

DECEMBER 2021

Illinois Country Living

BLOOM
where you're planted

CANDY CONTEST WINNERS
How sweet it is!

GARDEN WISE
Boughs of holly

PRAIRIE TABLE
Book lovers' delight

+

CO-OP
NEWS



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Electric Cooperatives

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Eye Doctor Helps Illinois Legally Blind To See

High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again



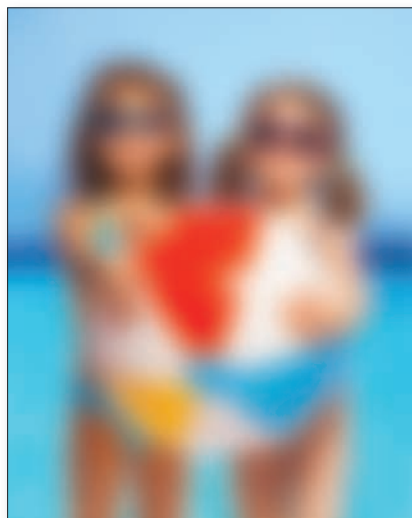
For many patients with macular degeneration and other vision-related conditions, the loss of central visual detail also signals the end to one of the last bastions of independence: driving. A Mascoutah optometrist, Dr. Marianne McDaniel, is using miniaturized telescopes that are mounted in glasses to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

1-618-566-8899

Office located in Mascoutah, Illinois

Marianne McDaniel, O.D.

www.FoxValleyLowVision.com

1-800-341-8498

Located in Oswego, IL

Ronald Weingart, O.D.





Illinois Country Living

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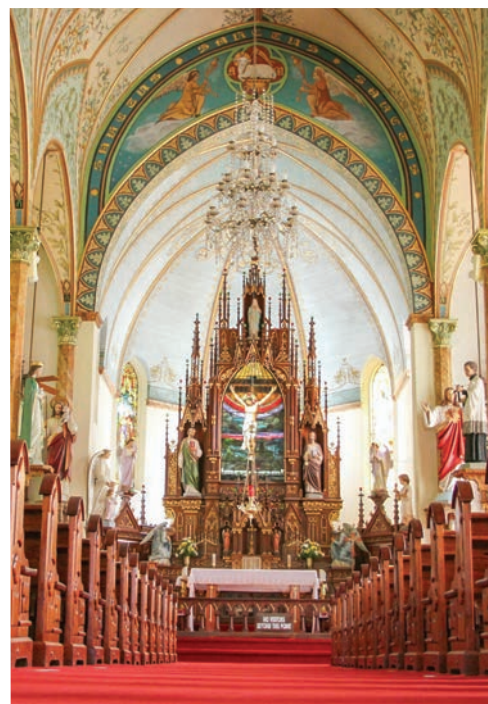
Sharing the bounty

Deer hunters help tackle food insecurity.

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A place of worship

Readers photographed the unique architecture of churches.





Use LED holiday lights to save energy.

According to the Alliance to Save Energy, LED holiday lights use up to 90 percent less energy and can last up to 40 holiday seasons. The cost to operate LED lights makes traditional bulbs look like energy hogs. At 12 hours a day for 40 days, a string of incandescent lights adds \$10 to your energy bill, while a string of LED lights adds just over \$0.25.

For more energy efficiency ideas, visit touchstoneenergy.com/energysolutions or contact your local Touchstone Energy co-op.



Touchstone Energy[®]
Cooperatives

Ring in the New Year with

Illinois Country Living's 2022 calendar!

Featuring photos by readers submitted to our Snapshots page!



\$8

Shipping included

Order online at icl.coop/calendar

Available while supplies last.

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 192,000, the magazine informs cooperative consumer-members about issues affecting their electric cooperative and the quality of life in rural Illinois.

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SALES REPRESENTATIVE
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Cheryl@amp.coop

CREATIVE SERVICES MANAGER
Chris Reynolds

CREATIVE SERVICES ASSISTANT MANAGER
Lisa Cherry

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
Jen Danzinger
Kathy Feraris

CONTRIBUTORS
Nancy McDonald
Kelly Allsup
Jack Spaulding
Brittney Haag

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The gift of time

WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON upon us and the New Year just around the corner, I can't help but reflect on the gratitude I feel for our communities. While we've seen our share of challenges these past two years, I am heartened by the ways we have all pulled together to make them stronger.

Many Illinois electric cooperatives conduct winter coat and mitten drives, collect food for area pantries or serve as a drop-off point for holiday toy drives. While many of these efforts are focused around the holidays, cooperative concern for community is a year-round endeavor.

Volunteerism and giving back are part of the DNA of cooperatives. Co-op employees and line workers are volunteer firefighters and first responders in our communities, putting their lives at risk to help others. Others coach

youth sports, assist in school productions, help at neighborhood food banks or serve on local boards.

I look at volunteerism as the gift that keeps on giving. While it's difficult to quantify the impact that volunteers have, I do know they make a tremendous difference in our communities and make our corner of the world a better

place. Many organizations depend on volunteers to fulfill their mission. Volunteers fill in gaps and spread joy and compassion through their efforts. Even assisting with the smallest tasks can make a big impact in the lives of people, animals or an organization in need. Often a big commitment or special skills are not needed, just someone who cares.

I hope you'll consider volunteering, not just during the holiday season but year-round. Give an organization or cause that you care about the gift of your compassion, time and talent. In addition to the organization and the community benefiting from your efforts, you will receive a gift as well. Not only will you enjoy the satisfaction of knowing you are helping a good cause, you will likely make new friends, expand your social network, strengthen existing skills or learn a new one.

Volunteering may provide additional dimension and purpose to your life. In the process, you will be a role model for your family because your commitment will offer a powerful lesson to your children. It will show them first-hand how one person can make a big difference and strengthen the community in which they live.

At the end of the day, the gift of volunteerism is a gift that will continue giving all year long. So, this holiday season, consider starting a new tradition—give the gift of time. 💡



Anne Prince writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

DECEMBER CHECKLIST

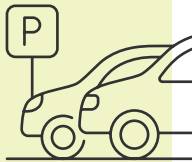
Holiday traveling.



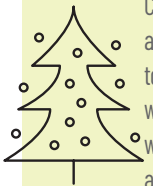
Prepare your car for winter and keep an emergency preparedness kit with you.

Shopping at night?

Park in a well-lit area and never next to vans, trucks with camper shells or cars with tinted windows.



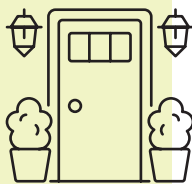
Keep your tree fresh.



Cut off 2 inches of a live tree's trunk to expose the wood for better water absorption and keep away from heat sources.

Tip of the month.

Uninsulated and improperly installed exterior doors can waste energy. Consider replacing it with a newer, energy efficient model. Energy.gov



West inducted into Hall of Fame

Chuck West was recently inducted into the Lineman's Hall of Fame at a ceremony following the International Lineman's Rodeo held in Overland Park, Kan.

West joined the line crew of Corn Belt Energy Corporation, Bloomington, in 1961. He worked as a journeyman lineman before being promoted to foreman. West retired in 2003 after 42 years of electric co-op line work.

He also served as an instructor for the AIEC lineman training school and upon his 2003 retirement, became lead instructor for the program.

In his letter of nomination for West, John Freitag, retired AIEC vice president of operations, wrote, "Chuck is a lineman's lineman ... he has personally been responsible for helping hundreds of electric cooperative linemen get started in the profession. He is known as someone who would take care of his crews and is an outstanding leader."

Ryan Campbell, Corn Belt Energy manager of construction and maintenance, attended West's induction. Campbell commented that one of the biggest things he remembers from working on West's crew was his attitude. "He always seemed to be



Chuck West, center, was joined by Ryan Campbell (l), and Jim Miles, AIEC vice president of training, safety and loss control, for his hall of fame induction.

positive about whatever project we were going to undertake that day. He also never thought twice about walking you through a task when you weren't sure what to do. It was safety first with Chuck. And, whenever he needed to put someone in their place, he did it and moved on. He never held a grudge, it was just time to get down to business."

