

MARCH 2024

Illinois Country Living

EASY AS Pi

FEATURE
Basking in the shadow

PRAIRIE TABLE
Pull up a chair in Mimi's Kitchen

POWERED UP
Plowing into the future

 CO-OP
NEWS

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Eye Doctor Helps Illinois Legally Blind To See

High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again



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

"Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss," said Dr. 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.



Illinois Country Living

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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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Women empower

America's electric co-ops are increasingly powered by women

A GENERATION AGO, if a young woman expressed an interest in working in the energy industry, it's possible her friends, family and even prospective employers would have steered her away. Keeping the lights on was traditionally seen as men's work, aside from customer service or clerical roles, that is.

Yet today, women represent an increasing share of the electric cooperative workforce, and not just in traditional roles of the past. As you look around Illinois' electric co-ops, you'll find women in every imaginable role — from engineers to financial managers and in top leadership roles.

International Women's Day is March 8. It's a great occasion to celebrate the accomplishments of the many women who are transforming electric co-ops and how they serve their communities. It's hard to imagine a better career field for today's young women interested in making their communities better places to live, work and play.

"The competition for talent and skill shortages have highlighted the need to expand recruitment strategies to get a more diverse range of candidates," explains Desiree Dunham, workforce programs manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). "The diverse experiences and perspectives of women contribute to more creative

and effective problem-solving, which can be especially beneficial in navigating complex challenges and finding innovative solutions that cater to a broad range of consumer needs."

NRECA reported that nearly 90 electric co-ops are headed by female CEOs, including Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Menard Electric Cooperative and Norris Electric Cooperative in Illinois. Strengths like teamwork, problem-solving and communication that women bring to leadership are particularly important to the industry's future.

Co-ops across America have a variety of opportunities available to women. Beyond the highly visible roles such as linework, the diverse mix of opportunities includes positions in IT, finance and engineering, which are all vital to co-op operations.

As nearly 20% of the nation's co-op workforce nears retirement age over the next five years, and local cooperatives compete with an ever-tighter job market, expanding the pool of potential workers is an effective solution. At the same time, there are many reasons women who are entering (or reentering) the workforce should consider finding a place in the electric co-op world.

"Cooperatives are often recognized as 'best place to work' employers in their communities, offering competitive benefits, caring cultures and support for families," Dunham says. "Co-ops also have a solid commitment to strengthening inclusion and diversity, and women are often strong advocates for fostering a culture where all individuals are valued for their skills and expertise."



Business writer **Scott Flood** has worked with electric co-ops for more than four decades to build knowledge of energy-related issues. He writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



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ARE ENERGY COSTS **DEVOURING** YOUR HOUSEHOLD BUDGET?



5 SIMPLE WAYS TO START SAVING

Turn things off when not in use. It's the simplest and most effective way to reduce energy waste.

Run full loads in your dishwasher and washing machine, and wash clothes in cold water.

Unplug unused electronics. Many devices still use standby power when not in use.

Adjust the thermostat at night and when you're not at home to give the HVAC system a break.

Take shorter showers and turn off the tap while shaving or brushing your teeth.



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MARCH CHECKLIST

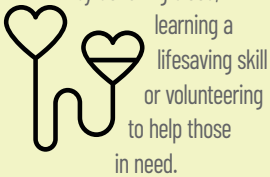
Don't rely on luck.

Flickering lights indicate an electrical problem that needs to be fixed.



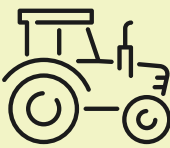
Don't take a chance — hire a professional.

Help save a life. March is Red Cross Month. Celebrate by donating blood,



learning a lifesaving skill or volunteering to help those in need.

Farm safely. When working near power lines, always have a spotter on the ground who can direct you away from power lines and poles.



Tip of the month.

While you're working on your spring-cleaning to-do list, dust electronics and other electrical items to



increase their efficiency and lifespan.



Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative's Travis Boylen, Corn Belt Energy Corporation's Daren Deverman and Prairie Power Inc.'s Scott Mason received Safety Leadership Awards during the Safety and Energy Conference.

Bringing safety to the forefront

Safety and Energy Conference held

Lineworkers, supervisors and warehouse personnel from electric co-ops across Illinois gathered in Springfield to attend the annual Safety and Energy Conference Jan. 31-Feb. 1, hosted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC).

The conference focused on safety and leadership in the energy industry. Attendees learned about mental health and dealing with trauma, explored the use of drones for infrastructure inspection, learned about strategies for success in a multigenerational workplace, and received relevant training to keep them informed and safe while on the job.

During the conference, safety leadership awards were presented to recognize individual and cooperative-wide commitment to safe work culture. The AIEC Individual Leadership Award recognizes safety awareness and rewards individuals who demonstrate safety leadership, promote safety culture and contribute to the safety of a project. Recipients must demonstrate safety leadership above and beyond the normal safety performance expectations.

The 2023 Individual Safety Leadership Awards were presented to Travis Boylen, line foreman at Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative; Daren Deverman, manager

of safety and forestry at Corn Belt Energy Corporation; and Scott Mason, health and safety manager at Prairie Power Inc. (PPI). Individuals were nominated by their peers. Each nomination provided specific details explaining why the person deserved the award.

"Travis is open-minded and listens to his crew for ideas to make sure the work is completed safely and efficiently," his nomination letter stated. "He understands the importance of family ... therefore, he always enforces safety because he wants his co-workers to return home safe each night and enjoy their families. Being a leader/teacher who takes pride in his work, demonstrates a safe work ethic and leads by example is what makes Travis a great safety leader."

An excerpt from Deverman's nomination letter read, "Daren has shown that he lives the safety culture. ... He recently administered CPR to an individual who had passed out in a grocery store. ... Daren took over [the situation] and provided CPR until paramedics arrived. He provides real-world examples of why safety is so important. ... We have people at home who count on us and that has to be our reason for doing the right thing, even when nobody is watching."

Continued on page 8

Sudoku

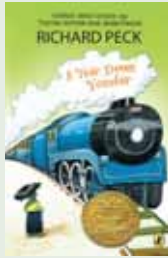
by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

Solution on page 33.

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

IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

Novelist Richard Peck (1934–2018) was born and raised in Decatur, a place he described as “middle middle America” in his autobiography. The former teacher penned several children’s and young adult titles and received many accolades for his writing, including the Newbery Medal for “A Year Down Yonder,” which takes place in Illinois, and the National Humanities Medal, both awarded in 2001. He was the first children’s author to receive the latter.



As a young man, Peck served in the military as a chaplain’s assistant and later earned a master’s degree at Southern Illinois University. Eventually, he found himself teaching junior high English. “It was junior high students, the puberty people, who taught



me how to be a writer,” he was quoted as saying. His brief tenure as a teacher served to provide ample material for his books.

In his obituary (as published in Publishers Weekly on May 24, 2018, following his death at his New York home on May 23), it said “the distinct sense of place from his boyhood remained with him, and he set most of his novels in the Midwest.” His stories often broached difficult topics, including pregnancy, rape, death and suicide. Some titles even incorporated the supernatural. 💡

“Bringing safety” - Continued from page 7

“Scott is a no-nonsense, lead-by-example type of person,” Mason’s nomination letter read. “He is a leader both in title and in work ethic. He is instrumental in PPI’s safety culture and safety leadership. He recognizes the value and importance of safety, ultimately in that everyone gets to go home. ... He consistently ensures all safety incidents are documented, investigated, and [that] corrective actions implemented are effective. Scott conducts field safety audits and gathers information from the crews regarding how to improve safety.”

In addition to the individual safety awards, electric cooperatives were also acknowledged during the conference for their commitment to safety. The AIEC Cooperative Safety Leadership Award recognizes safety awareness and rewards cooperatives that demonstrate safety leadership, promote safety culture and go above and beyond normal safety expectations. These were awarded based on OSHA documentation.

Clinton County Electric Cooperative, JCE Co-op and Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative received 2023 awards for Best Loss Time Rate. Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association, Illinois Electric Cooperative, Monroe County Electric Cooperative, Prairie Power Inc., Shelby Electric Cooperative and Tri-County Electric Cooperative earned both the 2023 Best Lost Time Rate and Best Incident Rate awards. 💡

The impact of energy policy

Change is a constant in today’s energy industry, and electric co-ops across the country lean into change while new ways to meet tomorrow’s energy needs emerge.

