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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 more than 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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Watts of affection

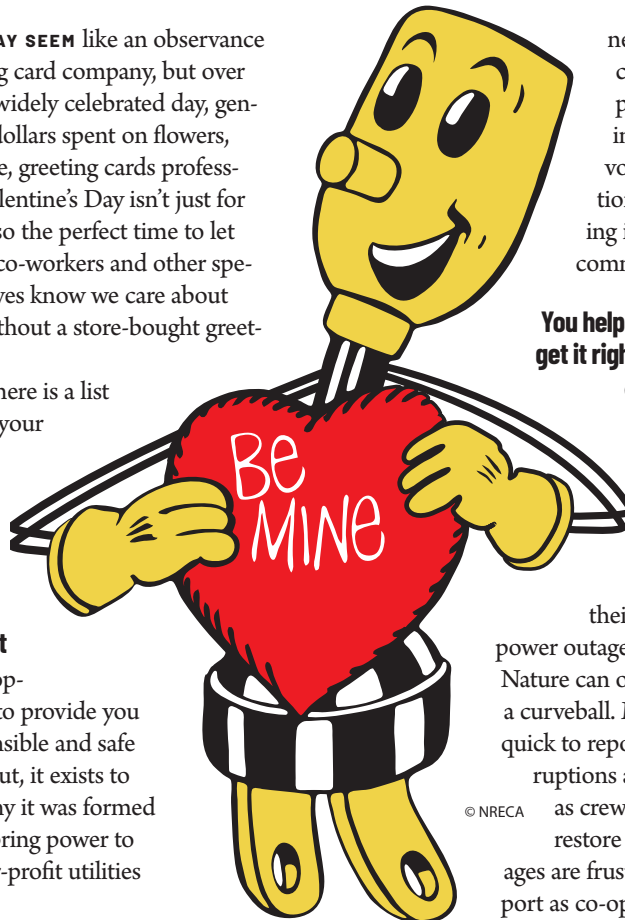
Why your electric cooperative loves to serve you

VALENTINE'S DAY MAY SEEM like an observance created by a greeting card company, but over time, it's become a widely celebrated day, generating millions of dollars spent on flowers, candy and, of course, greeting cards professing our love. But Valentine's Day isn't just for the lovebirds. It's also the perfect time to let our friends, family, co-workers and other special people in our lives know we care about them — with or without a store-bought greeting card.

So, in that vein, here is a list of five reasons why your electric cooperative loves serving you, the consumer-member.

Without you, your co-op wouldn't exist

Your electric cooperative's purpose is to provide you with reliable, responsible and safe electricity. Simply put, it exists to serve you. That's why it was formed decades ago — to bring power to rural areas when for-profit utilities would not.



You help your co-op get it right

needs. The broader co-op membership provides helpful input through their vote in director elections and by weighing in on co-op and community issues.

Co-op consumer-members are great about keeping their co-op in the know.

Co-ops do their best to avoid power outages, but Mother Nature can occasionally throw a curveball. Members are quick to report any power disruptions and are patient as crews work to safely restore power. While outages are frustrating, your support as co-op personnel work through storms means so much.

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You enable your co-op to give back

A major part of every electric co-op's mission is to serve its community and look after the greater good. With your assistance, your co-op is able to help the most vulnerable members of the community through food and toy drives and programs like Operation Round Up, Sharing Success and scholarships.

Members of your co-op also serve on the board of directors

Elected board officials provide guidance for setting co-op priorities and help make big decisions. Because board members live in the area, they're able to serve as the pulse of the larger community and identify immediate and long-term

Your feedback is also appreciated on co-op programs and services. Your opinions are critical to the co-op's success.

You are part of the community your co-op loves

Cooperative employees care about your community the same way you do, as they live and work there, too. They are invested and work to help it thrive. That's why your electric co-op donates to local charities, schools, scholarship funds and other local groups. It's also why your co-op invests in economic development, and why you'll see co-op employees volunteering at local schools and other charitable and community endeavors.

As electric cooperatives, their mission is to enhance the quality of life in their communities. Electric cooperatives across the nation love serving their consumer-members and their local communities and seeing them continue to thrive. 💡



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.

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30	8.94	7.73	9.77	8.61	14	11	18	16	58	28.33	21.98	50.43	36.04	89	62	169	117
36	9.12	8.12	10.32	9.44	15	13	22	18	59	31.07	23.51	55.50	38.76	98	68	188	129
37	9.21	8.37	10.52	9.81	15	13	22	20	60	34.14	24.28	59.98	41.71	109	73	207	140
38	9.21	8.48	11.69	10.16	16	14	24	21	61	37.41	25.65	66.43	47.11	122	84	236	156
39	9.46	8.61	12.35	10.56	17	15	25	22	62	41.07	27.91	73.90	51.33	136	93	265	171
40	9.63	8.83	12.94	11.01	18	16	27	24	63	44.58	34.39	85.55	59.61	152	102	287	187
41	10.05	9.05	13.66	11.61	20	17	30	27	64	48.23	38.53	93.16	64.39	169	112	323	206
42	10.47	9.26	14.21	12.46	22	19	33	29	65	53.18	41.15	100.34	70.37	188	125	356	229
43	10.98	9.39	14.72	13.25	24	20	38	31	66	59.15	44.62	115.74	75.41	209	135	392	248
44	11.58	9.73	15.68	14.10	26	22	41	34	67	65.66	49.09	130.13	83.65	231	148	436	272
45	12.25	10.15	16.86	15.16	28	24	46	38	68	74.33	59.65	145.11	112.92	262	174	491	322
46	12.84	10.65	17.85	15.87	30	25	49	41	69	82.98	65.91	161.68	129.33	293	188	548	352
47	13.43	11.16	19.14	16.84	33	27	54	44	70	93.20	73.30	181.25	148.72	330	204	615	387
48	13.48	11.89	20.45	17.77	35	29	58	48	71	102.45	82.71	204.38	159.34	374	235	702	443
49	13.71	12.33	21.77	18.77	38	31	63	52	72	113.68	94.13	232.46	172.23	427	272	807	512
50	14.37	12.99	23.41	20.00	40	34	69	57	73	127.55	108.24	267.15	188.15	493	319	937	596
51	15.38	13.75	25.38	21.18	45	35	78	62	74	142.08	123.01	303.50	204.84	562	367	1074	685
52	16.37	14.88	28.02	22.76	49	38	87	67	75	159.25	140.48	346.45	224.56	644	424	1235	789
53	17.46	15.88	30.96	24.81	55	44	101	77	76	200.03	174.92	418.29	276.67	785	530	1489	982
54	18.69	16.72	34.00	26.21	60	46	112	83	77	249.54	216.74	505.52	339.94	956	658	1797	1215
55	20.64	17.51	37.14	27.86	67	50	122	90	78	310.70	268.40	613.27	418.11	1167	817	2179	1504
56	22.69	19.48	41.67	31.07	74	53	140	97	79	374.78	322.52	726.16	500.00	1389	983	2578	1807
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FEBRUARY CHECKLIST

Take heart. February is American Heart Month. Know your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and see your doctor regularly.



Generate safety. In the event of a power outage, be sure to use backup generators safely. Improper use can create dangerous situations for you and others.



Remember to PASS.

The acronym will help when using a fire extinguisher. "Pull" the pin, "aim" low at the base of the fire, "squeeze" the handle slowly, and "sweep" the nozzle side to side.



Tip of the month. Manage your energy use by keeping your thermostat in check. During winter months, set it to



68 degrees (or lower) to boost efficiency.

Don't miss your co-op's annual meeting

Did you know that every cooperative is required to conduct an annual meeting? The purpose is to hold the election for the board of directors, share important financial information and occasionally vote on other matters, such as bylaw changes.

This month marks the start of the annual meeting season in Illinois with Norris Electric Cooperative's, which will be held on Feb. 24. While most annual meetings occur in the summer, some do take place in the spring and fall. Some are held at outdoor venues, others in auditoriums, schools or churches, and some are hosted right at the co-op's headquarters. Regardless of the location, be sure to plan to attend your co-op's annual meeting.

While annual meetings are designed to take care of important co-op business, equally important is the business of building a real sense of community. An annual meeting is a community gathering where members can meet new neighbors or catch up with old acquaintances. Very few organizations are uniquely positioned like electric cooperatives to bring together members of the community.

The annual meeting is also an opportunity for employees of the electric cooperative to spend time with the members they serve. As each co-op navigates change in the coming years, hearing from the membership is essential for moving into the future.

For those wondering if their opinion makes a difference, know that it does.



Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association

Gaining guidance and perspective from the membership helps set priorities for the co-op and guide future decisions. At annual meetings, issues are raised for voting consideration by the membership, and it's a time for members to vote on the co-op's board of directors.

Every electric cooperative's annual meeting is different. During these meetings, there may be meals, live entertainment, bucket truck rides, activities for kids and so much more. If you have never attended an annual meeting or if it has been a few years, take the time to be with your fellow co-op members. After all, your electric cooperative is connected to you by more than just power lines.

