

JANUARY 2025

# Illinois Country Living

## ANSWERING THE CALL

Illinois lineworkers go where needed

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Children's books  
inspired by life

### PRAIRIE TABLE

Wild brews

### SNAPSHOTS

Say cheese



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NEWS



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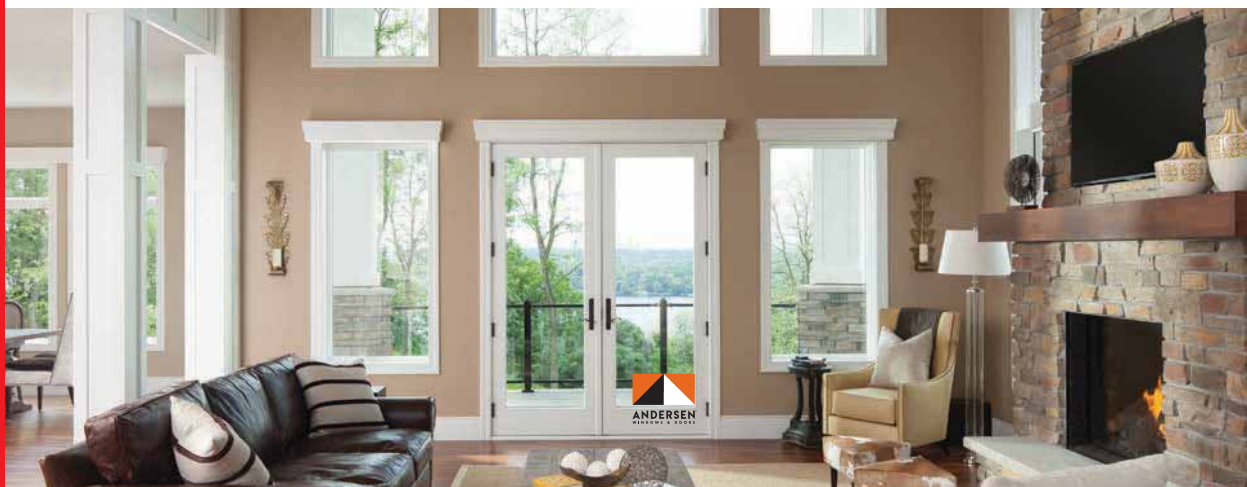
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PHOTO COURTESY OF RURAL ELECTRIC CONVENIENCE COOPERATIVE



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEB HAMEL



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCRATCH BREWING COMPANY

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On the cover: Journeyman Lineman Drayton Davis wades through floodwater in Georgia as he helps with recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RURAL ELECTRIC CONVENIENCE COOPERATIVE



# Become a voice for your co-op

**AS WE RING IN** the new year, Illinois lawmakers are gearing up to launch the 104th General Assembly on Jan. 8. The spring legislative session, running through May 31, promises to be a pivotal period of discussion and debate on issues impacting communities across the state. Amid this legislative activity, the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) will be at the Capitol, advocating for the interests of Illinois' electric cooperatives and their consumer-members.

The AIEC's mission is clear: to ensure that new laws and regulations help, rather than hinder, the ability of Illinois' not-for-profit electric cooperatives to provide reliable and affordable electricity to their consumer-members. A critical element of this mission is maintaining open, constructive communication with elected officials as they shape energy policies. At the heart of this advocacy lies the compelling story of electric cooperatives — a story worth sharing.

Born from the transformative Rural Electrification Act of the 1930s, electric cooperatives emerged as a beacon for rural communities that were previously left in the dark. When investor-owned utilities deemed these areas unprofitable, rural citizens united to bring electricity to their homes and farms. Today, electric cooperatives continue to empower rural Illinois, guided by several important principles, including:

- 1. Member ownership and democratic control:** Electric cooperatives are unique in that they are owned by the people they serve. Consumer-members elect directors to represent their interests, ensuring that policies and procedures align with the community's needs and priorities.
- 2. Community focus:** Cooperatives are more than electricity providers; they are integral to the well-being of rural communities. From delivering reliable energy to supporting education and fostering local development, co-ops are deeply invested in enhancing everyday life.

- 3. Not-for-profit commitment:** As not-for-profit entities, electric co-ops give any revenue back to those they serve. These are called capital credits, and they are returned to members.

In today's rapidly evolving energy landscape, it's more important than ever for elected officials to hear and understand this story — and for your voice to be part of the conversation. By joining Voices for Cooperative Power (VCP), you can play a vital role in advocating for your cooperative and its mission. VCP is a grassroots network uniting more than 1.1 million advocates nationwide to shape energy policies that keep the lights on.

Through VCP, you'll receive updates on key issues and opportunities to make your voice heard in Springfield, Washington, D.C., and beyond. You'll also have the chance to share your own story about the impact your co-op has on your community. Together, we can ensure that the foundational principles of local democratic control, affordability and reliability remain central to the future of electric cooperatives.

Visit [aiec.coop/iclvcp](http://aiec.coop/iclvcp) to get involved. Your participation strengthens the collective voice of co-op members throughout Illinois and helps ensure that our rural communities continue to thrive. Let's work together to keep the lights on, the power affordable and the spirit of cooperation alive. 💡



**Nick Reitz** is the vice president of government relations for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives.

**VCP** Voices for Cooperative Power



[aiec.coop/iclvcp](http://aiec.coop/iclvcp)

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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# POWERFUL PAST FUTURE FOCUSED

As the new year begins, it is the perfect time to reflect on what we, as a cooperative, have learned from our powerful past, remembering those lessons as we focus on the future. Although the landscape may change, we are committed to standing on the principles of the legacy we inherited from previous generations as we navigate the challenges ahead.

You can count on us.

**Best wishes for the new year to your family,  
from ours.**



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## JANUARY CHECKLIST

A new year brings new opportunities to save.



### Change air filters.

Clean or swap out HVAC air filters to

maximize energy use and to keep the system healthy.

### Adjust the thermostat.

In the winter, set your thermostat to 68 F while you're home and lower it when you're away.



### Seal drafts.

Use weatherstripping or caulk to seal gaps

around doors and windows and install door sweeps to prevent air leaks under doors.

### Unplug.

The simple task of unplugging appliances

and turning off lights that are not in use helps to save money and electricity.



## The fast-growing demand for electricity

### How rising power needs impact electric co-ops and their members

When rural electric cooperatives first strung power lines from farm to farm and through remote areas of the U.S., most members had but a handful of light bulbs to power. With time, they added appliances like refrigerators, but they couldn't begin to imagine the number and variety of electrical devices in today's homes and garages.

Across the U.S., people use a growing amount of electricity at work, at home, and with the growth of electric vehicles, even on the road.

The demand for electricity increased by 2.5% in 2024 and is expected to grow by 3.2% this year. That was after co-ops saw a 4.8% increase in 2022. Through 2029, the nation's peak demand is projected to grow by 38 gigawatts. That would be like adding another California-sized state to our nation's power grid.

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence is driving the development of massive data center facilities, often placed in electric co-op service territories to take

advantage of inexpensive land and fewer neighbors to complain. By 2022, these facilities accounted for 2.5% of the nation's consumption of electricity — and by 2030, they'll use 7.5% of all electric power.

Data centers and facilities like warehouses require a large, steady supply of electricity 24 hours a day. That means the electric co-ops supplying them can't rely on intermittent sources of electricity such as solar or wind energy to handle the additional load. Instead, they need more of what's known as baseload or always-available power, much of which is currently generated by burning fossil fuels. The more we depend on technology, the more we'll need reliable baseload generation.

Yet that's a problem, because at the same time Americans are using more electricity, power providers are being forced to shut down reliable sources of baseload power such as coal and nuclear power plants. Many large coal plants have been converted to use cleaner-burning natural gas, but others have

Continued on page 8



Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

To solve the puzzle, each row, column and box must contain each of the numbers 1 to 9. Level: Medium

Solution on page 33.

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

Continued from page 7

been deemed too costly to convert and are prematurely being shut down. More than 110 gigawatts of always-available generation — enough to power about 35 million homes — is forecast to retire by 2033.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration’s forecast expects coal-fired generation to drop to half of today’s levels by 2030. Renewable energy will capture a growing share of the supply, but as noted, much renewable energy is not reliable enough to provide baseload power.

As electricity powers a growing share of life’s tools and conveniences, overall demand is expected to continue its steady growth through 2050. A great example is the efficiency of electric heat pumps. Federal and other subsidies and tax advantages are powering significant growth in their share of the home heating market.

In other words, at the same time everyone is using more electricity than ever, the supply of the most reliable source is drying up. Add in the uncertainty created by public policy debates around energy and climate change, and you can begin to understand why 19 states face a high risk of rolling blackouts between now and 2028.

The energy industry studies demand closely because construction of all types of generation is costly and lengthy — often longer than a decade from groundbreaking to entering service.

As renewables become more efficient and cheaper to produce, their share of the power mix will only continue to grow. Someday soon, battery technology may reach the point where large-scale storage of renewable generation becomes possible, but until then, we’ll need more of those always-available power sources.

One more factor plays a key role in the ability of co-ops and the rest of the nation’s power industry to keep up with demand. That’s the supply chain, in which too few U.S. suppliers simply can’t keep up with the nation’s needs for power equipment. When a co-op orders new transformers, it may have to wait two years or more for delivery and pay a significantly higher price.