Electric co-ops play a crucial role in ensuring the lights come on every time Americans flip a switch. Their primary responsibility is to their members, and they are committed to providing reliable and affordable service. Energy policy has a profound impact on their ability to accomplish those goals.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the watchdog for our nation’s electric grid, has issued warnings about threats to grid reliability, warning that rolling blackouts could be the new normal. Nine states experienced blackouts in 2022 when electricity supply could not keep up with demand. Over the next five years, NERC forecasts that all or parts of 19 states from Montana to Louisiana are at high risk of rolling blackouts during normal peak conditions.



These warnings should not be taken lightly, which is why electric co-ops are pressing policymakers to recognize the need for time, technology development and new infrastructure alongside policies that include a diverse mix of energy sources to maintain reliable power.

The economy of the future will be heavily reliant on electricity. From data centers and manufacturing to electric vehicles and electric heat pumps, electricity demand is set to rise dramatically. Co-ops are planning for this surge in demand by investing in infrastructure, technologies and power supplies that will allow them to meet members’ needs, but additional challenges lie ahead.

Opposite this increasing electricity demand, many power plants that generate always-available electricity are being shut down without adequate replacements, posing a threat to reliability. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is pursuing sweeping new regulations that would force the premature closure of power plants, while also making it harder to permit, site and build new plants. Electric co-ops have urged the EPA to withdraw these proposed regulations that could lead to more blackouts and higher costs.

Advocating for rational policies in Washington, D.C., that preserve reliability and affordability is crucial. In April, electric co-op leaders will gather there for the

Continued on page 10

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TENDER AND JUICY EVERY TIME."

- Kristina T.



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Where is it?

The winners of the January hidden object contest were Karen Sutliff of Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative and Jane Peak of Norris Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.


February's football mug was hidden in the dirt on page 26. Winners' names will be drawn, and they will be notified. Visit Illinois Country Living on Facebook after each month's deadline for a closeup of the object's location and winners' names.

It's time for a new hidden object search. With daylight saving time beginning on March 10, be on the lookout for a clock. 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. 

"Energy policy" - Continued from page 8

annual Legislative Conference, where they will meet with members of Congress and federal agencies to discuss key issues and concerns surrounding reliability. This allows co-ops to educate policymakers on the issues that matter most to the families and businesses they serve.

Today's energy decisions and policies will determine if there are enough resources to meet tomorrow's energy needs. Electric co-ops will continue advocating to ensure a reliable supply of electricity to power everyday life for their members. 

Louis Finkel, NRECA

Co-ops shine online with adoption of .coop domain

Nearly 500 of the nation's 900-plus electric co-ops have adopted the .coop extension for their websites, ranking them No. 1 among all co-op sectors, according to the nonprofit that runs the domain. Some 9,000 co-ops worldwide use it.

"More than half of electric co-ops is a fantastic achievement," said Tom Ivey, community development manager at identity.coop, which manages the registry for the .coop domain.

The .coop domain was launched in 2002 after a push by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) to create an extension that would give co-ops an online identity. Identity.coop was created in 2001 to manage the domain after the ICA backed a proposal by the National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International, which works to advance and promote all co-ops.


Ivey said the mandate behind the .coop domain and identity.coop is to raise the profile and maximize the economic potential of the world's 3 million co-ops.

"Using .coop says you're not just another .com — that you put people first, that you're great to do business with and that you're part of a global movement of more than 1 billion members," he said.

Identity.coop is tasked with ensuring that any entity requesting the .coop domain is indeed a cooperative. It also provides tools and resources for switching over from another domain as well as branding and marketing support.

A .coop subscription has other benefits, Ivey noted, including a wide availability of domains, so co-ops will likely get the one they want. And because members are vetted, there's low risk of reseller markets with people buying them, pushing up the price and selling them.

Ivey said momentum among U.S. electric co-ops toward the domain has been building over several years. "I think there's just this desire among electric co-ops to form a community and to showcase their network," Ivey said.

The number of electric co-ops with the domain extension is evenly distributed across the U.S., according to the Global Cooperative Directory. In Illinois, 10 distribution electric cooperatives, one generation and transmission cooperative, the statewide association representing Illinois electric cooperatives, and this magazine utilize the .coop domain. 

Victoria A. Rocha, NRECA

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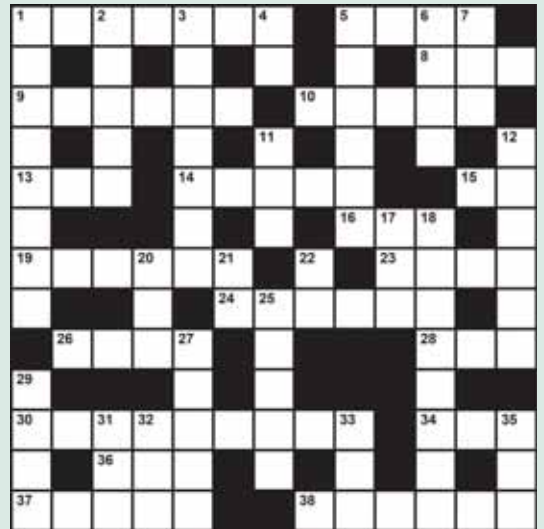
- 1 Civil Rights Memorial architect, 2 words
- 5 See 7 down
- 8 Target
- 9 Women's tennis superstar, _____ Williams
- 10 Argentine first lady played by Madonna in a movie of the same name
- 13 Sure!
- 14 DeGeneres' sitcom
- 15 Hollywood's home, abbr.
- 16 "Love Story" star, _____ MacGraw
- 19 "Melrose Place" star, _____ Milano
- 23 Carrie Underwood was an early winner on this show (familiar name)
- 24 Grammy winner _____ Keys

- 26 Tennis great who is also a pioneer of LGBTQ rights, Bille Jean _____
- 28 Trouble
- 30 Civil rights heroine in the movement for ending segregation in the U.S., 2 words
- 34 It may be glossed over
- 36 Banana cream, for one
- 37 Wine bottle categories
- 38 "Oranges and Sunshine" star, Emily _____

Down

- 1 Women's beach volleyball superstar, first names, 2 words
- 2 The whole nine _____
- 3 Pen name of "advice legend" of the Chicago Sun-Times, Ann _____
- 4 Sodium symbol

- 5 Big hit for Camilla Cabello
- 6 Chess ending, for short
- 7 Women's U.S. soccer great, goes with 5 across
- 11 Deli sandwich, for short
- 12 Deaf actress who won an Oscar for her role in "Children of a Lesser God," _____ Matlin
- 17 52 in Roman numbers
- 18 She was a key figure in the women's suffrage movement and one of the founders of the NAACP, 2 words
- 20 NBA player at Phoenix
- 21 Airline, for short
- 22 Two-way
- 25 "Frasier" star, _____ Linney
- 27 Stares at



- 29 Helen was a central figure in this epic story and ancient Greek city
- 31 Place for pampering
- 32 Scuba supply
- 33 Conclusion of "America the Beautiful"
- 35 Word with "ten" or "hair"

Solution on page 33.

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40 Years of Q.U.I.L.T.S.

MARCH
15-16

Springfield Q.U.I.L.T.S. Guild presents its 40th anniversary quilt show. More than 400 quilts and quilted items will be displayed. There will be a special exhibit of red and white quilts, a variety of vendors, door prizes, a charity sale, quilts of valor and bed turning. A raffle quilt drawing will be held on Saturday. There will be free parking, wheelchairs available and convenient onsite catered lunch and drinks.

March 15, 2024: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and March 16: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

● Illinois State Fairgrounds, Orr Building, Gate 9 on North 5th St., Springfield
Admission: \$10
217-652-9839 or springfieldquilts.com

Midwest Pickleball Championship

MARCH
15-18

Pickleball is one of the fastest-growing sports in the U.S. Join the Midwest Pickleball Championship tournament during spring break on the campus of Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. Players are invited to register and play in this indoor, climate-controlled tournament. Friday events include open play/practice and pro exhibition matches. Women's and men's doubles will be held Saturday, mixed doubles on Sunday, and ages 60-plus women's and men's doubles on Monday.

March 15, 2024: 3-7 p.m. and March 16-18: 8 a.m.-7 p.m.