Each electric cooperative in Illinois has a core purpose and mission to provide safe, reliable and affordable power. As a member of your community and of your electric cooperative, exercise the benefits of your co-op membership and plan to attend your annual meeting. 💡



Corn Belt Energy Corporation



JCE Co-op



Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

Solution on page 33.

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



Solar panels at EnerStar Electric Cooperative's headquarters in Paris.

Electricity generation from wind and solar to surpass coal in 2024

The combined electricity generation from wind and solar is expected to surpass coal-fired generation for the first time on record, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its latest report.

According to a recent Short-Term Energy Outlook, wind and solar generation will exceed coal by nearly 90 billion kilowatt-hours in 2024. “Renewables, particularly solar photovoltaics, are growing rapidly and making large contributions to electricity generation,” said EIA Administrator Joe DeCarolis.

The report predicts that solar generation will increase 39% in 2024 compared to this year. New solar generating capacity will get a boost from 9 gigawatts of new battery storage capacity in 2023 — double the amount from 2022.

Large gains in solar will likely slow growth in electricity generation from natural gas-fired plants. After natural gas generation grew 7% from 2022 to 2023, analysts expect it to grow just 1% in 2024.

The forecast for Henry Hub natural gas spot prices this winter averages close to \$2.80 per million British thermal units (MMBtu), down more than 60 cents from EIA’s previous forecast.

“The downward revision reflects both a warmer-than-average start to the winter, which has reduced demand for space heating in the residential and commercial sectors, and high natural gas production,” the report said.

EIA expects residential customers to pay, on average, 15.8 cents per kWh for electricity next year, about the same as in 2023. Forecasts for retail electricity prices in the commercial and industrial sectors in 2024 also remain relatively flat at 12.6 cents per kWh and 8.1 cents per kWh, respectively, the report said.

Victoria A. Rocha, NRECA

Thompson honored by EEC/Safe Electricity



Jim Thompson

With nearly 20 years of dedication to the Energy Education Council (EEC)/Safe Electricity organization, Jim Thompson, general manager of Adams Electric Cooperative in Camp

Point, was honored as its longest-serving board member on Dec. 6 in Springfield. He was recognized for his service on the board and his dedication to promoting electrical safety to help reduce injuries and save lives through public and internal safety communications.

Thompson was named a board member for the safety-minded organization in November 2004, the same year he was named Adams Electric’s general manager. As an EEC/Safe Electricity board member, he has voted on hundreds of motions, weighed in on countless educational member resources and guided the organization during times of change and growth.

Continued on page 10

IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

February has long been known as Black History Month, but its origins can be traced to Illinois and University of Chicago graduate Carter Godwin Woodson (1875-1950). The scholar was one of the first to promote the study of African American history.



In 1915, Woodson traveled back to Chicago to attend a 50th anniversary celebration of emancipation, sponsored by the state of Illinois. Inspired by what he saw, Woodson, A. L. Jackson and three others formed what is now known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). In 1916, Woodson went on to establish “The Journal of Negro History.”

Later, Woodson reached out to his former fraternity brothers to join him in his efforts, and in 1924, they created Negro History and Literature Week (renamed Negro Achievement Week). Woodson felt it would have greater impact in the hands of the ASALH and shared its new name and focus — Negro History Week — with the press in February 1926.

The public’s response was overwhelming, and the mission driving the observance gained ground through celebrations, black history clubs and school curricula. Ensuing decades saw the movement continue to grow, and in 1976, Negro History Week became Black History Month.

Learn more at asalh.org.

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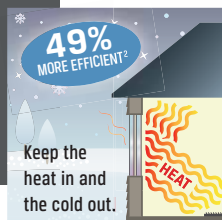
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Where is it?

The winners of the December hidden object contest were Diane Hill of Shelby Electric Cooperative and Michelle Norris of Menard Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL Tervis tumblers have been sent.

January's campfire mug was hidden on the table on page 23. Winners' names will be drawn, and they will be notified. Visit Illinois Country Living on Facebook after each month's deadline for a close-up of the object's location and winners' names.

It's time for a new hidden object search. With Super Bowl LVIII coming up on Feb. 11, be on the lookout for a football. The symbol 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 (nonmembers are also eligible), and the page number and location of the symbol. Visit icl.coop/hiddenobject and fill out the entry form (also found under Contact Us on the website) or mail a postcard to Illinois Country Living, Hidden Objects, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. We will NOT accept letters or entries via phone call. All entries for that month must be postmarked or received digitally by the 15th. Winners' names and the symbol's location will be published in each month's issue of Illinois Country Living. 💡

Thompson - continued from page 8

"We have been honored to have Jim on the board for nearly two decades. His leadership has enabled this organization to provide thousands of educational resources that have inevitably saved countless lives and prevented numerous accidents," said Erin Hollinshead, EEC/Safe Electricity executive director. "Jim has helped develop multiple policies, recruited dozens of members and reviewed hundreds of resources, making Safe Electricity a national, award-winning program and an expert in electrical safety education. We shall forever be grateful for his years of service and leadership," she added.

When Thompson joined the board, EEC/Safe Electricity had 70 Illinois members and 75 out-of-state members who represented five states. Today, the nonprofit based in Springfield has nearly 550 members representing 40 states.

"Safety is something all utilities can come together on," Thompson said. "It is one of those things that we can do better together than individually. Working with all utilities developing great safety products is very rewarding."

Since the Safe Electricity program was created in 2001, it has provided thousands of safety-minded resources to its more than 500 utility members across the country to help save lives and reduce injuries. Safe Electricity is a public awareness program of the EEC, a not-for-profit organization established in 1952, and operates under the University of Illinois.

The EEC is led by a board of directors that consists of industry professionals. In addition to Thompson, Craig Sondgeroth, president/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, and Anita Hoene, director of human resources at Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, are also on the board representing electric co-ops. 💡

Energy Education Council

Stay informed of scam trends

Fraudsters continue to change their tactics. Make sure you are aware of the latest scam trends at ssa.gov/scam. The best ways to stay informed include following reliable news sources, subscribing to scam alert newsletters and staying connected with local law enforcement. The more you know, the better prepared you'll be to identify and avoid scams.



Think before sharing personal information. Phishing is one of the main ways that scammers trick people into providing personal information. Pay close attention to emails or messages asking for your username, password or personal information.

Scammers pretend to be from familiar organizations to gain your trust. Stay alert when receiving calls claiming to be from banks, government agencies or other well-known companies. Contact the organization directly through official channels to verify the request is real before sharing personal information or making a payment.

Use strong passwords. Create strong, unique passwords like a phrase with upper and lowercase letters, numbers and special characters. Don't use passwords that are easy to guess, like birthdays or names. Consider using a password manager to generate unique passwords and securely store them.

Be savvy with QR codes. QR codes are increasing in popularity. They're in restaurants, on parking meters, in emails and on social media. Scammers have noticed and are physically placing fake QR codes on top of official ones or creating fake QR codes on social media ads to get access to your personal information. Never scan random QR codes. Also, if it looks odd or altered, do not scan it.

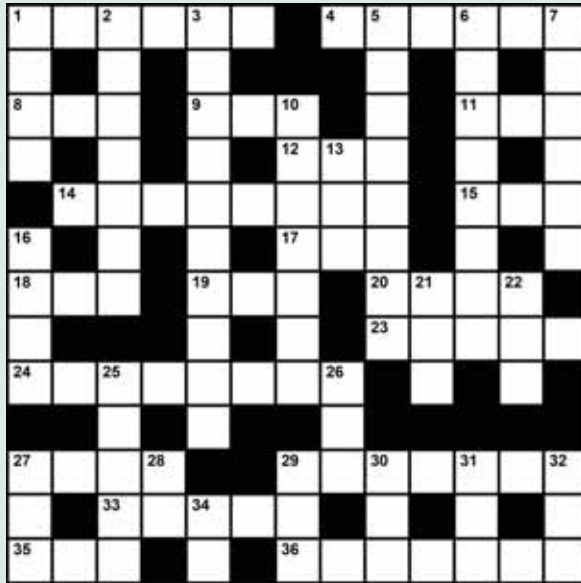
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Sheri Richey, Social Security Administration

Across

- 1 Icon of courage and freedom who helped many slaves escape to freedom, Harriet _____
- 4 First name of the '60s leader and champion of civil rights for African Americans
- 8 One of the roles 1 across had for the Union army
- 9 Another word for abolish
- 11 Embroider, e.g.
- 12 1950-1964 was one _____ of African American civil rights campaigning
- 14 First African American to play in Major League Baseball, Jackie _____
- 15 Organization whose priority is climate change, abbr.
- 17 Sports stat., abbr.
- 18 Allow
- 19 Marvin Ellison's role in Lowes, abbr.
- 20 Vicinity
- 23 On March 25, 1865, Martin Luther King led demonstrators to the _____ of the capitol in Montgomery, Ala.
- 24 Abolitionist and orator who was the leader of the movement for African American civil rights in the 19th century, Frederick _____
- 27 Civil rights champion who famously refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus, _____ Parks



- 29 African American activist who was a noted singer of spiritual songs, Paul _____
 - 33 National symbol
 - 35 At this time
 - 36 Martin Luther King insisted on non-_____ protest to achieve civil rights for African Americans
- Down**
- 1 Try out
 - 2 Protest against the Montgomery bus system for its degrading segregation policies
 - 3 President who abolished slavery, 2 words
 - 5 State where the "Little Rock Nine" had to go to court to gain the right to attend Little Rock High School
 - 6 African Americans who broke the racial barrier to become the first black aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps, _____ Airmen
 - 7 African American woman who campaigned for women's suffrage, Lyda _____
 - 10 Oppressive rulers
 - 13 Go bad
 - 16 Escaped
 - 21 GPS suggestion, abbr.
 - 22 Suitable
 - 25 Cause a disturbance
 - 26 _____ Paulo
 - 27 NAACP executive in the '60s and '70s, _____ Wilkins
 - 28 Airline abbreviation
 - 29 Joseph Lowery's title (American minister and leader in the civil rights movement)
 - 30 Life story (briefly)
 - 31 Compass point, abbr.
 - 32 _____ King Cole
 - 34 John Lewis was a civil rights activist who served in this state's 5th congressional district from 1987-2020, abbr.