Expect to hear more about the challenges created by record demand for electricity in the coming years. However, electric co-ops are continuously searching for new and innovative ways to manage and prepare for the increasing demand.

Scott Flood, NRECA



NERC warns of energy shortfalls this winter

Many U.S. regions are at elevated risk of electricity supply shortfalls in the event of extreme weather this winter, reflecting growing challenges for the power grid as substantial always-available generation is retired, the North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) said in a new report.

In its Winter Reliability Assessment, released Nov. 14, 2024, NERC said all assessed areas should have adequate resources for normal peak winter load. But much of the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic and Northeast are at risk of energy shortfalls or natural gas pipeline capacity constraints if there is a prolonged cold snap.

Those risks stem partly from growing power demand and the loss of capacity from retired coal-fired and older gas-fired plants, according to the report.

Challenges tied to higher demand are compounded by “flawed public policies” that are shutting down always-available power generation, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Jim Matheson said.

“This growing threat to reliable electricity jeopardizes the health of local communities and undermines the American economy,” Matheson said.

Continued on page 10

IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER



American hard rock band Head East was formed in east central Illinois in 1969. In 1975, the band released its debut studio album “Flat as a Pancake,” which is certified gold. Band members have changed several times over the years, but keyboardist Roger Boyd has remained as a founding band member. Here are a few of their hits.

Head East playlist

- Never Been Any Reason (1975)
- Love Me Tonight (1975)
- Fly By Night Lady (1976)
- Gettin’ Lucky (1977)
- Since You Been Gone (1978)
- Got to Be Real (1979)



## REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY



### STEALING COPPER HAS A HUGE COST

Thieves like to steal and sell the soft, reddish orange metal to make some quick cash. However, they may sacrifice more than they gain, since stealing copper can cause serious injuries or death. Copper thieves could also face hefty fines and prison time.

The FBI attributes copper theft to disruptions in the flow of the following: electricity, telecommunications, transportation, water supply, heating, security and emergency services. It presents a risk to both public safety and national security.

Common targets for copper theft include farm equipment, air conditioners, abandoned buildings, construction sites and electric utility equipment, including substations and power poles.

The majority of copper theft occurs at night or on the weekends. Detecting and reporting suspicious and illegal activity could help save a life.

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## Where is it?

The winners of the November hidden object contest were Sandra Rynkewicz of Corn Belt Energy Corporation and Kathryn Handy of Menard Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

Santa's famous red hat was hidden on the horse's head on page 12 of the December 2024 issue. 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. January is National Hobby Month. So, maybe give knitting a try by finding the ball of yarn.

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](http://icl.coop/hiddenobject) and fill out the entry form (also found under Contact Us on the website) or mail a postcard or letter to Illinois Country Living, Hidden Objects, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. We will NOT accept entries via phone call or email.


All entries for that month must be received by the 15th. Only one entry is allowed per household every month. If multiple entries per household are submitted, only the first will be considered. Winners' names and the symbol's location will be published in each month's issue of Illinois Country Living. 

Continued from page 8

"This report clearly highlights the need to swiftly implement a pro-energy policy agenda with a focus on affordability and reliability for American families and businesses. Smart energy policies that keep the lights on are more important than ever."

Ongoing industry efforts to bolster winter reliability have made the grid better prepared for the coming months, according to NERC.

But demand is growing from new data centers and increased electrification of home heating and transportation. Meeting that demand has become "more challenging and complex as coal-fired and older natural gas-fired generators retire and are replaced by variable and energy-limited resources," NERC said.

Severe arctic storms have extended across much of North America in three of the past five winters. NERC recommended ways that grid operators, generation owners and government authorities can prevent energy emergencies and minimize potential power shutoffs. Those actions include preparing for high electricity demand and low wind conditions, winterizing generation units, and increasing operational coordination around generation fuels. 

**Molly Christian, NRECA**



## NRECA urges Trump to support electric co-ops

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) CEO Jim Matheson urged President-elect Donald Trump to help electric cooperatives deliver affordable, reliable power to rural communities in a Dec. 4, 2024 letter to Trump's transition office.

The letter outlined high-priority actions the new administration can take to support a


pro-energy policy agenda that will help meet skyrocketing U.S. electricity demand, remove regulatory burdens for co-ops, and promote the wellbeing of rural communities.

"Our nation is at an energy crossroads. And your leadership in our nation's energy policy is more critical than ever," Matheson told Trump.

Matheson said reliability is under threat from "flawed public policies" that are forcing the premature closure of power plants. That's a key reason the North American Electric Reliability Corp. expects many states to be at high risk of rolling blackouts in the next five years during normal peak demand conditions. The problem is exacerbated by increasing demand from data centers, the letter stated.

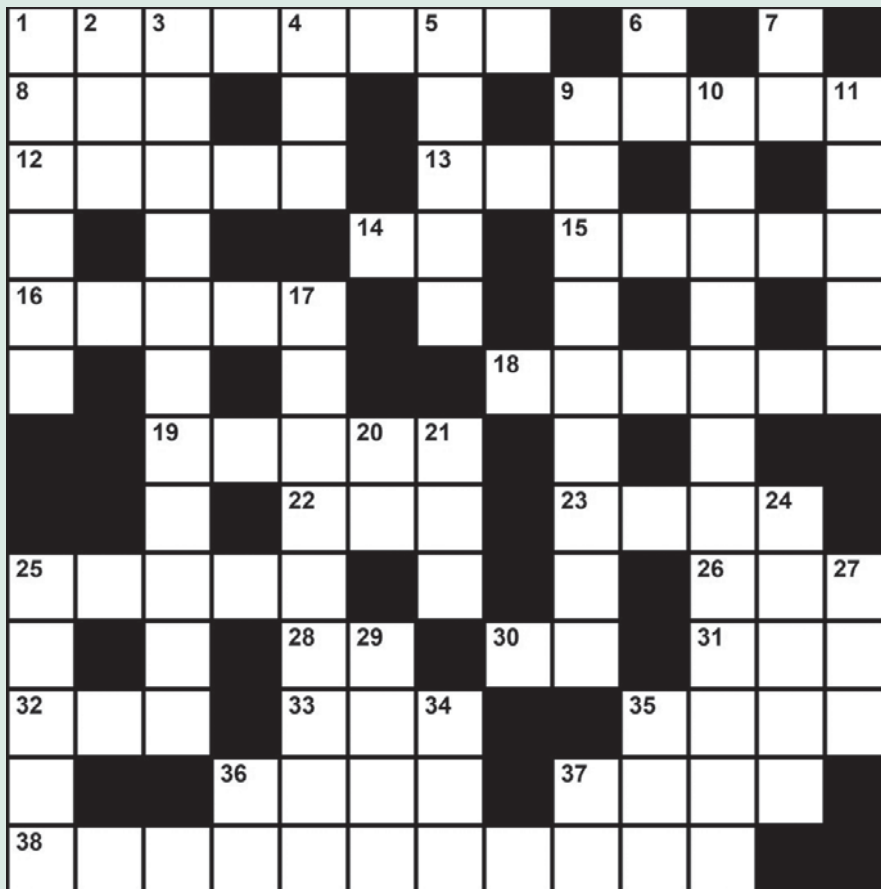
Matheson listed several key actions that Trump can take to address these challenges, including:

- Repeal the Environmental Protection Agency's greenhouse gas rule for existing coal-fired and new natural gas plants, as well as other EPA regulations threatening electric reliability.
- Streamline and accelerate federal permitting reviews of energy projects.
- Effectively use remaining funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to improve electric infrastructure and enhance grid resilience and reliability.
- Ensure access to important federal programs used by electric co-ops to benefit rural communities, including grant programs at the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy and for broadband deployment.
- Support the Treasury Department in administering crucial direct-pay tax credits that co-ops can use to invest in energy technologies.

"We urge you to take a coordinated approach which ensures that energy projects can be built efficiently, effectively and at reasonable cost," Matheson concluded. "And we look forward to supporting your administration's efforts to cut costly and burdensome regulations that would otherwise undermine affordability and reliability." 

**Molly Christian, NRECA**





## Across

- 1 Headgear for a New Year's Eve celebration, 2 words  
8 Get on in years  
9 Enjoy a good meal  
12 Romantic flowers  
13 Yes in French  
14 Medical expert, abbr.  
15 Recovery  
16 Barbie and Ken, e.g.  
18 The midnight hour  
19 Raise glasses to  
22 Sunset color, often  
23 \_\_\_\_\_ in the New Year  
25 Timekeeper  
26 Joke  
28 West coast city, for short  
30 Letter afterthought

- 31 \_\_\_\_ Jeanne d'Arc  
32 Good times  
33 New Year's \_\_\_\_  
35 Watched  
36 Annoys  
37 Cooking equipment  
38 Huge TV celebration venue on New Year's Eve, 2 words

## Down

- 1 Noted Pasadena event for the New Year, Rose \_\_\_\_  
2 In the past  
3 New decisions for 2025  
4 "O.K."  
5 Love a lot  
6 Exercise training, for short  
7 Good grades in exams

- 9 Celebratory pyrotechnics  
10 New Year's Eve song, 3 words  
11 Culinary herb  
17 Small fireworks  
20 Compass point, abbr.  
21 Chicago Bears' scores, abbr.  
24 Entrances  
25 \_\_\_\_ down before midnight Dec. 31  
27 High school exam, abbr.  
29 Michigan and Prairie in Chicago, abbr.  
34 Lawyer's abbreviation  
35 Corn section  
36 That is, for short  
37 Sound system, abbr.