● Eastern Illinois University Student Center, 200 Grant Ave., Charleston
Admission: varies
309-322-2754 or midwestpickleballchampionship.com



Galena St. Patrick's Day Celebration

MARCH
16

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with Galena Elks and Galena ARC. The festivities kick off with the Kids Mini Shimmy Dash at 11 a.m., where kids can participate in a fun run. No registration or fee is required. At 11:15 a.m., the Shamrock Shimmy 5K run begins, which costs \$30 to participate. Later at 2 p.m., the St. Patrick's Day Parade takes over Main Street, featuring an impressive 30 floats. Be sure to wear green as you join in the revelry and celebrate the luck of the Irish.

March 16, 2024: 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

● Historic Main Street, Galena
Admission: free
815-821-2224 or facebook.com/GalenaElks882

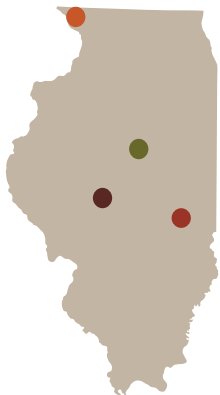
Music as Medicine

MARCH
17

Music as Medicine is just what the doctor ordered, where guests enjoy live music performed by local physicians in support of the Illinois Symphony Orchestra's acclaimed education programs and music scholarships. The evening will include hors d'oeuvres, desserts, coffee and soft drinks, along with a cash bar. Tickets are \$75 in advance or \$100 at the door.

March 17, 2024: 5:30-9 p.m.

● Chateau Hotel and Conference Center, 1621 Jumer Drive, Bloomington
Admission: varies
940-782-5557 or ilsymphony.org



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Planning for the farm's future and yours



Thursday, March 7

1:30 pm or 6:30 pm

PLANTING THE SEEDS:

The Process of Farm Succession Planning

Basic steps for creating a plan

Wednesday, March 13

6:30 pm

CULTIVATING COMMUNICATIONS:

The Farm Meetings

Types, purpose, who is involved and navigating differences

Tuesday, March 19

6:30 pm

CHANGING ROLES:

Who is Driving the Tractor?

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Visit siumed.org/farm to learn more about the event and find resources from the Farm Family Resource Initiative.



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Call first, dig later

Dial 811 before breaking ground

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD to the spring season, Plant a Flower Day is just around the corner on March 12. However, be sure to call 811 ahead of time to be sure it is safe to dig into the ground. Digging without locating underground utilities, even with

When you call, 811 will route you to your local utility locating service. Before you call, you will need to know where and when you plan to dig and what type of work you will be doing. Be sure to call in advance as it takes several business days for a


Underground utilities can shift, and it is important to be certain of where they are before ever putting a shovel in the ground.

If you accidentally come in contact with an underground utility, do not bury the problem. Your priority should be evacuating the area for safety. It can be difficult to locate exactly where a problem is after the damage occurred and was buried. Damage to some underground utilities can cause dangers and inconveniences miles away from the original site of the incident.

Small nicks in underground wires can be expensive, but necessary, to fix. If you nick an underground utility, notify your utility provider. Do not attempt to fix the problem yourself.

It is important to understand that 811 locators do not locate privately installed facilities. If you have any private utilities, you will need to hire a private utility locator. Some examples of private utilities include underground sprinkler systems, invisible fences, data communication systems, private water systems and gas piping to a garage.

If you do not know what facilities are on the property, look for clues to tell you what might be underground, like a propane storage tank, gas meters, a detached garage or outbuilding with lights, a grill or pool on the property, manhole lids, storm drains and pavement patches.

Once all underground utilities have been located, it is time to start digging, but be sure to wear the proper protective gear before putting the shovel into the earth. Remember, there is no project too small or task too menial that you shouldn't take the proper precautions before digging. For more information about digging safety, visit illinois1call.com and SafeElectricity.org. 



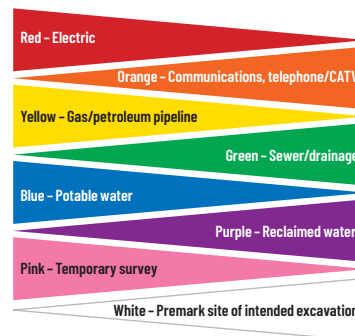
the smallest digging projects, could leave neighborhoods in the dark, cause thousands of dollars in damage or cause severe electrical shock.

Outdoor projects take planning and preparation. Part of that preparation is planning to avoid underground utilities, and 811 helps consumers do this. It's easy, free and keeps you safe.

The 811 "Call Before You Dig" number is a national line that was created to help prevent people from coming into contact with underground utility lines during digging projects. Don't want to call? You can also fill out an online form at illinois1call.com. A professional will come to your digging location to mark the areas where public utility lines are buried.

professional to mark your public utilities with flags or spray paint.

Different colors of paint and flags mark the underground utilities, and each color is universal to what utility is buried.



Even if you previously had utilities located by calling 811, it is best to call before every digging project.



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

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While cleaning light fixtures and fixture covers, check your bulbs and replace any incandescent or compact fluorescent with energy-saving LEDs.

Sweeping away energy waste

Spring cleaning tips to maximize efficiency

SPRING IS A GREAT time to refresh, clean and enhance energy efficiency at home. By adopting simple yet effective energy-saving strategies during spring-cleaning routines, we can create an efficient living environment that may also lower utility bills and extend the life of our heavily used appliances. Follow these spring cleaning tips to add some energy savings to the job.

Although it's out of sight, don't leave it out of mind. Check the filter in your HVAC system. Your furnace worked hard during the winter. Ensuring your system has a clean filter is a low-cost and easy way to protect your equipment and maximize efficiency. A dirty furnace filter can cause your system to work harder than necessary, decreasing efficiency and shortening the system's life.

While the filter is easy to replace, you should have your air conditioner serviced and professionally cleaned. Both the indoor and outdoor units should be cleaned. Dirty refrigerant coils reduce efficiency. This also applies to heat pumps and ductless heat pumps, also known as mini-split systems. The technician can check refrigerant levels and refill or repair, if necessary.

HVAC contractors get busy responding to calls for repairs during the summer heat. Scheduling cleaning services for your air conditioning in the spring (before the heat of the summer) can ensure the work gets done before the rush and even save you money. Some HVAC contractors offer special discounts for cleaning services in the milder months, which helps fill their schedules and keep their technicians working.

Window AC units get dirty, too. They can be cleaned with the proper tools, cleaning agents and know-how. Always unplug before cleaning, and wait until completely dry before plugging it back in again. Take the time to clean it properly in the spring before you need it in the summer.

Cleaning light fixtures and fixture covers can brighten your space by removing dust and grime collected during the winter. While you are at it, be sure to check your bulbs and replace any incandescent or compact fluorescent with energy-saving LEDs. Although they tend to cost a little more, LEDs last longer and use less energy.

Good-quality LED light bulbs are expected to last 30,000 to 50,000 hours, according to the

Department of Energy. A typical incandescent lamp lasts about 1,000 hours, and a comparable CFL lasts 8,000 to 10,000 hours. To put this into terms of everyday use, if you have an LED light on for 10 hours per day, it can last 13 years, compared to only about three months for incandescent bulbs and about two-and-a-half years for CFLs.

Don't forget the oven. A clean oven heats more evenly and quickly, providing better results and lower energy use. A clean oven window allows you to see the food and how it's cooking without opening the oven door, which wastes energy.

If cleaning windows is on the list, check the seals and sash locks to ensure they close tightly. Check for any areas that need caulking or sealing to reduce drafts. Sealing around windows contributes to year-round comfort in your home. Clean windows also allow more light into the home, reducing the need to turn on lamps and overhead fixtures.

Spring is the ideal time to declutter, deep clean and implement practices that not only tidy our homes but also reduce energy consumption, contributing positively to our homes' energy efficiency and saving money on energy use. 💡



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

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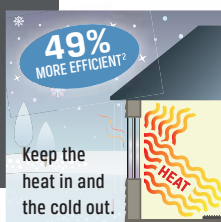
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Plowing into the future

The electrification of agricultural equipment

THE ELECTRIFICATION TREND IN agricultural equipment has gained momentum in recent years as farmers embrace electric vehicles and machinery. This shift offers numerous advantages, including reduced carbon emissions, lower operating costs, improved energy efficiency and quieter operation.

Smaller electric equipment, such as irrigation systems and utility vehicles, is becoming popular. Many farmers are now using electric motors in place of older, inefficient diesel ones for farm irrigation.