Solution on page 33.



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LET'S GO!

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



Argenta Icefest

FEBRUARY
10

Olympic Gold Medal Ice Carver Aaric Kendall and other talented artists will return to Argenta for the community's annual Icefest. The event features live demonstrations throughout the day, ice games for the kids, a 50/50 drawing and more. In the evening, all sculptures will light up as you drive down Elm Street in the warmth of your car.

Feb. 10, 2024: all day
● Elm Street, Argenta
Admission: free
argentafest.org

Winter Carnival Weekend

FEBRUARY
16-19

Enjoy all things winter at Eagle Ridge Resort and Spa's Annual Winter Carnival, a festive four-day celebration dedicated to cold-weather activities. Attendees can enjoy ice-carving demonstrations, ice turkey bowling, s'mores by the fire, scenic hayrack wagon rides, snowshoeing, ice skating, sledding and much more.

Feb. 16-19, 2024: 8 a.m.-9 p.m.
● Eagle Ridge Resort and Spa, 444 Eagle Ridge Drive, Galena
Admission: free
815-777-5000 or eagleridge.com



WIU Ag Mech Farm Expo

FEBRUARY
17-18

Considered the largest student-run agricultural event in the country, the 52nd Annual Ag Mech Farm Expo will include displays of farm tractors and machinery, ag sales and service, ag management, emerging ag technology, livestock and crop supplies, conservation and more. Craft vendors and children's activities will also be available.

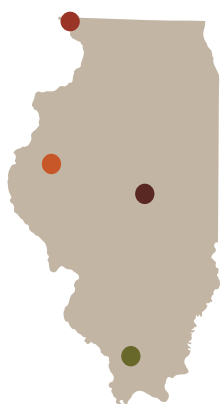
Feb. 17-18, 2024: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
● Western Illinois University, Western Hall, W. University Drive, Macomb
Admission: free
wiu.edu/cbt/agriculture/agmechshow.php

Women's Health Naturally Expo

FEBRUARY
24

The Annual Women's Health Naturally Expo & Workshops unite natural healthcare practitioners and providers from across southern Illinois with women interested in natural health methods. This event fosters a supportive environment to educate women on natural care for themselves and their families. Registration includes access to the expo floor and workshops. Register for the event online.

Feb. 24, 2024: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
● Carbondale Civic Center, 200 S. Illinois Ave., Carbondale
Admission: varies
618-713-5996 or womenshealthnaturally.org



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Paws and plugs

Tips to safeguard your pets from electrical hazards

FOR PET OWNERS, PLAYFUL dogs and curious cats become part of the family. Responsibility is an important part of pet ownership, and your pet's safety depends on you. February is Responsible Pet Owners Month, and you can keep your furry friends safe by learning about potential electrical hazards in your home.

Pets are naturally curious and tend to turn unexpected household

reach. This could be done by hiding them behind furniture or hanging them off the floor.

Occasionally check cords for bite marks and replace them accordingly. It may only take one bite with sharp teeth to create a shock or start a fire. Provide your pet with new and different chew toys to keep them entertained, so electrical cords do not become a dangerous replacement.

sure you create a drip loop on every electrical cord that enters the tank. This prevents water from running down the cord and into the outlet.

Colder winter temperatures may introduce unfamiliar electrical devices into the home, such as space heaters, heating pads and electric blankets. Look for potential hazards that may accompany such products and keep them away from pets.

Some may find a cozy spot near appliances or electronics to stay warm, but this is not safe. Discourage them from doing so, and never let your pet nap on a heating pad or electric blanket, as this presents a risk of electrical burn and can also result in overheating the appliance, which may start a fire.

In the case of a power outage, be sure to include pets in your emergency weather plans. Keep supplies in your emergency kit for pets in preparation for bad weather. Make sure it is stocked with at least three days' worth of food, water and any medicine they may need.

After a storm, use caution if you or your pets must go outside. Be on the lookout for downed lines or other damaged electrical equipment. If you ever spot a downed line, stay far away and call 911 to have the electric utility notified.

If the power is out, do not leave unattended pets in rooms with lit candles. Instead, use flashlights. A pet can easily knock over candles and other heat-producing devices, which may result in a fire.

Always be sure to include your pet in your fire escape plans, and regularly check that smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working properly. For more information about electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org.💡



items into play or chew toys. One important aspect of pet-proofing your home is making sure your curious pets do not think electric cords or devices are chew toys.

If you have difficulty getting your pet to stop chewing on cords, reprimand them. They need to learn these are not toys. You can spray cords with a bitter-tasting deterrent or enclose the cord in a PVC tube or thick plastic sleeve. Wind up excess cords and hide them from view or place them out of the pet's

Make sure plugs are completely plugged into outlets. Partially exposed prongs are also a hazard for pets. Remember to unplug appliances and electronics not in use to cut electric current.

All outlets near sinks or bathtubs should be equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), and that includes outlets near aquariums. GFCIs stop the flow of electricity instantly if there is a problem and can save lives. In addition, if you have an aquarium, make



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

“Harvard Doctor Says My New Remedy Worked for 96% of His Patients with Burning, Tingling, Numb Feet, Legs & Hands”

Never in the world did I think a Harvard doctor would say my remedy is the only one that worked for his 96% of patients. All I did was create a natural remedy I hoped would help my wife’s foot and leg pain.

By Alex Collins, Inventor

I’m in 7th heaven after reading this...! Harvard trained Dr Eric Wood says, “Now I finally have a natural solution I can recommend to my patients who suffer from leg and foot problems with pain. I’m delighted because previous treatments were not effective, but Neuroflo worked for *every one* of my patients without side effects.”

I created Neuroflo and I’m thrilled to tell you about it! My remedy doesn’t cost a lot, you don’t need a prescription, and 6 blue-chip, clinical studies *verified* its effectiveness. Imagine for a moment if you could...

- Go to sleep and wake up without throbbing pain
- Sooth the tiny nerves in your extremities that *directly* cause pain
- Get the feeling back in your feet, hands and legs
- Increase your blood flow to your hands, legs and feet
- Improve your finger strength—open any jar in seconds

“A Stunning 95% Reduction in LEG SWELLING, Verified in Clinical Study”

Says Dove Medical Press & Development and Therapy



“God bless this remedy.”

...meaning, discomfort, water retention, leg swelling, tiredness and circulation improved in 95% of test subjects.

Swollen legs are a warning sign. They mean blood and fluid is forced out of the blood vessels into the surrounding tissue. This causes non-stop pain. This is where Neuroflo’s active ingredient is such a big help.



MY SECRET: Science UNLOCKED The Amazing Power Plants Have to Stay Healthy and Repair Themselves

Plants are the healthiest life forms in the world. They stay this way without medicines of any kind. Finally understanding how they repair themselves helped scientists develop this all-natural, self-healing treatments for you and me. We have this miracle from plant life to thank for it.

This God-given gift from nature can now help us all. You can now find this breakthrough “Plant Secret” solution in a new formula under the brand name Neuroflo. The all-natural ingredients in this breakthrough have been shown in six blue-chip, placebo-controlled medical studies involving 543 participants to be effective and safe.

Your Neuropathy, Swollen Legs and Feet, Edema, Chronic Venous Insufficiency (CVI) and Other Problems Can Now Be Conquered

Now you *don’t* need drugs with horrible side-effects. The 8 scientifically selected, all-natural ingredients in Neuroflo work by helping to repair your most distressed cells—just like plants do—helping to strengthen your arteries and increase strong blood flow.

The ingredients in Neuroflo improve your circulation so rich oxygen-filled blood gets to your damaged nerves and repairs them. This almost eliminates your pain. Oxygen-starved nerves in your hands, legs and feet is the major cause of your painful condition.

You’ll quickly experience a new sense of wellbeing when your hands, legs and feet become more nimble and warmer, letting you feel them again. Even the *slightest* decrease in blood flow sets off the stinging, aching, swelling and coldness.

Life Can Be a Lot of Fun Again Once Your Aches and Pains Are Gone

What if I told you that it *really* is possible to make every day the kind of day you can celebrate your life and good health?