During the awards ceremony, the classes of 2019 and 2020 were inducted into the Hall of Fame. 💡

One co-op helping another

A ribbon cutting ceremony was recently held for the official opening of the new Wabash Telephone Cooperative, Inc. headquarters in Louisville. The project was possible thanks to USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant funds secured by Clay Electric Co-operative, Inc., Flora. The zero-percent loan was relent to Wabash Telephone.

Both Clay Electric and Wabash Telephone are located in an opportunity zone and serve rural poverty target strategy areas. National demand for broadband has created a need for more high-speed internet in rural areas.

Since 2015, Wabash has increased its customer base by 165 percent through natural growth and acquisition, deploying state-of-the-art



fiber optic facilities to homes and businesses across its service area. Due to its new business opportunities, Wabash's local consolidated employee base has increased from 52 employees to 127. 💡

Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

Complete the grid so every row, column and 3x3 cube contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusive with no repetition. Solution on page 37.

Level: Medium

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

A first for Adams Electric

History was made on Sept. 30 at the board reorganization meeting of Adams Electric Cooperative, Camp Point. For the first time, a woman was elected as board president, making three women elected to board officer positions.



Becky Barlow,
Board President

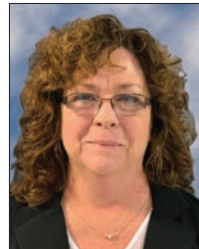
Leadership certificates and achieved the NRECA's highest achievement, Director Gold status.

Becky Barlow, Clayton, was named board president. Barlow has been on the board of directors since 2009 and has earned the Credentialed Cooperative

Director and Board



Laura Meyer,
Vice President



Kris Farwell,
Secretary

Adams Electric is one of the few electric cooperatives in the U.S. to have three women simultaneously serving in board officer positions. Laura Meyer, Liberty, was elected vice president and Kris Farwell, Plymouth, as secretary. Both Meyer and Farwell have attained the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certificates. Meyer also holds Director Gold status.

Investigating crop, solar panel combo

The U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded a \$10 million grant to a University of Illinois (UI) led team of researchers to study whether crops and solar panels can co-exist and help farmers' yields, energy production and profit.

Agrivoltaics is a practice using the same land for solar panels and agriculture. The

UI led project received the monies from the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture systems program. Researchers will also create the agrivoltaic arrays at Colorado State University and the University of Arizona.

UI lead investigator is Madhu Khanna, from the UI Institute for Sustainability, Energy and Environment. Khanna says with the "increasing profitability of solar panels and the energy they produce, crops are in direct competition for land space with unimpeded sunlight."

The four-year project will investigate how different crops succeed with different panel patterns. Khanna says the group will analyze how the various crops yields change based on the different environments.

The first planting will occur in spring 2022 as crops are planted between the rows of panels at the UI's Solar Farm 2.0.

Source: USDA



2022 Social Security COLA announced

The Social Security Administration has announced that the annual Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries will increase by 5.9 percent for 2022. The increase is based on the Consumer Price Index from the third quarter of 2020 through the third quarter of 2021.

Source: Social Security Administration

Gifting an electronic?
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Electricity.org

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— J. Fitzgerald, VA

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prevent back and muscle pain. The overstuffed, oversized biscuit style back and unique seat design will cradle you in comfort. Generously filled, wide armrests provide enhanced arm support when sitting or reclining. **It even has a battery backup in case of a power outage.**

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MicroLux™ Microfiber
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Chestnut



New

Mahogany
(Burgundy)



Tan



Chocolate



Blue



Burgundy



Cashmere



Chocolate



Indigo



Because each Perfect Sleep Chair is a made-to-order bedding product it cannot be returned, but if it arrives damaged or defective, at our option we will repair it or replace it. © 2021 Journey Health and Lifestyle!



Mindful eating during the holidays

With the holidays come parties and family and a seemingly never-ending supply of food including snacks, cookies, candy, cakes, etc. Before you overindulge and deal with facing the bathroom scale, take a few moments and consider how you can enjoy yourself and not regret it later.

- Stay in tune with your body. Are you hungry?
- Think in terms of moderation. Choose your favorite dessert instead of sampling several.
- Slow down and savor what you're eating. You'll be less likely to overeat.
- Stop when you are full.
- It's ok to say no to food pushers.

Feeling the stress of the holidays? Instead of grabbing that pint of ice cream, take a walk or call a friend. 💡



Fourteen scholarships available

Illinois electric cooperatives will award 14 scholarships in 2022 to financially assist deserving students in the electric cooperative family. The 14 scholarships, \$2,000 each, will be awarded through the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarship Program.

Eight scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors who are the sons or daughters of an Illinois electric co-op member. A ninth scholarship, the Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship, will be awarded to a student who is the son or daughter of an Illinois electric cooperative employee or director. Four additional scholarships are reserved for students enrolling full time at a two-year Illinois community college who are the sons or daughters of Illinois electric cooperative members, employees or directors.

The 14th scholarship, the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship, will help pay for costs to attend lineworker school conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College, Springfield. Sons and daughters of co-op members, relatives of co-op employees or directors, and individuals who have served or are serving in the armed forces or National Guard are eligible for this scholarship.

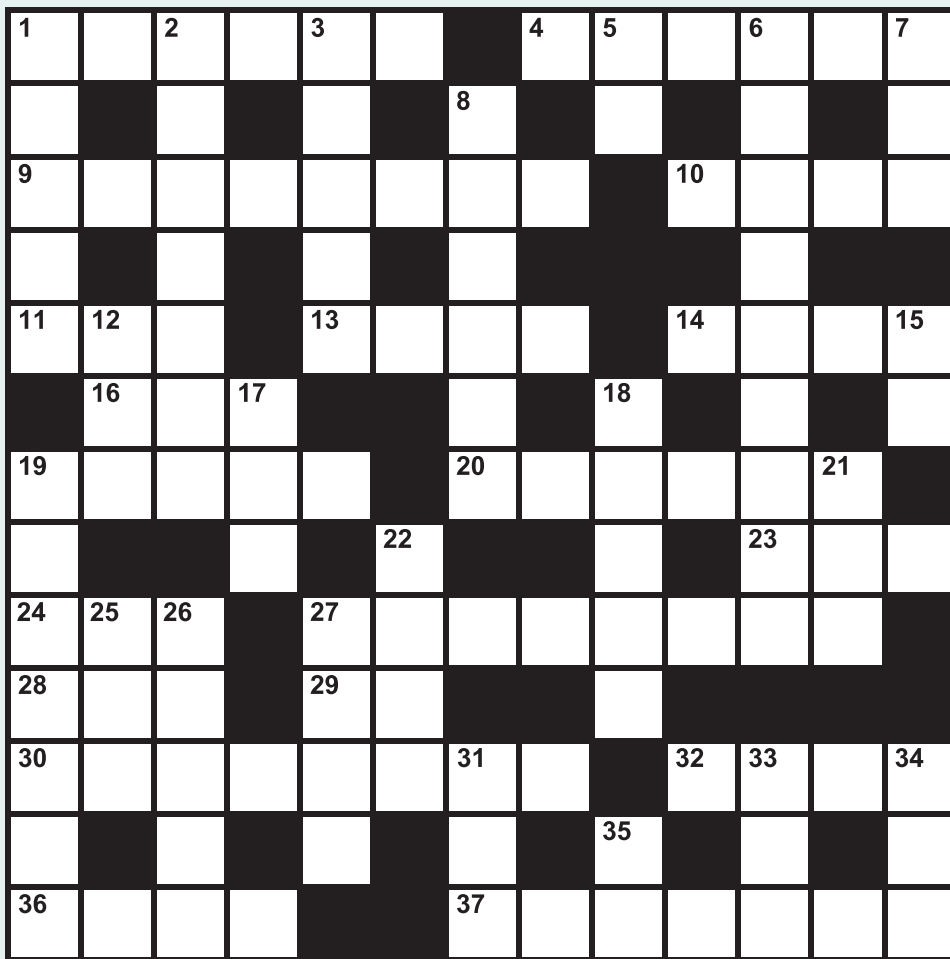
The application deadline is Dec. 31, 2021. The lineworker scholarship deadline is April 30, 2022. For more information regarding the scholarships, contact your electric cooperative or visit aiec.coop/iec-scholarship. 💡



Merry Christmas!

