

APRIL 2022

Illinois Country Living



HOUSE HUNTERS

FEATURE
That's what she shed

GREAT OUTDOORS
Bounty of the forest

FINEST COOKING
Nuts about pecans

+

CO-OP
NEWS

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*26% through 2022 and 22% through 2023

Illinois Country Living

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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL WOOD FLOORS ASSOCIATION



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Muddying the waters

NO ONE KNOWS THE benefits of clean water better than our nation’s farmers. The food, fiber and fuel we produce to support the needs of all Americans requires clean water. The health of our most valuable asset—our land, requires clean water. And the well-being of our families and communities also requires clean water. However, new regulatory proposals will impose incredible burdens that will have unintended, yet lasting, consequences.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers have proposed a new regulation that would, once again, change the definition of “waters of the United States.” This regulation would repeal the successful Navigable Waters Protection Rule and reinstate the troubling pre-2015 WOTUS rule.

If finalized, this rule would erase all the clarity and certainty that we have spent years working for and give the agencies the ability to assert jurisdiction over dry land that is located many miles from a federally regulated water. The agencies would have the ability to aggregate waters together to capture entire watersheds as jurisdictional. This is concerning because it runs counter to congressional intent under the Clean Water Act and ignores the limits imposed by Supreme Court precedents.

Farmers want clean water, and they need clear rules.

Many farmers are wondering, “What does this regulation mean for me?” Quite simply, this rule is a game-changer for any landowner.

It would greatly expand the universe of permits farmers would have to obtain. They would have to hire expensive environmental consultants and attorneys to navigate this overly complicated permitting process. This means more time, money and burdens for any business trying to comply.

Farmers need to know exactly where the line of jurisdiction lies because the stakes are high. The civil and criminal penalties for noncompliance have the potential to put them out of business or in jail.

One of the greatest pitfalls of this regulation is that it will inevitably discourage our nation’s farmers from implementing many environmentally beneficial projects on their land. Farmers often take on projects that provide erosion control, stormwater management, wildlife habitat, flood control, nutrient processing, and improve overall water quality in uplands and ephemeral features.

We will likely see fewer of these projects because this proposed regulation would require landowners to obtain costly federal permits to make these environmental improvements. That means progress of our state’s environmental efforts like the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy are in jeopardy when we complicate the lives of our farmers and the decisions they make on the land.

Unfortunately, this rule would exacerbate the affordability crisis we are experiencing in this country. It would make it more expensive for farmers and other businesses to bring their products to market at an affordable price due to the complex web of regulations they would have to navigate. This could put affordable food, safe housing and reliable energy out of reach for some Americans. 🙏



Lauren Lurkins serves as Director of Environmental Policy in the Governmental Affairs and Commodities Division of the Illinois Farm Bureau.

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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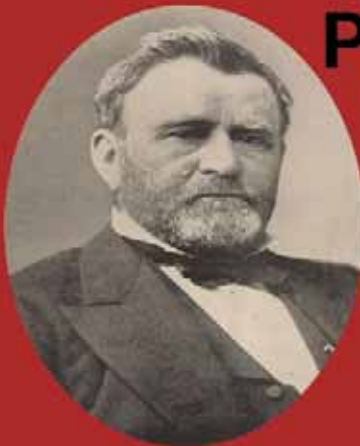
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President U. S. Grant's Bicentennial Celebration

April 29 - May 1, 2022
Galena, Illinois



Activities

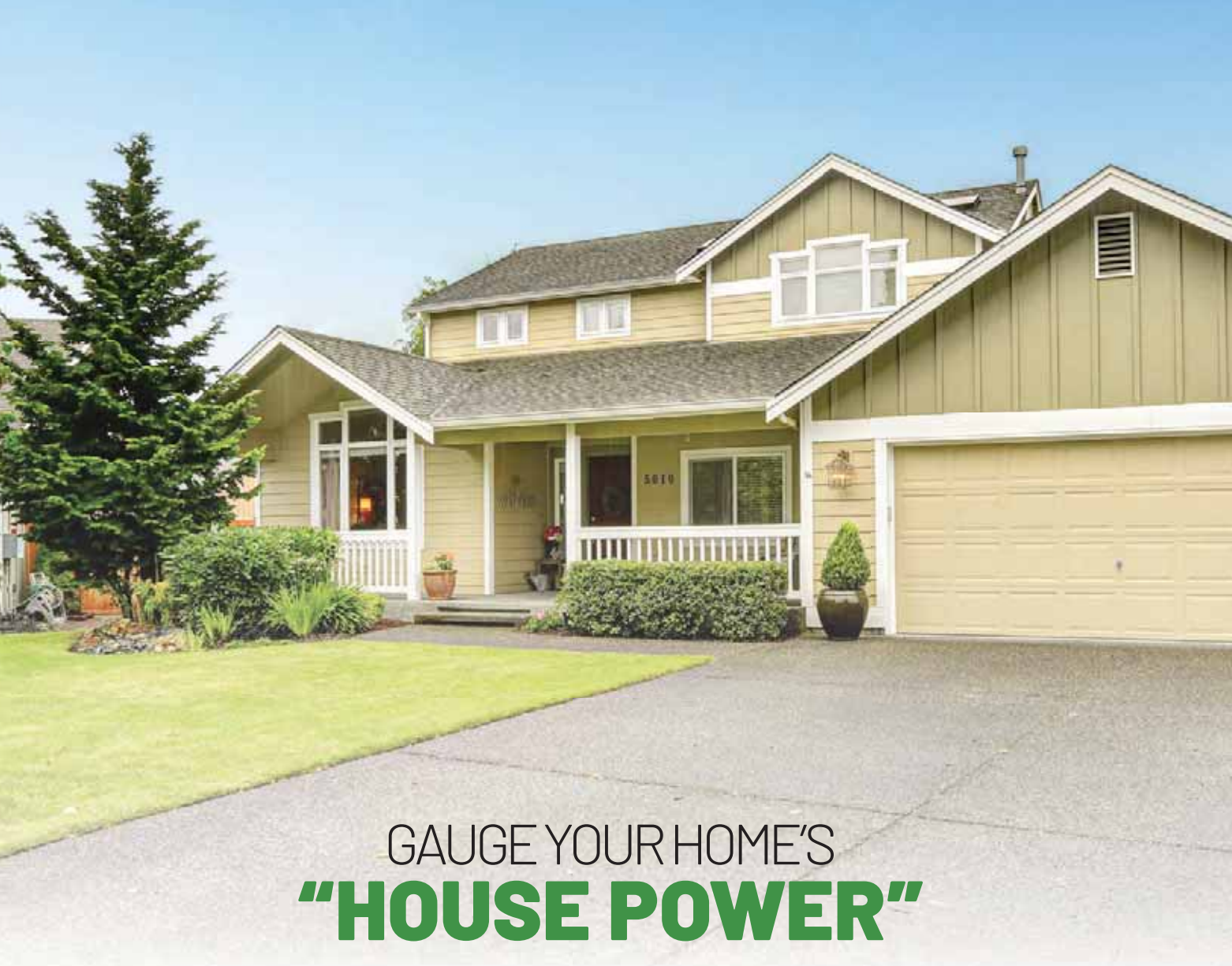
- Tour the Grant family's pre-Civil War Home - open to the public for a limited time!
 - General & Mrs. Grant presentation by Scott & Peggy Whitney
- Lamplight Tour of the Grant family's post-Civil War Home, Grant Home State Historic Site
- "Mr. U.S. Grant: A Man and A Patriot!" program by IL Road Scholar, Dan Haughey, with Dinner & Silent Auction at Turner Hall followed by new exhibit opening
- FREE Admission to the Galena & U.S. Grant Museum on 4/30-5/1/22

Visit www.galenahistory.org for details and tickets!



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GAUGE YOUR HOME'S "HOUSE POWER"

Do you have frequently blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers? Do your appliances operate more slowly than they should? Do your lights dim when other appliances and equipment are in use?

If so, you probably have low "house power," and the problem can usually be traced to your home's wiring.