“This remedy really works!”

Meet My 8 Magical Ingredients Could Take Away Your Persistent, Stinging Pain That Never Seems to Go Away...

These 8 ingredients were chosen for their clinically-tested power to help support your cells in the same full-force way nature does for plants:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Ruscus aculeatus | 6. Aesculus hippocastanum |
| 2. Diosim | 7. Ginger root |
| 3. Crataegus | 8. Cayenne |
| 4. L-arginine | pepper |
| 5. Niacin | |

Harvard-trained doctor says it “works for every one of my patients.”

By increasing blood flow through your body...banishing the throbbing pain in your hands, legs and feet...staying in a good mood...retaining more energy and healthy muscle function...and kick-up-your-heels vitality...It’s not too much to ask with Neuroflo. Here’s your next step...

I’m proud to say that this is the official release of NeuroFlo for Illinois Country Living readers. Everyone who calls within the next 10 days will receive 50% OFF their first order. A toll-free hotline number has been set up for local readers to call for this 50% OFF savings. The number will be open starting at 7:00 am today and only for the next 10 days.

All you have to do is CALL TOLL-FREE **1-877-419-7679** and provide the operator with the special 50% OFF discount approval code: **NEF158**. It works for you or it **FREE**.

Very Important: Due to Neuroflo’s popularity and media exposure on ABC, CBS and FOX NEWS, please give us a call *right now*. Our friendly operators are standing by. We’re open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.

Those who miss the 10-day deadline for 50% OFF will have to pay more for Neuroflo. **Act now—this offer may NOT be repeated!**

Greener living for manufactured homes

Tips and tricks to improve energy efficiency in your household

MORE THAN 22 MILLION Americans live in manufactured homes, according to the National Association of State Energy Officials. Manufactured homes represent 15% of housing in rural areas and only 3% in urban areas.

If you live in a manufactured home, there are several tasks you can complete to improve com-

point can come, in part, from the use of less expensive equipment and fewer materials, such as lower-efficiency heating equipment or less insulation.

If you are considering going this route, ENERGY STAR-certified manufactured homes are 30% more energy efficient than standard models, with a variety of options that can increase the home's energy efficiency.

each section of the home, with the registers and vents cut into it.

The first step is making sure all registers are accessible, open and not covered by furniture, rugs, dog beds or anything else.

Next, check the ductwork by removing the registers and looking inside. Anything inside the duct will restrict airflow, so check that it is free and clear. Use a mirror and flashlight to look into the duct or take a picture by sticking a camera or phone inside and snapping some shots with flash in each direction. I've pulled all kinds of things out of ducts over the years, from garbage to toys to shoes.

A double-wide or a triple-wide will likely have a crossover duct, which joins the ducts in each section. The crossover duct is typically a large flexible duct with an inner liner, insulation and an outer cover to protect the insulation. Damaged or disconnected crossover ducts allow the air to escape under the home. Often, damage is done by animals chewing or scratching to get inside the warm area. An inspection of the crossover duct requires crawling under the home. It's a dirty job and often a tight spot, so you might choose to hire a professional.

Another place to check is the joint joining the sections of a double-wide or triple-wide together. This is often covered by trim when the home is placed. You can caulk around the trim or remove it and caulk underneath to reduce air leakage.

Weatherstripping doors and windows to make sure they seal tightly will also reduce drafts and save energy. Some homes can benefit from additional insulation in the attic or under the floor. Those projects typically require specialized equipment or help from a professional. 💡



fort and use less energy. I started my career in energy efficiency as a weatherization technician in Wisconsin. In this role, I helped people in manufactured homes by air sealing, duct sealing, adding insulation and installing new windows, showerheads, faucet aerators and lightbulbs.

Knowing how manufactured homes are built helps us understand where we can seal in savings around the house. These homes are constructed in factories and then transported and set up on-site. Construction in a factory reduces costs, making manufactured homes an affordable option. That lower price

If you already live in a manufactured home, you likely know that they are constructed in sections. One section is a single-wide home, two are combined to make a double-wide home, and three make a triple-wide home.

In my experience, the biggest issues are in the duct systems, which deliver heating and cooling throughout the homes. The ductwork is typically located in the cavity between the floor and the transport barrier, which protects the underside of the manufactured home while it is transported from the factory to the site. Typically, one long duct runs the length of



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

Better than cannabis, better than CBD

New Joint-Supporting “Miracle Oil” Capsule Delivers Hip, Knee, and Shoulder Comfort in Just Days

Thousands of Americans are rediscovering normal freedom of movement thanks to a “miracle oil” capsule that’s outperforming hemp in promoting joint comfort.

According to the official figures from the CDC, more than 58 million Americans are living with joint discomfort. This epidemic has led to a search for alternative approaches – as many sufferers seek relief without the harmful side effects of conventional “solutions.”

Anti-aging specialist Dr. Al Sears is leading the way with a new formula he calls “the most significant breakthrough I’ve ever found for easing joint discomfort.”

The capsule is based on a “miracle oil” historically treasured for its joint health-supporting properties. Marco Polo prized it as he blazed the Silk Road. And to this day, Ayurvedic practitioners rely on it to promote optimal joint health.

Now, with a modern twist backed by science, Dr. Sears is making this natural solution for joint health available to the public.

Your Body’s Hidden “Soothing System”

Joint health research changed forever with the discovery of the endocannabinoid system (ECS) in 1992. Up until that point, research on cannabinoids focused on psychoactive effects. Now, scientists were looking at a new way to fight occasional aches and pains.

Your ECS serves as a central “signaling system” that tells your body how to react to things you do every day. It controls several critical bodily functions such as learning and memory, sleep, healthy immune responses – and your response to discomfort.

A recent study revealed a direct link between the ECS and creaky, sore joints. Researchers at the University of Edinburgh studied the aging of mice with endocannabinoid deficiencies versus “normal” mice.

As they aged, the deficient mice had a whopping 60% more joint degeneration than the mice with a healthy ECS.

As the name suggests, the ECS responds to cannabis. At the time it was discovered, scientists assumed that was the best way to support it. But thanks to Dr. Sears’ all-natural solution, you can power up your ECS without marijuana.

“Calling it the ‘endocannabinoid system’ was a misnomer from the very beginning,” Dr. Sears explained. “Modern research reveals that you don’t need cannabis to activate this incredible system. You don’t need to ‘get high’ to get joint relief.”

A scholarly review found that plants and herbs that don’t produce mind-altering effects can support the ECS and help it maintain its healthy functions.



The active ingredient in Mobilify soothes aching joints in as little as 5 days

This includes common foodstuffs, such as kava, chocolate, black pepper, and most significantly – the star ingredient to Dr. Sears’ own **Mobilify** formula - frankincense.

Modern scientists say this natural ingredient meets “cannabinoid tetrad” – the signs used to determine if something supports the ECS. While it doesn’t produce a “high” like cannabis does, it binds to the same receptors to support a healthy response to discomfort.

All the Benefits of CBD – Without Cannabis

Indian frankincense, the chief ingredient in **Mobilify**, has been shown to provide all the benefits of cannabis without any feelings of sluggishness or sleepiness.

And studies show that users don’t have to wait long for the comfort they’re looking for.

In a study published in the International Journal of Medical Sciences, 60 patients with stiff knees took 100 mg of Indian frankincense or a placebo daily for 30 days. Remarkably, Indian frankincense “significantly” supported healthy joint function and relieved discomfort in as little as five days.

Additional research linked regular use to lasting comfort.

In another study, 48 participants were given an extract made from frankincense for 120-days. When the results came in, researchers determined the extract strongly supported joint comfort – especially in the knees.

These results were all achieved without marijuana. Research continues to back up the idea that you can support smooth, strong, and healthy joints naturally – without tiredness or sluggishness.

Get Moving Again with Mobilify

Mobilify has already helped thousands of Americans stay on their feet and breeze through their daily activities with ease.

One user even reported getting results the

same day it was used.

“**Mobilify** really helps with soreness, stiffness, and mild temporary discomfort,” Joni D. said.

Larry M, another user, compared taking **Mobilify** to living a completely new life.

“After a week and a half of taking **Mobilify**, the discomfort, stiffness, and minor aches went away...it’s almost like being reborn,” he said.

Dennis H. said it helped him get back to his favorite hobby.

“I can attest to **Mobilify** easing discomfort to enable me to pursue my golfing days. Definitely one pill that works for me out of the many I have tried,” he said.

How to Get Mobilify

Right now, the only way to get this powerful, unique **Mobilify** formula that clobbers creaking joints without clobbering you is directly from Dr. Sears. It is not available in stores.

To secure your bottle of this breakthrough natural joint discomfort reliever, buyers should call with Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-341-7842**. “The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers.”

Dr. Sears believes in this product so much, he offers a 100% money-back guarantee on every order. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days, and I’ll send you your money back,” said Dr. Sears.

The Hotline will be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow them to restock. Call **1-800-341-7842** to secure your limited supply of **Mobilify**. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again! Call NOW to qualify for a significant discount on this limited time offer. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **ICLMB224** when you call.