*Solution on page 33.*




## Want to be a lineworker? Apply for a scholarship

The \$2,000 LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship will help pay for costs to attend the lineworker's school conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) in Springfield.

Awarded for the first time in 2011, the scholarship was endowed by the McEntires to assist students attending lineworker's school at LLCC. LaVern served as a lineworker for more than 42 years at McDonough Power Cooperative.

The scholarship is awarded annually to an individual who is related to a rural electric cooperative employee or director in Illinois, is the child of an electric cooperative member in Illinois, is enrolled in the LLCC lineworker's school, or has served or is serving in the U.S. armed forces or National Guard. The applicant must have a high school diploma or a GED at the time the scholarship is awarded in July.

Scholarships are awarded based on an essay, a biographical statement, references and a recommendation that will be submitted. The deadline to apply is April 30, 2025. Learn more at [aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship](http://aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship). 



## LET'S GO!

For more information, a complete listing of events or to submit an event, visit [icl.coop/datebook](http://icl.coop/datebook).



## Alton Eagle Ice Festival

JANUARY

4

Enjoy a variety of activities in celebration of wintering American Bald Eagles returning to southwest Illinois. Get a bite to eat, see a live eagle from the World Bird Sanctuary, take an eagle-watching tour and enjoy fun winter activities for all ages, including live music, ice carvers and a winter market.

- Jan. 4, 2025: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Flock Food Truck Park, 210 Ridge St., Alton  
Admission: free  
618-465-6676 or [riversandroutes.com/events/alton-eagle-ice-festival-2025](http://riversandroutes.com/events/alton-eagle-ice-festival-2025)

## Owl Hike and Campfire

JANUARY

17

All ages are invited to take a short hike and learn about the owls of Will County. Afterward, hikers can gather around a cozy campfire and roast s'mores. Register by Jan. 15 for the event and bring a chair and blanket.

Jan. 17, 2025: 4-6 p.m.

- Four Rivers Environmental Education Center, 25055 W. Walnut Lane, Channahon  
Admission: free  
815-722-9470



## Illinois Snow Sculpting Competition

JANUARY

22-25

Since 1987, teams from around the state have competed each year to represent Illinois in the U.S. Nationals Snow Sculpting Competition. High school teams also participate for bragging rights. Stroll among their cold creations in Rockford's Sinnissippi Park.

- Jan. 22-25, 2025: 6 a.m.-10 p.m.  
Sinnissippi Park, 1401 N. 2nd St., Rockford  
Admission: free, donations welcome  
[ilsnowsculpting.com](http://ilsnowsculpting.com)

## Eagle Watch Weekend

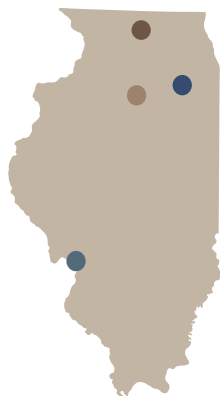
JANUARY

25-26

Learn more about these iconic birds of prey. Programs, including live birds and various activities for children, are scheduled at multiple locations. The family-friendly event also features educational exhibits at Starved Rock Lodge.

Jan. 25-26, 2025: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

- Starved Rock State Park Visitor Center, 2678 East 873 Road, Oglesby  
Starved Rock Lodge and Conference Center, 1 Lodge Lane, Oglesby  
Illinois Waterway Visitors Center, 950 N. 27th Road, Ottawa  
Utica Village Hall, 248 W. Canal St., Utica  
Admission: free  
815-667-4211 or [starvedrocklodge.com/event/eagle-watch-weekend/2025-01-25](http://starvedrocklodge.com/event/eagle-watch-weekend/2025-01-25)







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Mexico Colonial Cities	8	1195
Mexico Ancient Civilizations	9	1495
Mexico Copper Canyon Train	8	1695

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## Resolve to stay safe

Overlooked New Year's resolutions for everyday safety

**A NEW YEAR IS** a chance for a new beginning — a time when people oftentimes make resolutions. For many, these resolutions involve diet and exercise, financial and/or career goals, or new hobbies. Here are a few New Year's resolutions that some may overlook in everyday life. Start the year with safety in mind, and do your best to keep these resolutions throughout the year.

### Stop driving distracted

In the U.S., nine people are killed each day in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver. When you drive, just drive. Distracted driving not only puts you and other drivers at risk, but it also endangers roadside crews, bikers and pedestrians.

### Test GFCI outlets

In the bathroom, kitchen and anywhere an outlet is located near a water source, check the ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs)

once a month to make sure they are in good working order. The fast-acting circuit breaker shuts off the power in case of a wiring or ground fault issue.

### Call 811 prior to any digging project

To help stay safe and prevent accidents, call 811 before you dig to get underground utilities marked. Once marked, respect the boundaries and dig carefully. Keep at least 2 feet away from the utility line markings. Stop work immediately if contact is made with an underground line. Call 911 to notify emergency personnel and the affected utility. Do not resume work until the area has been confirmed safe by your electric utility.

### Look up and look out for power lines

Always look up and look out for overhead power lines. If you or an object you are touching contacts or gets too close to a power line, you could be seriously injured or killed.

Regardless of the task, always keep a 10-foot minimum clearance between you or an object you are holding and an overhead line, including the drop-down service line.

### Check the weather

From 2006 through 2021, 446 people were struck and killed by lightning in the U.S. Nearly two-thirds of the deaths happened while people were enjoying outdoor leisure activities. Lightning often strikes away from heavy rain; it can happen up to 10 miles away from rainfall. To prevent lightning-related tragedies, follow the general rule — when thunder roars, go indoors.

Incorporating safety into your New Year's resolutions is a meaningful way to protect yourself and your loved ones. Simple yet impactful commitments can significantly reduce the risk of accidents and hazards. For more information about safety around electricity, go to [SafeElectricity.org](https://SafeElectricity.org). ⚡



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





# Americans can finally grow thick, lustrous hair

## "This will help your thinning hair and receding hairline in just 30 days" says top US Doctor

*Clinical trials show a new hair loss breakthrough can help both men and women naturally regrow a thick, full head of hair – without drugs, surgery, or side effects*

Thousands are rushing to get a new hair restoration method based on surprising new studies from the University of California.

It is the world's first and only hair loss solution that revives dead hair follicles. And studies confirm it helps men and women regrow a thick, full head of hair, even after years of balding.

Now, with news of this breakthrough spreading like wildfire — the manufacturers are struggling to keep up with overwhelming demand.

That's because, unlike other methods, it is prescription-free, drug-free, and has no side effects. And while hair transplants can cost \$4,000 or more, this new approach costs pennies on the dollar and doesn't involve going to the doctor's office.

Instead, it leverages cutting-edge technology to prevent hair loss, fills in embarrassing bald spots, and **Re-Nourishes** thinning hair — with results you can see and feel in 30 days or less.

As Jeanne F. from San Diego, CA reports: "When my husband began to use this product, all he had on top of his head was fuzz. His hair began to grow after 30 days and now it is about 2 to 3 inches long!"

### Surprising Truth About Hair Loss

It is commonly believed that hair loss is hereditary.

Unfortunately, most people think there is nothing they can do to stop it. However, while many doctors will tell you that thinning hair, a receding hairline, and bald spots are due to your genetics, this is not the whole story.

"While genetics play a role, it's not the main reason you lose hair," says Dr. Al Sears, the nation's top anti-aging doctor. "And surprisingly it's not just your age, thyroid, hormones, stress, or a vitamin deficiency, either."

The latest scientific research reveals that hair loss is primarily

caused by the stem cells in your hair follicles dying.

"This discovery is a true breakthrough because by reviving these stem cells on your scalp, you can stop hair loss dead in its tracks and trigger new hair growth, even in areas that have been thinning for years," explains Dr. Sears.

Now, at his world-famous clinic, the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, FL, Dr. Sears and his team have used this game-changing discovery to develop a brand-new hair restoration formula that is taking the country by storm.

Sold under the name **Re-Nourish**, it is flying off the shelves with men and women of all ages raving about the results it delivers.

**Breakthrough research proves this discovery helps fill in bald spots, re-nourishes thinning hair, and leads to noticeable growth in as little as 30 days.**

"I have seen a significant improvement in hair growth. Previously, you could see thinning areas at the back of my head and now hair has grown over it," says Peter W. from Ontario, Canada.

And Susan D. from Fort Pierce, Florida reports, "My hair was thinning. So, I began to use **Re-Nourish** every day on the front part of my scalp. Now I have thicker hair."

### Regrows Hair In Just 30 Days

Scientists now know that stem cells are the lifeblood of your hair follicles.

Research from the University of California shows they're the reason you're able to grow hair. However, these stem cells aren't always active. In fact, studies reveal they're only active during certain phases of the hair growth

cycle.

"Your hair grows in three phases," explains Dr. Sears. "First, you have the anagen phase, the hair growing phase. Then the catagen phase, when hair gets ready to shed. And finally, the telogen phase, where your hair is pushed from the follicle and falls out."

As you get older it becomes harder for your hair follicles to complete this three-phase cycle. The results? Your hairs get stuck in the telogen phase. This is when they start falling out and stop regrowing, no matter what you try.

This process doesn't happen overnight, says Dr. Sears.

"At first, your hair dries out, becoming brittle, thin, and harder to style. Then, you start finding hairs on your pillow and down the drain. Finally, you're left with bald spots that age you prematurely."