Wishing you
peace and joy
this holiday season.





Across

- 1 Reindeer transport
- 4 Christmas songs
- 9 The Saint who gave his name to Santa Claus
- 10 Stone used for chess sets
- 11 Neighbor of Fla.
- 13 "White Christmas" coat
- 14 Yuletide, for short
- 16 Final
- 19 Potato, in slang
- 20 "____ Night" traditional Christmas carol
- 23 Male turkey
- 24 Orange tuber
- 27 Popular Christmas dinner, 2 words
- 28 Winter sport equipment

- 29 Chicago's state, abbr.

- 30 Jewish November-December celebration
- 32 Coats a cake
- 36 See 26 down
- 37 End of year celebration of African-American culture

Down

- 1 Christmas present bringer
- 2 Enthrall
- 3 What a yule log does
- 5 Morning time, abbr.
- 6 Tree decorations
- 7 Number of geese a laying, in the Christmas song
- 8 Enjoys the taste of
- 12 Actress Michele of "Glee"

- 15 Saint, for short
- 17 Winter month, abbr.
- 18 Flower
- 19 Place to buy presents for the kids, 2 words
- 21 Little one
- 22 Music genre for Joan Baez
- 25 Letters before an alias
- 26 Sweet Christmas food, goes with 36 across
- 27 Large freshwater fish
- 31 Request
- 33 Cousin, for short
- 34 Stress relief location
- 35 Oregon neighbor, abbr.

Solution on page 37.



Slow delivery?

You may be experiencing slow delivery of Illinois Country Living and other periodicals. The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) finalized a plan to cut costs which results in potential slower delivery.

The USPS is shifting delivery service away from air transportation, which officials say is less reliable and more costly, to ground transportation. The move changes standard delivery of first-class letters, flat envelopes and periodicals from a one-to-three-day window to a one-to-five-day window for mail within the U.S. According to a USPS notice, the delays will affect pieces of mail traveling the farthest, from coast to coast.

In August, USPS raised rates on first-class stamps, marketing mailers and magazines. 💡

DECEMBER **Datebook**

LET'S GO!

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



Peoria Area Community Festival of Nativities

DECEMBER

2-5

This annual festival returns with A Thrill of Hope. Members from area churches come together to create this unique and complimentary interfaith exhibit. Come see more than 750 nativities from around the world including a selection from the James and Emilia Govan Creche Collection from Loyola University Museum of Art. Listen to live musical performances as you stroll through the collection.

Dec. 2-5, 2021; Thurs. 5-9 p.m.; Fri.-Sat. 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sun. Noon-6 p.m.

● Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 3700 W. Reservoir Blvd., Peoria

Cost: Free

309-241-0695 or CommunityFestivalofNativities.com

Winchester Hometown Christmas

DECEMBER

4

The town of Winchester invites you to enjoy this holiday event. Beginning at 9 a.m., enjoy story time with Mrs. Claus at Winchester Public Library, a cookie walk at First Christian Church, shop a variety of vendors and downtown businesses, then visit the gift wrapping station, and a gingerbread house contest at Old School Museum. Santa will drive around town beginning at 1 p.m. (Check the Hometown Christmas Page for his route.) The areas largest lighted parade begins at 6 p.m. and a Memory Tree Ceremony immediately follows at Douglas Park.

● Dec. 4, 2021 – all day throughout Winchester

Cost: Free

217-370-8493



Christmas on the Square

DECEMBER

5

Join your friends and neighbors for horse drawn carriage rides, a candy cane hunt for the kids, hot chocolate and snacks, a cookie walk, visit with Santa, enjoy our local businesses for Christmas shopping, live nativity and a surprise guest will be available for photos with kids and families.

Dec. 5, 2021; 4-6 p.m.

● Vienna town square

Cost: Free

Visit 4th Annual Christmas on the Square on Facebook

Cranberry Christmas 2021

DECEMBER

10-11

More than 35 vendors will offer handmade items to direct sales including handmade wreaths, ornaments, snowmen, fleece, home décor, jewelry, fudge and much more. Favorite direct sales vendors will also be available. Come shop and find gifts for that special someone and maybe something for yourself!

Dec. 10-11, 2021; Fri. 5-8 p.m.; Sat. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

● Blue Mound Civic Center, 551 N. Lewis St., Blue Mound

Cost: Free



Snowflakes and Sweets Stroll

DECEMBER

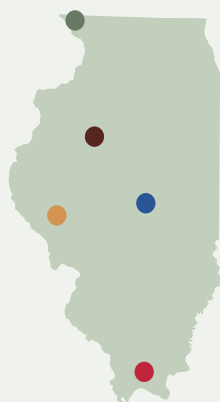
18

Take your time enjoying special sweet treats from local bakeries, chocolatiers and more while strolling down Galena's magical Main Street. Hopefully you'll enjoy some snowflakes as well. You will find sweet treats sprinkled along Main Street in our unique collection of shops. Your ticket will get you a punch card for 10 sweet treats. The treats will be a mix (chosen by you) of cookies, candies, drinks and more. Ticket holders must check in between 10 a.m.-1 p.m. to pick up their map and punch card. Check the website or Facebook for location and how to purchase a ticket.

Dec. 18, 2021; Noon-4 p.m.

● Galena Main Street

Cost: \$25 preordered, \$30 day of purchase unless sold out
Visitgalena.org



How to Be Cut Off From Civilization

When it's you against nature, there's only one tool you need:
the stainless steel River Canyon Bowie Knife—now **ONLY \$49!**

You are a man of the wilderness. The only plan you have is to walk up that mountain until you feel like stopping. You tell your friends that it's nothing personal, but this weekend belongs to you.

You've come prepared with your **River Canyon Bowie Knife** sheathed at your side. This hand-forged, unique knife comes shaving sharp with a perfectly fitted hand-tooled leather sheath. The broad stainless steel blade shines in harmony with the stunning striped horn, wood and bone handle. When you feel the heft of the knife in your hand, you know that you're ready for whatever nature throws at you.

This knife boasts a full tang blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to Gear Patrol, a full tang blade is key, saying "A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."

With our limited edition **River Canyon Bowie Knife** you're getting the best in 21st-century construction with a classic look inspired by legendary American pioneers. What you won't get is the trumped up price tag. We know a thing or two about the hunt—like how to seek out and capture an outstanding, collector's-quality knife that won't cut into your bank account.

This quintessential knife can be yours to use out in the field or to display as the art piece it truly is. But don't wait. A knife of this caliber typically cost hundreds. Priced at an amazing **\$49**, we can't guarantee this knife will stick around for long. So call today!

Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the craftsmanship. If you don't feel like we cut you a fair deal, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the sale price. But we believe that once you wrap your fingers around the **River Canyon's** handle, you'll be ready to carve your own niche into the wild frontier.

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★★★★★

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— D., Houston, Texas



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actual size.

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Where can you find the most home energy savings?

Dear Pat: Our energy bills seem high, but I'm not sure where to start looking around my home for opportunities to save energy. Do you have any suggestions? – Les

switching to a new heating or cooling system could save 20 percent, they likely mean you can save 20 percent on heating or cooling costs, which are a portion of your overall energy costs.

next most cost-effective measure, followed by insulating exterior walls, crawl space or basement.

Replacing windows is a high-priority project for many homeowners, and new windows can certainly add value to your home. However, this can be costly, making it difficult to justify solely based on potential energy savings. If your windows are old and leaky, it could be worth the investment. Do your research upfront so you fully understand the costs of the project.