The wiring in your house determines how much electricity you can safely use. Low "house power" is a signal that your home doesn't have adequate wiring to meet your family's electric needs.

The remedy might not be as expensive as you think. However, you need to consult an experienced electrical contractor to help determine how to gain the "house power" needed in your home.

Call your local Touchstone Energy cooperative today for more information. Safety precautions mean peace of mind.



Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives

APRIL CHECKLIST



**Thank a
lineman.**
Lineworker
Appreciation Day
is Monday, April 11.

Turn off before turning in.

Turning off
outdoor lights
at bedtime
can be a
sign to potential intruders
that someone is home.



Taking a vacation? Don't announce it on social media.

Wait until you
have returned
to post those
photos.



Tip of the month. Avoid
streaming on game consoles.
They use 10
times more
power than a
tablet or laptop.



Commitment to community

Clinton County Electric Cooperative, Inc., Breese, recently awarded \$4,000 in Touchstone Energy 2021/2022 Classroom Empowerment Grants. Eight classrooms in six local schools received the funds to help with educational projects.

Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, Dongola, awarded Classroom Empowerment Grants for a variety of projects at area schools. Projects include an outdoor classroom, motor skill development, a media center printing station, hands-on science kits and Vernier probes for advanced science classes.

McDonough Power Cooperative, Macomb, distributed \$8,000 in Operation Round Up grants to local organizations for projects that benefit youth. The funds will help replace a worn-out playground used by an after-school program, purchase of targets for a national scholastic 3-D archery program, and a sensory playground accessible to all students, kindergarten through third grade. 💡



Where is it?



The winners of the February hidden object contest are Tara Johnsey from SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative and John Gordon of Menard Electric Cooperative. Congratulations, and your ICL Tervis tumblers are on their way!

March's leprechaun hat was hidden among the Black-eyed Susans on page 22. Winner's names will be drawn and notified.

It's time for a new hidden object search. April showers bring May flowers, so April's symbol is an umbrella. Remember, symbols can vary in size and will never be on this page, a lettered page or in an ad.

Entries must include your name, address, name of your electric co-op (non-members are also eligible), and the page number and location of the symbol. Visit icl.coop/hiddenobject and fill out the entry form, use the link under Contact Us on the website, or mail a postcard to Illinois Country Living, Hidden Objects, 6460 S. 6th Street Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. We will NOT take letters or entries via phone call. All entries for that month must be postmarked or received via email by the 15th. Winner's names and the location of the symbol will be published in each month's issue of Illinois Country Living.

Good luck! 💡

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

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



3G phase out coming soon

If your mobile phone is more than a few years old, you may need to upgrade before your mobile provider shuts down its 3G network, to avoid losing service.

During 2022, mobile carriers are shutting down their 3G networks, which rely on older technology, to make room for more advanced network services, including 5G. As a result, many older cell phones will be unable to make or receive calls and texts, including calls to 911, or use data services. This will affect 3G mobile phones and certain older 4G mobile phones.

Contact your mobile provider or consult your provider’s website for more information about their 3G retirement plan and whether your phone, or other connected device, may be affected. It is important to plan now so you don’t lose connectivity, including the ability to call 911.

Other devices, such as certain medical devices, tablets, smart watches, vehicle SOS services, home security systems, etc. may be using 3G network services.

Why are 3G networks being phased out? As mobile carriers seek to upgrade their networks to use the latest technologies, they periodically shut down older services to free up spectrum and infrastructure to support new services, such as 5G. Similar transitions have happened before.

Contact your mobile provider for more information.

Source: Federal Communications Commission

JCE receives Connect Illinois grant

Jo-Carroll Energy’s (JCE) broadband division, Sand Prairie, was awarded a \$4.6 million grant in Round Two in Connect Illinois grant funds.

This grant is the fourth the cooperative has received for its fiber to the premises projects. It will enable construction to bring Sand Prairie fiber to approximately 625 households, businesses or farms in rural portions of Whiteside, Carroll and Jo Daviess counties. This project includes rural areas north of Mount Carroll and areas of Fenton, Fulton, Garden Plain and Albany and will build out 146.8 miles of fiber.

The grant will be combined with JCE matching funds bringing the total project to \$9,377,681.

Power out? Blame a squirrel

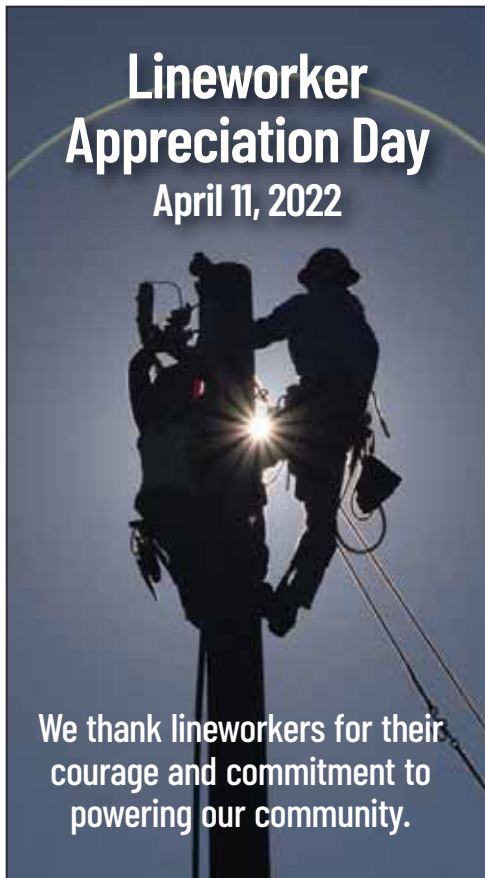
While severe weather causes most outages, if it’s nice out and your electricity goes off, it could be caused by a squirrel. We know to play it safe around electricity, but squirrels don’t. They scamper and chew around transformers, substations and utility poles where they can disrupt high-voltage equipment.

But it’s not just squirrels. Snakes, birds and other critters can find their way into dangerous places. There’s no official recordkeeping of wildlife-caused power outages, but estimates run as high as 20 percent.

Source: NRECA



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEGAN ZOPP



We thank lineworkers for their courage and commitment to powering our community.

Highways could charge electric vehicles in the future

If researchers have their way, electric vehicles wouldn't need to plug in—they could charge while they're being driven.

“Wireless dynamic charging” projects are underway around the world. The idea is similar to wireless chargers you can buy for your home electronics, the kind you can set near a charger rather than actually plugging in the smartphone or other device.

Charging cars while they're driving along the freeway is of course a lot more ambitious. But some developers predict that within five years, in addition to today's special high-occupancy-vehicle lanes for rush-hour traffic in large cities, there could be stretches of vehicle-charging lanes.

Futurists expect electric trucks would be the most likely users of wireless charging lanes. Most electric cars, after all, can charge overnight in a residential garage. Wireless dynamic truck charging could keep the deliveries rolling rather than having drivers sitting and drinking coffee for the several hours it could take a conventional plug-in to get trucks back to full power. 💡