Fortunately, **Re-Nourish** puts a stop to this. It revives the dead stem cells in your hair follicles and reactivates your hair's three-phase cycle, triggering new growth in as little as 30 days — even in areas that've been balding for years.

### Reawakens Dead Hair Follicles

For years, scientists couldn't figure out why hair follicle stem cells died.

However, a study from the University of California finally found the answer.

It has to do with T-cells — an important immune cell in your body. The researchers discovered these T-cells are the only way to command hair follicles to grow new hair.

More importantly, they showed that T-cells helped revive the stem cells in your hair follicles — spurring new growth, filling in bald spots and natural hairline.

**Re-Nourish** uses a unique blend of all-natural ingredients. By spraying it on your hair once per day, scientific studies show you

can revive dead stem cells and improve the appearance of thicker, fuller hair.

For example, the key nutrient of **Re-Nourish** was tested on a group of severely balding women.

After 6 months, nearly 70% of the women saw significant improvement in hair growth. Their hair was noticeably fuller, thicker, and healthier looking. Most exciting of all, they grew new hair on parts of their scalp that had been bald for years.

In another study, Italian researchers gathered a group of both men and women with thinning hair and applied the core ingredient of **Re-Nourish**. After 12 weeks, they reported a staggering 74% increase in hair growth.

"It's really mind-boggling that my hair started growing back," says Zan R., another **Re-Nourish** customer.

With results like this, it's no surprise that demand for **Re-Nourish** is soaring. Thousands of men and women are scrambling to get their hands on the limited supply available.

**Re-Nourish** is not currently available in any store at any price. But we've secured a small batch for our readers.

### Try Re-Nourish 100% Risk-Free

To secure the hot, new **Re-Nourish** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-850-5133 TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Re-Nourish**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back."

Call NOW at 1-800-850-5133 to secure your supply of **Re-Nourish**. Use Promo Code ICLRN125 when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!





Inspecting the attic of an old house can reveal decades of insulation disasters.

## Uncover savings with a DIY energy audit

**A HOME ENERGY AUDIT** may sound daunting, but it can be as easy as creating a checklist of improvements based on what you see around your home. Here's what you'll need to find opportunities to save energy and money: a flashlight, dust mask, tape measure and cooking thermometer. I recommend taking notes on your phone or a notepad.

First, check the heating and cooling equipment. Determine the age and efficiency of the equipment by looking up the model number on the nameplate. The average lifespan of HVAC equipment is 10 to 30 years, depending on the type of equipment and how well it's maintained. If your equipment is older, it may be time to budget for an upgrade. Check the filter and replace it if needed.

Then, check the envelope of your home, which separates the heated or cooled areas from the exterior, for drafts and air leakage. Feel around windows and trim for any drafts. Pay special attention to spots where different building materials come together. Check under sinks for gaps around pipes. Seal with weatherstripping, caulk or expanding foam as needed.

Make sure to replace incandescent or compact fluorescent bulbs

with LEDs. LEDs use significantly less energy and last longer than traditional incandescent bulbs.

Next, look in the attic, while wearing a dust mask, to make sure it's insulated. You may be able to see enough from the access area using a cellphone with the flash on to take pictures. Use the tape measure to check the depth of the insulation. It should be a minimum of 12 inches deep. This can vary depending on the type of insulation used and your geography.

Insulation can become compacted over time. It should be evenly distributed throughout the attic. Loose fill or blown-in insulation should be fluffy and evenly dispersed. Rolled batt insulation should fit tightly together without gaps.

Also, exterior walls should be insulated. If your home is older than the 1960s, the walls are probably not insulated. Homes from the 1960s or 1970s likely need more insulation. Sometimes you can see wall insulation by removing an outlet cover or switch plate and using a flashlight to look for insulation inside the wall cavity. Turn off the power at the electrical panel to avoid the risk of electric shock. Wall insulation can be blown in from the

inside or the outside of the home. This is a job for a professional.

If you have a basement or crawl space, head there next. Unfinished basements should have insulation on the rim joists, at minimum. This is the area between the top of the foundation and the underside of the home's first-story floor. Use closed-cell spray foam or a combination of rigid foam and spray foam to insulate rim joists.

Crawl spaces should have insulation on the underside of the floor between the floor joists. Insulation should be properly supported in contact with the floor with no air gaps. Water pipes and ductwork should also be insulated.

Lastly, check the temperature of your water by running it for three minutes at the faucet closest to your water heater. Then fill a cup and measure with a cooking thermometer. Hot water should be between 120 and 140 degrees. You can reduce the temperature on your water heater to reduce energy waste and prevent scalding.

Once your home energy audit is finished, review your findings and start prioritizing home energy efficiency projects. For step-by-step instructions, visit [energy.gov/save](http://energy.gov/save). 💡



**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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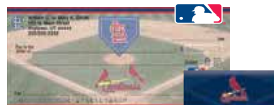
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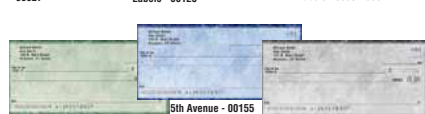
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PHOTO COURTESY OF TRICO ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Utility-scale storage systems could play a crucial role in grid stabilization by absorbing excess energy during periods of low electricity demand and releasing it during peak demand.

## Saving for later

Learn the difference between utility-scale and residential battery storage

**IN AN EVER-CHANGING ENERGY** landscape, electric cooperatives are on the cutting edge of delivering reliable, resilient power to the local communities they serve. Co-ops utilize a variety of generation and grid technologies to provide power, including battery energy storage — but not all battery storage systems are the same, and understanding the key differences between each is important.

Utility-scale battery systems are designed for large-scale energy storage to support the electric grid, requiring high initial investments but offering significant long-term savings and benefits. In contrast, residential battery systems cater to individual homes, providing more energy independence and savings while still representing a significant investment.

### Utility-scale battery storage

Utility-scale storage systems are large installations designed to store vast amounts of electricity. Typically connected to the grid, these systems can store power generated from both conventional and renewable energy sources, with capacities ranging from several

megawatt-hours (MWh) to gigawatt-hours (GWh).

While most battery storage system projects are developed with a primary application in mind, they can also be optimized for multiple applications, which adds significant additional value.

Utility-scale storage systems could play a crucial role in grid stabilization by absorbing excess energy during periods of low electricity demand and releasing it during peak demand, which is particularly beneficial in rural areas where demand can fluctuate significantly.

This could lead to utility-scale storage systems at electric substations to enhance grid resilience and ensure a steady supply of electricity as needed. In the event of a power outage, utility-scale storage systems could provide backup power to critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and emergency services.

### Residential battery storage

Residential battery storage systems are compact installations designed for individual homes, typically ranging from a

few kilowatt-hours (kWh) to 10s of kWh in capacity. Often paired with residential solar panels, these smaller systems allow homeowners to store excess energy generated during the day for use later at night or during power outages, providing a level of energy independence.

By utilizing stored energy, homeowners can reduce their energy bills and ensure a steady supply of power, even during grid disruptions and outages, enhancing the resilience of rural households. However, the initial cost of purchasing and installing a residential storage system can be expensive, which may deter some homeowners.

As electric co-ops navigate the complexities of modern energy supply, the strategic deployment of both utility-scale and residential battery energy storage systems can play a transformative role.

By understanding the unique advantages and challenges of each type of system, co-ops and their members can make informed decisions that enhance grid reliability, reduce costs and improve resilience for their communities. 💡



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.



# Now, THIS is a Knife!

*This 16" full tang stainless steel blade is not for the faint of heart —now **ONLY \$99!***

In the blockbuster film, when a strapping Australian crocodile hunter and a lovely American journalist were getting robbed at knife point by a couple of young thugs in New York, the tough Aussie pulls out his dagger and says "That's not a knife, THIS is a knife!" Of course, the thugs scattered and he continued on to win the reporter's heart.

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

Secured in a tooled leather sheath, this is one impressive knife, with an equally impressive price.

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

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# ANSWERING THE CALL

## Illinois lineworkers go where needed

By Lisa Cherry

**AS HURRICANE HELENE MADE** landfall on Sept. 26 in Florida, lineworkers from electric cooperatives across the country were either already on their way or preparing to head out to help. They were ready and willing to offer their time and expertise to help more than a million people left in the dark in the wake of the natural disaster.

Almost all of Illinois' electric co-ops dispatched crews to various locations affected by the massive storm. A few of those Illinois lineworkers share what they encountered while participating in a real-life example of one cooperative guiding principle — Cooperation Among Cooperatives — in action.

### Drayton Davis, Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative



Prior to Hurricane Helene, newly promoted Journeyman Lineman Drayton Davis had only participated once in a mutual aid effort, after a tornado wreaked havoc in Spoon River Electric Cooperative's territory.

"I think we were there for five days. ... It took a direct path, and it wasn't overly widespread, whereas the hurricane was so widespread that everybody was affected by it," says Davis. "[That] made it difficult, because you didn't really know where to start, and [there] wasn't an end in sight for several days."

He and his fellow lineworkers had no idea what they were about to experience as they made their way to the first of two co-ops the RECC crew would end up assisting. "Nothing prepared you for what you were going to see when you got down there," he says.