Larger agricultural equipment can be difficult to replace with electric alternatives due to their weight. In response, manufacturers are developing more compact tractors that are lower in weight and feature battery-powered options. The design of these tractors allows for better maneuverability in smaller farming spaces, improving efficiency and productivity in the field.

For example, a farmer who owns a small orchard may opt for a compact electric tractor instead of a larger traditional one. The smaller size and electric power allow the farmer to easily navigate between rows of trees without damaging the fruit or soil, ultimately increasing the yield and reducing maintenance costs.

In addition, drones equipped with electric agricultural technology are proving to be valuable. Drones provide farmers with the ability to monitor crops, perform precision spraying and participate in crop pollination. Equipped with specialized sensors and cameras,

drones capture high-resolution images to help farmers make informed decisions about crop management. The versatility and cost-effectiveness of drones make them a valuable tool for optimizing crop health, detecting pests and enhancing irrigation practices.

Here are some common types of farming operations that benefit from electrified agricultural equipment.

Crop farming: Electric equipment such as tractors, sprayers and harvesters are used for tasks like plowing, planting, spraying pesticides, drying and harvesting crops.

Livestock farming: Electric equipment can be utilized for tasks such as feeding, milking and waste management.

Vineyards and orchards: Electric pruning equipment can be utilized for precision pruning of grapevines, fruit trees and bushes.

Greenhouses and nurseries: Electric equipment like tillers, seeders and potting machines are used for efficient soil preparation, seeding and transplanting.

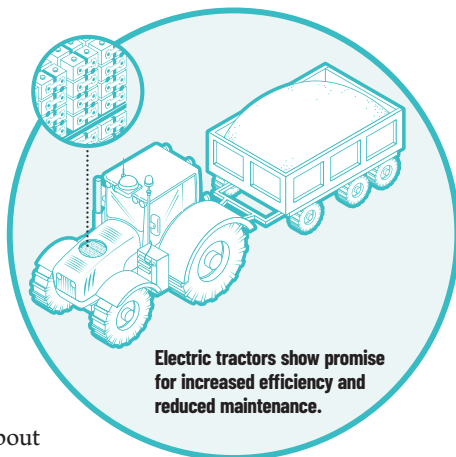
Organic farming: Electrified agricultural equipment used in organic farming operations focuses on sustainability and environmentally friendly practices. Electric tools and equipment help minimize the use of fossil fuels and reduce emissions.

Electrified agricultural equipment offers several benefits beyond reducing carbon emissions. Electric drive trains are simpler and easier to maintain compared to traditional tractors, resulting in lower maintenance costs. Additionally, electric equipment is more energy efficient, converting a higher percentage of electrical energy into usable work.

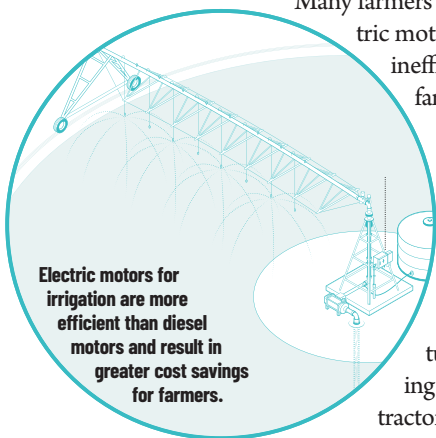
Electric drive trains are radically simpler than modern tractors, making

maintenance cheaper and easier. Electricity flowing through batteries and electric motors is more efficient than diesel being delivered to farms, moved into tanks and burned in diesel engines, and as battery technology continues to advance, further improvements in electric farming equipment are expected.

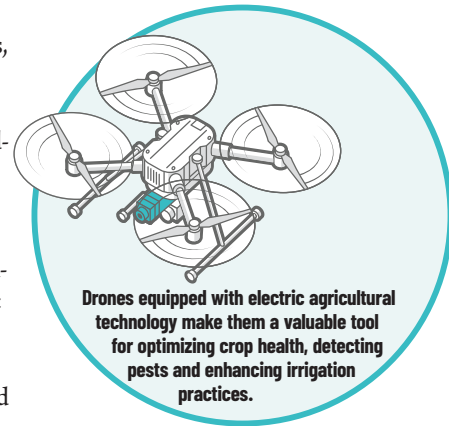
This efficiency leads to reduced energy consumption and lower operating costs for farmers. Also, the quieter operation of electric equipment minimizes disruptions to nearby communities, livestock and wildlife, making it ideal for residential areas or sensitive environments.



Electric tractors show promise for increased efficiency and reduced maintenance.



Electric motors for irrigation are more efficient than diesel motors and result in greater cost savings for farmers.



Drones equipped with electric agricultural technology make them a valuable tool for optimizing crop health, detecting pests and enhancing irrigation practices.

When considering electrified equipment, farmers should evaluate their specific needs, including power requirements and operational tasks. Farmers should work with their local electric cooperative to assess the farm's power supply capacity to ensure it can handle the additional load without causing issues. By analyzing their needs and goals, farmers can determine if adopting electrified agricultural equipment is a suitable and advantageous option. 💡



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.



It's what's for dinner

Rural market offers farm-raised meats

By Lisa Cherry

IN SEPTEMBER 2023, BRIAN and Nola Schultz moved on an idea that had sat on the back burner. The husband and wife, farmers for 32 years on Shelby Electric Cooperative lines, opened Schultz Country Market in Stewardson, the rural community where the two were born and raised.

"We've always had cattle and hogs, and we've always sold quarters and halves or wholes to people, whatever they wanted, but there were [some] who didn't need or couldn't afford that much meat," says Nola. "We've always had this in the back of our minds, but it was never the right time."

The time finally came, however, when meat wholesaler T & L Locker Service closed a year ago. "It had been there for years," says Nola. "But hard times [hit]."

The Schultz Country Market fills the gap left behind with the sale of the family's farm-raised beef, pork and chicken. "People love it because there's not a place close by where you can get meat that you know where it was raised," she says. "You know who it's coming from. You can look down the road at our farm and see it."

Friends and neighbors were already familiar with their meat products. "Friends would buy a hog from us and help us butcher it," says Nola. "We always use the same seasoning. ... Everybody's like, 'That's Schultz's sausage.'" For that reason, she and her husband had to find a processor willing to keep using it.

They are surprised by how many people have visited from outside their community in the short amount of time the shop

has been open. "We've had them from Toledo and Effingham, Shelbyville, Finley ... we've had a lot of support from people," says Nola. "It's been really nice."

It's not just meat at the market. The family likes to stock the 16-by-26-foot space with goods from the community and the state whenever possible. Local products available include noodles, breads, jams and jellies from Beachy's (an Amish wholesaler in Arthur), crafts by local artists, and honey from her brother-in-law's hive, which Nola says is some of the sweetest she's ever tasted.

In the spring and summer, they plan to sell more fresh local produce. She adds that the family would like to add walk-in coolers and/or a walk-in freezer at some point to alleviate the number of trips they must make to the processor. "That's going to take a little commitment and time and money, so [we're] not quite to that step yet," she explains. "Eventually, we'd like to add on to the market ... but we wanted to start small first — just a little storage shed that we've turned into a cute little market."

According to Nola, who predicts the business will be a lifelong learning experience, the reasons behind launching the long-awaited venture were twofold. "We did this to diversify our farm, but also to become an asset to the community," she says. "We want a person to [be able to] get some good, quality meat and make a good, healthy meal for their family."💡

SHOW SUPPORT

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 at icl.coop/local for consideration. If you have any questions, contact Lisa Cherry at 217-241-7952.

Schultz Country Market

2885 E. 300 North Road, Stewardson
217-682-3397

Follow the market on Facebook.