After you've found ways to reduce your heating and cooling costs, your next largest energy use is likely water heating. A few low-cost measures like repairing leaky faucets and insulating the first 6 to 10 feet of hot water line could deliver significant savings. Installing energy efficient showerheads can save water and reduce energy use. Check out Consumer Reports for reliable comparisons and reviews of energy efficient showerheads.

If your water heater is more than 10 years old, it's likely time to consider how and when to replace it. You can purchase a traditional water heater that uses the same fuel you're using now. Other options include heat pump, tankless and even solar water heaters. Be sure to research before your water heater breaks so you know your options.

Appliances and lighting account for a smaller portion of your energy use. As you replace older appliances and lighting, look for options that include the ENERGY STAR sticker. Also review energy use information found on the EnergyGuide label.

I hope this information will help you identify areas to save energy at home. Consider enlisting the help of an energy auditor who can provide an assessment of your home's efficiency. 💡



A single ductless heat pump can serve up to four rooms through blowers installed in each room. Photo Credit: Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance

DEAR LES: THAT'S A great question. There are many products and services that claim to provide maximum energy efficiency, so it can be challenging to know where to start. Fortunately, our monthly bills can help identify areas for the most energy savings.

For most homes, the months requiring the most energy use are in the winter and summer when temperatures are most extreme. Total up your average energy use for the months you use the most energy, then subtract the average amount you use during "shoulder months," when you're barely using your heating or cooling system.

The likely reason for the difference in energy use is heating and cooling your home. If someone says

Every home is different. For example, a small percentage of homes include uncommon energy uses like a well pump, pool or a home business that requires more energy than heating or cooling. Typically, heating and cooling by far use the largest amount of energy.

Sealing air leaks is often the least expensive energy-saving measure that delivers the most bang for your buck. The second most cost-effective way to cut heating and cooling costs depends on your situation.

If you have an older propane or oil furnace, replacing it with an energy efficient heat pump might be your best investment. If you already have a relatively efficient furnace or air conditioning unit, insulating your attic could be the

This column was written by **Pat Keegan** of Collaborative Efficiency. For more information on home energy savings, please visit: collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips.

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actual size.

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Christmas buys for your tech gals and guys

IT'S DECEMBER. ALL GIFTS are purchased, wrapped and hidden, just waiting for that special someone. If you are like me, that isn't even close to reality! Still looking for the perfect gift for that tech junkie in your life? Here are a few items to consider.

an album cover and physically touching the medium on which the music lives is something that few people under 40 understand – removing the vinyl from its protective cover, placing it on the turntable while gently situating the needle on the record, anti-

are often sold in do-it-yourself kits requiring assembly. DJI has cornered the market when it comes to aerial cinematography and has several options to choose from. If you are looking for serious action and that feeling of flying in the cockpit, visit GETFPV.com to check out different available kits.

Action camera

Wherever you are, you can usually spot someone wearing an action camera. These little cameras are small and light to be worn comfortably in any environment. They may be valuable to anyone looking to capture exciting moments. My three sons are avid dirt bike riders and it's exciting to see video captured from the action cameras on their helmets. This first-person view offers a different perspective from what a bystander can capture. GoPro has some of the highest quality action cameras available with image stabilization and a 360-degree model to capture everything happening around you. DJI offers the Action 2 camera, which provides a modular, magnetic camera at a reasonable price.

Apple towel

While this isn't technology in the traditional sense, it may be the perfect gift for that Apple fan. The cloth is touted by Apple to be compatible with more than 88 specific Apple devices from smartphones to laptops. Yes, it is just a towel to wipe off your screen, but it has a fancy apple logo on it! Apple claims it is made with proprietary technology to be the most high-tech towel ever created. It is about 5x6 inches and costs about \$20 if you can find one in stock. 🧺

3D printer

There are many options of 3D printers, and prices can range from a couple hundred dollars to thousands. Last year, I decided to give 3D printing a try and to my surprise it was relatively inexpensive to get started. I was able to produce high quality prints in no time at all. If you know someone who enjoys building things and likes to understand how things work, this may be the perfect gift. The Ender 3 Pro is a budget friendly 3D printer that comes as a kit you build yourself.

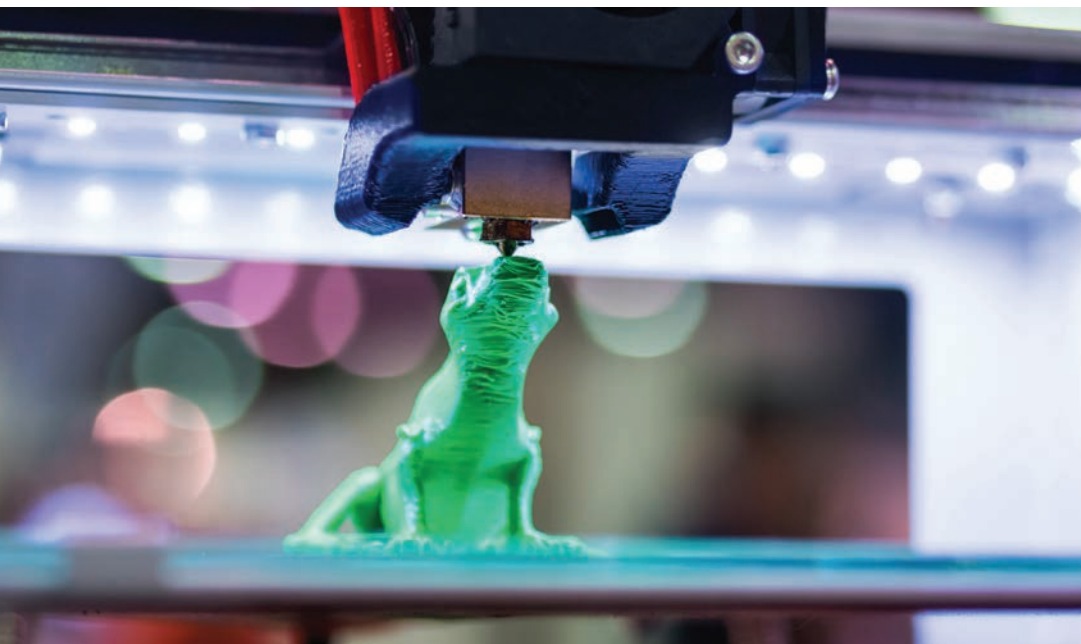
pating that familiar scratch sound. The experience is much more than clicking play on your favorite digital playlist.

Drone

A drone, also known as an unmanned aircraft system (UAS) or quadcopter, is a piece of technology that is appealing on many different levels and useful in more than one way. They are well known for their stunning aerial video shots creating a professional cinematic look for even the novice content creator. A growing number find excitement in First Person View (FPV) flying where a pilot wears a pair of special goggles with a live, real time video feed from the UAS. You can buy a pre-built FPV drone, but they

Record player

Vinyl is back! I have noticed turntables appearing in several big box stores along with an assortment of classic records. Opening



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



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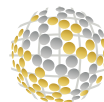
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Q: What's the most common type of electrical injury for household pets?

A: Electrocution from chewing on an electrical cord



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Although any pet can chew on a cord, puppies are the most likely culprit. Pups are busy and they may chew on an electrical cord without anyone realizing it. If you see burns in or around your pet's mouth, singed hair or whiskers around the mouth, or notice shortness of breath or other respiratory issues, seek immediate medical attention for your pet.

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Boughs of holly



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.

DECORATING WITH FRESH GREENERY is a treat for most gardeners preparing to spruce up their homes for holiday festivities. Some holiday decorators buy freshly harvested greens from a local garden center or may buy an extra tree to cut into pieces. However, you can save holiday dollars by harvesting branches from evergreen conifers in your backyard.