The crew left Illinois on Sept. 25 and arrived at Carroll Electric Membership Cooperative in Carrollton,

Ga., the following day. They ended up leaving there on the 27th. "They didn't get hit as badly as they were expecting," Davis explains. Their next stop — Planters Electric Membership Corporation, also in Georgia — was a different story.

"It ended up taking us eight hours to get down there, just because of how bad the roads were. There were trees down everywhere, [broken] poles everywhere," he says. "As we were headed down there, we started getting a feeling for what we were getting into."

He says they were the first visiting crew to arrive, and that they were met with much gratitude. The crew was hosted by a local church throughout the duration of the storm recovery there.

"We would go back to Planters Electric to eat in the morning and to eat at night, [but] we slept at the church," says Davis. Cots had been set up for the lineworkers in a building separate from the sanctuary.

"It was like a basketball court. They had a full kitchen ... there were cookies in there the whole time — baked goods, milk in the refrigerator, Gatorade, water — everything you could think of that you'd want to get your hands on when you got done working a long day," he describes. "We let them know how thankful we were."

Davis says he was especially grateful for the church's three showers and multiple bathrooms. "I haven't [slept] in a man camp yet. I would [assume] that church was a lot better," he laughs.

Each morning, they would gather at the cooperative, eat breakfast, and grab lunches, snacks and drinks to take with them. "Then we would head to our truck, meet up with the bird dog, and he would give us a breakdown on what materials we needed to load," Davis explains.







The “bird dog” was a retired lineworker from Planters, who served as a point person for the RECC crew. “He basically got assigned an area, and since he was our bird dog, we went with him,” says Davis. “We’d hit the road for the day and be gone all day with him.”

Those days averaged 17 hours on the clock and presented other challenges. “It was a couple days [in] when all the water from the north headed south, that all the water started to rise,” he describes. “There were several times we were driving through water a foot and a half to 2 feet deep to get to a pole.”

Untangling wire from downed 80-foot canopy trees was another challenge. However, it was the snakes that really made an impression. “There was one right of way we walked through late one night,” says Davis. “A local there told us as we were walking in, ‘Hey, we call that [a] snake right of way.’”

At first, the crew thought he was joking. “[Later,] we’re stringing wire. We’re climbing through these trees trying to get wire through them ... right when we’re making the splice back together so we can pull the wire up, we about step on a snake,” Davis laughs.

It turned out to be a copperhead. On another occasion, while standing in yet another fallen tree, a local gave him a warning. “Just to let you know, this morning ... [that] tree was engulfed in rattlesnakes,” Davis quotes. “Luckily, I didn’t see any.”

Every day they came back to the church, the lineworkers would find new thank-you letters on their cots. That wasn’t the only kindness the men received, however; they also came in from work to find their dirty clothes freshly laundered and folded.

According to him, southern hospitality is a real thing. “When we first got down there, people were only out of power for a couple of hours. They were super



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RURAL ELECTRIC CONVENIENCE COOPERATIVE

appreciative of us being there so soon,” says Davis. “By the time we left, and people were out of power for two weeks, [they were still] super appreciative of us being there. ... Typically, if somebody’s out of power, they’re usually not in the best mood.”

As community members bonded in the face of the disaster, behind the scenes, lineworkers did, too. “We’d get back after working all day, and we’d sit outside the church and talk and hang out. There were a couple nights we stayed out there for a couple hours and just talked and stuff,” he says. “I met a lot of new friends down there ... a lot of really good linemen.”

Davis says he would volunteer to go where needed again. “For everybody to be able to come together from each co-op ... and work so well together, it’s kind of crazy to think that’s even possible to do,” he explains.





PHOTO COURTESY OF MENARD ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

### Austin Baskett, Menard Electric Cooperative



The Helene mutual aid trip was Austin Baskett's first hurricane effort as an apprentice lineman. Like RECC, his crew's first stop was Carroll EMC. After a brief period helping there, it was on to Planters EMC for the six men.

"I had no idea what to expect, really," says Baskett. "The terrain is a lot different down there than what we're used to here. It's more like a forest in a lot of areas."

He says most of their work was dealing with tree damage. "They weren't expecting to get hit like they did. ... It was supposed to go west of them," he explains. "They were very happy to have the help and got everything together as quickly as possible, whether it came to food, housing, showering — everything like that."

The Menard crew was on the detail for 13 days, according to Baskett. At night, the men slept in a tent city.

"It wasn't as bad as what you [might] think," he says. "You sleep on a cot, and there's quite a few guys in there. They had AC, and that was wonderful." The temporary complex was also equipped with a mobile shower unit.

Baskett says there was a feeling of camaraderie when they took their meals in the food tent. "What was cool is that there were quite a few co-ops from Illinois there," he says. "It was really good seeing them and talking to them and catching up and getting to work with them a little bit."

During the first half of the trip, the Menard crew mainly worked rights of way.

"We took our right-of-way machine down with us. It's a skid steer with a pole-setting attachment," Baskett explains. "Usually, the wire is pretty well mangled. Trees have fallen through it, [it's] stuck under the tree. If it's too big of a tree, you've got to cut the wire out and pull it over. It's an ordeal."

"It was mainly due to trees falling through line and either breaking the pole or breaking the wire, stuff that we do see up here from time to time. It was just [on] a large scale," he adds.

Baskett says many of the local co-op members went above and beyond to show their gratitude. "We [talked] to quite a few members down there, and I can't say enough good about them," he shares. "Very kind, thankful that we were there, constantly coming out and talking to us and offering us water, Gatorade, anything they could do to help. They were outstanding."

Their warm response broadened his perspective of his career as a lineworker. "It really makes you appreciate what you're doing to try and help," he explains. "[It] makes you feel good that the people really appreciate it, and they're glad to see you there. [It] brings a whole new meaning to it."



## Zach Gaines, Corn Belt Energy Corporation



Zach Gaines has been a journeyman lineman with Corn Belt Energy for three and a half years. A former resident of Louisiana, he often assisted following storms there, though not with an electric cooperative.

"I was pretty new in the field [then]," he explains. "This time, having a little bit more experience, I was able to help more. I felt like I was making a difference, being able to turn power on and things like that — getting that boost when people get their power back."

When his crew arrived at Carroll EMC, Helene had not yet hit the area. "We were to meet back in the morning. ... They didn't really know what direction it was going to take ... then it changed course overnight," says Gaines.

The next day, they ended up picking up a couple sections of line before leaving for Planters EMC. "We were supposed to get there late in the night, and it ended up being early morning by the time we got there, because of the interstate closings and trees on the road," he says. "It was definitely a different scene. I think they were caught off guard, and rightfully so."

Some aspects of the terrain were new for Gaines. "I lived in southern Louisiana for six years, so I was expecting [something similar], but the sand roads threw me for a loop. It seemed like, if you weren't on a main road, it was nothing but sand."

Other settings were more familiar. "We had to use [a] boat and paddle through the swamp to pull up line. ... In Louisiana, we had a whole bunch of line in the swamp. Maybe that's why I volunteered," he laughs.

The sheer amount of work was also new. "I know we put a good dent in the number of outages in the area we were in, but, man, it felt like it just kept going," Gaines explains. "I've been on plenty of hurricanes in Louisiana, but all local to where we were. Within a week, it seemed like we had everything picked up every time, and this time, the damage just seemed much more widespread."

Even so, he says he would go again. "[It's] a pretty good feeling, turning people back on that have been off for weeks at a time," explains Gaines. "[They're] pretty grateful, even though they were out for two to three weeks."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORN BELT ENERGY CORPORATION

## Scott McTaggart, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative



Scott McTaggart, a 22-year journeyman lineman and foreman with Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, says that of the storms he has worked, Helene has been the most comparable to Hurricane Katrina. "There was still a ton of devastation, so I would

hate to understate it, but [Helene] wasn't quite at that level," he explains. "Having had that experience, this felt more manageable, even though it was a massive undertaking." He admits that part of that might be a result of experience, since he was an apprentice when Katrina hit.

McTaggart and his crew, like the others, spent a few nights at Carroll EMC before heading to Planters EMC. En route to their second destination, conditions around them worsened.

"Your GPS is telling you to go one way, but the roads are blocked off. You start guessing and heading in the general direction and hoping the next road is not," he explains. "The number of downed trees just kept increasing, the amount of [downed] power lines kept increasing. It was obvious we were headed toward the devastation."

He says they became fast friends with the local lineworkers, and he and his bird dog realized they had even worked some of the same storms. "You're in the same trade, you're trying to achieve the same goal. There's a brotherhood," says McTaggart. "I'm still friends with quite a few of them on Facebook ... just from working together for two weeks."

While working alongside these new friends, he realized something many people might not have considered. "A lot of these linemen didn't have power when they went home," he adds. "So, they had their own struggles when they got home the first week. They're working these same long hours, and then they're going to a house without power or staying with someone who did have power, maybe staying at a home they're not used to."

The number of Illinois lineworkers answering the call to help in Helene's aftermath, traveling even farther than their neighboring states, impacted him as well. "[It's] cool that all the guys from Illinois rolled out to do this," he says. "That was pretty amazing."

It's even more amazing when the estimated time originally thought needed for recovery was 30 days. "I think, honestly, [it was] more like 10," McTaggart says. "I think it's hard for everybody to judge what 200 men can do, all working toward the same mission."