EASY AS 3.141592

Pie contest results

WHO NEEDS AN EXCUSE to eat pie? March 14 marks the annual celebration of the mathematical term Pi, and it is also a great excuse to indulge in the beloved dessert of a similar name. After receiving more than 80 entries, narrowing down recipes, baking the finalists, and being taste-tested by a panel of judges, here are the winners of Illinois Country Living's pie recipe contest. A big thank you to everyone who entered. Hopefully, you find a new favorite pie to help celebrate Pi. 🍷

Cran-Apple Pie



Submitted by Gail Fritts, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association
Servings: 8

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Crust: | | |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg | 2 cups cranberries, coarsely chopped |
| 1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour | 1/8 teaspoon salt | 2/3 cup brown sugar |
| 1/2 cup butter, diced and chilled | 6 tablespoons butter, melted | 1/2 cup sugar |
| 3-4 tablespoons water, chilled | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract | 1/3 cup all-purpose flour |
| Topping: | Filling: | 1 teaspoon cinnamon |
| 1/2 cup brown sugar, packed | 4 cups apples, peeled and sliced | 3/4 cup walnuts, chopped |
| 3/4 cup all-purpose flour | | |

For the crust, mix salt and flour. With a pastry blender, cut in cold butter until crumbly. Add cold water 1 tablespoon at a time until it comes together when pressed. Add more if needed. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour. Preheat oven to 425 F. In a bowl, mix the first four topping ingredients. In a separate bowl, stir the vanilla into the melted butter, pour it into the flour/sugar mixture and mix until combined. Put in refrigerator or freezer while making pie. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to an 1/8-inch-thick circle. Transfer to a 9-inch pie plate and crimp the edges. Combine all pie-filling ingredients. Pour into pastry-lined pie pan. Cover with crumb topping. Bake 50 minutes or until golden brown. Nutrition information: 536 calories; 27.4g fat; 121mg sodium; 70.6g carbohydrates; 5.5g protein.



California Black Grape Pie

2nd PLACE

Submitted by Nilene Covert, Rock Energy Cooperative

Servings: 8

Filling:

- 6 cups black grapes
- 1-1/2 cups sugar
- 3 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca
- 1 teaspoon butter
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup pecans, chopped

Crust:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup shortening
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 5 tablespoons water, chilled
- 1 tablespoon vinegar

Preheat oven to 425 F. Place grapes in a saucepan on medium-low heat, stirring and mashing until there is sufficient liquid and cooked to equal 3-1/2 cups. Combine sugar, tapioca, butter, salt and pecans, blending well with a pastry blender. Add to mixture of medium-cooled grapes and stir to combine. For the crust, mix flour and salt. Cut in shortening and butter until it resembles coarse crumbs. Add water and vinegar, mixing with a fork. Form into two balls and roll one for the bottom crust; carefully lift into a 9-inch pie pan. Pour filling into pie shell. Roll out the remaining dough ball and cut it into strips for a lattice top. Crimp and seal edges. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce the temperature to 400 F for 30 minutes. Cool and serve. Nutrition information: 678 calories; 33.7g fat; 328mg sodium; 91.8g carbohydrates; 5g protein.



Sour Cream Raisin Pie

3rd PLACE

Submitted by Sandra Hall, Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 8

Crust:	1/2 teaspoon salt
1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour	6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt	2-1/4 cups half-and-half
2 teaspoons sugar	1/2 cup sour cream
1/2 cup shortening	1/4 cup butter, cut into pieces
5 tablespoons water, chilled	
Filling:	Meringue:
2 cups water	1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1-1/4 cup raisins	1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
4 egg yolks	4 egg whites
1 cup sugar	5 tablespoons sugar

Preheat oven to 425 F. Mix first 4 crust ingredients with a hand mixer until coarse and crumbly. Add 1 tablespoon of water at a time until it holds together in a ball. Roll out the pie crust on a floured sheet. Place into a 9-inch pie pan. Using a fork, prick the bottom and sides of the pie crust. Bake for 10 minutes. Allow the crust to cool on a rack, and do not turn off oven. For the filling, bring 2 cups of water to a boil, remove from heat, add raisins and stir until covered. Set aside. Put egg yolks in a small bowl. In a saucepan, combine sugar, flour and salt and mix with a whisk. Gradually stir in half-and-half. Cook over medium heat and stir until thick and bubbly. Reduce heat, cook and stir for 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Beat egg yolks slightly. Gradually stir 1 cup hot mixture into the yolks, stirring to incorporate the yolks. Return the egg mixture to the saucepan and stir both mixtures together. Cook to a gentle boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Drain water off raisins. Add raisins, sour cream and butter to the hot mixture. Stir until just combined. Pour the hot mixture into the prepared pie crust. Prepare meringue by adding vanilla and cream of tartar to the egg whites. Beat with a hand mixer until beginning to set. Add 1 tablespoon of sugar at a time, mixing completely between tablespoons. Beat until soft peaks form. Spread over pie and bake for 5 minutes. Nutrition information: 2,518 calories; 44.6g fat; 375mg sodium; 497.6g carbohydrates; 40.7g protein.



Spanish Cream Pie

FINALIST

Submitted by Shanna Mehler, Norris Electric Cooperative

Servings: 8

Crust:	Filling:
1-3/4 cups all-purpose flour	1 cup sugar
1/2 cup vegetable or canola oil	2 heaping tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt	2 cups whole milk
4 tablespoons water, chilled	2 egg whites
	1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 475 F. Combine ingredients in a bowl and form into a ball. Roll out between pieces of wax paper. Place in pie shell and crimp edges. Bake for 15 minutes and cool. Mix sugar, flour and milk in a large pot on the stove. Over medium heat, cook until thick, stirring continuously. In a stand mixer, beat 2 egg whites until stiff. Once the milk mixture is thickened and still warm, fold in the stiff egg whites. Fold in vanilla. Pour into baked and cooled crust. Once cooled, store in the refrigerator. Top with whipped topping before serving. Nutrition information: 1,622 calories; 19.3g fat; 331mg sodium; 314.1g carbohydrates; 41.6g protein.



Chocolate Chess Pie

FINALIST

Submitted by Marylee Allen, Corn Belt Energy Corporation
Servings: 8

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Crust: | 1/4 cup cocoa powder |
| 1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour | 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour |
| 1/2 teaspoon salt | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1/3 cup shortening | 4 eggs, well beaten |
| 5 tablespoons water, chilled | 1/2 cup milk |
| Filling: | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 2 cups sugar, sifted after measuring | 1/2 cup butter, melted |
| 1 tablespoon cornmeal | 1 cup pecans, chopped |

For the crust, mix flour and salt in a large bowl. Cut in shortening until crumbly. Gradually add ice water, tossing with a fork until the dough holds together when pressed. Shape into a disk, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour or overnight. Preheat oven to 350 F. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough to an 1/8-inch-thick circle and transfer to a 9- or 10-inch pie pan. Trim crust to 1/2 inch beyond the rim of the pan and flute edge. Combine sifted sugar, cornmeal, cocoa, flour and salt in a large mixing bowl. Add eggs, milk, vanilla and butter. Stir until smooth. Fold in pecans. Pour filling into unbaked crust. Place in oven and bake for 1 hour until filling is set and crust is golden. If the crust begins to brown, lower the temperature to 325 F and place a ring of foil over the edge of the crust. Cool completely before serving. Nutrition information: 1,503 calories; 35.2g fat; 492mg sodium; 264.2g carbohydrates; 33.7g protein.

FINALIST

Summertime Strawberry Custard Pie

Submitted by Theresa Jackman, JCE Co-op
Servings: 8

- Crust:**
- 1-1/4 cups graham cracker crumbs**
 - 1/4 cup sugar**
 - 1/3 cup butter or margarine, melted**
- Topping:**
- 1 quart fresh strawberries, sliced**
 - 1/4 cup sugar**
- Filling:**
- 1 cup dry milk**
 - 1-1/8 cups sugar**
 - 1/2 cup all-purpose flour**
 - 3/8 teaspoon salt**
 - 3 eggs**
 - 3 cups water**
 - 1-1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
 - 2 tablespoons butter or margarine**

Preheat oven to 350 F. Mix crust ingredients. Pat into a 9-inch pie pan, including up the sides. Bake for 15 minutes. Let cool. For the topping, slice strawberries and stir them with sugar in a large bowl. Set aside. For the filling, mix dry milk, sugar, flour and salt in large pot. Add eggs and mix well. Add water gradually. Cook over medium heat to a full rolling boil. Take off the heat and add vanilla and butter/margarine. Stir until butter/margarine is melted. Pour into graham cracker crust and cool. When ready to serve, top with strawberries. Nutrition information: 417 calories; 14.1g fat; 304mg sodium; 68g carbohydrates; 7.6g protein.

