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CO-OP
NEWS

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Illinois Country Living

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On the cover: Erica Matthews, owner and lead instructor of the Autism and Movement Project/Autism Movement Therapy in Pana.



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Tough choices, lasting legacies

The strength behind rural communities

MY GREAT GRANDPARENTS, DAVID and Sarah Matheson, faced tough choices. They came to the U.S. from Scotland, crossed the continent and settled in the small rural town of Parowan, Utah.

You've seen pictures of the covered wagon trains moving west across the plains. Well, David and Sarah walked. They pulled their worldly belongings across the plains in hand carts.

My great grandfather lost his sight from a bout with scarlet fever. The folks in Parowan provided a job to him as the janitor in the schoolhouse. Since he couldn't see, his kids would come to the school to shovel coal into the boiler in the winter and clean the school throughout the year.

David and Sarah had a family of 13 children, and, as was common in rural America, they paired each of the kids closest in age so that one worked on the farm for a year while the other went to school. The next year, they'd switch who went to school and who worked on the farm.

My grandfather, Scott Matheson, was paired up with his brother Angus. At the end of the year when Angus had worked on the farm and

my grandfather went to school, Angus suggested it would be best to give up his school opportunity so my grandfather could continue.

I think about that all the time. It must have been a difficult decision for Angus. He recognized the importance of education. He valued that chance to go to school, and he knew that each of them holding half an education could never

accomplish what one of them could holding all of it. Angus was right.

My grandfather Scott was the only one of the 13 children to graduate from high school. Angus worked on the farm his whole life — a life he chose. It tells me a lot about the costs of being exceptional, what it takes sometimes to completely change your circumstances. . . .

We all have great stories just like this one. Our families all have examples of tough times and the hard decisions that come along with them. But we strive to do the right thing, and we're good at doing this for a reason.

In the face of hardship, we draw on this incredible foundation laid by those who came before us — one of character, courage and hope. As electric cooperatives, we know we still face tough choices in rural America today.

We talk about the challenges all the time: growing demand for electricity, bad policy and regulations, undervaluing reliability, and failing to plan for the future. Yes, these are challenges, but we don't allow them to defeat us. . . .

When we plan for the future, we do it with members of the community as stakeholders in leadership positions at our co-ops and in our boardrooms. With transparency, with democracy, with real concern for the community. . . .

Let's acknowledge the moment we're in. This is a chance to create real, meaningful change. Throughout the history of electric co-ops, we've always approached times like this with ideas and vision. With positive, constructive engagement. With authentic leadership.

When we're faced with tough choices and we choose the communities and people we serve, when we put them first, we make an incredible difference. 🗣️



Jim Matheson is the CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. This is an excerpt from his keynote address to the nation's electric cooperatives during NRECA's PowerXchange annual meeting on March 10 in Atlanta. To read the full address, go to icl.coop.

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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APRIL CHECKLIST

Safe Digging Month



Call 811 before you dig. Before starting any digging project,

contact 811 at least two to three business days before breaking ground to have utilities mark the location of underground lines.

Wait for utility markings.

Utility lines will be marked with colored flags or paint, indicating different types of lines, such as gas, electric, water and communication.



Dig with care. Respect the marks and use proper tools to prevent damage.

If you hit a utility line, stop digging and contact the utility immediately.

Be aware of changing conditions.

Erosion, construction or landscaping can alter the depth of buried utilities over time. Even if you previously marked an area, check again before digging.



Students from Shelby Electric Cooperative meet with their elected official, State Representative Regan Deering.



Youth Day opens doors for future leaders

A 60-plus-year tradition in Springfield, Youth Day celebrates Illinois' electric and telephone cooperatives, state politics and Illinois' rural youth. The annual event, which is organized by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), invites co-ops across the state to bring high school students within their service territory to the State Capitol to learn about co-ops and meet their elected officials.

On March 5, approximately 200 high school students from across rural Illinois representing 22 co-ops gathered in Springfield for an active day touring the State Capitol building and visiting the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. In addition, attendees learned about the cooperative business model, the energy industry and leadership skills.

"It's an important event that fosters leadership and civic responsibility among Illinois youth," said Brooke Gross, member services

manager and facilitator of youth programs at the AIEC. "It highlights the role of electric cooperatives in rural communities and shows participants state government in action."

