's what I like the most ... the true idea of the cooperative spirit."

"I have to agree with that," Bob says. "I've worked a lot of jobs, but I've never had the job satisfaction like turning someone's lights back on in the middle of the night."

The Schafers also agree that working for an electric co-op is much more than a job; it is a family. When a milestone, like the birth of a baby, is being celebrated, the whole co-op celebrates. When a fellow lineman is working in the air, you keep an eye out for your brother.

"I can honestly tell you when I retired after almost 33 years, I looked forward to coming to work every day," Thom says. "It is that good of a place."

"That family dynamic really separates co-ops in the industry," Bob says. "I still look forward to coming to work every day." 💡

Using the

imagination

COVID-19 creates innovation

By Nancy McDonald

ASK SOMEONE WHO WAS around when the lights first came on about the history of the electric co-op, or REA (Rural Electrification Administration), and they'll tell of the excitement they experienced when the poles and wires went up and that first bulb glowed. Next, they'll talk about their co-op's annual meeting.

Everyone knew when the annual meeting caravan came to town. It was a big production. Trucks from the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) brought everything needed to run the meeting – a big tent, chairs, microphones, staging, appliances and people to set it all up.

Early annual meetings were a social event with a buzz of activity for two days. Attendees learned how to use electricity safely and could purchase the latest appliances. There were cooking demonstrations, a co-op queen competition and entertainment. The business meeting was followed by prizes and more prizes. Prize drawings continue to be an exciting part of annual meetings, but as member needs have changed, so have annual meetings.

While the caravan setup may be long gone, co-ops have found new ways to bring their members together and conduct co-op business. Today's annual meetings offer health screenings, line safety demonstrations and inform members about innovative ways to reduce energy use and costs. They also provide information about co-op goods and services, and end with the business meeting. Essential to meetings past and present is the ability to visit with friends and chat with the co-op manager, employees and directors.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 coronavirus brought the state to a standstill, creating a stumbling block for co-op annual meetings.

Jo-Carroll Energy

While many co-ops canceled their annual meetings or postponed them until 2021, Jo-Carroll Energy, Elizabeth, was determined to hold theirs.

Originally scheduled for June 2020, the meeting had been postponed until Aug. 22 due to the pandemic.



During Jo-Carroll Energy's annual meeting, President/CEO Mike Casper helps a member take a virtual reality bucket truck ride.

Even then, COVID-19 transmissions continued to be high and state mandates limited indoor in-person meetings to 50 attendees.

"Our meeting was scheduled to be held inside, and literally a week before the meeting, I decided, nope, we're going to make it work outside," says Mike Casper, the co-op's president/CEO. "It was the state mandate, but also moving it outside was for the safety and health of our members and employees."

Embracing technology, Casper had already planned for a livestreamed indoor meeting but determining how people could attend the meeting and broadcasting it from outdoors posed a challenge. Casper quickly pulled his team together and consulted with AIEC Coordinator of Video Productions Paul Dow. Together, they and WCCI radio crafted a drive-up meeting that was livestreamed through a link on Jo-Carroll's website and simultaneously broadcast for people who couldn't attend or wanted to listen from their cars.

This format was a first for Jo-Carroll and Dow, but the meeting was seamless. No stats are available for how many listeners tuned in via radio, but Peggy

Francomb, the co-op's manager of communications and marketing, says a few members attended the drive-up meeting, the livestream drew more than 50 members the day of the meeting, and at least another 25 listened to the recorded version.

Following COVID-19 guidelines at the time, Jo-Carroll was able to host this year's meeting indoors, and again livestreamed and broadcasted it. It was much like past meetings with booths, but masks were suggested, and contact was minimized. Some new technology was added – a virtual reality bucket truck ride. As in other virtual reality systems, goggles drive the technology. Francomb explains that it's a fun way to demonstrate technology, and it could spawn some future lineworker "wannabes."

Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, Eastern Illini Electric's annual meeting had been held at a local high school in Paxton. Their meeting was a big production with a carnival-like atmosphere including kids' activities, seminars and a buffet meal followed by the business meeting. With one of the largest service areas in the state, some members attending the meeting in Paxton had to drive more than an hour. Being unable to hold the annual meeting in 2020 gave co-op leadership time to review how a meeting could best serve members.

"As we looked at 2021, things were better pandemic-wise," says Mike Wilson, the co-op's vice president of member and community relations. "We wanted to come up with a way to



During an Eastern Illini Electric drive-thru annual meeting event, co-op employee Shannon Deck shares a laugh with a member.

engage members, keep everybody safe, and still get out there to see some of our folks and of course have our annual meeting to do the business of the co-op."

The co-op decided to host three member events on consecutive nights. The first two events were member appreciation events, one in Paxton and the other in Sidney. Wilson explains, "We came up with a plan where there were two drive-thru events. It was just pick up a meal, vote [for board directors

and bylaw changes] and move on. We didn't have a formal presentation, sit-down meal or an actual meeting. We did have folks on hand to talk to members if they had questions." Both meetings were successful with approximately 100 people at each.

The third event followed the same drive-thru format as the first two but as people exited, they were offered the option to attend the in-person business meeting at the 4-H Building on the Iroquois County Fairgrounds. This location was chosen because it is the center of Eastern Illini's service territory.

While attendee numbers for the three events were slightly lower than for the single event in past years, Wilson felt the new meeting format was a success. "I'm a big fan of going out where members are instead of making them come to you," says Wilson. "If you have any space at all, be willing to go out where they are and try different locations." Even if Eastern Illini can host an in-person meeting in the future, this new format will allow members better access.



Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative

COVID-19 posed a couple of issues for Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative (RECC). First, the 2020 meeting had to be canceled, but with four members vying for a seat on the board, an election still needed to be held. The co-op conducted its first mail-in election. Jeff Lancaster, the co-op's manager of member services, says the response was surprising.

"The election went really well. A total of 33 to 34 percent of eligible voters returned ballots," he explains. "SBS, the company that conducted the election for the co-op, says it was the highest percentage response of total membership they had ever seen. We usually have around 200 ballots returned. We had around 1,500."

The second issue involved how to hold the 2021 annual meeting. The co-op followed through with a suggestion that had been made by Lancaster several years before – to host the meeting at a drive-in movie theater. RECC tends to have an older audience for its meetings, and Lancaster envisioned an event that would draw a broader demographic group to the meeting and people with young children could stay for the movie afterward. The Route 66 Drive In Theater was able to accommodate large, socially-distanced crowds and had nice restrooms and concession stands.

Employees registered members as they arrived and handed them goodie bags and meals as they drove into the parking lot. "Attendees enjoyed it," says Lancaster. "It was something different with a relaxed environment. Some people were conversing at their own tables, and one group even brought their own table and chairs and made a party out of it." A scavenger hunt created by RECC employees enabled people to move around and was another success.

Since the meeting was held on the longest day of the

year, meeting proceedings couldn't be projected on the movie screen, but an FM transmitter enabled members to hear the meeting proceedings in their cars or from home if they couldn't attend the meeting in person. When motions were necessary during the business meeting, people honked their horns to indicate a yes vote.

Looking ahead

Lessons learned from new meeting formats are now helping to frame future meetings. Even if future in-person meetings are held, Casper says he'll continue to livestream and broadcast the meetings on radio. It enables the co-op to reach a broader demographic of members who don't attend in-person meetings.

Wilson suggests if you have a large territory, consider going out to the members instead of making them come to you. He says, "The board really liked three events and getting out to where the members are. Whether it's for sit-down or drive-thru events, we're planning this format for next year."

Whether next year's meeting will be virtual or in-person, RECC's board is considering a hybrid-type director election. While this year's meeting was a success, Lancaster hopes future meetings can return to the regular format at a school.