Blackberry Cream Pie

FINALIST

Submitted by Leona Sensenig, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative
Servings: 8

Crust:

- 1-1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup lard
- 1/2 teaspoon vinegar
- 5 tablespoons water, chilled

Filling:

- 2 cups blackberries
- 2/3 cup evaporated cane sugar
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 cup sour cream

Preheat oven to 400 F. For the crust, combine flour and salt. Cut in lard until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add vinegar and water. Stir gently with a spoon, pressing dough together into a ball. Do not overmix. Dump onto a floured surface and knead lightly to get it into a smooth ball. Roll out into a circle a little bigger than a 9-inch pie pan. Transfer to pie pan and press it gently against the sides. Use a knife to trim excess dough and crimp the edges. Place berries into unbaked pie crust. The bottom should be covered. In a small bowl, whisk together sugar and cornstarch. In a medium bowl, whisk together cream and sour cream, until smooth. Whisk in sugar/cornstarch mixture. Pour over fruit. Bake for 30 minutes or until set. Cool on a wire rack and chill in the refrigerator before serving. Nutrition information: 342 calories; 13.8g fat; 163mg sodium; 50.6g carbohydrates; 2.8g protein.



Key Lime Pie

FINALIST

Submitted by Joyce Dillon, Clay Electric Co-operative
Servings: 8

Crust:

- 1-3/4 cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 5 tablespoons butter, melted

- 2 14-ounce cans sweetened condensed milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 egg yolks
- Zest from 1 lime

Filling:

- 3/4 cup key lime juice (Nelli & Joe's Famous Key West Lime Juice recommended)

Whipped topping:

- 8 ounces heavy cream, very cold
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350 F. For the crust, pulse graham crackers in a food processor until they become crumbs. Add in sugar and butter and pulse until combined. Press crumbs into a 9-inch pie pan, across the bottom and up the sides. Bake for 6-8 minutes or until golden brown. Allow the crust to cool completely. Combine all filling ingredients in a mixing bowl and beat on medium-high for 2 minutes. Pour filling into prepared pie crust. Bake for 15-20 minutes in a 350 F oven or until filling only wiggles a bit in the center when shaken gently. Don't allow the pie to brown. Cool on the counter for 30 minutes, then place in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours. Once chilled, whip cream on high until stiff peaks begin to form. Add in vanilla and powdered sugar and whip until stiff peaks form. Put whipped cream on top of the pie an hour before serving. Sprinkle a little fresh lime zest over top. Keep the pie chilled until ready to serve. Nutrition information: 1,769 calories; 84.4g fat; 668mg sodium; 217.8g carbohydrates; 35.2g protein.



Mobilify Provides Terrific Joint Comfort When Other Natural Options Fail

This new "5-day joint comfort" formula works 10X faster than Glucosamine — GUARANTEED!

Mary used to see stairs as a cruel reminder of how she wasn't bouncing back from her busy, active life.

But with **Mobilify**, she's just one of over 1 million lucky people who've had the support to continue their active lives... without second guessing their abilities...

She even noticed clear benefits in as little as 5 DAYS that remained consistent with this best-selling Doctor-formulated joint-soothing formula.

From sunny Palm Beach, across America's Heartland, all the way to the tranquil shores of Thailand...

With **Mobilify**, a growing community of men and women has redefined what it means to get older without joint discomfort -- in just days!

"I never thought I could feel this good!"

Take Shirley, for example. After just two weeks on **Mobilify**, she was bounding up and down her staircase with renewed vigor. *"I had no idea this was such a wonderful product,"* Shirley exclaims, now a devotee who shared **Mobilify** with her entire circle of family and friends.

Or consider Dan, a military veteran hailing from Thailand. Life after sustaining military injuries seemed like an unending saga... Never knowing when it would strike... It seemed like, on occasion, regular activities like walking, once as natural as breathing, became more of an uphill battle—until **Mobilify**. *"I walk over 2 miles a day now,"* he says, *"I'm thrilled to consistently feel this good."*

And then there's Cindy from Tomball, Texas. For her, joint discomfort was just another bump in the road that was more noticeable as she aged. Her dreams of dancing into retirement turned into "sit and wait" while more agile friends lived it up. **Mobilify** proved her wrong. *"My joints are feeling good enough to dance every night... even after a long day,"* she happily reports. And she didn't need to wait weeks to notice results like she thought.

"Why Wait 8 Weeks... When I Can Feel It Start Working in Just 5 Days?"

That's the question many are asking after trying **Mobilify**, a breakthrough supplement that is rapidly changing the game for those dealing with

occasional joint discomfort.

Gone are the days when you had to wait weeks and weeks for supplements like glucosamine to take effect. With **Mobilify**, a study on one of the key ingredients found that it: "... improved joint function and relieved occasional discomfort in as early as five days." — That's a staggering 10 times faster than glucosamine!

10 Times Faster Than Glucosamine... AND a 100% Success Rate? What's Behind This Unmatched Support?

First, let's get one thing straight: A large-scale review of multiple scientific studies on Glucosamine and Chondroitin recently found that these popular options don't work any better than taking a placebo, which is like taking nothing. Fun fact: the placebo worked even better in one case!

But get this: In a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, patients with occasional knee discomfort took just ONE of the ingredients in **Mobilify** for eight weeks. The results were nothing short of astonishing: **Every single participant who took this ONE key ingredient in Mobilify noticed loose, comfortable joints.**

I'll say it again: **100% success rate with just ONE of the ingredients**—when the alternative doesn't even work at all! When's the last time you heard something worked for everyone... All the time?

Your Satisfaction is 100% GUARANTEED!

Dr. Sears, the pioneering physician behind the new formula, knows it's hard to believe something natural could work so well... and so fast... Especially if you've tried other options with no real results. That's because just ONE of the ingredients that make up the unique combination in **Mobilify** helps support the natural healthy function of your joints instead of "covering up" discomfort like over-the-counter options.

From patients sharing stories of their quest to keep their active lifestyles... while choking down multiple pills a day... and slathering greasy ointments and creams on their knees and shoulders... Dr. Sears knows you're bombarded with options that all sound like the next big thing... That's why he is announcing the most incredible way to take ALL



With Mobilify, a growing community of men and women has redefined what it means to get older without joint discomfort -- in just days!

risks off your shoulders.

The "Move Like New" RISK-FREE 100% Money-Back GUARANTEE!

Dr. Sears says, *"After witnessing first-hand transformations... Please just give Mobilify an honest try. If it doesn't help with occasional soreness, stiffness, or temporary discomfort, help you feel your very best, or give you hope in any way... just send back the unused product within 90 days, and I'll send you your money back."* It's that simple. **Move Like You're Young. Or Don't Pay a Red Cent.**

Impressive Results for Supporting Knees, Hips, Shoulders, and Joints

"I take Mobilify first thing every morning before my daily workout. It allows me to go at the intensity that I'm used to, without aches." — Claire H. is living life on her terms.

Start A New Chapter of Vitality with Mobilify — Act Now for an Exclusive Offer!

Seize this unprecedented opportunity to experience the revolutionary joint-support formula that's transforming lives, and it's only available through Dr. Sears' cutting-edge **Mobilify**. You won't find this groundbreaking formula on any store shelf.

To reclaim your freedom from occasional joint discomfort... to guarantee you get the best price, risk-free guarantee, and support — only buy directly from the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-329-8418**. *"Our*

hotline lets us bypass retailers and get Mobilify directly into your hands," says Dr. Sears.

Dr. Sears believes so strongly in the transformative power of **Mobilify** that he offers an unbeatable 100% money-back guarantee on every single order. *"Return the bottle and any unused product within 90 days, and you'll get every cent back,"* he assures.

Time is Ticking — the Sears Health Hotline is Open and Waiting for Your Call!

After that, lines may close to accommodate restocking. Act now to secure your limited supply of **Mobilify** at a significant discount!

Unable to get through? Don't miss out; try calling again. The Hotline may experience high call volumes, which is just another testament to **Mobilify's** extraordinary efficacy.

But whatever you do, don't buy **Mobilify** from anywhere other than the Sears Health Hotline or the official website -- this way, you claim the best pricing and make sure your order comes with a 100% guarantee.

Claim Your 100% Risk-Free Trial of Mobilify Today

Dial **1-800-329-8418** and use Promo Code **ICLMB324** to unlock this exclusive, limited-time offer.

Act NOW before it's too late! Our friendly customer service team is waiting for your call. They can answer your questions and give you the BEST deal possible... but you must act fast, as this is only available while supplies last.