Source: NRECA



PHOTO FROM PIXABAY CONTRIBUTOR LEON WALLIS

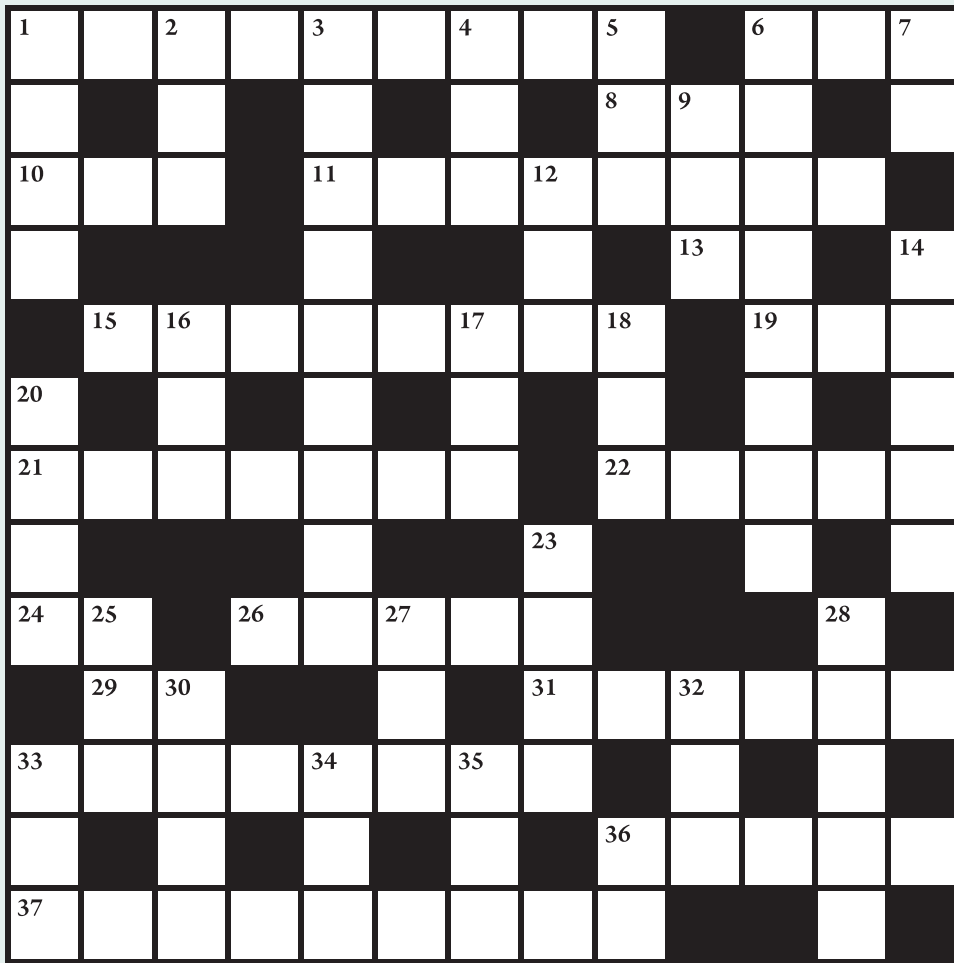
Wireless dynamic charging projects are underway around the world. Some developers predict that within five years, in addition to today's special high-occupancy-vehicle lanes for rush-hour traffic in large cities, there could be stretches of electric vehicle charging lanes.



Digging into an Outdoor Project?



Before you dig, dial 811 or visit www.call811.com to protect underground utilities. Careless digging poses a threat to people, pipelines and underground facilities. Contact 811 first and help keep our community safe.



Across

- 1 White flowers that are among the first to bloom in early spring
- 6 Like a greenhouse
- 8 Climbing plant
- 10 Salad liquid
- 11 Flowers of many colors that originated in South Africa
- 13 Software recipient
- 15 Flowering plants that grow well with fuchsias and ferns
- 19 Savings account, abbr.
- 21 Winter _____: spring flower with just a solitary yellow bloom
- 22 Dapper
- 24 Weight measurement, abbr.
- 26 Tree with shaking leaves
- 29 Word of surprise
- 31 Flowers often white, yellow

- or purple which come out in spring
- 33 White, yellow or purple spring bulbs
- 36 Spring bulb with many multi-colored varieties
- 37 Variety of daffodil with yellow or white flowers or a mix

Down

- 1 Glory-of-the-_____, blue and white flower
- 2 Night predator
- 3 Wordsworth wrote a famous poems about these flowers
- 4 _____ "To Spring"
- 5 Girl in the family
- 6 Spring bulbs of many colors (of the lily family)
- 7 Gift-tag word

- 9 Big shot
- 12 Time schedule to arrive, abbr.
- 14 Flower part
- 16 Concept of self
- 17 Rink surface
- 18 It's vital for photosynthesis
- 20 Like sunflowers
- 23 Liquorish flavor
- 25 Legal people
- 27 Fathers
- 28 Marine _____ trope flower- bright blue in color
- 30 _____ frost
- 32 Note of debt
- 33 Watering _____
- 34 Prefix with versity
- 35 Slalom path
- 36 _____ Eliot (poet)

Solution on page 32.



Guard your card

The Social Security Administration encourages everyone not to carry their Social Security cards every day. The best way to "guard your card" is to keep it in a safe place and only share when required. In most cases, just knowing the number should be enough.

Be careful about sharing your number when asked for it. You should always ask why your number is needed, how it will be used, and what will happen if you refuse. Also, don't carry documents that display your number. 💡

Source: Social Security Administration



LET'S GO!

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



Spring Wildflower Walks

APRIL	APRIL	APRIL
2	9	15

Trillium Trail in Giant City is one of the best spring wildflower trails in southern Illinois. Join

the natural resources coordinator to meander through the spring woods and take a closer look at the beauty. This is a moderately difficult 2-mile trail with some steep stair climbing.

April 2, 9, 15, 2022; 10 a.m.-Noon

● Giant City Visitor Center, 235 Giant City Rd., Makanda

Cost: Free, registration required

618-457-4836 or facebook.com/friendsofgiantcity

Finders Spring Market

APRIL
9

Enjoy all things fresh and fun as more than 80 vendors fill spaces with fabulous finds. Find fresh picked vintage, handmade goods, antiques, industrial and architectural finds, furnishings, seasonal décor, repurposed and upcycled goods, boutique clothing and accessories, and more.

April 9, 2022; 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

● Decatur Conference Center and Hotel, 4191 US 36 West, Decatur

Cost: \$5, children 12 and under free

jumpjiveproductions.com



Grant's Home Front Reenactment and Encampment

APRIL
23-24

Experience life in the 1860s through a Living History Encampment and Civil War Battle. Enjoy the Sanitary Fair (a Civil War ladies bazaar supporting our troops) with beautiful handmade items for sale. On Saturday, park opens at 9 a.m. and closes at 4 p.m. with a battle at 11:30 a.m. Sunday's battle is 1:30 p.m. and park closes at 2 p.m.

April 23-24, 2022; 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

● Depot Park, 91 Bouthillier St., Galena

Cost: \$5, children 12 and under free

Visitgalena.org

Spring Baby Shower

APRIL
30

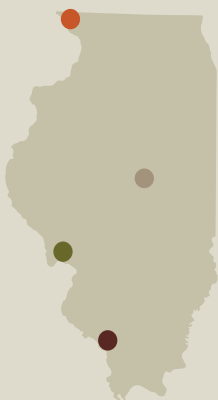
Help celebrate our native wild babies with games, activities and crafts. New this year are artisan craft and food vendors. Bring a donation and be entered to win door prizes. Items on the baby shower list include OxiClean, bungee cords, 33-gallon trash bags, frozen vegetable and fruits, and more. For a complete list of requested donations, visit the website below. Donations help provide care for the baby animals so they can be released back into the wild.

April 30, 2022; 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

● TreeHouse Wildlife Center, 23956 Green Acres Rd., Dow

Cost: Free

618-466-2990 or treehousewildlifecenter.com/donate





MASON CITY & CLEAR LAKE

A Perfect Pair: No other destination blends world-class architecture, small-town charm and endless memories quite like Mason City and Clear Lake. Relax and recharge at one of the top beaches in America, dance the night away at the **Surf Ballroom** then settle in for the night in one of the luxe rooms at **Frank Lloyd Wright's Historic Park Inn**.

DYERSVILLE

A Piece of Heaven: Sometimes confused with heaven, Dyersville is a small yet exciting Iowa stop. Home to the **Field of Dreams Movie Site**, **If You Build It Museum**, **National Farm Toy Museum** and **Dyer-Botsford House and Doll Museum**, this community boasts some memorable attractions. Complete your visit with a drink at a local winery or brewery.

JACKSON COUNTY

Luscious Lands: Home to **Maquoketa Caves** and **Bellevue State Park** along with 38 county parks and the Mississippi and Maquoketa Rivers, this county's rolling hills and overlooks offer a perfect break from the road. Reconnect with nature by hiking through the caves or along the rivers, camping in tents or cabins or exploring the waterways on kayaks and canoes.