The Clinton Power Station is one of six nuclear power plants in Illinois. It is located near Clinton and began commercial operation in November 1987.

Advancements in nuclear energy

THE TOP PRIORITY FOR Illinois' electric cooperatives is to provide reliable and affordable electricity to their members. In the quest to meet the growing energy demands of their communities, they continually explore innovative solutions. One such solution that deserves attention is nuclear energy. With advancements in technology and safety measures, nuclear power offers the potential for sustainable electricity generation.

Nuclear energy, often overshadowed by solar and wind energy, provides a reliable source of power that can be generated at any time. Over the past two decades, nuclear power has reliably and economically contributed nearly 20% of electrical generation in the U.S. It remains the single largest contributor, accounting for more than 70% of nongreenhouse gas-emitting power generation in the country.

Nuclear energy currently accounts for about 15% of the electricity delivered by electric cooperatives, and more than two-thirds of all co-ops include a percentage of nuclear energy in their local fuel mix.

Nuclear energy has been powering the nation's grid for six decades, producing an average of one gigawatt of power per plant. Ninety-two nuclear reactors currently operate in the U.S., according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Eleven of those nuclear power reactors are located at six sites in Illinois, and more may be to come. In December 2023, Gov. J. B. Pritzker signed legislation lifting the moratorium on the development of nuclear reactors in the state. This legislation will allow small-scale nuclear reactors producing less than 300 megawatts of power to be developed beginning January 2026.

Light-water reactor (LWR) technologies make up the existing U.S. nuclear fleet and have a remarkable safety and performance record. An example of this is the Vogtle Unit 3, which commenced commercial operations in the summer of 2023. It is the first newly constructed nuclear unit in more than 30 years and can power an estimated 500,000 homes and businesses.

The Vogtle Unit 3 is the first deployment of the AP1000 Generation III+ reactor in the U.S. and is currently the largest generator of clean energy in the nation. The project created numerous jobs during its construction phase and laid the foundation for future Small Modular Reactor (SMR) deployments across the country.

SMRs are seen as a promising alternative to traditional large-scale nuclear power plants, offering shorter construction times and increased safety. They can be easily transported and located in areas that wouldn't support a full-scale

nuclear plant, providing greater flexibility in energy production. However, SMRs face several hurdles, including capital investment costs, economic competitiveness, supply chain challenges and radioactive waste.

Like any power source, nuclear energy has its pros and cons. The most significant benefit is that nuclear power plants are a carbon-free source of electricity, emitting no greenhouse gases. Additionally, these plants provide a reliable source of power, especially during extreme weather. They operate continuously and have a relatively small physical footprint compared to other forms of energy generation. Nuclear plants in the U.S. also have the highest maximum capacity for power output at 92%. Compare that to 49% for natural gas, 44% for coal, 34% for wind and 24% for solar.

Safety has always been a paramount concern in the nuclear energy sector. Generation III+ nuclear reactor designs include safety features that do not require sustained operator action or electronic feedback to safely shut down the plant in the event of an emergency. These enhanced designs are more resilient to accidents and have a reduced environmental impact. By prioritizing safety, nuclear energy can be harnessed responsibly without compromising public well-being. 💡



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



One idea lights a thousand candles

By Lisa Cherry

CORN BELT ENERGY CORPORATION member Alice Long and close friend Amy Manahan were celebrating Long's birthday when inspiration struck. Manahan had signed them up for a do-it-yourself candle-making experience — afterward, the women only made it across the street before their collective wheels began to turn.

"We started talking about how fun of an activity it was and how unique it was and how we could bring it back to central Illinois," says Manahan. Literally within the hour they had a name — Farm to Wick.

Their story didn't begin there, however. They were co-workers first, oftentimes joking about business ventures, like opening a taco or a cupcake truck. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and both found themselves working from home. That fateful birthday excursion took place the following year when restrictions began to lift.

As their conversation that day continued, Long and Manahan realized that reinventing what they had just enjoyed might be a welcome experience for others coming out of the isolation caused by the pandemic. "We got to thinking that people need an activity to reconnect. That was the premise ... to have something [where] people could reconnect with their tribe, with their people," says Manahan.

Upon returning home, Long got the ball rolling. "I thought it was going to take a good year or more to get this going," says Manahan. "[But] Alice is a project manager by trade. She wrote a date and all the things that needed to be done." While Long set Sept. 1 that same year as the target date for the business to open, Manahan jokes that she had yet to even tell her husband.

They chose to use soy wax to support farmers and the local ag industry. Long and Manahan

also decided to incorporate a retail side. They say the two facets of the business — DIY and retail — balance each other out as events ebb and flow. Retail candles are made fresh to order unless inventory is needed for fairs or festivals.

The two decided against a storefront. "We want to go to the people; we want to connect with them. ... We thought mobile was the way to go," says Manahan. At first, that meant hauling a trailer. Today, they drive a box truck affectionately nicknamed Marge.

"Once we started getting a following, we were thinking of ways we could get people to come back. So, we have a refill program, and it's taken off," says Manahan. The two laugh at the number of phases the business has gone through. "I think we're on phase, like, 85."

Manahan says Long is famous for saying, "We might as well make hay while the sun shines." That drive has resulted in a variety of products and unique experiences — unity candles, shower and wedding candle "bars," pop-ups, fundraising and corporate events — including one for Corn Belt Energy employees last year. "We've been able to build on our ideas," she says.

The owners find it's not all about the candles anymore. "People feel comfortable around us. We really try to interact," says Manahan. "There have been times when people have shared heavy things with us. They're going through cancer, or they're going through a divorce. It's a relationship that we build. ... You feel like you're creating an avenue for that connection."💡



Farm to Wick owners Alice Long, left, and Amy Manahan

SHOW SUPPORT

Farm to Wick

Find farms to attend or host an event at farmtowick.com.

For more information, email farmtowick@gmail.com or call 309-275-9739 or 309-532-0625.

Follow Farm to Wick on Facebook and Instagram.

If you are a small business owner and are interested in being featured in the Support Local section of Illinois Country Living magazine, please submit the form on icl.coop/local for consideration. If you have any questions, contact Lisa Cherry at 217-241-7952.



REMEMBERING FORGOTTONIA

A publicity stunt leaves a lasting legacy

By Colten Bradford

CREATING A NEW STATE is no easy task, but a group of concerned citizens in west-central Illinois attempted to do just that more than 50 years ago. ... Well, sort of.

In what could be considered a grab for attention, Forgottonia became a movement to raise awareness of a 16-county region in the bulge of western Illinois and its lack of transportation infrastructure projects in the area. In the 1960s, when the interstate road system was formed, a large chunk of western Illinois was bypassed. With lagging economic growth and residents moving away, a small group decided to take matters into its own hands.

The publicity stunt itself was a symbolic gesture of secession, declaring war and then immediately surrendering.

"It was a bit of a satire ... tongue-in-cheek," says Sue Scott, director of Western Illinois Museum in Macomb. "It was a group of people trying to give voice to the concerns that they had, in a way they thought would reach a broader audience."

That key group of people included Coca-Cola bottler Frank “Pappy” Horn, his son Jack Horn (who is said to have coined the name Forgottonia), Macomb Chamber of Commerce board member John Armstrong and Neal Gamm, the face of the movement.

“They all had their interest,” Scott explains, indicating that the Horns likely sought better roads to distribute soda and Armstrong to boost local businesses. “And then Gamm, I think he was just a bit of a showman ... a rebel.”

Gamm, who was a fine arts and theater student at Western Illinois University, was declared the governor of the symbolic state. He is depicted in photo ops wearing a frock coat and a bowtie charging a 25-cent toll at an old bridge, checking someone’s travel visa upon entering the “independent republic,” and standing in Fandon, Forgottonia’s capitol, an unincorporated community in McDonough County located south of Macomb.

“If you blink, you’ll miss it, literally,” says Jock Hedblade, executive director of the Macomb Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, about driving through Fandon. “It’s that small. But it was a big deal.”

The Forgottonia movement put Fandon on the map, but not because of booming industry, scenery or travel. It was because of publicity shots of Gamm around the community, standing in front of abandoned or worn-out buildings labeled as the “Governor’s Mansion” or “Capitol Building,” for example — most of which are gone today.

Of course, Fandon being Forgottonia’s capital was part of the joke, as was the state flower being the forget-me-not, the state bird being the albatross, which also means, “something that causes

deep concern,” and the state flag being the white flag of surrender.

The movement gained national media attention, and while many of the locals were in on the joke, others were unhappy and didn’t find it

“It was a bit of a satire ... tongue-in-cheek. It was a group of people trying to give voice to the concerns that they had, in a way they thought would reach a broader audience.”

- Sue Scott, Western Illinois Museum

funny. Some of those negative opinions still exist today.

“Part of the community didn’t like it at all,” Scott says. “A lot of people found it offensive. They found [Gamm] a caricature of what people in rural America look like. I think some people felt they were being made fun of. ... People were saying, ‘Hey, we don’t look like that. We don’t talk like that.’”