For the meetings these Illinois co-ops and others held, decisions had to be made quickly, requiring cooperative effort. Co-ops have shown this type of adaptability through the years

and have proven once again that they're prepared to keep their annual meetings relevant, with the safety and best interest of their members at the forefront. Whether it's hosting the meeting with a tent caravan or in a livestreamed format, there will always be something there for you. 💡



RECC President/CEO David Stuva addresses this year's annual meeting attendees at a drive-in theater.





Owner and chef Benjamin Grice

The Humble Hog

By Valerie Cheatham



Brisket, Mac & Cheese



Fried pickles



The Pig Mac

HOW DOES A FINE DINING chef with culinary training and experience on the east coast and in Europe end up opening a barbecue restaurant in Paxton, population 4,220? It all circles back to his roots.

Benjamin Grice grew up in Paxton, went to North Central College in Naperville and on to Arizona for chef's training. While in Boston, he and his wife were expecting their first child and decided to move closer to his parents in Paxton.

Ben had always tinkered with barbecue, had a small smoker and while in Boston would cook for the restaurant's crew. He began creating different barbecue sauces and says that's how his barbecue philosophy started.

After returning to Paxton, he had the opportunity to compete on Chris Engelbrecht's barbecue team. Engelbrecht builds smokers at his Paxton-based company and Ben says competing with Engelbrecht opened his eyes to the Kansas City Barbecue Society circuit. He discovered a love for the challenge of live fire cooking.

"There are so many factors," he says. "It's the size and age of the log, humidity, wind speed and other factors that contribute to the final product. At the end of the day, you need your product to be the same every time. The people that are good at it can figure out how to manage all those variables and I never get bored, whether at work or home." He was hooked.

Ben never expected to get into casual dining. "With my background, I figured I would continue with a fine dining approach, but when

we moved to central Illinois, there really wasn't a place where I wanted to pursue that," he says.

He realized he wanted to do something to help downtown Paxton and create local jobs. He tested ideas and created the Paxton Swine and Dine Festival, which grew rapidly. He had ideas about how he wanted to do barbecue, make sauces and how fresh he wanted his ingredients. It was the impetus for him to purchase an existing restaurant.

It was a good-sized gamble for a town the size of Paxton. "I had a lot of friends and family ask why I didn't open in Champaign since I could have made a lot more money," Ben explains. "But that wasn't the point of the project. I wanted to bring in local jobs and grow a business from the small town I grew up in. I'm very proud of that."

Humble Hog sources everything it can locally. The tables are made from the original wood from the Paxton bowling alley and the chairs are mismatched because they were purchased from local antique shops. "When you talk about supporting local, I took it to every level I could," Ben says. "Everything on the walls, the old church pews for seating, everything was purchased here. I think a lot of local business owners support each other. If small towns aren't supporting themselves, that's a tough road. For me, it was never about the size of the crowd. I wanted to do something in my hometown before I did it anywhere else. This will always be my baby – the original."



Humble Hog sauce, rub and spicy pickles



The Pig Pile

Humble Hog serves a variety of items, all homemade. Most popular are the pulled pork and brisket. Ben says he always judges other barbecue places based on how well they do pulled pork, so he wanted to make sure he had it right. The pulled pork can be found on the Pig Pile, a plate covered with shoestring fries sprinkled with Humble Hog rub, homemade cheese sauce, pulled pork, barbecue sauce and topped with sliced jalapeños. It's one of their best sellers.

The Pig Mac is huge in size and popularity. Hungry one day, Ben made it as a joke and loved it. It's a pulled pork sandwich with mac and cheese, slices of bacon and jalapeños. "It's a whole lot of food," laughs Ben. "If you use the paper wrapper, you have a chance of picking it up and eating it. It's almost a bragging rights sandwich – it's just so big."