CEDAR RAPIDS

Cultural Corridor: Cedar Rapids offers surprises with every turn. Visit Iowa's only statewide museum devoted to preserving African American history and culture at the **African American Historical Museum**. Step back in time with a visit to **Brucemore Mansion**, Iowa's only National Trust Historic Site. Explore the shops and flavors of the **New Bohemia Shopping District**.

AMANA COLONIES

Historic Haven: Named a National Historic Landmark, the German-founded Amana Colonies offer many must-visit Iowa road trip attractions. Discover historic crafts at the woolen mill, sit down to a family-style meal at restaurants or relax at wineries and breweries. Learn about its communal history with a visit to the **Amana Heritage Society**.

FORT MADISON

Ancient Adventures: Dating back to the early 1800s, Fort Madison is full of culture, past and present. Discover the first military outpost on the upper Mississippi with a visit to the **Old Fort Madison**, or head to the **Old Santa Fe Depot** to learn about the town's rich railroad history. For modern fun, peruse Main Street's shops, restaurants and breweries.

RED ROCK AREA

Sights and Sounds: Savor sweet Dutch pastries in **Pella**, hear the engines roar at sprint car races in **Knoxville** and see nature's beauty in every season at **Lake Red Rock**. Invent your adventure at Red Rock Area's cozy places, relaxing pubs, specialty shops, and exhilarating recreational activities.

travel
IOWA

WONDERING WHY IOWA (WASN'T ON YOUR MUST-DO ADVENTURES LIST SOONER)?

Hey, Illinois! Pack your bags and buckle up because adventure awaits, and it's closer than you think. An exhilarating day trip or relaxing weekend getaway is in store in Iowa.

YEAR OF THE



ROAD



TRIP



This is your adventure.
THIS IS IOWA.

MASON CITY & CLEAR LAKE



DYERSVILLE

JACKSON COUNTY

AMANA COLONIES

CEDAR RAPIDS



RED ROCK AREA



FORT MADISON

Find fun without going far at
traveliowa.com.



Please make room for roadside crews

WHEN THE POWER GOES out, so do the line crews of your local electric cooperative. Lineworkers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work tirelessly to restore power, no matter the time of day or the weather.

Protecting line crews is a top priority for Illinois electric cooperatives, and it's a safety measure everyone can help with. National Work Zone Awareness Week is April 11-15 and serves as a reminder for drivers to make room for roadside crews. Moving over is not only a good law, but also the courteous thing to do.

Crews already perform dangerous work to keep the lights on. They deserve a work environment that's as safe as possible. If you're traveling and see a crew working on the side of the road, please move over if possible and give them extra space to work.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a two-lane road, moving

over to the next lane might not be an option. In this case, simply slow down when approaching roadside crews. If you approach a crew while traveling on a four-lane road, and safety and traffic conditions allow, move over into the far lane.

In Illinois, it's the law. Scott's Law requires drivers to move over or slow down when approaching any vehicle displaying flashing emergency lights, including commercial trucks and cars. Slow down, change lanes, if possible, and always proceed with caution.

Electric utility crews are special cases to watch out for. A study of utility worksite accidents found that the relatively temporary nature of power line repairs could surprise motorists. A roadside construction operation might close a lane for days or weeks, giving time for people familiar with the area to anticipate the changed traffic pattern. Utility work can start and finish in a few hours, possibly raising risks

with drivers who might think they know the road ahead.

Another risk to watch for is when worksites are being put up or taken down. Roadside accidents can happen as crews are setting up signs and traffic cones.

Utility crews aren't the only ones who need extra space. Emergency responders, such as police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians, often find themselves responding to emergency situations near busy roadways. We ask that you follow the same procedures mentioned above to help keep these crews safe.

There's plenty of room for all. Let's work together to keep everyone safe on our local roadways. Don't drive distracted. Drive according to the conditions of the road. Be courteous to roadside work crews. Watch the signs and obey them. It's good advice that could save a life. 💡



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



Plan a road trip to Carbondale, Illinois and embrace your inner wanderlust. Sip award winning wines and take in the picturesque views of rolling hills and rocky bluffs among the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail. Lose yourself in the woods on one of the many hiking trails at Giant City State Park or camp, rock-climb or just relax in the endless beauty of the Shawnee National Forest. Dine out at eclectic eateries and enjoy locally sourced cuisine in peaceful patio settings. Unwind with live music and enjoy the downtown nightlife scene with drinks and cocktails on the "strip". The day could end worlds away from where it began – all without traveling more than a few miles.

Adventure Starts Here

618.529.4451 | carbondaletourism.org

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Astronomical internet

EVERYONE WANTS ACCESS TO reliable, high-speed internet. As an IT professional of nearly 25 years, I've spent most of my career living in rural Illinois where high-speed internet has always been just out of reach.

Trust me when I say I've tried every option available from cellular hotspots, satellite and wireless broadband providers, and none of them have delivered the performance needed to accommodate a family of six, let alone an IT professional who relies on technology.

On days when internet demand is high in my house, it is not uncommon to prioritize who is allowed to connect. If I need to use the internet for work, the rest of the family must wait until I have completed my work before they get access.

Three miles from my residence, new fiber-optic internet is being installed; however, there is no intention of bringing that service to my sparsely populated neighborhood just on the outskirts of town. If you live in rural Illinois, you can probably relate. However, I am happy to report there is a new option available, and you may or may not have already heard of it.

Elon Musk, co-founder and CEO of Tesla and rocket

manufacturer SpaceX has delivered on a solution to provide internet across the globe. Starlink provides high-speed, low-latency broadband by deploying thousands of low Earth orbiting (LEO) satellites hovering somewhere between 125 and 1,200 miles above Earth.

In comparison, traditional satellites orbit 20,000 miles above Earth, resulting in high latency. Latency is the time it takes for the signal to travel from your computer to the satellite and back again.

This high latency is why traditional satellite internet is not sufficient to meet the demands of the modern household. Starlink has recently moved from beta testing to offering a fully functional product. While it has not yet reached its full potential, it recently became more widely available as more LEO satellites have been launched.


I signed up to be among the first to receive this new high-speed satellite internet more than a year ago. I am happy to report that Starlink is now available in central Illinois, and it may be available to you as well.

I've been using Starlink for a couple of weeks and can say that it lives up to my expectations and delivers where no other provider in my area could. Starlink advertises

speeds between 100 and 200 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 20 Mbps upload with latency as low as 20 milliseconds.

These speeds are consistent with my experience at home with a clear unobstructed view of the sky. When compared to my old wireless provider that charged me \$20 less per month and provided a measly 6 Mbps download, .5 Mbps upload and more than 400 milliseconds latency, I couldn't be happier.

Starlink is impressive, but what about fiber? Starlink isn't going to replace fiber anytime soon, if ever. Fiber is still far superior, and if I had that option, I would prefer fiber to any wireless or satellite solution. Unfortunately, fiber is not an option for many rural Illinoisians.

If you are looking into high-speed broadband solutions, you should first reach out to your local internet providers and see if they offer a fiber solution in your area. Many of these providers are working hard to deploy fiber to the home and you could be next on the list. If you can't wait for fiber to come to your door and need a solution, check out Starlink.com to see your options. 



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



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Five questions to ask your home inspector



Ask your home inspector if the electrical panel can accommodate new appliances you might want to add, such as air conditioning or an electric vehicle charger. Photo courtesy of Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources



Miranda Boutelle is the director of operations and customer engagement at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company.

Q: I'm planning to buy a new home this year, and I want to know how efficient it is. What questions should I ask my home inspector?

A: **MANY FACTORS GO** into buying a home. For most people, energy efficiency does not top the list and houses don't typically come with energy efficiency ratings.

It can be difficult for a buyer to know how efficient a home is when viewing the listing online or taking a tour. But your home inspector can help you identify potential energy costs and energy-efficiency upgrades.

Some homes may already be efficient, while other homes may need improvements. There's nothing wrong with buying an inefficient home, but you will want to

know what you're getting into and that you can afford the energy costs once you get the keys.

Here are five questions to ask your home inspector.

What is the condition of the electrical panel and wiring throughout the home?