Whether making wreaths, porch pots or swags, your eastern red cedar, pines, spruces, holly, yew, boxwood and junipers can be used. Cedars, pine, firs, boxwood and holly are the best options for using indoors while others will maintain freshness longer if used in outside décor. While foraging for evergreen branches, look for cones, berries and decorative twigs to incorporate into your designs.

It is best to harvest after hard frost, as the tree is now dormant and will retain its needles longer.

If cutting a tip of a branch from an evergreen, be sure to leave live foliage behind on the tree as to not kill the entire branch. Boughs

should be cut 2-4 feet from the tip of a branch and above a node to encourage regeneration. The goal is to make harvesting look unnoticeable, so be mindful in your cuts.

If cutting the entire branch, leave a proper pruning cut behind. Never leave a stub or cut into the collar of the branch. The collar is a swollen base that allows the cut stem to heal. Never cut more than 25 percent of the evergreen plant to avoid stress and evenly distribute cuts around the plant to maintain form. Store cuttings in your garage, misting often.

Boxwoods and hollies suffer if they freeze after cutting and may turn colors.

Shearing or trimming boxwoods is a good practice for young plants to maintain a certain form with dense growth. Removing all or most of last year's growth can be done with hand pruners or hedge clippers and used in boughs or wreaths.

Simply trim branch tips of holly bushes back to a node. Do this throughout the entire plant to

maintain or even improve shape. The female holly plants will have bright red berries.

Red twig dogwood displays the brightest color on new growth. Trimming every other year is a benefit to this popular landscape shrub. Either remove some older less colorful stems, while selecting some of the bright ones, or if you haven't pruned in a while, cut them all to 3-4 inches from the ground.

Berries with winter interest grown in Illinois backyards are chokeberry, elderberry, high-bush cranberry and winterberry. Winterberry is a native deciduous holly that has bright red berries during winter months. Separate female plants produce berries with a male plant in the vicinity to pollinate them. One male plant pollinates about 10 females. Stems can be cut before leaves fall off. Place in a cool dry location in a bucket of water before using.

Cuttings from your yard will save money, leaving more for gift buying. 💡

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BLOOM

where you're planted



By Valerie Cheatham

AS LEGEND GOES, PEPITA, a poor Mexican girl had no present to give to the baby Jesus at Christmas Eve services. She was sad not knowing what she could give. Her cousin Pedro tried to cheer her up telling her he was sure even the smallest gift, given by someone who loves him, would make Jesus happy.

Pepita picked a small handful of weeds growing by the side of the road and made them into a bouquet. As she knelt down before the nativity scene, the bouquet burst into bright red flowers. Everyone who saw believed they had witnessed a miracle. Since then, the bright red flowers have been known as Flores de Noche Buena or Flowers of the Holy Night. The flower and leaves of the plant are thought to be a symbol of the star of Bethlehem, which led the Wise Men to Jesus.

While many homes are adorned with sparkling lights and the fragrance of evergreen trees, poinsettias are also synonymous with the holidays. Since the early 1900s, churches, businesses and homes have displayed these colorful plants.

Poinsettias were first introduced to the United States around 1827 by Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico – hence the name poinsettia.

They didn't become traditional decorations until almost a century later.

Today, poinsettias are the top-selling potted flowering plant in the United States, exceeding \$256 million in sales, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. During the six-week season around Thanksgiving and Christmas, more than 25 million poinsettias are sold. While the color red may come to mind, varieties include a nearly limitless array of colors including pink, purple, white, yellow, bright green and tri-color.

N.G. Heimos Greenhouses in Millstadt, the parent company of Millstadt Young Plants, has grown the popular plants since the mid-1950s.

What began in 1951 as a small produce stand in St. Louis, run by Norwin Heimos and wife Shirley, has become a large company with offshoots including greenhouses at Eddie and Park in Sunset Hills, Mo., and Millstadt Young Plants and Millstadt Greenhouse in Millstadt. The company also has Micky's Minis, which provides miniature 2-inch plants, often seen in grocery stores or in direct home delivery through 1-800-FLOWERS.

Norwin Heimos began his first greenhouse in 1952 in St. Louis, growing geraniums and poinsettias. After expanding into two acres of greenhouses at that location, he purchased the Sunset Hills site in 1974 and added floral mums, followed by spring annuals and perennials.

The Heimos brand expanded into Illinois in the mid-80s after purchasing a small greenhouse and five acres from Bob Warner in Millstadt. That location now encompasses 56 acres including 1.5 million square feet of greenhouse space.

Millstadt Young Plants propagates thousands of plants from hundreds of species including annuals, perennials, succulents,

tropicals, herbs and vegetables. It is also a rooting station for Dummen (a breeding company) along with Selecta, Syngenta and Sakata. The company roots all the genetics for those groups. Dummen Group is one of the world's leading young plants producers in poinsettia research and production.

One of only three in the U.S., Millstadt became the Midwest rooting station for Fischer USA in 2001 and for The Flower Field Group in 2003.

One hundred percent of Millstadt Young Plants are sold to growers. Even Millstadt Gardens, one of the companies under the N.G. Heimos Greenhouse brand, places orders.

"It's the only way to make it fair," explains daughter Amy Heimos Morris. "We pull everyone's order, assemble and deliver it to their location. We bulk pull everything because we don't want our other customers thinking we give our own retailer better [plants] than what we give them. We want everyone to get the good stuff."

The only difference is when there are leftovers or over-bloomed items. Those are sent to Millstadt Gardens to give them an opportunity to be sold instead of discarded.



Left: Amy Morris displays the Norwin Orange, named after her father.

Above: As the holidays near, greenhouse floors are covered with a variety of colors.



Workers ring the plants to provide support.

Poinsettias are one of their biggest sellers.

According to Morris, one of nine siblings (six involved in the business), Millstadt Young Plants propagates millions of poinsettias each year – around 45 varieties on the Heimos side alone. Add the plants for other U.S. growers and it more than doubles to 3-4 million plants grown annually.

With poinsettias, it revolves around timing. Poinsettias, like garden mums, bloom in a certain number of weeks. “We try our best to get ones that bloom early to come on early,” she says. “Our middle crop naturally blooms in growth weeks 47 and 48 and the later ones in weeks 49-50. But if we like stuff that does bloom early, we’ll black cloth it or light it to get it to hit when we want it to.”

Like a well-oiled machine, a group of 60 H2A employees annually provides the necessary hands-on labor to take the plants from cuttings to fully grown plants. Morris says the workers are there for 10 months, from February thru November, but she would keep them year-round if federal law allowed.

In early October, the greenhouse floors are covered with pots of poinsettias in various stages of development. The larger 10-inch pots usually contain four plants, which gives them the fullness we recognize. Workers are moving plants closer together to make room for more and, having run out of floor space, are hanging smaller pots from the metal rafters of the greenhouses.

Rolls of black cloth are visible on the greenhouse ceilings and a portion of plants get covered every night to manipulate their bloom. A variety of drip hoses keep the plants at the right saturation level.

Mechanical sprayers run the length of each section of plants to provide the calcium and other nutrients, or insecticides, poinsettias require. In October, they are spraying the plants with calcium which is absorbed by the leaves and stems and strengthens the plant.

Red is by far the most popular color accounting for 70 percent of sales. On the growing floor are red varieties and Norwin Orange, named for Morris’

father who discovered it. They also pot a popular bi-color red/white mix and grow variegated varieties such as Ice Crystal, which is mottled with pink, white and red, and Jingle Bells – red with white or pink speckles.

“When you grow a poinsettia, sometimes you get a rogue color,” says Morris. “My dad discovered a pink variety in the middle of red plants. The breeder had us ship it to them and started taking cuttings from it. That’s how new varieties happen. Dad discovered several over the years.”

An early white variety, the Autumn Beauty, is sprayed for Thanksgiving. “We paint a lot of our poinsettias and put an autumn touch and shimmer on the Autumn Beauty along with a harvest tag,” she says. Autumn Beauty, Norwin Orange and a red variety are the first out the door.