Besides pork and brisket, you can order turkey, rib tips and smoked sausage. Specials change daily. One of the most popular is smoked wings. Ben says that one time between online orders and people waiting in line, they sold 1,000 wings in 8 minutes! However, due to the case cost of wings quadrupling due to COVID-19, they are currently paused.

Sides include shoestring fries or sweet potato fries, fried okra, fried pickles, coleslaw, pit beans, mac and cheese, green beans and corn muffins. All are made in house and buns are sourced from a local bakery. Humble Hog also offers a variety of Illinois beer on tap.

All service ware is compostable including cups, plates and eating utensils. Ben explains that as they planned for more takeout during pandemic shutdowns, they had to make a tough decision. Earth-friendly items are more expensive, but they didn't want to buy the cheaper Styrofoam containers. All plates and bowls are made from wheat and the cups from corn. According to Ben, the cups will "turn to dirt" in 90 days.

Just released, Humble Hog sauces, rub and spicy pickles can be purchased online. Customers would ask to buy cups of the sauce or rub and now they can. They will also be available in local grocery stores.

The business keeps evolving and Ben recently purchased a building in Knoxville, Tenn., which will house a much larger Humble Hog. He hopes that location will be one of many more in the future.

"When we opened, I wanted it to be like grandma's house where everyone is welcome," he says. "I didn't want a hostess or reservations. We are sitting on a church pew with a bowling alley table, that's about as comfortable as it gets. The vibe is laid back with old school blues music and dim lighting. It's very relaxed. I always tell people to make themselves at home."💡



LET'S EAT!

The Humble Hog

125 S. Market St., Paxton

217-579-1082

Humblehogbbq.com or
The Humble Hog on Facebook

HOURS:

Tuesday-Saturday
11:30 a.m.-8:30 p.m.



Don't cry

ONIONS ARE A COMMON ingredient used to add flavor to a variety of recipes. They vary in size from the small shallot to the large Vidalia and colors range from white to yellow and red. They range from sweet and mild to more pungent varieties. October's recipes celebrate the onion by making it a focal part of each one. 💡

STUFFED VIDALIA ONIONS



WE NEED RECIPES!

Upcoming monthly topics

Quick breads and muffins

Irish-inspired meals

Pecans

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 Illinois Country Living staff. 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.



FRENCH ONION ONE-POT PASTA

French Onion One-Pot Pasta

Submitted by: Francine Anderson, Corn Belt Energy

Servings: 4

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 3 medium sweet onions, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced crosswise | 1 teaspoon salt | 2 cups water |
| 3 tablespoons olive oil | 1/2 teaspoon black pepper | 2 cups beef broth |
| 1 tablespoon unsalted butter | 1/2 cup sherry or dry white wine | 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce |
| 1 teaspoon minced garlic | 1 tablespoon fresh thyme* | 12 ounces uncooked linguine |
| | 1 tablespoon fresh chopped parsley* | Parmesan cheese |

Place a large skillet with flat sides over medium-high heat and add olive oil and butter. Stir in onions and cook for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in garlic, salt and pepper, cook an additional 5 minutes or until onions have browned and are jam-like in texture. Stir in sherry or white wine and scrape the bottom of the skillet to remove any brown bits on the bottom. Stir in water, beef broth, thyme, parsley and Worcestershire sauce. Add broken linguine and stir to incorporate pasta into the liquid. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until pasta is cooked and most of the liquid is absorbed. Remove from heat and cover for 3 minutes. Toss in grated Parmesan to taste and garnish with additional sprigs of thyme and chopped parsley, if desired. *You can also use 1 teaspoon dried thyme and parsley if fresh herbs aren't available. Nutrition information: 428 calories; 16.2g fat; 1051mg sodium; 56.4g carbohydrates; 13.1g protein.

Stuffed Vidalia Onions

Submitted by: Norma Hofmeister, Western Illinois Electrical Coop.