Hedblade agrees. “There is a faction of the community that has a negative connotation about Forgottonia,” he says. “Some take that name at face value and then take umbrage because of it. What they’re not seeing is the story behind it ... the fact that the reason why this whole thing came about was because this part of the state had no infrastructure.”

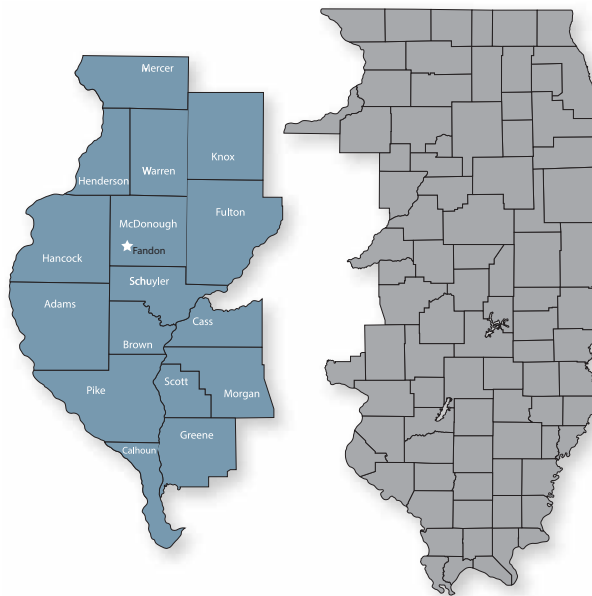
Hedblade grew up in Macomb and remembers the start of Forgottonia as a young teenager. He believes any successes from the Forgottonia movement stem from it being humor-based with a serious message behind it.

“That message embarrassed the state, and it kind of forced them into taking care of this area,” Hedblade says. “The bottom line is, whatever you thought of it, it had a positive impact on this area. ...

We want to show that there are so many layers to the story and that it had a positive impact that helped transform this area.”

The movement may have produced some change. The interstate system didn’t originally include west-central Illinois. However, the Central Illinois Expressway, now known as Interstate 72 and Interstate 172, began development in the late ’70s and now connects Quincy with Springfield and Champaign.

However, Scott isn’t convinced that the Forgottonia movement achieved the change it intended to, but “in some ways, it did galvanize people at that time to try to do something a bit more within the state government system.”



Forgottonia consists of 16 counties in western Illinois. The capital of Fandon is located south of Macomb in McDonough County.

She also believes the meaning of Forgottonia has changed over time. “I think it’s come to represent something different,” she says.

For the Western Illinois Museum, it’s about collecting oral histories. Thanks to a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, the museum holds a summer program with high school students to collect local oral histories.



ALL HISTORICAL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Neal Gamm, governor of Forgottonia, is depicted in many tongue-in-cheek photographs promoting the movement.

She explains that while Forgottonia is certainly part of local history, this program isn't all about that specific history. More accurately, the program focuses on the idea of the forgotten story or narrative. Using primary sources, these students are gaining a better understanding of local histories and the importance of sharing them.

"[Forgottonia] seems to be a catchy way for young people to enter into thinking about [their community]," Scott says. "What makes it Forgottonia? What is being forgotten? What can be done to make sure that it's not forgotten? We're trying to teach young people that they have a role in collecting their local history, preserving it and deciding which part of that history gets told."

Something similar can be said about the Macomb Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, which has dubbed the area as Unforgettable Forgottonia.

Hedblade returned to Macomb six years ago after many years of working in media. Heading up the visitor's bureau, he knew the area needed a new brand. With the help of a marketing agency, Unforgettable Forgottonia was born.

"We needed something different, and [Forgottonia] was just hanging there. ... Not many people

know what it means, but it makes you curious. ... It sounds whimsical, it sounds different, it sets us apart, and it's ours. [Forgottonia] was created here," Hedblade says. "And it's worked, particularly outside of this community."

He says that since the rebranding, tourism has grown exponentially. He credits much of that to the spirit of Forgottonia. The idea is to take pieces of obscure and nearly forgotten history and create a destination out of them.

For example, Abraham Lincoln made a stop in Macomb during his tour of the state while debating Stephen Douglas for senate. During his stay, Lincoln spoke with an audience at the Macomb courthouse. This moment in history was honored with the Living Lincoln Topiary Monument, which was unveiled outside Macomb's City Hall in August 2020. It is a bust of Lincoln, his beard alive with colorful plants. The U.S. National Park Service later named Macomb as an official Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area in June 2021.

"Sometimes, you've got to get far away from something to be able to look back and see what the real importance of it was," Hedblade says. "I think if this does nothing else, I would be happy if it changes people's attitudes about what this story is ... if it puts it in a better light, and that

people can understand how important it was and still is, and why we need to embrace that history."

In 2011, "How the States Got Their Shapes" host Brian Unger interviewed Neal Gamm in Fandon for the second episode of the series, "The Great Plains, Trains and Automobiles." In the episode, Gamm says, "It all started as a publicity stunt. We were just forgotten by the state and federal government, so we just ought to secede." Gamm passed away in November 2012 at age 65.

More than a decade later, on Sept. 9, 2023, Fandon saw a flurry of excitement as people gathered to observe the 50th anniversary of Forgottonia and honor the satirical governor. "We probably tripled the population that day," Hedblade laughs. During the event, the thoroughfare through Fandon was officially declared as Gov. Neal Gamm's Forgottonia Veterans Freeway.

"Knowing that [Gamm] was an actor and performer at heart, I think that he would have been very proud of what happened here," Hedblade speculates. "I can't imagine that he wouldn't have wanted to participate fully in [the anniversary event]. And not just for the limelight of it, but just the knowledge and the recognition that what he did — that started as a joke, really — had a lasting impact and is now only growing stronger than it ever has."💡



During Forgottonia's 50th anniversary in September 2023, Fandon's thoroughfare was renamed in honor of the late Neal Gamm.

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Digging for dollars

How to save money in the garden

By George Weigel

PLANT PRICES HAVE GONE up sharply in recent years. So have insecticides, fertilizers, mulch, tools and other accessories gardeners use to keep their green investments alive. Even bagged dirt isn't dirt-cheap. What's a gardener on a tight budget to do? Let's dig into specifics.

Ways to save on plant purchases

You could pay full price at prime planting time, like most gardening consumers, or you could pay half or less with some bargain-sniffing strategies. Start by looking for markdowns on overstocked, out-of-bloom or past-prime plants. These are often perfectly healthy . . . just not attractive enough to fetch top dollar.

Four top savers include perennials relegated to a bargain rack after they've finished blooming for the season, annuals and vegetables still viable but unsold after the spring rush, trees and shrubs that are misshapen markdowns but fixable via pruning and patience, and spring-blooming bulbs that are often 50% off when unsold but can still be planted by the end of October.

If you shop local, get on your favorite garden center's loyalty program. These offer discounts, coupons, rewards and special sales to regular customers. While you're at it, let local garden center managers know you're interested in plants they want to clear out. You might get a call before plants go on the clearance rack.

Bargains are sometimes possible through mail-order and online vendors, but expect the plants to be small and "bare root" — i.e., shipped with weight-saving packing material around the roots instead of soil. Coddle them in a pot for a year to maximize success.

Plant bargains also can be found from unconventional sources, including plant societies, Master Gardeners, libraries, public gardens, farmer's markets, schools and garden clubs — all of which often hold plant sale fundraisers using divisions from members' yards, locally started seedlings and discounted greenhouse transplants.

Landscape companies are another overlooked resource. Landscapers routinely dig up healthy plants during renovations, simply because they've outgrown the space or a new homeowner doesn't like them. They may let you salvage their dig-outs before they go to a dump.





Dividing clumps of expanded perennials is a way to add plants at no charge.

Ways to trim the plant budget

Wherever you buy plants, opt for less-expensive smaller sizes. Given patience and good growing conditions, a quart-sized perennial will end up at the same mature size as a gallon-sized one, but at a significantly lower starting price.

Leaning small especially saves on trees, which can double in price for just 2 or 3 feet of additional height. Research has found that smaller transplant sizes usually establish faster and catch up to their bigger brethren within a few years.

Starting new plants from seed yields more plants to the dollar than transplants. Vegetables and annual flowers are fairly easy to start from seed inside in winter. Basic workshop lights with fluorescent tubes are sufficient for growing seedlings, which usually need about six weeks of inside growth before they're ready to plant outdoors. Even less expensive is planting seeds directly in the ground outside, bypassing the need for lights, pots and potting mix.

A third plant budget-stretcher is mining your own plants for expansion. Most perennial flowers can be dug up and divided into fist-sized pieces after several years of growth, giving you free plants to use elsewhere. Clumps of spring bulbs also can be dug up and divided after their foliage browns in spring, and some shrubs will yield newbies if their "suckers" (roots that send up shoots) are dug up and transplanted.

Check with friends and neighbors to see if they'd like to trade divisions, which can yield free varieties for your yard. New shrubs, trees, roses and evergreens can be created by snipping 4- to 6-inch pieces off the tips of "mother plants" and sticking them into moist potting mix. That induces roots to grow from the buried cut ends, giving you a new "baby" copy of the plant. This works for many annual flowers and tropicals, too.