A panel upgrade or rewiring can be a costly endeavor. An older panel and wiring aren't inefficient, but it can delay or make some energy-efficiency projects more expensive. In several homes I have worked on, older wiring had to be replaced before insulation could be added.

Make sure the panel can accommodate any new appliances you might want to add, such as air conditioning or an electric vehicle charger.

How old is the HVAC system, and how efficient is it? Has it been maintained?

The typical lifespan of an HVAC system is 15 to 25 years. As the largest energy user and often the most expensive equipment in the home, you will want to know the energy, maintenance and replacement costs. If the HVAC system is old, consider the cost of replacement.

How old is the water heater?

The lifespan of a storage water heater is about 10 years. The replacement cost ranges from \$400 to \$3,600, depending on the unit type and installation costs. If an older water heater is in a finished space or on a second floor, replace it before it fails and potentially causes water damage.

What are the levels and conditions of insulation in the attic, walls and floor?

Insulation is one of the easiest and most beneficial energy-efficiency

upgrades you can make. It can make a home more comfortable, waste less energy and reduce outdoor noise.

To cut down on drafts and make insulation more effective, air seal before insulating. Seal cracks, gaps or holes in the walls, floors, ceiling and framing between heated and unheated spaces.

If your new home needs insulation and air sealing, make this your efficiency priority. The sooner you do it, the more energy you will save over time. Recommended insulation levels vary by location. You can find information about insulation and air sealing at energy.gov.

Are there any extras in this home that will increase my utility bills?

Any motors in the home or on the property should be assessed, including pumps for wells and septic systems. When it comes to extras, remember life's luxuries aren't free. You will want to be able to afford the cost of operating amenities, such as pools, hot tubs and saunas.

Additional considerations

You can request the home's utility bills for the previous two years from the seller or realtor. Your bill will not be the same due to your personal energy habits, but this information will give you an estimate of the home's energy costs.

When buying a home that checks all your boxes, ask your home inspector the right efficiency questions. Understanding the condition of appliances, features and building materials can save you from hidden surprises in your home and on your first utility bills. 💡

Add early pops of color

AFTER A LONG WINTER, many seek signs of spring – trees blooming against a canopy of bare branches, bulbs appearing from crusted brown earth, and pale blades of grass breaking dormancy in shades of glorious green. One thing this gardener looks forward to is filling the porch and patio containers with annual plant combinations that burst with color as a reminder that warm weather is coming soon. Although bare garden beds cannot be filled yet, don't discount the season. A small selection of colorful annuals that love the cooler spring-time temperatures are available.

Cool-season annuals can tolerate light frost and grow best during the cool weather during spring and fall. This characteristic makes them great contenders for extending the growing season and allowing your garden to come alive with color before other plants consider showing up for the season. As a bonus, these annuals make beautiful companions to spring-blooming bulbs and shrubs in the landscape.

Many garden centers are already stocking spring favorites. Pansy, viola, ranunculus and primrose are commonly found this time of

year, and all are available in a wide range of colors and combinations. The ever-favorite pansies and violas have cheery, flat blooms resembling painted faces popping up out of the foliage. Ranunculus (one of my favorites) has perfect rose-like

of color among spring-blooming shrubs and bulbs.

In addition to giving us hope for warmer weather, cool-season annuals supply the early spring pollinators searching for much-needed nectar. In early March, pollinators



flowers, and primrose offers large amounts of bright blooms on a rosette of dark green foliage.

Others that may tolerate cooler temperatures are sweet alyssum, snapdragon, nasturtiums and dianthus. Cool-season plants grown for their foliage are ornamental kale, Swiss chard and dusty miller.

Add interesting twigs, like birch, contorted filbert or willow to the center of cool-season containers or arrangements. These elements add height and interest to the arrangement of low-growing plants. If planting in-ground, group plants in large masses to create waves

emerge looking for food sources to survive. There are few flowering plants blooming except bulbs like grape hyacinth and crocus. Our additions of cool-season annuals are an important addition to their spring diet.

As the weather warms in late May and June, many cool-season plants will fade out and stop blooming. Once the threat of frost has passed, it is time to fill your containers with warm-temperature loving annuals and tropical plants to enjoy all summer. 💡



Brittnay Haag is a Horticulture Educator for the University of Illinois Extension serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford counties. Her work focuses on youth horticulture education through school gardens and Jr. Master Gardener programs.



HOUSE HUNTERS

GETTING THE MOST FOR YOUR HOME

By Les O'Dell



ACROSS THE NATION, THE real estate market has been red-hot, with demand for homes exceeding supply and, in many areas, selling faster and for more money than ever before.

Even in cases where sellers anticipate numerous offers and a quick sale, they still benefit from efforts to get the highest selling price possible.

“I think there are a lot of sellers who overlook trying to get the most money for their home, and that’s one of the biggest mistakes I see. Even in a hyperactive market, you still should try to get top dollar,” explains Jason Gelios, author of “Think Like a Realtor.”

There are ways to help a home sell quickly and for top dollar.

“Selling your house without completing simple improvements is like choosing to sell your car because you don’t want to vacuum it,” says Kyler Cook, a realtor in Kalamazoo, Mich. “A little bit of effort will translate into a better buyer experience and a higher selling price.”

Change your perspective

“When selling, it is best to stop thinking of it as ‘your home’ and more like a product with the goal of appealing to as many prospective buyers as possible,” says Jonathan Faccone, a real estate investor and developer in New Jersey. “It’s easy to become emotionally involved, but it’s best to remember that any renovations are meant to net you the most

money, not for your own personal satisfaction.”

Ralph DiBugnara, president of Home Qualified, an online real estate resource, calls it “looking at your home with buyers’ eyes.”

Experts say it benefits the seller to have someone else provide feedback about your home.

“One of the best things a homeowner can do when looking to sell is to invite a non-partial, third-party to give their honest opinion about the house,” Gelios adds. “Get someone who is not afraid to tell the truth, walk the home and give their impressions.”

Upgrade to sell

To get the most for your home, upgrades may be in order. But how do you decide what to renovate and how much to spend? Huntsville, Ala. real estate investor Jordan Fulmer says market research is as important for sellers as it is for buyers.

“Look at the houses in your area – essentially your competition – and see what kind of features and finishes they have,” he says, adding that good research will help sellers not only decide what to do, but also not to over-do renovations and improvements.

Almost without exception, real estate professionals say even though the entire home is important, sellers should primarily focus on two areas: the kitchen and bathrooms ... especially the kitchen.

Gelios explains, “Home sellers should make the kitchen top



Ralph DiBugnara of Home Qualified assists with a kitchen makeover prior to placing a house on the market.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RALPH DIBUGNARA/SW PUBLIC RELATIONS

priority. As the heart of the home, sellers should make updates to the cabinet hardware, lighting fixtures and even update appliances. This will not only bring the best offer from a home buyer, but it will also lead to a faster sale.”

Making renovations to the kitchen will boost the sale price, Cook says.

“It’s the highest return-on-investment area of the house,” he explains. “For every \$1,000 you spend, you should see something like \$3,000 in return.”

Neutral colors – shades of white, beige and gray are best, he says. “Don’t use bright colors and keep things in the middle of the line. Avoid luxury items.”

Even minor changes make a difference, DiBugnara says.

“Changing cabinet knobs, putting in under-cabinet lights and other little things that are inexpensive make everything look new and make the house easier to sell,” he explains.



Make a strong impression outside

Many experts say initially focus on what potential buyers see first. Whether in-person or online, a home must capture attention. Known as curb appeal, the general attractiveness of a house from the street or the sidewalk is a priority.

“When somebody pulls up to the house, they’re going to see landscaping, and it has to be tasteful and in good shape,” Jimmy Whaley of Whaley Realty in Americus, Ga. explains.

Fulmer says the way a home looks when a prospective buyer arrives sets a precedent for the rest of their visit. The home needs power washed or freshly painted. At minimum, give the front door a touch-up.

Don’t ignore the top of the home, Fulmer says. If the roof is still in good condition, he recommends having it professionally power washed to remove any streaks or stains and make it look almost new.