Servings: 8

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4 medium Vidalia onions, peeled | 1 cup diced zucchini | 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano |
| 2 tablespoons oil free Italian dressing | 2 ounces Mozzarella cheese, shredded | Fine breadcrumbs |
| 1 red bell pepper, diced | 2 tablespoons parsley, minced | Paprika |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Cut a slice off top and bottom of each onion to make a flat surface, reserving slices. Chop slices into small pieces and set aside. Heat pot of water to boiling. Cook onions in boiling water 15-20 minutes - remove center of onions and set onion shell aside to cool. Heat together Italian dressing, red pepper, zucchini and chopped onion slices. Remove from heat and add Mozzarella, parsley, oregano and enough breadcrumbs to help thicken mixture. Fill onion shells with vegetable mixture. Bake covered for 20 minutes, then uncover and bake for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with paprika before serving. Nutrition information: 52 calories; 1.4g fat; 101mg sodium; 7.5g carbohydrates; 3g protein.

Zweibelkuchen (Onion Pie)

Submitted by: Shae Thoele, Norris Electric Cooperative

Servings: 6-8

- 1 prepared 9-inch pie crust
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2-1/4 pounds yellow onions, sliced
- 5 slices bacon, chopped
- 1-1/2 cups sour cream
- 4 eggs
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon caraway seeds

Preheat oven to 400 F. In a large skillet, saute bacon until done. Add butter and onions and cook over low/medium heat until caramelized, about 30-40 minutes. Remove skillet from heat and let onion and bacon mixture cool. In a large bowl, combine sour cream, eggs, flour, salt and caraway seeds. Add the onion mixture to the filling mixture and stir until combined. Pour into prepared pie crust in pie pan or springform pan. Bake for 45-50 minutes until top is brown and filling is firm. Nutrition information: 395 calories; 26.1g fat; 1189mg sodium; 28.6g carbohydrates; 12g protein.

Onion Shortbread

Submitted by: Laura Kerr, Norris Electric Cooperative

Servings: 15

- 1 regular cornbread recipe OR 2 Jiffy cornbread mixes, prepared as directed
- 1 15-ounce can creamed corn
- 1 stick butter
- 2 large sweet onions, thinly sliced
- 16 ounces sour cream
- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 350 F. Mix the creamed corn into the prepared cornbread batter. Spread in a buttered 9x13-inch baking dish. Saute onions in butter until tender. Mix in sour cream and 1-1/2 cups cheddar cheese. Pour onion mixture over cornbread mixture and top with remaining cheese. Bake for 35-40 minutes until golden and bubbly. Nutrition information: 381 calories; 22.1g fat; 585mg sodium; 36.2g carbohydrates; 7.6g protein.

Heavenly Onions

Submitted by: Jalayne Luckett, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 15-18

- 3 sweet onions, sliced
- 1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1/2 pound sliced Swiss cheese
- 3/4 loaf French bread (9 inches, sliced in half lengthwise and buttered)
- 2 small cans cream of chicken soup
- 3/4 cup milk
- 4 tablespoons soy sauce
- Butter

Preheat oven to 350 F. Saute onions and mushrooms in 2 or 3 tablespoons of butter until onions are soft and translucent. Place in a greased 9x13-inch pan. Top with cheese slices. Tear bread into bite-sized pieces and place on top of cheese. Combine soup, milk and soy sauce and pour over bread. You may have to press the bread down to make sure it is all covered with some of the soup mixture. Bake for 35 minutes uncovered until bubbly. Serve. Nutrition information: 264 calories; 8.5g fat; 874mg sodium; 37.1g carbohydrates; 12.8g protein.



ZWIEBELKUCHEN (ONION PIE)



ONION SHORTBREAD



The plover drover and the good Samaritan

TRAVELING A LONELY COUNTRY road, I noticed what looked to be small pieces of concrete skittering around in the road. Hoping I wasn't suffering from heat stroke, I stopped to check it out.