If you're spending too much on annual flowers (the ones planted anew each spring), save money by converting space to perennials (plants that come back year after year). Limit those \$6 annuals to pots, hanging baskets and window boxes.

Perennials cost more upfront and don't bloom as long as annuals, but the return on investment takes three years or less. Some annuals are good at "self-seeding," meaning they return on their own from seed dropped by last year's flowers.

Save on your potted plant budget by starting with fewer plants each season. With patience, pots of fewer premium-priced potted annuals will fill in eventually and cost less than tightly packed ones.

Another pot option is scavenging the yard for perennial flowers that you can dig up and divide to use in pots. The best are ones with colorful foliage that add interest beyond the few weeks they're in flower. Return the perennials to the ground in the fall to overwinter and mine again next year.

A third money-saver is using "double-duty" plants. Most so-called "houseplants" are tropical or subtropical species that do perfectly fine outside in northerly summers and inside over winter.

Top 10 money-saving gardening practices

1. Collect and save your own seed. The mature flowers from many plants yield seed that can be saved and planted the following year.
2. Make the most of retail seed. Most seed bought in packs are good for two or more years, especially if stored in a cool, dry place. If the packs have more seed than you need, share or trade with gardening friends.
3. Make your own compost. Start a pile where you can recycle your property's leaves, grass clippings, spent plants and kitchen scraps into highly nutritious (and free) compost.
4. Don't yank the annual flowers after they die back at fall frost. Some types are cold-hardy enough to survive the winter and grow anew next spring.
5. Watch for annuals that pop up on their own. Flowering annuals might sprout in spring from your own self-seeders, as well as seeds brought in by birds, bugs and the wind. If you recognize these as flowers and not weeds, you have free flowers.
6. Don't be too quick to yank dead plants in spring. Some plants take longer than others to return to life. Heap patience on top of patience before you turn to the shovel.
7. Take season-long advantage of all vegetable garden space. Many gardeners plant veggies once in spring, then leave the space empty after harvest. Reload harvested space with new crops that can be planted in summer to utilize the entire growing season.
8. Save water by letting lawns go dormant during a dry summer spell. Most turfgrass can survive without water for three or four weeks after going brown in a summer-survival dormant state.
9. Save on mulch. Cover the bare ground with ground-cover plants. You'll pay more at planting time, but as the plants spread, they'll hold down weeds without having to buy mulch anymore.
10. Decorate for the holidays with harvested landscape plants. Clippings from evergreens can be used to make wreaths, while clusters of holly berries and dried hydrangeas make good color accents.



Seeds sprout best when they're lightly tamped into loosened soil and kept consistently moist.



Direct-seeding into the soil is even less expensive than starting your own plants from seed inside.

Consider using plants you've bought as houseplants in summer pots, dressed up with coordinated annuals. Conversely, instead of discarding tropicals bought for summer pots at the end of the season, convert them into houseplants over winter.

Ways to save on gardening products

The fastest way to save on gardening products is to cut out things that you and your plants don't need.

Some possibilities include wound dressings for pruned trees (not necessary), leaf shine (a soft, damp cloth with diluted soap cleans dusty houseplant leaves), compost activator (a few shovelfuls of finished compost or soil adds decomposition microbes), anti-transpirant/anti-desiccant sprays (somewhat helpful in transplanting but research shows little to no cold-weather protection), moisture-holding gels for potted plants (research shows little to no water-saving benefit), landscape fabric (inhibits soil oxygen and traps moisture in poorly drained beds) and tree fertilizer spikes (trees get the nutrients they need from the soil).

Next is reducing the amount of products you use, such as fertilizer. Plants take up only the nutrients they need. Adding more doesn't make them grow bigger or better and is a waste of money.

If plants are growing well, there's no need to add anything. If they're not, a soil test will tell if lack of nutrition is the culprit, along with identifying what nutrients are needed. Extension offices and many garden centers offer

inexpensive DIY soil-test kits to help you spend fertilizer dollars wisely.

Bug and disease sprays are another potential cost-saver. Some gardeners routinely use pesticides "just in case," both wasting money and potentially killing beneficial insects that would've controlled pests for free.

Most bugs and diseases target only specific plants, and much of the damage is temporary or cosmetic. Consider products only when plants are under threat from intolerable or potentially fatal damage — and when there are no better alternatives.

Expensive potting mix can be stretched by mixing your own from bulk ingredients or by "refreshing" last year's saved mix with new mix, assuming last year's mix wasn't bug- or disease-ridden.

Even costly hardscaping materials such as bricks, stone, patio furniture, garden ornaments and fencing are sometimes available free or heavily discounted from neighbors advertising them through local social media channels.

Lots of household waste items are fair game for repurposing in the garden, including storage tubs that morph into flower containers, cut-off soda bottles that serve as plant protectors, and butter tubs that become seedling pots.

While most everything related to gardening has become more expensive, there are many ways to keep costs down. So, whether you're a seasoned gardener or new to the hobby, don't get discouraged with increased prices as navigating gardens on a budget is easier than one might think. 💡

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Warren James Winery owner Cole Pierce

A toast to Warren James

By Kayla Adkins

THERE'S SOMETHING NEW GROWING on the vine in Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative's service territory. Warren James Winery opened its doors in July 2023. Eight years after the idea sprouted for brothers Blake and Cole Pierce, they were finally in business.

"It started as an idea between me and my older brother. He had just [turned] drinking age in college and went to some wineries in southern Illinois with his friends. He had never been," Cole explains. "He thought it was more of a type of thing for women but saw the beauty behind it."

Thus, the planning began, which included several years of schooling and research. "I have visited every single winery in a 60-mile radius from here for a reason," Cole says, explaining that he learned something new with each visit that helped them shape the winery as it is today.

The winery is located a few miles off I-57 and Route 16 in Mattoon. Cole says the location was everything. "One of my biggest pet peeves was driving down rock roads and potholed roads to a winery," he says.

Spanning 55 acres of former farmland, Warren James Winery includes a vineyard, an apple orchard, hiking trails, beehives, a

sunflower field and a pond. The bees create honey that will be available for sale. When ripe, the apples will be used to make wine.

Inside, a bookshelf holds board games and books for customers to enjoy while wining and dining, and an indoor/outdoor fireplace provides a cozy atmosphere for guests to relax. These ideas sprung from the need for an "escapism-type atmosphere from everyday life," according to Cole.

The winery's name stems from both brothers' middle names, which are also the maiden names of their mother and grandmother. Cole hopes the winery can become a family business that spans generations. "Blake and I both have sons now and have passed on those middle names, respectively. So, hopefully, one day they will be running this place."

Although their main business is wine, an extensive menu is also available. The appetizers offer something for everyone, including spinach artichoke dip, Korean beef mini tacos and a charcuterie board; however, the most popular are the Southwest chicken eggrolls. This food fusion takes an eggroll and fills it with chicken, black beans, corn, jalapenos, cheese, spinach, a signature house sauce and Southwestern pesto.

Main courses include sandwiches, wraps and flatbreads. A couple of crowd favorites are the BBLT, an elevated BLT made with fried green tomatoes, hot honey, sugar-marinated bacon and lettuce topped with the winery's signature sauce, and the Outlaw Grilled Cheese, made with brisket, bacon, four varieties of cheese and house barbecue sauce. "It's so good, it should be outlawed," Cole laughs.

Flatbread varieties include the Margherita, chicken bacon ranch, Southwest chicken pesto and barbecue brisket. For those with food allergies, flatbreads can be made with a cauliflower crust and sandwiches can be made with gluten-free bread. Wraps can also be ordered as salads.

Chicken strips, mini corndogs and grilled cheese comprise the kids' menu, and desserts include seasonal cake, salted caramel cheese-cake and cake bite flights.

Diners can opt for indoor or outdoor seating, the latter of which features heated igloos that can seat four or eight people. Reserved igloos come with a personal server and offer views of the pond and vineyard. Four-legged guests are also welcome in these outdoor areas, on the trails and the patio. Water bowls and pet clean-up areas can also be found on the premises.

In addition to the restaurant, the winery's banquet room can be booked for wedding receptions, corporate parties, bridal/baby showers and birthday parties. Cole adds that their venue was voted the No. 1 best reception space by the local newspaper.

The scenic beauty surrounding the winery adds to the location's ambiance at dances, weddings and other events. The winery will also host several regular events, including music bingo, concerts, brunch, trivia contests, comedians and more.

At the center of it all is the wine. Currently, Warren James Winery is partnering with other vineyards to source its wine, which includes 13 varieties, from dry to sweet red to white. However, 1,000 vines outside the restaurant will bear fruit in the coming years.