Likewise, improving the looks of the front of your home without paying attention to the rest of the property is akin to only ironing the collar and cuffs of a shirt.

Outbuildings, the backyard, decks and patios need to look their best and can be attractive to potential buyers, as a way of bringing the inside outside.

“More people are looking for ways to fully utilize their property by creating outdoor living spaces. You can capitalize on this by creating a private outdoor seating area. It doesn’t have to be large, just big enough for a cafe table and chairs,” says Rinal Patel of We Buy Any Philly Home. “It should be a serene spot that’s perfect for enjoying a morning cup of coffee or an evening cocktail.”

... And inside

The initial impact when someone enters a home may be the only impression they take away with them.

“When buyers walk in, they get a perspective of the home and are likely not to change it,” cautions Amy Smith, a realtor in Cheyenne, Wyo. “You don’t want people to recall your house negatively. ‘Oh yeah, I remember that house; it was the one with the dirty windows or the sticky doorknobs.’ We want them remembering all of the really good things about the house.”

For that reason, brokers encourage de-cluttering, deep cleaning and home staging.

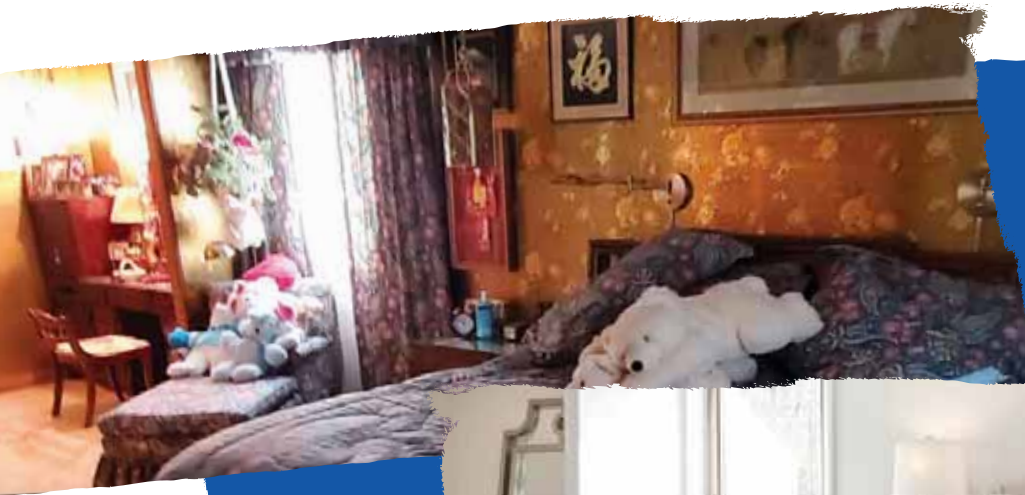
“This isn’t a costly investment, but it requires time and effort,” explains Chase Michels, a Downers Grove, Ill. realtor. “A cluttered house will make a large room appear small and cramped. Cleaning and decluttering your home could help you see up to a \$2,000 price increase.”

Whaley says decluttering means more than shoving items in a closet. Instead, he recommends moving personal items like photo albums, collections and even out-of-season clothes, off-site. Then, the home needs cleaned.

“I don’t mean to scrub the baseboards with a toothbrush, but at least make sure every time someone is coming, the home is dusted, swept and vacuumed,” he says.

Sellers should strive to present the home in its best light from the beginning, not just for showings.

Smith says more than 80 percent of home shoppers review properties online before looking in person. For that reason, she recommends the home not only be clean, but also



Before and after – a fresh coat of paint and decluttering to remove personal effects can go a long way in helping a potential buyer visualize what the space could be. Consider hiring a home stager.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEIGH NEWPORT, STAGED BY DESIGN



CURB APPEAL



A few simple things can help sellers maximize the price they get for their homes. From basic clean-up to renovations, thinking like a buyer helps homes sell faster and for more money.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAN CANNON, RE/MAX TRADERS UNLIMITED, PEORIA, ILL.

all photographs used in marketing the property be professionally done.

“I’m confident that professional photography and professional cleaning absolutely pays dividends on the bottom line,” she asserts.

Many recommend using the services of a home stager, a professional who can make a property look “picture perfect,” through consultations with residents or by bringing in furniture to make an empty house look like a home.

Help buyers feel at home

The goal is to help house hunters imagine themselves living in the home and making them feel welcome.

“Fragrances are important,” urges Fulmer. “We always recommend a vanilla scent. Also consider having some kind of refreshment available. Whether it be drinks or a self-serve coffee station, small gestures can make potential buyers’ viewing experience more enjoyable. The more comfortable they feel, the more they will want to live there and the more they will be willing to pay for it.”

Letting buyers know “inside” information also is important – things like what internet service is available, if there is hardwood under the carpeting and which walls are non-load bearing and potentially could be removed as part of future remodeling.

Taking the right steps to prepare a home for sale can make a big difference in how quickly the home attracts buyers and how much they are willing to pay. It takes some work but is worth it.

“Sure, you can just put your house up for sale and it probably will sell,” Smith cautions. “But if you don’t do the little things, it’s like leaving money on the table.” 💡

The old warning that there is not a second chance to make a first impression is true not only for people, but for homes too. That’s why the way a house looks from the road or street – often called curb appeal – is especially important.

“You must invest a little to make your home flawless in the buyer’s eyes,” explains Dan Belcher, CEO of Mortgage Relief. “Consider first and foremost the curb appeal. First impressions, as they say, are the most valuable. Improve the exterior by upgrading the front door, installing new light fittings or adding plants to make it more enticing to potential purchasers.”

Curb appeal, especially when it comes to landscaping, does not have to be complicated, according to Sheila Schrader of Schrader Landscape Design in Lincoln, Neb.

“When I am working with a client who knows they are selling their home, I actually encourage them to do some simplifying to their landscaping and make sure that it looks like it’s easy to maintain,” she says.

She adds would-be sellers should choose landscaping with selling in mind.

“It’s important to focus on the front of the home, as that is what makes the first impression,” she says. “I recommend choosing plants that have their peak bloom or color when the house is going onto the market.”

She also recommends putting plants in decorative containers near the front door and along sidewalks.

“It’s bright and an easy investment to bring color into your landscape. Plus, you can take those with you when you move to your new home,” she says.

Schrader said the outdoor areas of the home should be staged just like the interior. She suggests cleaning up gardens and flower beds and adding new cushions to outdoor furniture.

“It adds a pop of color and make it feel warm and inviting. It’s a good way to help people picture themselves in the landscape,” she explains.

Jason Gelios, author of “Think Like a Realtor,” says curb appeal – from the lawn to the way the home’s exterior looks – is incredibly important.

If you have home buyers pull up to a house and in their mind feel it will take thousands of dollars to clean up a yard, or if they see branches and dead trees in the backyard, they’re not going to care if the inside of the house is updated or not. Landscaping is huge, especially in rural areas.”

He adds that curb appeal does not just mean what can be seen from the road, street or sidewalk; it’s the entire property.

“It’s the front, it’s the back, it’s any out-buildings, it’s everything. It all matters,” he says.

Chase Michels, a Downers Grove, Ill. real estate consultant explains paint is a great investment to enhance curb appeal.

“Painting the exterior is a cost-effective upgrade for a home. An exterior paint job can potentially increase the value of your home from 2-5 percent. Selecting the right paint will give your home a clean look, the widest range of buyers and help improve its value,” he says.

Michels suggests neutral colors like white or cream for the exterior and using a color for railings, trim and accents for a fresh look.

“Even if you decide against a complete paint project, consider painting the door an eye-catching color to make a great first impression,” he adds.

First impressions are vital, Gelios says. “You can have a really beautiful home with all the attractive features, but if the curb appeal spells disaster when a buyer pulls up, that may hinder the rest of the showing experience,” he concludes. 💡





That's what She Shed

By Lisa Cherry

SELF-EXPRESSION HAS FOUND A new avenue in the most unlikely of places—the backyard. Women across the state, and the country, are creating the woman's equivalent of a “man cave.”