Much to my amusement and delight, there were four little plovers, or baby killdeers, very confused and hopping about in the middle of the hot concrete slab. Nature's camouflage was at its best, as the baby birds were difficult to see from just a few feet away. Nearby in the ditch, Momma plover was doing her best broken wing imitation in hopes of diverting my attention.

Walking up to the milling congregation of miniature plovers, looking like marshmallows on toothpick legs, I began to try to drive them to the safety of an old lane next to the county road.

Driving baby plovers sounds like an easy task, but one renegade fledgling was determined to thwart my attempts and repeatedly darted to the side away from his siblings.

Using a flowing stance of a combination traffic cop, ballerina dancer and sumo wrestler, I hopped back and forth with my legs spread wide, in crude semi-circles, waving my arms from side-to-side while occasionally muttering directions to the baby birds. For effect, I dropped my arms low to the ground in a

swooping motion and found with each swoop, the little birds would move 8 or 10 inches closer to safety.

After several minutes of performing my plover drover routine, I was able to get the tiny birds out of the road and into the safe haven of the old lane. Thrilled at my successful effort, I gave myself half of a "high five" and dropped low to the ground with the universal umpire sign indicating "SAFE!"

Turning around, I was surprised to see another car, driven by an elderly gentleman wearing rather thick glasses, parked behind my van. He was watching me very intently and had a somewhat horrified look on his face.

Embarrassed at my antics, I said, "Just getting them off the road."

When the old gentleman replied, "Getting what off the road?" I realized he had not seen the baby birds.

He carefully cracked his car door, stuck his head out and said, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine. just getting the plovers off the road."

"Gettin' the clovers off the road?"

At this point, I realized the elderly good Samaritan was somewhat hard-of-hearing as well as visually impaired. Speaking several volumes higher, I said, "No. I was getting the baby plovers off the

road. Their mother is here in the ditch. "

"Whose mother's in the ditch?"
 "The baby plovers' mother. I was trying to get the little plovers out of the road. You know, little birds... little birds... little birds... killdeer!"
 "Little birds kill deer?"

By then, I was having a hard time standing as laughter shook my body in what must have appeared to be some sort of a seizure.

Finally, I blurted out, "I'm okay. Thanks for stopping. I'm going to my van now."

At this, the old gentleman dropped his car in gear and left at what could best be described as a very high rate of speed.

Seeing the baby plovers made it a special day. As for my encounter with the good Samaritan, I'll remember it for the rest of my life. Probably the old gent will too.

I wonder what the old guy told his wife. Something like, "I rounded the corner and there he was! Some kind of drug-crazed dancer hopping all over the asphalt! It was plumb scary! Here it's almost 100 degrees out and he's a hollering about somebody's mother in the ditch and getting the clovers off the road! When he said, 'Little birds kill deer' and started for his van, I got the heck out of there!"



Jack Spaulding is an outdoors writer. Readers can contact the author by writing to this publication or email jackspaulding@hughes.net. "The Best of Spaulding Outdoors," a compilation of 74 of Spaulding's best articles written over the past 30 years is available on Amazon.com.



Top performing electric vehicles

AS ELECTRIC VEHICLES GAIN popularity nationwide, many car manufacturers are creating new electric models to appeal to consumers. Electric vehicles may have higher sticker prices than traditional gas-powered vehicles, however, their lifetime costs can end up being less due to lower maintenance and fuel costs.

Since electric vehicle technology is constantly improving and prices keep decreasing, consumers are starting to consider electric vehicles for their next purchase. There's an electric model out there for everyone, depending on your priorities and preferences.