"There's a lot of maintenance when it comes to [vineyards], which we are focusing on. ... For the last six months, we've been preoccupied with getting the winery and the restaurant going," Cole says, adding that wine production will begin onsite starting this spring. "I'd like to do it all in-house. There's a lot more to happen here." 💡



Outlaw Grilled Cheese with a side salad



Cake Bite Flight

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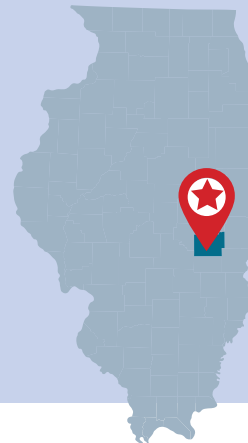
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Dinner for two

IT'S NEARLY VALENTINE'S DAY, and love is in the air. While there's nothing wrong with going out to a packed, overly dark restaurant for a romantic dinner for two, I think there's something special about putting in a little extra effort and making something at home. You can try to surprise your significant other with a delicious meal, or the two of you can work on it together for some fun quality time. Whether it is Valentine's Day or any day, here's a set of recipes perfect for a date night at home. 💡

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Recipes are prepared, tasted and photographed by **Colten Bradford**, Illinois Country Living editor.



Parmesan-Dill Salmon

Submitted by Julie Douglas, Shelby Electric Cooperative

Servings: 2

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 2 salmon filets, patted dry | 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce | 2 teaspoons Paul Prudhomme Salmon Magic seasoning* |
| 1 tablespoon plain Greek yogurt | 1 tablespoon capers | 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated |
| 2 teaspoons fresh dill, chopped | 1 lemon, zest and juice | |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line a sheet pan with aluminum foil and spray with cooking spray. Set aside. In a large sealable bag, add yogurt, dill, Worcestershire sauce, capers, zest of whole lemon and juice of half a lemon (save the other half). Squeeze the bag to mix the ingredients and add the salmon. Marinate the salmon in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Remove filets and place them on the sheet pan. Sprinkle 1 teaspoon of seasoning blend and 1/4 cup Parmesan and place a slice of lemon on each filet. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes. *Editor's note: If you cannot find the Salmon Magic seasoning, you can create a blend by mixing 1/2 tablespoon paprika, 1-1/4 teaspoons salt, 1/2 teaspoon each of onion powder and garlic powder, and 1/4 teaspoon each of cayenne pepper, white pepper, black pepper, dried thyme and dried oregano. Nutrition information: 326 calories; 15.1g fat; 943mg sodium; 6.5g carbohydrates; 44.6g protein.

Julie's Garlic Bread

Submitted by Julie Douglas, Shelby Electric Cooperative

Servings: 2

- 1 small baguette
- 1 stick salted butter, melted
- 4 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded
- Cavender's Greek Seasoning, to taste*

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line a sheet pan with aluminum foil and spray with cooking spray. Cut bread into 1/2- to 1-inch slices. Place butter in a microwave-safe dish and microwave 30 seconds at a time until butter melts. Dip bread slices into butter and lay bread butter side up on sheet pan. Sprinkle with seasoning mix liberally and top with mozzarella cheese. Bake 10-15 minutes until cheese melts and bread is crispy. *Editor's note: If you prefer to make your own seasoning blend, mix 1/2 teaspoon each of salt, garlic powder, dried basil, dried oregano, black pepper, dried parsley, dried rosemary, dried dill and dried thyme. Nutrition information: 628 calories; 39.1g fat; 965mg sodium; 54.8g carbohydrates; 16.2g protein.

Mini Fruit Galettes

Servings: 4

Pastry:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 6 tablespoons butter, chilled and cubed
- 6 tablespoons ice water
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon milk

Filling:

- 3/4 cup frozen cherries, thawed

- 3/4 cup frozen raspberries, thawed
 - 1/3 cup sugar
 - 2 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca
 - 1/8 teaspoon almond extract
 - 1 pinch salt
- Glaze:
- 6 tablespoons powdered sugar
 - 1 teaspoon milk
 - 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

In a medium bowl, stir together the flour, salt and sugar. With a pastry cutter, cut in the butter until coarse mixture forms. Mix in ice water 1 tablespoon at a time, stirring with a spatula until a ball of dough forms. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 1 hour. For the filling, stir together the fruit, sugar, tapioca, almond extract and salt. Cover and refrigerate. Once the dough is chilled, preheat the oven to 425 F. Divide the dough into two equal portions. One at a time, place on a lightly floured surface and roll the dough until a rough 7-inch circle is formed. Transfer the dough to a parchment paper-lined rimmed baking sheet. Divide the fruit mixture in two and place each portion in the center of each dough circle, leaving 2 inches of dough around edges. Fold the dough just over the edge of the filling, pinching overlapping edges together to keep the filling from spilling out during baking. Whisk together the egg yolk and milk and brush it on the crust. Bake 30-35 minutes, until the crust is golden. Let the galette cool completely on pan. Once cooled, mix the glaze ingredients. Add more powdered sugar to thicken or milk to thin. Drizzle glaze over the top of the galettes and serve. Nutrition information: 559 calories; 24.6g fat; 428mg sodium; 78.8g carbohydrates; 8.1g protein.

Lemon Garlic Asparagus

Submitted by Julie Douglas, Shelby Electric Cooperative

Servings: 2

- 1 bunch fresh asparagus, woody ends removed
- 2 teaspoons garlic, chopped
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons salted butter
- 1/4 cup almonds, slivered
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Blanch asparagus by adding them to boiling water for 1-2 minutes and then placing them in an ice water bath. Place olive oil and butter in a large skillet over medium heat until melted and combined. Saute garlic for 1-2 minutes. Add the asparagus, toss to cover, remove from heat, and salt and pepper to taste. Plate and sprinkle with slivered almonds. Nutrition information: 195 calories; 15.5g fat; 264mg sodium; 11.4g carbohydrates; 7.3g protein.

Red Wine Vinaigrette Dressing

Servings: 2

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1-1/2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1-1/2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

Whisk all ingredients together. Spoon over salad greens and toppings of your choice.

Nutrition information: 124 calories; 14.1g fat; 147mg sodium; 0.8g carbohydrates; 0.1g protein.





With travel being so common, bed bugs can easily spread by sneaking into luggage.

Bed bugs check in, but they don't check out

Tips to keep them out of your home

DID YOU KNOW THAT similar to yawning, itching is contagious? Even reading about yawning or itching can cause the reader to do the same. I have yawned twice and now have an itch on my shoulder just from writing this opening paragraph.

The reason I bring up itching is that this article may cause you to start itching. We are about to dive into some information about a little bug that has been part of civilization since humans dwelled in caves. The bed bug.

Bed bugs are parasitic insects that feed on humans. The insect's nocturnal habit leads to bites occurring while we sleep. Not everyone reacts to bed bug bites, but those who do have a range of reactions that commonly include small itchy bumps and less commonly, large painful welts. When a bed bug feeds, there is no painful stab as it uses its straw-like proboscis to draw a few drops of blood out of us. Please note, bed bugs do not transmit any known diseases to humans.

Bed bugs even show up in ancient Egyptian texts. Humans have had to deal with these pesky little biters for all of history, except

following World War II. With the invention of modern-day insecticides, we were able to reduce bed bug populations to near zero in most of the developed world in the 20th century.

So, why are bed bugs making a comeback? We never truly eliminated bed bugs, even in the U.S. "Bring back DDT," you say? Sorry, bed bugs are already resistant to it and many other chemicals. Unfortunately, bed bugs are good at developing resistance to insecticides.

For centuries, before modern insecticides, humans adapted to living with and avoiding bed bugs. With cases increasing today, it may be time to re-adopt some old habits. Since travel has become much easier and more common, here are some tips for reducing the chance of introducing bed bugs to your home after returning from a trip.

- ✿ Have a hard surface suitcase. This limits the hiding spots for bed bug hitchhikers.
- ✿ When you return home, leave your suitcase outside or in the garage.
- ✿ Take your clothing (dirty and clean) out of the suitcase and toss

it in a clothes dryer. High heat (120 degrees Fahrenheit) for 20 minutes kills all life stages of bed bugs. After the dryer, toss the clothes into the washer for normal cleaning.

- ✿ Store your suitcases in the garage, if you have one. Avoid storing your suitcase in your bedroom closet or under your bed.

Most younger Americans have not had to deal with bed bugs, so they have a lot to learn. An important lesson is that everyone can get bed bugs, but not everyone can afford to treat them. Managing bed bugs is not an issue of filth, it is an issue of money.

If you want to learn more about reducing the risk of introducing bed bugs to your home, how to inspect a hotel room, or what to do if you find a bed bug in your house, check out our Good Growing podcast at go.Illinois.edu/Bedbugs, where we chat with entomologist Kacie Athey about bed bugs. I promise, you won't be too itchy by the end of the show, and you will learn a lot of ways to avoid bed bugs. 💡



Chris Enroth is a horticulture educator with the University of Illinois Extension, serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough and Warren counties. This column also appears in the "Good Growing" blog at go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing.

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UPCOMING THEMES

April - Water

May - Point of view

June - Youth photographers (entries by readers ages 17 and younger)

July - Sky



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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. McDaniel, 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



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

condition. As many as 25% of those over the age of 50 have some degree of macular degeneration. The macula 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. McDaniel. "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 a call. You can also visit our websites.

www.mascoutaheyecare.com

1-618-566-8899

Office located in Mascoutah, Illinois
Marianne McDaniel, O.D.