The origins, styles and purposes of these “she sheds” are as unique as their owners. Yoga and art studios, outdoor living and entertaining areas, home offices and workspaces—women have a myriad of reasons for creating these designated spaces.

Aunt Red

Take, for instance, Myra Bennett's she shed, affectionately named “Aunt Red” after her close friend's aunt. Bennett, after retiring from a career in social work, found herself restless and needing an outlet.

“I decided to write a children's book about a little dog we'd had, and I was going to sell it to make money for our local

humane shelter. So I [needed] a place where I could write,” she says. “In one end, there is a little writing and reading area. On the other end, I've created an old-fashioned farm kitchen. I have girlfriends come for lunch, and we just have the best time.”

Bennett, who lives in the southernmost part of the state, says her first guests were Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative line-workers who came to run power to Aunt Red. “I think it was the first time they'd heard of a she shed,” she laughs.

The daughter of a World War II veteran who was a banker, Bennett attempted to do things as inexpensively as possible. She says she was pleased with her experience at EZ Portable Buildings, which has locations in Anna, Marion, Mt. Vernon and Carmi.

“Anymore, [she sheds] come in all different color combinations, and you can get different colored tin roofs.” She selected

a red 12- by 24-foot shed with a green tin roof. “In time my husband built me a front porch,” she adds. “It's the front porch that really makes it.”

She has enjoyed decorating Aunt Red with antiques and items from her childhood, like her parents' china and coffee percolator. “I like old linens and things like that. I had been having fun purchasing these items, but I really wasn't using them in my home. So it just all started coming together.” Other adornments include a portrait of Aunt Red's namesake and a series of license plates from Colorado, one of her favorite places to visit.

“[The shed has] double barn doors, which I open up wide in the spring and fall,” she says. Bennett has equipped her shed with outlets, galvanized lights and electric fireplaces, and her husband built an accompanying outhouse they have named “Uncle Johnny.”

Aunt Red has been a perfect fit for Bennett's needs. She finished her book, "The Life and Times of Hurricane Charley Bennett," and is now working on her next project, a book based on her favorite saying that has become even more poignant amid the pandemic—finding your happy medium.

Char She Shed on Wheels

Charlene Shallow had different reasons for her "Char She Shed on Wheels." She describes it as a retirement transition for her and husband Maurice. The couple currently lives on Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative lines.

Childhood memories of camping on family land in Ontario prompted the idea. Although the couple has not yet retired, they already enjoy the she shed in their backyard. "We ended up pouring a cement pad in the backyard. ... We go and sit, and it feels like we're at camp, even though we're just steps away from our house. It feels like we aren't home."

Shallow, a self-proclaimed HGTV binge watcher, says she did a lot of research before selecting her she shed. Eventually she decided

to work with Doug Schroeder, owner of Timbercraft Tiny Homes. "It was the right build and right style for me," she says.

"I knew I was looking for certain things," Shallow adds. "Doug was very specific. 'What do you want this for?' I said, 'Well, I want to be able to pick it up and go and drop it off and live out of it for a while.'"

Based on their discussion, Schroeder advised her to go with a slightly smaller version than she originally wanted (from 10 feet to 8.5 feet wide) to avoid the need for special permits required by different states.

Shallow, inspired by the tiny home movement, went with a Craftsman country look for the 36-foot-long and 13.5-foot-high space. Keeping storage and portability in mind, she had Schroeder outfit her RV-certified she shed with lights and hookups, a composting toilet, tiled shower, washer and dryer, stove, refrigerator, fireplace, and a catwalk for their pets. It even has a walk-in closet.

"When my mom and niece come to visit, they love it. It's like we've built a cottage," Shallow says. "I love it. It's everything I had hoped for. We use our backyard much more."

Shedding light

Both women have advice for those looking into getting a she shed of their own.

"[You] really have to think about storage and maneuverability around the space and how that fits for you," Shallow says. "The neat thing about [she sheds] is that they're used for different reasons. They come in different styles and have different capabilities. Some are more modern, and some are more eclectic."

She advises others to be purposeful in the decision-making process. "Determine what's important to you, what kind of investment you want to make, and what will make you comfortable in it. Pay attention to specifics."

Bennett says one of her goals was finding less expensive options. She advises women not to overlook premade sheds but to also price building materials. She recommends perusing online and print resources for ideas, particularly Pinterest, blogs and magazines.

She encourages women to embrace their creative side. "Don't let anybody make you feel silly if it speaks to you. Create your special place," she says. "You want yourself a she shed, you get yourself a she shed."💡



Char She Shed on Wheels



Bounty of the forest

AS THE WINTER SNOW melts and temperatures warm, Illinois outdoor lovers anticipate the start of mushroom hunting. Southern Illinois will be the first area to produce the treasured fungi beginning the first two weeks of April. Look for tree-covered southern-facing slopes. These are the first areas to bring out the woodland harvest.

During mid-April, central Illinois will begin producing, followed by the northern section late in the month. Keep in mind, morels do best with warm days and mild nights, and a cold front can set back their appearance.

Good mushroom hunting can continue until and sometimes beyond Mother's Day.

It is always a race to find the treasures before they are hidden among May flowers and other vegetation growing on the forest floor.

Late season yellow morels are the giants of the mushroom harvest. I have seen yellows standing well above the forest floor and visible for a long distance. Look carefully if you see some, a motherlode could be hidden in surrounding vegetation.

Many Illinois public lands are open for foraging with only some restrictions. During spring turkey season, visitors to state parks, fish and wildlife areas, and other IDNR-managed sites must remember hunting areas are closed daily, from before sunrise to 1 p.m., to other activities. The hunting area safety restrictions apply to all visitors, including mushroom collectors. For turkey season dates, check the IDNR website at dnr.illinois.gov.

No license is required for mushroom collecting in Illinois, but collectors always need landowner permission on private property. Carrying written permission from the landowner is always a good idea.

On public sites, mushroom collectors must adhere to approved regulations and hours. Collection is prohibited in any area designated as a dedicated nature preserve.

In the Cache River State Natural Area, mushroom hunting is allowed in most areas and there is no limit on the amount collected.

Mushroom collectors should call ahead to the IDNR site they intend to visit to learn of any site-specific

regulations, and no fungi collected on public lands in Illinois may be offered for sale.

Mycologists (mushroom experts) advise hunters to carry collected mushrooms in open weave mesh bags. Porous woven bags allow mushroom spores to escape and fall to the forest floor where they can repopulate.

If you are new to woodland foraging and can't find help from a local mushroom hunter, there are YouTube videos available.

Taking a slow stroll through the woods on a warm spring day is a fabulous experience. Top it off with a platter of fried morels for dinner, and you are in outdoor lover's heaven. 💡



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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The deli and market serves up American favorites, including fish sandwiches with pickles, lettuce, tomato and cheese.



Owners Aaron and Julie Christ



Louie's P&R Italian Market

By Les O'Dell

IT WOULD BE INCORRECT to call Louie's P&R Italian Market a grocery. Likewise, "restaurant" does not adequately describe the longtime Williamson County establishment. Nor does the term deli fit.

Louie's P&R, as it is known, is all the above and more. Simply put, the business is a Herrin, Ill. icon – a connection and reminder of the community's Italian heritage.

"Our Italian heritage speaks for itself in a lot of ways in Herrin," Mayor Steve Frattini says. "Louie's helps personify that because of the selection of Italian products. The market certainly is helping."

The iconic nature of Louie's P&R is not lost on the business' owners, Aaron and Julie Christ, who have not only embraced the market's history, qualities and role in the community, but also have enhanced it.

Both area natives spent 20 years living in St. Louis prior to returning to southern Illinois. The Christs then purchased Louie's P&R from the Gualdoni family, who operated the market for more than 60 years. However, the establishment's history goes back much further.

The business first opened in the 1890s as a meat market and butcher shop and was originally known as D&R Market. A change in ownership led to a change in name to P&R in 1950. Gualdoni bought

the market in 1957, amending the name again to Louie's P&R.

Regardless of its name changes, visits to the market are a tradition that spans generations.