For many, affordability is most important when purchasing a new vehicle. There are several budget-friendly options for those that want

an electric vehicle but don't want to break the bank. One of the most popular and relatively most affordable electric options is the Nissan Leaf. The 2020 Nissan Leaf has a Manufactured Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) of \$31,600, according to the U.S. News & World Report, and an older Nissan Leaf can be purchased for an even cheaper price. As with conventional vehicles, used (or older) electric models will typically cost less than the newest ones.

Although not available in Illinois, the Hyundai Ioniq Electric has one of the highest MPGe ratings compared to other electric vehicles, at 133 MPGe, meaning it uses electric power very efficiently, thus needing fewer charging sessions. Additional benefits of the

Hyundai Ioniq Electric include high safety scores and a long warranty.

For those interested in a luxury vehicle while still keeping it relatively budget-friendly, the 2020 Tesla Model 3 could be an option to consider. With a starting MSRP of \$35,400, the car provides a sophisticated interior while delivering great efficiency and 220 miles of range.

Some consumers may instead prioritize a greater mileage range on their electric vehicle to eliminate range anxiety. Several new electric vehicle models have an especially large range. The 2020 Tesla Model S Long Range Plus has the largest range currently available on the market at 402 miles of maximum range. Using a Tesla Supercharger for only 15 minutes can get you

The Hyundai Ioniq Electric has one of the highest MPGe ratings compared to other electric vehicles, at 133 MPGe, meaning it uses electric power very efficiently. Photo Credit: Hyundai



Maria Kanevsky is a program manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.



One of the most popular and relatively most affordable electric vehicle options is the Nissan Leaf. The 2020 Nissan Leaf has a Manufactured Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) of \$31,600. Photo Credit: Nissan

Electric vehicles, like the 2020 Nissan Leaf shown here, have higher sticker prices than traditional gas-powered vehicles, but their lifetime costs can be less due to their lower maintenance and fuel costs. Photo Credit: Nissan



about 130 miles of range on the 2020 Tesla Model S, but this car comes with the hefty MSRP price tag of about \$80,000. Another option that's a little more affordable but still provides a modestly long driving range is the 2021 Chevrolet Bolt, with a maximum range of 259 miles and an MSRP of roughly \$36,600. The Chevrolet Bolt is a strong competitor among many electric vehicles, making it a solid choice as an everyday car.

Many of the electric vehicles discussed in this article can be found in U.S. News & World Report

with additional details and buyer reviews. Before purchasing any new vehicle, be sure to appropriately research which model will work best for you and your family.

Check the current market price for the vehicle you're interested in to make sure it's within your budget. If you're buying through a dealer, ask any important questions before finalizing the purchase. Having a plan for charging your new vehicle will also be critical, either at home or at public charging stations. Once you purchase an electric vehicle, let your local

electric cooperative know. Some electric co-ops offer one-time rebates or special rate plans for electric vehicle owners that can help you save additional money over time when charging your new car.

Electric co-ops generally welcome the idea of more members owning electric vehicles, and proper planning will be necessary to make sure you and your co-op are prepared to meet your charging needs. 💡



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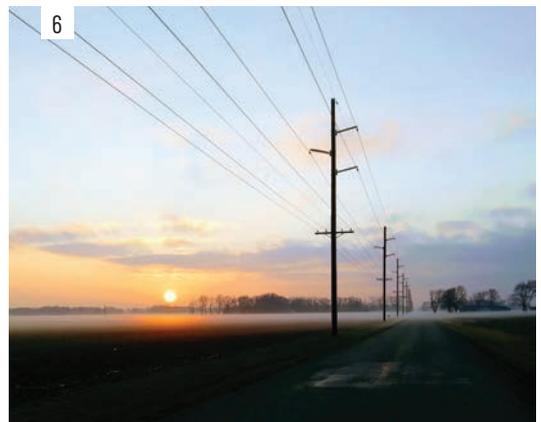
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UPCOMING THEMES

- December - Churches
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- February - Bridges
- March - Weather