Basking in the shadow

Solar spectacle to take center stage

By Les O'Dell

ASTRONOMER ROBERT STRAUSBAUGH HAS never seen a total eclipse in person, but the Eastern Illinois University (EIU) professor does not have to wait long to finally experience one. Nor will he have to travel to be in its path. Like millions of others in the U.S. and thousands in Illinois, he will find himself in the moon's shadow during a total solar eclipse on the afternoon of April 8. Officially, the total solar eclipse in Illinois begins at 1:58 p.m., with the final exit of the moon's shadow from the state at 2:06 p.m.

"The eclipse is going to pass through Texas up through New England in sort of a diagonal path," the native of Arizona, who now works as an assistant professor of physics and director of the Charleston campus' observatory, explains. "Most of the country will be able to see at least a partial eclipse."

According to NASA, a total solar eclipse happens when the moon passes between the sun and Earth, casting a shadow on the planet. Places where the moon's shadow covers the sun are known as the path of totality. The closer to the



PHOTO COURTESY OF ILLINOIS OFFICE OF TOURISM

of the nation, will experience the eclipse. At the EIU observatory, Strausbaugh says he expects “near totality.”

“Here, we’ll be at 99.5% totality, so we won’t quite be in the totality, but we’ll still see the dimming of the sun and the sun being covered by the moon, but it won’t be the same level of darkness,” he says.

“During the total eclipse, it will get pretty dark, similar to twilight levels of darkness and, from a biological point of view, any birds that you normally hear chirping during the day will be quiet,” Strausbaugh explains. “Between the darkening of the sky and the quiet of nature, it [should be] a surreal experience.” In fact, he adds, the skies will be dark enough that streetlights should come on.

The time of totality (darkness), slightly more than 4 minutes in some locations (4:06 in Benton, for example), helps Strausbaugh understand how ancient civilizations were mystified by these rare celestial events. “I imagine what it would have been like if I was an ancient human. Pretty much every other day of your life, the sun comes up in the morning and it goes down at night, then maybe once in your entire lifetime, during the middle of the day, the sun just goes away for potentially minutes at a time. How would you make sense of that?” He continues, “Obviously, with our current understanding of how the solar system works, we have figured it out, but back then, it must have been an indescribable experience.”

Even today, with knowledge of the why and when of total solar eclipse events, many still characterize them as indescribable experiences. For that reason, statewide tourism officials expect travelers not only from other parts of Illinois to visit the path, but also eclipse watchers from across the country and world to make the trek to south-central and southern Illinois. For some, it will be a familiar trip, as parts of this eclipse’s path also experienced a total solar eclipse in August 2017.

“It’s like we have won the celestial lottery,” says Carbondale Economic Development Director Steven Mitchell, referring to the city’s location on the path of totality for both eclipses. In 2017, Carbondale had 2 minutes and 40 seconds of totality from an eclipse — one of the longest durations in the nation — as the shadow crossed the country in a northwest-to-southeast pattern. Being at the intersection of both eclipses has led the city to refer to itself as the “Eclipse Crossroads of America.”

Seven years ago, Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) was the “eclipse epicenter,” featuring teams of NASA researchers and a live broadcast by The Weather Channel.

“We had the greatest duration the first time around, but we will actually have a longer duration at 4 minutes and 9 seconds [this time],” SIUC’s Bob Baer, who co-chairs the regional 2024 Eclipse Steering Committee, told The Southern Illinoisan newspaper. According to Baer, even though the region is not the point of longest duration — that distinction belongs to Mexico — southern Illinois should be popular with eclipse watchers, many of whom visited seven years ago. NASA has indicated it will be back, and area hotel rooms, rental cabins and camping spaces are in high demand.

centerline of the path, the more complete the total eclipse will be, and the longer eclipse viewers in those areas will be in darkness. In Illinois, the centerline of the eclipse includes the communities of Murphysboro, Carbondale, West Frankfort, Benton and Fairfield.

The path of the total solar eclipse includes the towns of Metropolis and Cairo to the south, as well as Chester, Centralia, Salem, Effingham and Paris to the north. Although not in complete totality, about one-third of Illinois, and much



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARBONDALE TOURISM

According to the National Park Service, the only safe way to look directly at the sun during an eclipse is through special-purpose solar filters, like eclipse glasses (available at many retailers in the path of totality or online) or handheld solar viewers. Remember, the only safe time to look at the sun without solar filters is during the 2-4 minutes of total eclipse.

LEARN MORE

For more information, visit these websites:

greatamericaneclipse.com
nationaleclipse.com/states/2024-total-solar-eclipse-illinois.html
eclipse2024.org/eclipse_cities/total/il

Baer explains that this eclipse will be different, not only because of the length of totality but also because of the type of totality. “The first time around, you got a 360-degree sunset effect during most of the eclipse, meaning you could see the sun right outside of that 70-mile-wide shadow of the moon,” he says.

In contrast, Baer says, the 2024 eclipse will feature a shadow of about 115 miles wide. “We’re going to be in the center of a very dark shadow, and you’re not going to see the edge of it. It is going to be very dark here.”

Other communities along the shadow are also making plans. Throughout the eclipse path, towns are planning everything from viewing parties to musical events and picnics. Beth Sandusky is helping organize two days’ worth of events in the Hamilton County community of McLeansboro, which is expecting 4 minutes and 7 seconds of totality. “People have been calling for the past six months, so it’s pretty exciting,” she says, adding that scheduled events are designed to both bring the community together and to show hospitality to visitors.

Sandusky says community leaders have been planning for more than four months for the four minutes of the eclipse. “Some are predicting as many as 20,000 people in our community of 8,000,” she says. “Regardless of the number, we are super excited.”

“With the eclipse’s visibility spanning 128 miles of Illinois, and partial solar eclipse visibility across the entire state, there are plenty of viewing opportunities,” says Daniel Thomas, deputy director of the Illinois Office of Tourism. “Across Illinois, 31 state parks are in the eclipse’s path of totality, and many other parks lie just outside it, offering equally spectacular views of the eclipse, just for shorter periods.”

Thomas says the eclipse should be a boost for tourism and the economy in the lower portion of the state. “We know this year’s solar eclipse will have an extremely positive impact on local communities throughout southern Illinois and beyond. In August 2017, nearly 200,000 people witnessed the solar eclipse across southern Illinois, with visitors’ spending impact between \$15 and \$18 million for the state. It was an unprecedented, unforgettable experience.”

Mitchell says the eclipse had an economic impact of about \$8 million on the community, in addition to millions of dollars’ worth of public relations exposure for the city and university, and he expects more of the same in 2024.

Thomas says for many residents and observers, the 2024 total solar eclipse will be a “once-in-a-lifetime experience,” and he’s right. The next total solar eclipse in the continental U.S. will be in 20 years, and the next one visible in Illinois will be in 2099. 📍

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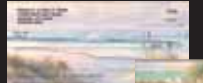
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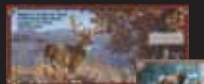
Great Outdoors -
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Prayers of Serenity w/
verse "Trust in the Lord
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Nurses Rule! - 00542
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Glitter Sparkles -
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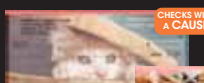
Thomas Kinkadee's Faith
for All Seasons w/verse "Believe all things
are possible with God" - 00105
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Footprints w/verse "One
night I dreamed that I was
walking along the beach with the Lord." -
00667 Leather Cover and Labels - 00667 ☆



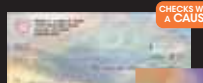
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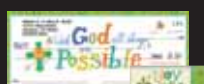
Coping Together -
01397 Leather Cover -
00125 and Labels - 01397 ☆
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Grandkids Rule! w/verse
"I'd rather be with my grandkids." - 00437
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Mountains - 01287
Leather Cover and
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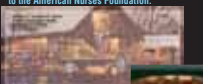
Words of Faith w/verse
"With God all things are possible." - 00551
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Cowboy Boots - 00434
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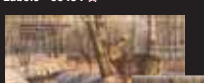
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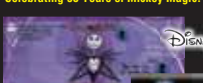
Farm and Tractors -
00785 Leather Cover
and Labels - 00785 ☆



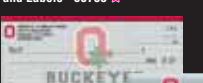
Black & White -
01393 Leather Cover
and Labels - 01393 ▲



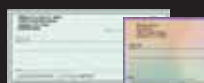
Winter Calm - 00017
Leather Cover and
Labels - 00017 ☆



Nightmare Before
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00513 Leather Cover
and Labels - 00513 ◆
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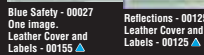
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Leather Cover and
Labels - 00125 ▲



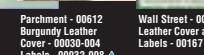
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Burgundy Leather
Cover - 00030-304
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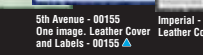
Wall Street - 00167
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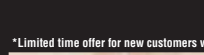
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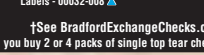
Imperial - 00165 One Image.
Leather Cover and Labels - 00165 ▲



Chevron Chic - 00578
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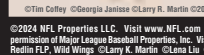
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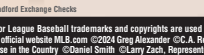
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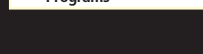
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The Po-taco

Pull up a chair in Mimi's Kitchen

By Lisa Cherry

BRENDA NELSON, KNOWN AS Mimi to her grandson, is no stranger to the kitchen. "I raised six kids, so I cooked all the time," Nelson laughs. "[I] like making food. Food makes people happy. [That] makes me really happy."