In the end, 104 lineworkers from 21 electric cooperatives across Illinois assisted with the recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene. As for Davis, Baskett, Gaines and McTaggart, they say they would "absolutely," without hesitation, answer the call again. 💡



# INSPIRED by LIFE

*How a children's author turns  
her adventures into stories*

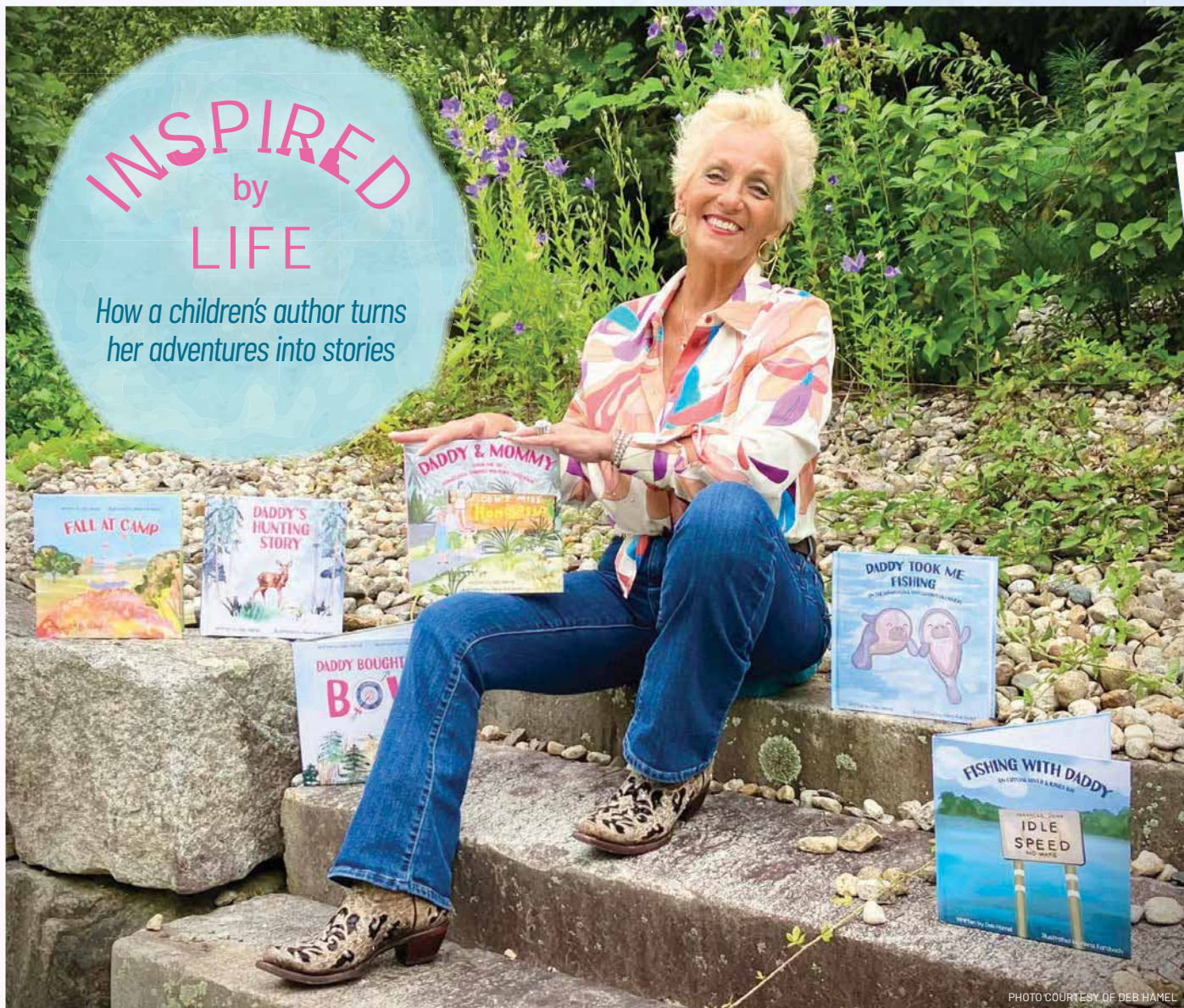


PHOTO COURTESY OF DEB HAMEL

*By Colten Bradford*

**GROWING UP, DEB HAMEL** loved books, from the plastic covers and the crinkling sounds they made to even their smell. She often escaped into books like “Corduroy” by Don Freeman and “The Mouse and the Motorcycle” by Beverly Cleary, two of her childhood favorites. Years later, Hamel became a children’s book author herself.

“I’ve always had a vivid imagination, so it was wonderful to get a book and just put myself in as one of the characters or the animals being portrayed,” Hamel says. She quite literally put herself in her own stories. Hamel currently has three children’s book series, all starring a young girl named Debber.

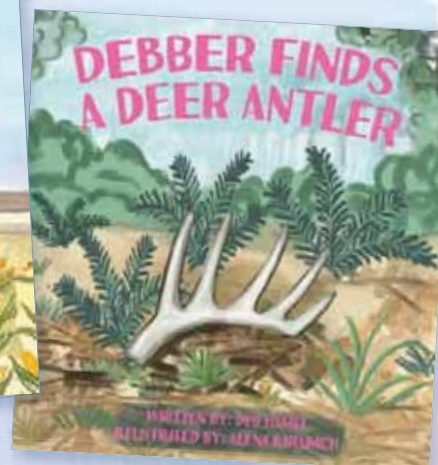
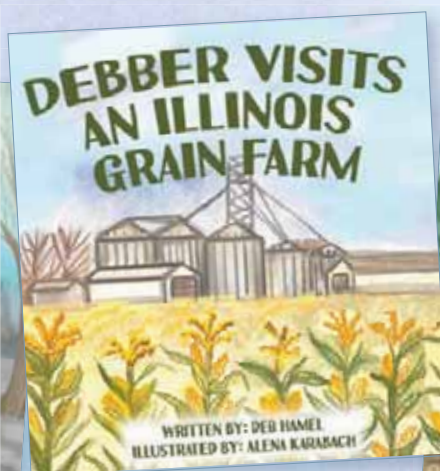
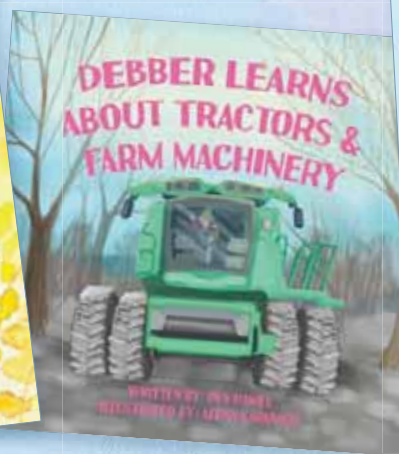
“My husband calls me ‘Debber,’ so I decided to call the little girl that. In real life, my husband’s name is Doug, whom I nicknamed ‘Dougah,’ but because that

wouldn’t fit with the storyline of a little girl and her dad, I named his character ‘Daddy,’” she explains.

In “Daddy’s Hunting Series,” Debber has adventures in northern New Hampshire and learns about appreciating nature and wildlife. Inspired by her time living on Florida’s coast, “Daddy’s Fishing Series” shares the joys of coastal living and marine life. “Daddy’s Farming Series” is a tribute to Illinois farmers, originating from Hamel’s fascination with farm life and equipment.

“Each of my stories is true and factual to things that happened between my husband and myself,” Hamel says. “I am a native New Yorker, [a] city slicker who really knew nothing about hunting, or the wilderness, or the sounds animals make, but when Doug and I got together, I said I wanted to learn about his passion, which is all of the above.”





The books bring their outdoor experiences to life, teaching children and adults about nature and wildlife while emphasizing old-fashioned family togetherness. For her research, Hamel shares that she would ask her husband question after question.

"He had great patience for me," Hamel says. "You see, I had major strokes at 40 and 50. I had to learn to walk and talk all over again, and in between, I have had several TIAs (transient ischemic attacks, or mini strokes). In some ways, I could say that was a blessing in disguise, because it slowed me down. It calmed me down. It made me want to stop and smell the roses. I now have a child-like way of looking at things, so the books are all real stories with my new stroke-enhanced imagination."

Hamel's journey to writing children's books began in Olney, Ill., after a career in the public sector. During that time, she worked as a political consultant, a radio talk show host and for the state of New Hampshire's board of education, among her other occupations.

Beyond her professional achievements, books and storytelling were always a passion. One cold day at Fox Creek Outfitters in Olney, she penned "Daddy's Hunting Story" while her husband was out hunting. That day, she wrote nine manuscripts. A friend in publishing encouraged her to pursue children's books, which led to the publication of her first series, and what started as a simple tale to pass the time blossomed into a new career.

For years, Doug visited Illinois to hunt, and the couple often talked about buying a place nearby. The charm of the area eventually won them over. Hamel explains that they fell in love with the area, the people and the down-home country feel.

They purchased their Richland County home a year and a half ago, which is on Norris Electric Cooperative lines. "Daddy's Farming Series" came about as they were remodeling their new home.

"Our painter saw all my books and [suggested I write] a series based on farmers in Illinois," Hamel says. "I asked if he knew a farm family I could sit down and talk with." He did.

"I had so many questions, and [they] answered each one very patiently," she says. "I immediately went home and wrote two books, figured out the illustrations, and I published them right off. The turnaround time on this was so quick."

Each of Hamel's series combines the author's real experiences with vivid illustrations by artist Alena Karabach, who is from Ukraine. "I send her my storyboard, and I sometimes draw things out. More often, I take photographs of each situation that I want to be depicted and provide details from colors to emotions." She says Karabach skillfully translates her vision to watercolor illustrations.