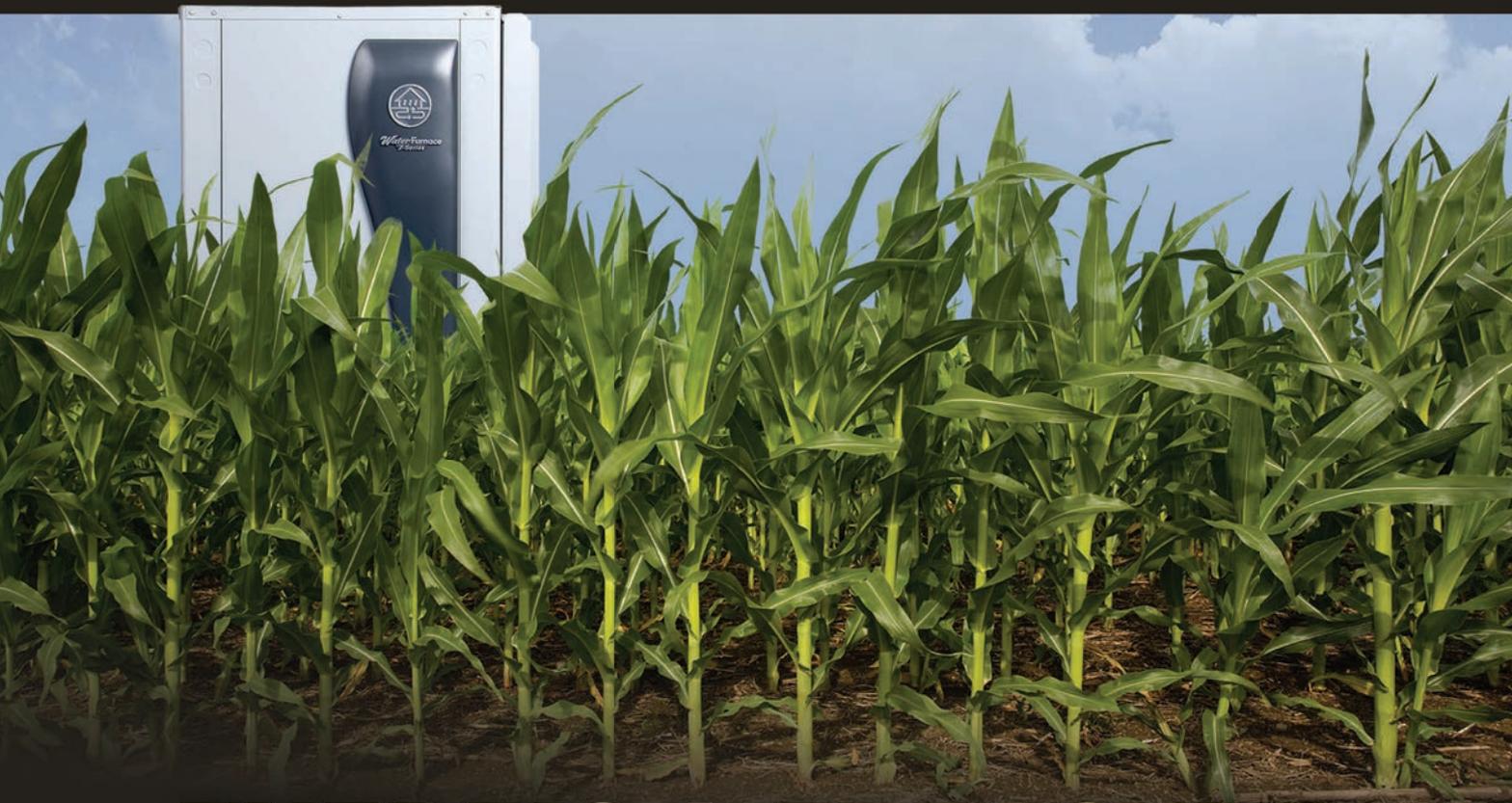


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