"We are a bustling market," Julie explains. "We have groceries on the shelves, we are a meat market, and we have a deli with a dine-in area."

The Christs have refined the market's focus and product line in recent years. During their time in St. Louis, the couple fell in love with the shops, delis and markets of "The Hill," a Gateway City neighborhood rich in Italian heritage.

"We've tried to bring that same feel here. Instead of just being a deli or a place for lunch, we want to be more. That's why we have added the freezer case full of ravioli, tortellini and other pastas. We're trying to expand while keeping all of the traditional things that have always been here," she says.

Don't expect aisles and aisles of grocery products such as milk and eggs. The market limits itself to Italian ingredients, pastas, olive oils, sauces, cheeses and other items like seasonings and rubs for grilling.

"We have a lot of grilling meats like bacon, steaks and chops and, of course, our sausages," Julie says.

Yes, it is the sausage that brings people into Louie's P&R. Staff members freshly



The hot salami sandwich is a Louie's P&R favorite.

grind a number of sausage products on site. Aaron says the recipes and techniques are generations-old and have stood the test of time.

“Sausages are handmade here several times each week,” Julie says. “We make them in four or five different flavors, and we are probably best known for our salameat, which is a garlicky sausage that has been made here for more than 50 years. We still make it fresh every Wednesday.”

Other popular items include the hot beef sandwich, Italian beef and pastas ready for grab-and-go customers to prepare at home.

Louie's P&R is a popular spot for lunch. Diners can choose from a variety of salad and sandwich offerings. The hot salami sandwiches, prepared Saturday mornings, always lead to a line of customers, often as deep as the market itself. That's part of the appeal, Aaron says.

“Most people don't mind to wait in line. We're a meeting place where people talk about the community, their families and kids,” he explains.

Community is the attraction. For a city proud of its heritage – the annual HerrinFesta Italiana is one of the region's largest community-based celebrations – Louie's P&R is the epicenter of Italian tradition in the city of 12,000, as well as a pillar of the community.

“I think we are involved in all of the clubs and activities in town, and that's a huge draw for people because there is a sense of community. We are all here to help each other,” Aaron says, adding he understands the legacy of Louie's P&R.

“When you come in, you're definitely going to feel the 120 years of heritage and history here,” Aaron stresses. “It has a small-town feel, but we've also heard from many who say it's like something

they would expect to see on The Hill in St. Louis or even a deli in New York City.”

Yet, there is no denying that Louie's P&R is a Herrin landmark – one that the Christs and local residents treasure.

“It is a bright and shining star in our community,” Frattini adds. “Louie's P&R has been a long-time favorite of mine, and it will remain that way for years to come.”

The Christs appreciate the opportunity to serve both great food and the community.

“We are having so much fun,” Julie says. “The response we get from the region is amazing. It is crazy how much love people have for this place.”



LET'S EAT!

Louie's P&R Italian Market

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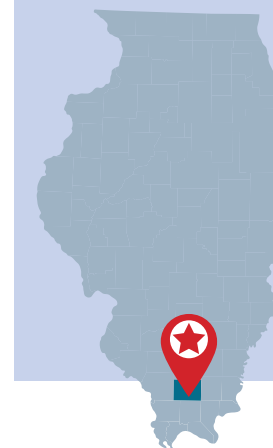
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Nuts about pecans

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ORANGE GLAZED PECANS



CARAMEL FRENCH TOAST

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Upcoming monthly topics

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Recipes prepared, tasted and photographed by Illinois Country Living staff. For more recipes and photos go to www.icl.coop. Questions? Email finestcooking@aicc.coop.

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

Caramel French Toast

Submitted by: *Janice McNeely, Illinois Electric Cooperative*

Servings: 6

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1 cup brown sugar | 1-1/2 cups milk | 1/2 cup pecans, chopped |
| 1/2 cup sweet cream salted butter | 1 tablespoon vanilla extract | 12 slices thick white bread (Texas toast) |
| 2 tablespoons light corn syrup | 1/4 teaspoon salt | |
| 6 large eggs, beaten | 1 teaspoon cinnamon | |

Combine brown sugar, butter and corn syrup in small saucepan. Cook over medium heat until thickened, stirring constantly. Pour syrup mixture into a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Sprinkle pecans evenly over syrup mixture. Place 6 slices of bread on top of syrup mixture and then place 6 more slices on top of the other slices (12 slices total, 2 pieces deep). Combine eggs, milk, vanilla, salt and cinnamon, stirring until blended. Pour egg mixture evenly over bread slices. Cover and chill 8 hours. Preheat oven to 350 F. Bake in preheated oven 40-45 minutes or until lightly browned. Serve immediately. Note: I refrigerate overnight and bake for breakfast. No syrup needed. Invert each piece upon serving. Nutrition information: 676 calories; 36.7g fat; 722mg sodium; 72.2g carbohydrates; 15.9g protein.

Pecan Stuffed Chicken Breasts

Submitted by: *Jan Dial, Corn Belt Energy Corporation*

Servings: 8

- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1-1/2 cups bread cubes | 3/4 cup pecans, chopped | 8 boneless chicken breasts, butterflied |
| 1/4 cup onion, chopped | 2 tablespoons butter, melted | Lemon juice |
| 1/2 cup celery, chopped | 2 teaspoons parsley flakes | 2 tablespoons butter, melted |
| 1 medium apple, chopped | Salt and pepper | |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Combine first 8 ingredients and divide among the 8 chicken breasts. Roll inside breast and place seam side down in greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Brush with lemon juice and melted butter. Season with salt and pepper and bake until internal chicken temperature reaches 165 F, about 50-55 minutes. Nutrition information: 1,052 calories; 19.9g fat; 656mg sodium; 5.7g carbohydrates; 208.5g protein.

Pecan Pie Bars

Submitted by: Carol Sue Carnes, Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 15

Crust:

- 1-3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup butter, softened
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup pecans, finely chopped

Filling:

- 2/3 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1-1/2 cups dark corn syrup
- 4 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1-1/2 cups pecans, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 F. Combine first 3 crust ingredients in mixer bowl. Beat at medium speed until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in finely chopped pecans. Press mixture into bottom of ungreased 9x13-inch pan. Bake 18-20 minutes or until very light golden brown. While the crust is baking, combine brown sugar, flour and salt. Add corn syrup, eggs and vanilla, and mix well. Stir in pecans. Spread mixture evenly over hot crust. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until filling is set and knife inserted in center comes out clean. Cool completely and cut into bars. Nutrition information: 367 calories; 21.5g fat; 242mg sodium; 41.5g carbohydrates; 5.1g protein.



PECAN PIE BARS

PECAN STUFFED CHICKEN BREASTS



Orange Glazed Pecans

Submitted by: Janice Aldridge, South Eastern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Servings: 12

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 cup granulated sugar | 2 tablespoons orange rind, grated |
| 1 tablespoon light corn syrup | 2 tablespoons orange juice |
| 1/4 cup evaporated milk | 2-1/2 cups pecan halves |

Mix all ingredients (except pecans) in iron skillet and bring to a boil. Boil for 4 minutes stirring constantly. Remove from heat and add pecans, stirring to coat well with mixture. Return to heat and cook 1 minute. Pour onto waxed paper and let cool. Separate into pieces. Nutrition information: 274 calories; 20.7g fat; 6mg sodium; 23g carbohydrates; 3.4g protein.

Swedish Nuts (Sugar free)

Submitted by: Sheryl Dietz, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association
Servings: 12

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 egg white, slightly beaten | 1/3 cup Splenda |
| 2 cups pecans | 2 teaspoons cinnamon |

Preheat oven to 300 F. Grease a jelly roll pan. Mix egg white and pecans in medium bowl until pecans are coated. Stir Splenda and cinnamon together and sprinkle over pecans. Stir until pecans are completely coated. Spread pecans in a single layer in pan. Bake 30 minutes or until toasted. Cool completely and store in airtight container. Nutrition information: 161 calories; 13.5g fat; 3mg sodium; 8.4g carbohydrates; 2.3g protein.

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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.

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