Wholesalers place their orders for the plants early each year. Several different tractor trailer/freight companies move the product. Morris says the lack of drivers is currently tricky. “Distribution has almost

doubled because of COVID-19, but we've always been able to get drivers." When weather is either too hot or cold, they rely on refrigerated or heated trucks to deliver them – as far north as Wisconsin, south to Kentucky and Texas and west to Colorado.

Poinsettia trials

Each year during the week before Thanksgiving, Millstadt Young Plants showcases its poinsettia trials. The 2021 comparison trial feature poinsettias from seven different breeders. Industry individuals – breeders, gardeners, growers, brokers and vendors – visit to get a view of the plants and attend classes on disease, insects, water and soil management.

The cuttings for the trials are given to Millstadt, which doesn't pay for them directly but bears the expense of growing them. This year, they have 176 varieties of the plants and there are hundreds more.

According to Morris, "the trials can be, well, a trial! Each cutting-edge cultivar has its challenges. These are all the newest poinsettias and are 2-4 years from hitting the market."

On the Sunday after the trials, the business hosts an open house for family and friends. The Optimist Club of Millstadt helps to staff it and receives all profits. Attendees enjoy tours, local entertainment, snacks and can purchase the trial plants. It's a big fundraiser for that organization.

"Two years ago, they made more than \$10,000," says Morris. "Last year, due to COVID-19, we had to cancel our event but donated that same amount to them. They count on that money to help the kids here in Millstadt and we were happy to do it."

Millstadt Young Plants provides poinsettias to a wide variety of florists, grocery stores and retailers across the Midwest. The plant you buy could be supporting two businesses - your local business and its Illinois supplier. 💡



Workers hang plants from the rafters after running out of floor space.



Caring for a poinsettia

Amy Morris says to keep your plant evenly moist and away from a drafty vent or cold window. It doesn't need direct sunlight and will flourish in a well-lit office.

She explains that keeping a plant healthy past the holidays can be tricky. "There are people who can do it and others that just can't," she says. "I'm one of those that will keep it alive until Christmas and then let it die on its own."

She fields multiple calls each year from those wanting to know how to get a poinsettia to rebloom. She says to put it in a closet for 12 hours every day for 8 weeks and don't forget it. Most people forget it and it dies. She also suggests using a room that no one goes into at night. "My mom used to keep one in an old room with windows that no one ever went into. If she needed something a quick flick of the light switch didn't harm it."

After 8 weeks, bring the plant back out and let it grow.

Poinsettia facts

- ❁ National Poinsettia Day is December 12.
- ❁ More than 35 million potted poinsettias are sold every year in the U.S. accounting for almost one quarter of sales of all flowering potted plants.
- ❁ The flower of a poinsettia is not the colorful bracts but the small yellow buds in the center.
- ❁ Poinsettias are not poisonous. However, pets snacking on the bracts/leaves may have intestinal problems. A cat would have to eat 50 pounds and 100 pounds for a dog to be poisonous.
- ❁ The poinsettia is a perennial shrub in Mexico that can reach 10-15 feet tall.
- ❁ Poinsettias were valued by the Mayans and Aztecs for their reddish-purple fabric dye and the medicinal qualities of its sap. 💡

How sweet it is!



Christmas candy contest results

HOMEMADE CANDY HAS BEEN a holiday tradition for hundreds of years. Readers submitted almost 300 candy entries of their family holiday favorites, making it a difficult decision narrowing down entries.

Ultimately, winners emerged as judges sampled from 14 different selections including a variety of caramels, fudge, toffee, hard candies and chewy favorites.

First place went to the winning combination of toasted nuts, toffee and chocolate in Linda Pittman's

Triple Nut Toffee. The Honey Caramels, submitted by Jerry Daugherty, were a close second place for their smooth luscious texture and Carol Walk's Snickers Fudge placed third for its chocolate, peanut, caramel combo that tastes just like its namesake.

The five honorable mentions are also in the following pages, and visit icl.coop/candycontest for a look at all submissions. There will be something to entice the sweet tooth in every family. 🍬

Triple Nut Toffee

Submitted by: Linda Pittman, Spoon River Electric Cooperative

1/3 cup finely chopped pecans
1/3 cup finely chopped almonds
1/3 cup finely chopped cashews
1/2 cup brown sugar

1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 cup butter
1/4 cup water
1/2 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line a 15x10x1-inch baking sheet with foil. Spread nuts in pan. Bake 6-10 minutes, stirring occasionally until light brown. Pour into small bowl; set aside. Save foil-lined pan. In heavy 2-quart saucepan, combine brown sugar, granulated sugar, butter and water. Cook over medium high heat 4-6 minutes, stirring constantly until mixture comes to a full boil. Boil 20-25 minutes, stirring almost constantly to 300 F on a candy thermometer. Immediately remove from heat and stir in 1/2 cup of toasted nuts. Pour into the foil-lined pan. Quickly spread mixture to 1/4-inch thickness with rubber spatula. Sprinkle with chocolate chips; let stand about 1 minute until chips are melting and spread to cover completely. Sprinkle with remaining nuts. Refrigerate about 30 minutes until chocolate is firm. Break into pieces and store in airtight container at room temperature.

**FIRST
PLACE**



Honey Caramels

Submitted by: Jerry Daugherty,
Corn Belt Energy Corporation

- 1/3 cup honey
- 1-1/4 cups sugar
- 2/3 cups light corn syrup
- 10 ounces heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

In a 3-quart saucepan over medium heat, add honey, sugar, corn syrup and half of the cream. Stir until mixture boils, then add rest of cream, butter and salt. Return to boil and cook until candy thermometer reaches 244-246 F. Remove from heat and stir until it stops boiling, then add vanilla and stir. Pour into a parchment-lined 8x8, 9x9 or 9x13-inch pan. Cool completely, cut into pieces and wrap in wax paper.

Note: Everybody loves this recipe. I got it from my mother. She is gone now, but it is special to us and reminds us of her love of Christmas.

SECOND
PLACE





Snickers Fudge

Submitted by: Carol Walk, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative

- 2 cups milk chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup butterscotch chips
- 3/4 cup creamy peanut butter
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup evaporated milk
- 7 ounces marshmallow crème
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1-1/2 cups chopped peanuts
- 14 ounce package caramels
- 1/4 cup heavy cream

First layer: In saucepan, melt together 1 cup milk chocolate chips, 1/4 cup butterscotch chips and 1/4 cup peanut butter. Pour into lightly greased 9x13-inch pan. Refrigerate until set.

Second layer: Melt butter, then add granulated sugar and evaporated milk and bring to a boil. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and quickly add marshmallow crème, 1/4 cup peanut butter, vanilla and chopped peanuts. Pour into pan and refrigerate until set. **Third layer:** Melt caramels and heavy cream over low heat until smooth. Pour into pan and refrigerate until set. **Fourth layer:** Repeat first layer directions, pour into pan and refrigerate at least 1 hour before cutting.

Note: This is a family favorite and tastes like a Snickers candy bar.



THIRD PLACE



Chocolate Amaretto Snowballs

Submitted by: Nancy H. Peterson,
Corn Belt Energy Corporation

- 18 ounces semi-sweet chocolate morsels
- 14 ounces sweetened condensed milk
- 3-4 tablespoons Amaretto liqueur
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- Finely chopped blanched almonds

In heavy saucepan or double boiler on low heat, melt chocolate morsels with sweetened condensed milk. When completely blended, remove from heat and stir in Amaretto and extract. Chill in refrigerator for 2 hours. Shape into 3/4-inch balls and roll in chopped almonds. Place each snowball in miniature cupcake paper and store in refrigerator until ready to serve. The flavor of this candy improves after 24 hours.

Note: When I place the Amaretto Snowballs on trays or in boxes mixed with other Christmas candy and cookies, my family and friends always ask which one is the candy with the Amaretto in it. It is an easy recipe to mix up and is fun to make with a friend. I have been making this candy for over 40 years.