Looking ahead, more books are underway. Hamel has five manuscripts written, copyrighted and ready for editing and illustrating. She also hopes to publish more books about farming in Illinois and would love to speak to some interested farmers.

"These books are more than just stories about a little girl," Hamel explains. "They are educational and fun to read. They teach about nature and the outdoors, and hopefully introduce a whole new generation to love wildlife."

To learn more or to purchase a book, visit Hamel's website at [debhamel.com](http://debhamel.com). 💡



## Wellness is her way of life

By Lisa Cherry

**CAROLYN HITCHCOCK, OWNER OF** Front Porch Soap & Gift Co. and longtime Spoon River Electric Cooperative member, has taken a hobby she stumbled upon in semi-retirement and built a shop beloved by her Lewistown community. That hobby — making soap — has since led to an expansive product inventory.

The former medical technician and OSHA inspector says she originally was just looking for something to do. First, it was beekeeping. “I had beginner’s luck,” she says. “You always have some left that you probably aren’t going to bottle for human consumption, but it can be used for other things. So, I googled things to make with honey.”

One of those things was soap. “[I] fell in love with soap-making, and it wasn’t long before the family was saying, ‘We don’t have room for anymore,’” she laughs. Her husband Mike ended up taking some of her soaps with him to the local coffee shop.

“[People] started coming back to him, saying, ‘Hey, I love that soap ... where can we get more?’” she adds. “So, I opened a tiny little shop on the front porch.”

Hitchcock prefers to make cold process soap. The first step is creating a lye solution. For this, she uses distilled water. “You don’t want any metals in your water,” she says. “I make my lye water up and let it cool. [It] gets very, very hot as you add the lye into the water.”

Next, she preps her oils while the lye solution cools. When the correct temperature is reached, blending begins. Shortly after, she pours the blend into molds. “We leave it on the cure racks for six weeks, and that’s strictly for the water to evaporate to make a hard bar,” she explains. “[That way,] once you get that bar into water and you’re using it, it’s not becoming mush.”

The process is called saponification, which produces soap and glycerin. “[Once] it’s gone through the saponification

process, there’s no longer any active lye in the soap,” Hitchcock adds. “[And,] if you don’t have glycerin in the bar soap you’re using, you’re basically not using soap. You’re using detergent on your skin.”

Early on in this venture, Hitchcock sustained a broken bone, and her daughter, cosmetologist Tonya Sidwell, came alongside to help. “She’s been with me ever since,” says Hitchcock. “She was a perfect fit for the business.”

In 2014, they formed an LLC. “When that small shop got busy, I built a new shop,” she explains. “We were five years in the small shop, and then five years in the new shop, and the business has just steadily grown.” That growth has included small, handmade bath and body products and gift lines. She also has a variety of products for babies, pets and men.

Her husband Mike was one of the first to experience the healing benefits of her soaps. “He said, ‘I don’t have itchy skin in the winter,’” she says. “[Now] he won’t use anything but the soap I make. It’s just a healthier soap for the skin.”

Customers have also commented on the healing properties of her other products, particularly in caring for surgical incisions and burns, even nosebleeds. Hitchcock attributes it to the natural ingredients she uses, like goat milk, honey and colloidal oatmeal.

With most of their inventory being handmade, store hours are limited. “We need those hours in the kitchen if we’re going to continue to offer people healthy, handmade, small batch,” she explains. “Those are the keywords — small batch [and] homemade.”

Even with all the hard work and fastidious attention to detail, Hitchcock says that her original love of making soap has endured. “We’ve really enjoyed it. We look forward to it,” she says. “It’s given us a real sense of purpose.”

### SHOW SUPPORT

Small business owners can request to be featured in the Support Local section of Illinois Country Living magazine by submitting the form at [icl.coop/local](http://icl.coop/local).

#### Front Porch Soap & Gift Co.

14242 E. County 14 Highway, Lewistown  
309-258-9655  
[Facebook.com/front.porch.soap](https://www.facebook.com/front.porch.soap)

#### HOURS

Fri: Noon to 6 p.m.  
Sat: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

\*Store is closed in January.  
It will reopen Feb. 7, 2025.



# 2025 CALENDAR

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SCRATCH BREWING COMPANY

# Wild brews

Foraging and fermentation meet at Scratch Brewing

By Mary Blye Kramer

**COUPLES CLUTCHING MUGS OF** beer huddle around a fire pit or at one of the weathered picnic tables sampling some of the most unusual beer in the world. The owners of Scratch Brewing Company, Marika Josephson and Aaron Kleidon, make their beer almost entirely from plants growing wild across the 80 acres owned by Kleidon's family.

"Every beer is an adventure," says Kleidon, who is a member of Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association. He tends bar, serves food and chats with customers who have driven a hundred miles after hearing about Scratch from a friend, centering their day trip around a tasty beer.

A sample flight might yield beers made with wild carrot and nettle, barrel-aged blackberry lavender, saison with saffras or beers made from any number of wild ingredients: lemongrass, elderflower, fig leaves, shagbark hickory or chanterelle mushrooms.



Top left: Owners Marika Josephson and Aaron Kleidon  
This page: Scratch Brewing Company main building and patio

Top right: Beer with hops  
Bottom right: Handmade steins by a local artist are available for purchase.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KENDALL KARMANIAN



Although there are dozens of foraged-based breweries across the U.S., Outside magazine has named Scratch one of the top four, adding that few breweries experiment as zealously as Scratch.

“March will be our 13th anniversary,” says Josephson, “and we still brew beers we’ve never done before.”

Along with quality, Scratch excels in ambience. All About Beer magazine named it one of the most beautiful places in the world to drink beer. Alongside the main building, which the founders built by hand, lie a couple of patio-porches with picnic tables and a log cabin donated by a friend, which Kleidon moved log by log, reassembling it on their property.

Three goats nibble at clover and dried leaves, originally bought so Scratch could make its own cheese. That didn’t work out, so, Josephson says with a grin, “they’re now our mascots.” Farm machinery sits alongside the greenhouse where carrots, ginger, arugula, peppers and tomatoes are grown for Scratch’s pizzas.

Just inside, at the bar, handmade wood levers, also made by Kleidon, release whatever beer is on tap. If you want to head upstairs, you’ll pass a rack full of herbs — sweet clover, lemon balm, marigold, lemon basil and sweet basil. A dehydrator holds oyster mushrooms.

The large, open upper area, named the Serpent Room, was designed in collaboration with local artist Brett Douglas Hunter, and is filled with unique art, a bar and additional seating for group gatherings.

The owners met at a local restaurant/bar, which has since closed. There, patrons could share a bottle of craft beer with a table full of new acquaintances. That’s where Kleidon, Josephson and Ryan Tockstein (the third Scratch Brewing Company founder, who eventually left the business) bonded over their love of home brewing. They began swapping ideas and fusing their individually created flavors. Together, they decided to start a business.

Josephson was excited. She’d moved to the area so her husband at the time could attend Southern Illinois University, and she fell in love with rural living, quiet walks in the forest and fresh food in season. With a doctoral degree in philosophy and a career in

publishing in New York City, she relished the idea of opening a brewery with foraged ingredients (a few items are outsourced, but all are local) for both food and drink.

Kleidon came up with the perfect spot. His parents had purchased 80 acres of forested land when he was a teenager, where he grew up exploring the woods and learning about its native plants. His parents supported their idea for a brewery and sold the three young adults 5 acres of land. Scratch Brewing was incorporated in 2011, began building in 2012, and opened the following year for business.

As the business grew, they were able to hire a full-time brewer and seven part-time employees to help in the kitchen and bar, as well as in the garden. Although Josephson estimates that they made between 350 and 400 varieties of beers by the end of their third year, the growing business now demands that they cut back on experimenting and increase the quantity of their most popular beers.

Still, each beer is uniquely and artfully crafted. The newest one is a pale ale with lemon balm, juniper, lemon basil and marigolds.

Scratch has received recognition and awards as they’ve expanded. They’ve been nominated for three James Beard awards, a foundation established in 1990 recognizing the top chefs and restaurants in America. In summer 2024, the New York Times named Scratch one of the 22 best pizza places in the U.S. In addition, “The Homebrewer’s Almanac,” co-authored by the three founders of Scratch Brewing, has been featured in several periodicals.

Scratch offers specials at certain times of the year, usually during Oktoberfest and Scratch’s March-April anniversary. During these events, patrons can sign up for walks through the woods, with guided foraging followed by personal tea-making.

Freshly baked sourdough bread, bottled beer, steins and growlers, and “The Homebrewer’s Almanac” are available for purchase. Scratch also offers natural sodas, such as their tulsi basil, as well as a variety of pizzas and cheese plates. Whether surrounding yourself with art in the Serpent Room or engulfed by natural beauty outdoors, each season offers something different with food, drink and ambience at Scratch Brewing Company. 🍷



PHOTO COURTESY OF KENDALL KARMANIAN



## LET’S EAT!

### Scratch Brewing Company

1264 Thompson Road, Ava

618-426-1415

[scratchbeer.com](http://scratchbeer.com)

#### HOURS

Fri-Sun: noon to 8 p.m.