Nelson previously owned the Fast Break food truck and Sno Shack in Kincaid. She also ran the kitchen at Danenberger Family Vineyards in New Berlin. In June 2023, just off Illinois Route 104 in Divernon, Nelson began a new venture when she opened Mimi's Kitchen, a quaint restaurant offering American fare.

A previous employee suggested she look at the vacant restaurant space. "I saw a guy [who] actually worked for me on both my food truck and at Danenberger's. He told me [the previous owners] were leaving and asked if I wanted a restaurant," says Nelson. "I looked at it, and I liked it because it was small."

She also loves the location. "It's close to home," she says. "I know a lot of people who come in here."

Nelson incorporated some elements from her previous endeavors, including an ice cream counter. "I have new items as well. I just did my own daily specials. . . . I found out what [customers] really liked, and so I adapted to that."

Customer favorites include a variety of horseshoes, the Frisco melt, chili, BLTs and the different soups served on Mondays. The Smothered Sancho, however, was "No. 1 at my food truck, and it's still No. 1 here," she says. Another Fast Break favorite is the Po-taco. "We were actually on our way to a vacation with friends of ours, and I said, 'I have this potato that I want to put all the taco toppings on, but I need a clever name for it.' She's like, 'What about a po-taco?'" Nelson's personal favorites are the veggie burgers and tacos.

She and her staff of three often see people from the surrounding towns, including Pawnee, Auburn and Kincaid, but word of mouth has started bringing in new patrons. “We’ve had an influx of people from Springfield, and Facebook is reaching other people,” Nelson says, adding that they average 30 to 50 visitors on a regular day, and 20 to 30 for their Sunday all-you-can-eat brunch buffet.

Changes are coming, including alcoholic beverages and gaming. “I would like to incorporate a special on Saturdays and add to the menu as well. I started out with a small menu because I didn’t want to set myself up for failure, honestly,” says Nelson. “It looks better to add than to take away, so I don’t want to do that.” She would also love to do more catering.

Some customer requests have been unexpected. “This couple would come twice a week. ... Their kids all love it,” she says. “He’s like, ‘Can I rent this out for a reception?’ I said absolutely. About a week later, he came in, he said, ‘How about if we have the wedding here, too?’” Nelson says she was honored to host the event, and that their wish to have it at her establishment meant a lot to her. “I like to make people happy,” she says. “I wouldn’t turn down anything ... if it’s doable.”

Her husband has been in the restaurant business for 40-plus years. “My husband supports me. ... He gives a lot of tips and helps me with the menu,” Nelson says. “He’s run Steak ‘n Shakes for more than 40 years.” In fact, she purchased the booths for Mimi’s Kitchen from Steak ‘n Shake, because the restaurant has been a big part of his life. “I [thought] it would be nice to have [them] in my restaurant,” she adds.

Nelson has learned a few things since opening. “I never knew how important it was to support local restaurants until I became a restaurant owner,” she says. “It is very important to support local businesses, because [we] depend on everybody. You know, without them, I wouldn’t be here.”

“I just want people to come in here and say, ‘Hey, I love that place,’” says Nelson. “I would like to stand out in the crowd, and someday expand or get a bigger place. Who knows what the future holds?” 🍷



House salad



Pork tenderloin horseshoe

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Crowning the herb of the year

Award-winning yarrow deserves a spot in any garden

WINNING A TITLE SUCH as “Herb of the Year” is something many plants strive to achieve, but few are bestowed this great honor. One must be deemed outstanding for their decorative, culinary or medical use by the International Herb Association (IHA), and be a favorite among gardeners. Yarrow, a perennial plant known for its long season of showy blooms, while also being drought-tolerant, deer-resistant and a favorite of many native pollinators, has been selected as IHA’s 2024 Herb of the Year.

While yarrow is not native to Illinois, it is found naturalized on roadsides across the state and is happiest growing in well-drained areas that are full sun. Yarrow has several common names, such as old man’s pepper, devil’s nettle, milfoil, soldier’s woundwort and thousand seal. Its botanical name, *Achillea*, was derived from the Greek mythology war hero Achilles, who used the yarrow leaves to stop bleeding and heal wounds during battle, as legend has it.

Its long bloom season (June to September) and distinct gray fern-like, hairy foliage make yarrow a valuable plant for the garden.

Although yarrow is a relatively short garden plant, reaching 2-3 feet tall and wide, the stems are known to flop over in hot, humid conditions, or when grown in overly wet or fertile soils. To keep plants more compact, cut back in May before flowers develop or select a cultivar bred for strong stems and compact habit.



Plants can be easily divided and replanted every three years to maintain healthy growth and flower production. Yarrow plants can be aggressive in the garden, spreading by rhizomes (horizontal underground plant stems), or self-seeding, which can develop into large, naturalized clumps in a garden if left unchecked. With their tendency to colonize, these plants make a great addition to rock gardens, cottage gardens, naturalized areas or as a ground cover.

Common yarrow has tiny white flowers in large, flattened clusters, but new cultivars come in a

rainbow of colors, including pink, red, cream, yellow and bi-color pastels. The pleasant, spicy fragrance attracts a variety of pollinators to the plant. It is a favorite of bees, wasps, butterflies and moths. To extend the bloom season of yarrow, cut back the plant to the next flower bud after the initial flowers fade; this encourages more blooms while keeping plant growth tidy.

In the language of flowers, a cultural trend to convey messages and emotions in the Victorian era, yarrow symbolized healing and love, making these a perfect gift when offering wishes of “get well soon” to a loved one. Whether gifted to friends or kept for the home, the umbel-shaped flower clusters add dimension and color to cut floral arrangements, and the flowers remain beautiful and vibrant when dried.

For more tried and true garden selections, consider past IHA Plants of the Year: ginger, violas, parsley, anise hyssop, coriander/cilantro and savory. Garden and plant associations use rigorous criteria to recognize favorite and dependable plant selections; select a few winners for your garden to make it a champion of beauty and dependability. 🌱



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.



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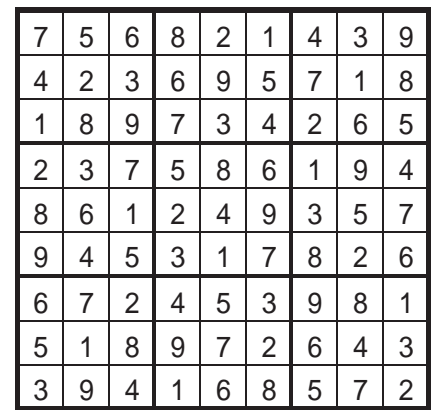


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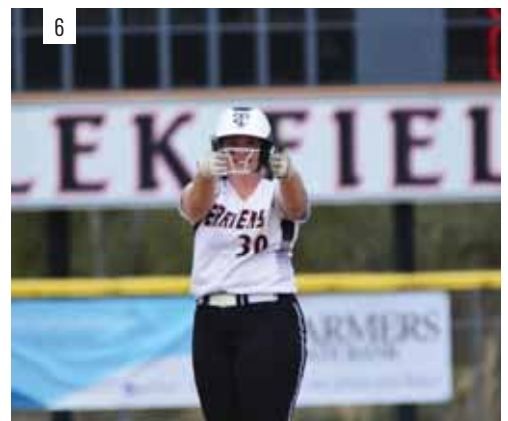
UPCOMING THEMES

May - Point of view

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

July - Sky

August - Vintage cars or trucks



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