FINALIST



Rock Candy

Submitted by: Diane Sherman,
Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative

- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 cup water
- 3/4 cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon flavoring (we used cinnamon oil)
- Food coloring

FINALIST

Line cookie sheet with aluminum foil and sprinkle liberally with powdered sugar. In heavy 2-quart saucepan, combine sugar, water and corn syrup over medium heat until sugar dissolves. Boil to 310 F without stirring. Hard crack will occur when mixture is drizzled into cold water. Remove from heat and stir in flavoring and food coloring. Pour mixture onto prepared cookie sheet and allow to cool completely. Break into pieces.

Note: This is a family favorite because it is a Christmas tradition to work together to make this and share with family and friends.

Pecan Espresso Bark

Submitted by: Barbara Wiesen, Jo-Carroll Energy, Inc.

- 3 ounces raw pecans (about 1/2 cup)
- 2 tablespoons espresso beans
- 8 ounces 70% dark chocolate, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon flaky sea salt

FINALIST

Preheat oven to 400 F. Toast pecans on a baking sheet until fragrant and browned, about 7-10 minutes, tossing halfway through. Once cool, coarsely chop pecans and set aside. Lightly crush espresso beans with a rolling pin and set aside. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. In a double boiler, melt 6 ounces of dark chocolate over low heat until chocolate is smooth. Once completely melted, remove from heat and stir in remaining 2 ounces of chocolate. Pour chocolate onto baking sheet, spreading to 1/4 -inch thickness. Sprinkle evenly with pecans. Repeat with espresso beans and sea salt. Refrigerate, uncovered, until completely hardened. Break into rough pieces and serve. Store in airtight container in refrigerator.

Note: The bark can be made ahead of time for a special holiday treat. It's so much tastier than most store-bought candy or bark. It also tastes great with a bit of dry red wine.



Nougat

Submitted by: Mary H. Hammann,
Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative

- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup light corn syrup
- 1 cup water
- 4 egg whites (using large eggs)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1-1/2 cups chopped nuts (we used walnuts)
- 1/2 cup chopped candied cherries

In heavy saucepan, boil together one half the sugar, half of water and half of corn syrup to 280 F. Meanwhile beat egg whites until well beaten. When syrup reaches 280 F, slowly drizzle into beaten egg whites, beating while adding. While beating, put remaining sugar, water and corn syrup in pan and bring it to 280 F. Add it to the first mixture and beat while adding. When cool, add the vanilla, nuts and cherries and pour into buttered 9x13-inch pan. Smooth over surface, cover and let stand overnight before cutting. In morning, cut and wrap in oiled paper.

Note: I am 95 years old and have been with RECC since 1953.

FINALIST



Maple Bacon Fudge

Submitted by: Dorothy Billington,
Norris Electric Cooperative

- 6 slices crisp fried bacon, drained and crumbled
- 24 ounces white chocolate chips (not white almond bark)
- 14 ounces sweetened condensed milk
- 1/4 cup butter, cut into cubes
- 1-1/2 teaspoons maple extract

Line a 9x9-inch pan with foil and grease with cooking spray. In a microwave-safe bowl, combine white chocolate, sweetened condensed milk, butter and maple extract. Microwave on high, stirring every 20 to 30 seconds, until melted. Stir in bacon and pour into prepared pan. Chill in refrigerator until set up and cut into squares.

Note: We all love the flavor of bacon and maple together. It makes the holidays extra special when we get together and enjoy each other with this sweet treat.

FINALIST





Sarah Lezon and Kathryn Elder stand behind the display case at Mockingbird Bakery.



Blueberry muffins



Lemon raspberry scones



Cranberry almond (left) and cookie butter biscotti

Mockingbird Bakery

By Colten Bradford

"THAT'S IT," KATHRYN ELDER remembers her husband saying as he put down his newspaper. Finally, the name of her new bakery clicked into place.

Initially having a difficult time coming up with a name, Kathryn was inspired by her daughter's love for reading and started going through her family's bookshelves, taking a favorite book title and adding bakery. When she got to *"To Kill a Mockingbird,"* Mockingbird Bakery was born.

"I wanted a place where somebody could come in, read a book and have cup of coffee and a baked good, because that's my cozy spot. That's what I do at home when I want to relax," Kathryn says. "I've seen people sitting in here reading a book, and I'm like, oh my gosh, it's working!"

Her plans for the bakery started with an idea she had when she moved to Rochester 11 years ago with her husband and 2-year-old daughter. "I thought, this town needs a little bakery or coffee shop," Kathryn says. "I thought in 10 years somebody else would beat me to it, but nobody else ever did."

Prior to moving to central Illinois, Kathryn attended Texas Culinary Academy in Austin, Texas, interned in New York City, and worked at a bakery in Chicago. She then decided to stay home to raise her daughter. Two more children and a decade later, plans for the bakery started to fit into place.

"I always thought I'd start it a little sooner, but life happens," Kathryn says. For a while she struggled to find a space in

Rochester because of the low commercial space turnover in the community. When a spot became available, she jumped on the opportunity. "When we saw it, it was go time. ... It might not have been the perfect timing [with the COVID-19 pandemic], but it ended up being pretty perfect."

Mockingbird Bakery opened for business May 21, 2021, and Kathryn is grateful for the overwhelming community support the bakery received as well as her dedicated group of employees.

"We sold out every day for a month," Kathryn recalls from when the bakery first opened. "The biggest surprise was how many people came in. My husband said we were going to get hit like a tsunami. I had a vision, and it did not go like I thought. It was so many more people."

Customers can expect a different selection of baked goods made from scratch in the display case every day as there is no set menu. At least one baked good represents each category every day: scones, muffins, cookies and cupcakes. Plus, an occasional cake, pie or other surprise will be thrown into the mix.

"We started experimenting with flavors, and not just doing the same thing every day," Kathryn says. "With the shortages happening, sometimes things just aren't available. So, we have never created a regular menu, and I think that's just going to be our thing. It gives us a lot of creativity in the kitchen, and we can adapt to seasonal changes."



Oatmeal cream pie

Left: Take a book and leave a book at the bakery's small library.

Every morning, the baked goods of the day are posted on Facebook and Instagram. Customers can also call or stop by to find out what's available.

"I think some people like to check every day to see what's new," Kathryn says. "We do have favorites that we make every week."

Scones have consistently been the number one seller since opening. She says customers are oftentimes surprised scones are not dry. The raspberry lemon and the blueberry lemon scones are best sellers. For muffins, the blueberry is a top seller.

The iced sugar cookie has also proven to be a crowd favorite. "They're time consuming, but people love them," Kathryn says. "We try to do them at least once a week."

The cookie designs are oftentimes intricate, and they try to vary the amount of icing used as some people like a little more and others prefer less. Footballs, pumpkins, roses and American flags have adorned the sugar cookies in the past.

Other popular cookies include chocolate chip, peanut butter stamped with the Mockingbird Bakery logo and the oatmeal cream pie, which Kathryn says has a cult following. "Our customers like traditional flavors of cookies, but they are up for new things," she says. "But those classics always sell really well."

During the upcoming holidays, Kathryn anticipates a lot of sugar cookies and gingerbread. She's also playing around with the idea of sugar cookie kits so families can decorate cookies together.

For those with a gluten intolerance, gluten-free options are occasionally available, typically on Saturdays, and these items are baked by Sarah Lezon. "Sarah is my gluten-free baker," Kathryn says. "I love her expertise because I've never eaten gluten-free. I don't know what it is supposed to taste like."



"Sometimes there can be such a profound difference in texture with gluten-free," Sarah says, who has had a gluten-free diet in the past. "Gluten-free scones work the best with the gluten-free flour. You can't really tell the texture difference." She also does a popular gluten-free chocolate tart with a pecan crust.

Due to the small kitchen, cross contamination can be an issue. If you just can't eat gluten, then that's fine, but if you are highly sensitive, then they don't recommend it.

Kathryn says Sarah is her creative baker because she likes to experiment with flavors while Kathryn herself is a little more traditional. "It's nice having somebody whose brain works a little differently than mine," Kathryn says. "We make a good team."