#### CASH ONLY





## Keto cooking

**THE KETOGENIC DIET** – or keto, for short — is a popular diet trend featuring a low-carb, high-fat dietary plan. This means bread, pasta, rice and sugar are avoided, and fat becomes the primary source of calories. According to the diet, this encourages the body to enter a metabolic state called ketosis and improves metabolic health. Whether or not you've adopted a keto diet, these are great recipes to give a try. 💡

### WE NEED RECIPES!

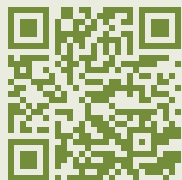
Stone fruit

Corn

Drinks

Dips

Please email recipe submissions or questions to [finestcooking@icl.coop](mailto:finestcooking@icl.coop) or mail them to Finest Cooking c/o Illinois Country Living, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. Please include your name, address, phone number (for questions), and the name of your electric cooperative. Additional recipes can be found on our website at [finestcooking.com](http://finestcooking.com).



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



### Cauliflower Crust Pizza

*Submitted by Anand Bhatt, Corn Belt Energy Corporation and author of Rock Star Recipes*

Servings: 1-4

- 1 bag of frozen steamable microwave cauliflower
- 1 egg
- 2 cups fat-free mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1 bottle organic, sugar-free spaghetti sauce
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1/2 cup chopped basil (or 1 tablespoon dried)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 450 F and lightly grease a pie tin with olive oil. Follow the instructions on the cauliflower bag to steam. Let cool enough to handle and empty the bag into a food processor or blender. Grind the cauliflower until it has a rice consistency. Transfer to a large bowl. Crack the egg into it with a cup of mozzarella. Mix with your hands, press into a pie tin and bake for about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, mix the sauce and spices in a separate bowl. Remove cauliflower crust from oven and top with sauce, cheese and desired toppings. Broil it until the top is browning.

### Thai-Inspired Keto Peanut Red Curry Noodle Bowl

*Submitted by Shirley Keyes, Rock Energy Cooperative*

Servings: 2

- 1 8-ounce package shirataki noodles
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened peanut butter
- 2-3 teaspoons Thai red curry paste
- 2 teaspoons coconut aminos
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1/4 teaspoon ginger, grated
- 1/4 cup bell pepper, sliced
- 1/4 cup canned chickpeas
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 1 pinch red pepper flakes, optional
- Chopped peanuts, optional

Drain and rinse the noodles thoroughly. Place the noodles in a frying pan on medium-low heat and cook for a few minutes, until the noodles are mostly dry. Add the peanut butter, curry paste, coconut aminos, sesame oil, grated ginger and bell peppers to the pan and stir until a sauce forms and everything is evenly coated. Cook for about 3-5 minutes more, until the peppers soften and everything is heated through. Remove from the heat, transfer to a bowl, top with chickpeas and garnish with red pepper flakes, chopped peanuts and additional lime juice.



## Keto Green Bean Casserole

Submitted by Rosemary Wiley, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 4-6

- |                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 onion, sliced                    | 1/2 cup chicken broth            |
| 2-1/2 cups fresh mushrooms, sliced | 1/2 cup cream cheese             |
| 1 clove garlic, minced             | 3 cups green beans               |
| Salt and pepper, to taste          | 1/2 cup cheddar cheese, shredded |
| 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg                | Bacon bits, optional             |

Preheat oven to 400 F. In a large nonstick skillet over medium heat, saute onions, mushrooms and garlic until caramelized. Season with salt, pepper and nutmeg. Add chicken broth and scrape all bits on bottom of pan. Add cream cheese and melt. Mix in green beans and transfer to a casserole dish. Top with cheddar cheese and bacon bits, if desired. Bake until bubbly, 10-15 minutes.



## Keto Chili

Submitted by Susan Livvix, EnerStar Electric Cooperative

Servings: 8

- |                            |                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2-1/2 pounds ground beef   | 1 teaspoon pepper                |
| 1/2 onion, chopped         | 2 tablespoons sugar-free ketchup |
| 1/2 green pepper, chopped  | 2 cups tomato sauce              |
| 3 tablespoons chili powder | 1 cup water                      |
| 1-1/2 teaspoons cumin      | 1 can Rotel tomatoes             |
| 1 teaspoon celery seed     | 2 tablespoons tomato paste       |
| 1 teaspoon salt            |                                  |

In a large pot over medium heat, brown ground beef and drain. Add onion and green pepper to the beef and saute until onions are translucent. Add the spices to the meat mixture and saute an additional 2 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients and simmer to combine flavors, about 15-20 minutes. Add more water for desired consistency. Serve with grated cheddar cheese and sour cream.



## Grain-Free Granola

Submitted by Toni Hayes, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 12

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 large egg white                                | 1 cup unsweetened coconut flakes               |
| 2 tablespoons monk fruit blend sweetener         | 1 cup roasted unsalted shelled sunflower seeds |
| 2 tablespoons coconut oil, melted                | 1/4 cup blanched almond flour                  |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract                       | 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon                   |
| 1 cup chopped raw pecans or slivered raw almonds |  |

Preheat oven to 325 F and position a rack in the center of the oven. Line a 15-by-10-inch baking pan with parchment paper. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg white, then stir in the monk fruit, melted coconut oil and vanilla extract. Add pecans, coconut flakes, sunflower seeds, almond flour and cinnamon to the bowl. Stir until the pecan mixture is completely coated with the egg white mixture. Spread the granola evenly on the lined sheet pan. Bake for 20 minutes, stirring after 10 minutes, until light golden brown. Remove from the oven and let cool completely before serving. Makes 12 1/4-cup servings. Store in an airtight container for up to two weeks.





## Steeped in tradition

Why chamomile deserves a spot in your garden

**ENJOYING A WARM MUG** of tea on a crisp winter night can gently calm the mind and help you drift into a peaceful sleep. German chamomile is a common ingredient in these tea mixes, providing a soothing and

soils; the shallow root system may rot in wet soils. Besides some decline in hot temperatures, it is low maintenance as well, requiring little supplemental fertilization and presenting few problems with pests.

below the plant. Its close relative, wild chamomile or pineappleweed, is a commonly found weed in gardens and along roadsides. It features edible flowers and emits a pineapple scent when crushed.

One easy way to distinguish pineappleweed from chamomile is that pineappleweed lacks the white “petals” or ray flowers. Another plant often referred to as chamomile is Roman chamomile, a low-growing perennial. This plant is occasionally used in teas, but it has a more bitter taste.

Its shorter growth habit makes this plant a perfect addition to the front border of a landscape, near a garden walkway or tucked into small crevices in a rock garden. Its fruity fragrance can also be enjoyed near a patio or sitting area. Besides beauty in the garden, chamomile has many other uses. The dried flowers can be used in teas, pot-pourris, dyes and crafts. Flowers should be harvested at full bloom by cutting off just the flower head from the stem. Teas are made by steeping dried flowers.

In the language of flowers, a cultural trend to convey messages and emotions in the Victorian era, chamomile symbolized joy, happiness and peace, making these perfect gifts when offering well wishes to a loved one. Whether gifted to friends or kept at home, the small, daisy-like flower adds a touch of delicacy and color to cut floral arrangements.

Consider incorporating past International Herb Association Plants of the Year into your herb garden or landscape, like yarrow, ginger, violas, parsley, anise hyssop, coriander/cilantro and savory. By choosing a few of these top performers, you can create a garden that excels in both beauty and dependability. 🌱



calming effect. This culinary herb also received the prized award of “2025 Herb of the Year.”

To receive this honor from the International Herb Association, the plant must be found outstanding for its decorative, culinary or medical use. Chamomile, native to Europe and Asia, is grown as a cool-season herb or ornamental annual plant in many gardens in Illinois.

Small, daisy-like white flowers with yellow centers are scattered among delightfully fragrant foliage, reaching 2 feet tall. It reliably blooms from midsummer through fall, attracting a wide array of pollinating insects. The finely divided leaves give the plant a miniature fern-like appearance.

German chamomile grows best in full to part sun and well-drained

Chamomile plants can be started easily from seed by either directly sowing in the garden when soil temperatures reach 55 degrees Fahrenheit or starting them indoors six to eight weeks before the last frost for later transplantation.

These tiny seeds need light to germinate. After scattering seeds on the soil, gently press seeds into the soil instead of covering them with additional soil. Seeds should germinate within seven to 10 days. Transplant the seedlings outdoors when they are small (less than 2 inches tall), as larger plants do not transplant well.

German chamomile is self-seeding in the garden. To prevent seedlings from appearing next year, deadhead any spent flowers to stop the mature seeds from scattering

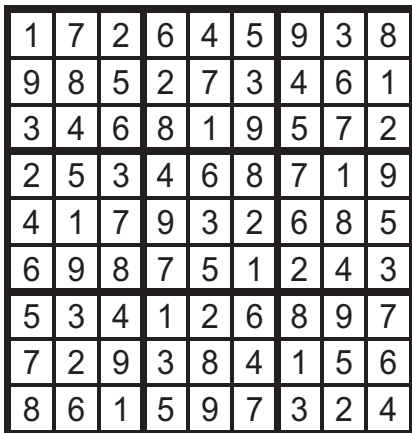


**Brittnay Haag** is a Horticulture Educator for the University of Illinois Extension serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford counties. Her work focuses on youth horticulture education through school gardens and Jr. Master Gardener programs.



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### UPCOMING THEMES

March — Fences/gates

April — Reflections

May — Serenity

June — Roads



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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](http://www.mascoutaheyecare.com)

**1-618-566-8899**

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



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