In addition to Sarah, two other bakers are on staff as well as a handful of high school and college students who work the cash register.

Mockingbird Bakery doesn't only sell baked goods. Kathryn also utilizes several local businesses in her bakery. Tea comes from Whimsy Tea Company in Springfield, which created a blend for the bakery called Finch's Fancy. The coffee is from Redbud City Coffee Roasters in Auburn and Arrowroot Coffee Co. in Springfield.

Kathryn says Arrowroot's cold brew gained a following over the summer, and the coffee roaster developed a blend for the bakery that is certified bird friendly. Nearby Rochester chocolate shop, Cocoa Blue Chocolates, dips the bakery's shortbread cookies in chocolate, and Mockingbird Bakery T-shirts come from Reverie Apparel in Springfield.

When customers come in for a hot drink and a sweet treat, they are welcome to browse the books in the small library where readers can take a book and leave a book. Of course, there are plenty of copies of "To Kill a Mockingbird" on the shelves. 💡

LET'S EAT!

Mockingbird Bakery

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mockingbirdbakery.org

Mockingbird Bakery on Facebook and Instagram

HOURS

Tuesday-Friday

7 a.m.-noon, 3-5 p.m.

Saturday

7 a.m.-2 p.m.





Sharing the bounty

ILLINOIS DEER HUNTERS ARE once again stepping forward to share the bounty of the hunt with those less fortunate. Because of the generosity of hunters and funding support, thousands of pounds of high quality, protein rich ground venison have made their way to food pantry refrigerated shelves in Illinois.

According to Feeding America, in Illinois it is estimated one in 10 residents struggle with hunger including one in eight children. In helping to address the situation, a new project focused on expanding food access was recently allocated funds through University of Illinois Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education.

The Illinois Deer Donation Program Pilot is connecting meat processors, hunters and food pantries in 12 central Illinois counties: Clay, Coles, Cumberland, DeWitt, Douglas, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Macon, Moultrie, Piatt and Shelby. By engaging hunters to donate deer and meat processors to produce ground venison, a local source of lean protein is available to food pantry clients. Clients also receive

recipes and resources from Illinois Extension to help prepare venison at home, which might be unfamiliar to individuals and families.

"This will be an opportunity for hunters to help tackle food insecurity in their communities while doing something they enjoy," says Michelle Fombelle, Extension SNAP-Ed educator.

In addition, the Health Equity Achieved Together (HEAT) Project engages local stakeholders and community members to design and implement its initiatives. HEAT is a multi-disciplinary program to develop and implement innovative strategies to improve health outcomes and reduce community barriers to healthier lifestyles. Working with others across the Extension network enables HEAT to leverage its expertise and networks across the state, maximizing the positive impact on the health of Illinois families. Projects will also plan sustainability and inclusion strategies to ensure the projects have long-lasting community impact.

Hunters are encouraged to donate their entire deer harvest to

food banks and charities. Participating meat processors will grind the venison into 2-pound packages of burger. However, hunters **MUST** properly field dress the animal before delivering to the meat processor. Any questionable deer will not be accepted by the processor. Roadkill deer may not be donated based on the inability to determine time of death.

Venison is richer in protein than any other red meat. It's good for your body because it promotes muscle growth. It's also great for your diet because the more protein a food has, the more it satiates your appetite. In other words, when you eat venison, you'll feel fuller longer.

What are the health benefits of eating venison? Venison is a high-quality (and complete) source of protein, lower in saturated fat than other red meats, and a great source of haem iron – an essential component of red blood cells. Venison is also brimming with zinc and is filled with an array of essential B vitamins. 🍷



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.

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Heating Bills Could Skyrocket 54% According to U.S. Government

INFLATION SURGES!

As Inflation Rises Demand for New Heater Soars as People Look for Ways to Save Money

Prices on everything are going up and people are desperate for ways to save money.

In fact, heating bills are expected to rise 54% this winter depending on your fuel source and the region that you live.

But, people all over the country are reporting massive savings on heating bills using a new hybrid heating technology.

The company is having a hard time keeping heaters in stock due to the astonishing demand.

And the sudden inflation surge has unleashed a buying frenzy for the EdenPURE® GEN40 and its proven savings on heating bills.

RIISING COSTS ON EVERYTHING

With the cost of heat rising a staggering 54% from last year for some people, your heating bills this winter are going to be devastating to your bank account.

Paying for everything is going to get even harder.

It's not just your heating bills that are going to rise. Everything from food and gasoline, to services like car and home repairs are going to increase as well.

THE SOLUTION

But it's not all doom and gloom. EdenPURE, a USA based company, is working on ways for Americans to SAVE money in these trying times.

You are probably wondering, how does the EdenPURE GEN40 work to decrease my heating bills so much?

MIRACLE HEATING TECHNOLOGY

An advanced heating engineer team has managed to combine an infrared heating system AND a convective heating system into one space heater.

These 2 technologies work

together to heat a home BETTER than your current furnace, boiler, base board heat AND other space heaters.

MASSIVE SAVINGS

The EdenPURE GEN40 heater uses Infrared Heat AND Convective Heat to warm a room. Most space heaters only use one form of heat which isn't as efficient, leaving you cold and wasting money.

And since infrared and convective heat heats EVERYTHING in a room, the air AND objects, you get surrounded and directly warmed up. That's why this kind of heating technology will eventually phase out furnaces and boilers, saving you money for years to come.

FRENZY OVER LIMITED SUPPLY

Once people start to get their heating bills this season, demand for the EdenPURE GEN40 is expected to go through the roof as customers seek to reduce their high heating bills.

But to get one now, EdenPURE has told me that all readers have to do is call their direct line based in Canton, Ohio at **1-800-531-9680** and give **Offer Code: K3233**. If lines are busy, keep trying.

This special offer code will give readers \$25.00 OFF the LOWEST sales price but only for the next 72 hours!

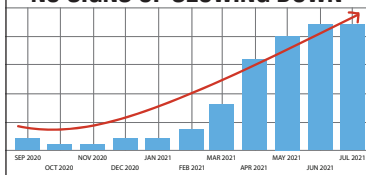
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And its risk-free, 100% money back guarantee really makes this a no-risk trial.



■ In just the last few months inflation has surged, causing prices on everything to skyrocket. Prices for everything from food and gasoline, to services like car and home repair are increasing. Consumers are seeing a huge hit to their monthly budgets and are worrying about paying bills. And heating bills are expected to rise 54% from last year, making this winter especially tough.

INFLATION SKYROCKETS WITH NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN



■ Paying for everyday things is about to get a lot tougher. Inflation is skyrocketing, causing prices to catapult to record levels. Families everywhere are starting to feel their belts tightening.

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Reports are Pouring in on Hybrid Heating System

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We Save Money

We love it so much we bought a 2nd one. I like the fact it goes up and down, right and left. Plus it had a timer on it. ... We save money in electricity.

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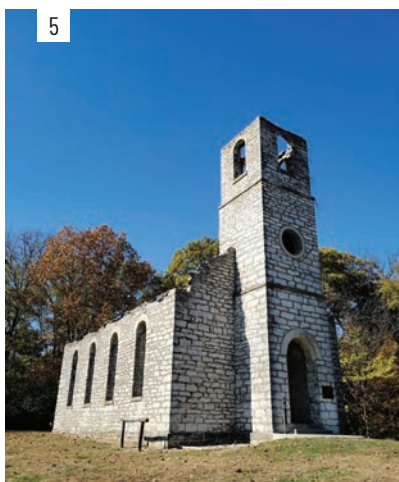
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2. **PAT WARREN**
Jo-Carroll Energy
3. **ELLEN MCRELL**
Corn Belt Energy Corporation
4. **MARTHA GENTES**
Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative
5. **KRISTY KESSLER**
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Norris Electric Cooperative

UPCOMING THEMES

February – Bridges
March – Weather
April – Signs of spring
May – Cats



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