Continued on page 8



State Representative Dave Severin takes a selfie with Representative Ryan Spain and Norris Electric Cooperative's delegates.

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.

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

"Youth Day" continued from page 7



State Representative Tony McCombie talks with JCE Co-op students Hazel Harris and Alexander Abt.

IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

In honor of National Pet Day on April 11, this month's Entertainment Corner features a famous cat from Illinois. You may remember Morris, the orange tabby "spokescat" of 9Lives fame. The cat food's mascot, created by the Leo Burnett Company and voiced by John Erwin, was described as "the world's most finicky cat."

The first of three incarnations of Morris was a rescue from a Chicago shelter. He first appeared in TV commercials in the late '60s. Throughout his career, the original Morris was featured in 58 commercials. He also played a few roles on the big screen, in the films "The Long Goodbye" and "Shamus."

For his acting chops, Morris twice received the coveted PATSY Award, which recognizes animal performers in film and TV. The Illinois rescue died July 7, 1978, in Chicago.💡



The morning kicked off at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel with an introduction from Paris Van Dyke, the 2023-24 Illinois Youth Leadership Council representative, who was sponsored by Wabash Communications CO-OP during the 2023 Youth Day and Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. She spoke about her experiences representing Illinois' electric and telephone cooperatives.

"I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for this experience two years ago, because I really got out of my box and I decided to try something new," Van Dyke said. "Be proud of yourself for sitting in the chairs that you are in today, because you have an opportunity that not very many students get. So, take advantage of that, and just remember to say yes to the opportunities that come your way."

After, the students headed to the State Capitol building to tour the facility and meet with their elected officials, where they were able to talk to state senators and representative and ask questions.

During lunch, Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs addressed the students. He shared his journey from a small town in Illinois to his current role, emphasizing the importance of finding interesting and challenging opportunities. He encouraged students to pursue their passions and take risks.



State Senator Steve McClure gives students representing Wabash Communications CO-OP a tour of the newly remodeled senate chamber.

"When you push yourself outside your comfort zone, it's uncomfortable at first, but you learn a lot," Frerichs said. "I'm guessing this is a room of people who want to do big things."

Youth Day also ties into a larger program that includes the opportunity to participate in Youth Tour, a weeklong trip to Washington, D.C. During this trip, students have the chance to meet other youths from across the country and explore issues impacting their communities and the energy industry. This year's trip will be held June 16-23. Participating students will have the opportunity to meet their elected officials, see historic sites, learn firsthand how cooperatives work and gain valuable leadership skills.💡

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Where is it?

The winners of the February hidden object contest were Tom Young of JCE Co-op and Tom Graham of Shelby Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

The slice of cherry pie was hidden in the photo on page 17 in the Energy Solutions section of the March 2025 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. In honor of Earth Day on April 22, be on the lookout for the planet we call home.

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 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. 💡



Buchanan represents Illinois during PowerXchange

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's annual PowerXchange conference, held March 7-12 this year in Atlanta, is the largest annual gathering of electric co-op leaders. While the conference is designed to discuss and embrace the challenges of the ever-changing electric industry, it also highlights future leaders. One of those leaders present was Cole Buchanan.

In June 2024, Buchanan was one of 54 high school students who represented Illinois' electric and telephone cooperatives during the annual Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.

During the trip, Buchanan, who represented SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative, was selected by his peers as the 2024-25 Youth Leadership Council (YLC) representative for the Illinois delegation. The YLC is a yearlong appointment.

He is thankful for the opportunity to represent Illinois. "Thank you for entrusting me with this position to represent the state ... and for supporting me along the journey," Buchanan said. "It's really been influential learning about cooperatives."

While he enjoyed his first visit to Atlanta, getting the opportunity to visit Centennial Olympic Park (the site of the 1996 Summer Olympics) and the College Football Hall of Fame, he most appreciated getting to know his fellow YLC delegates and meeting co-op leaders from across the nation.

In just a few short months, Buchanan's service as Illinois' 48th YLC will come to an end, when a new YLC is selected during this year's Youth Tour in June.

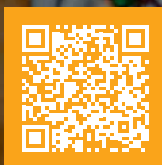
"I had no intentions of ever being in this role, but going on Youth Tour really pivoted my life, and I see everything from a new perspective," Buchanan said. To his peers, he added, "My advice is to be ambitious. Get out there. Don't be shy, but don't think that you know everything. I've learned so much through this experience. It has been life-changing." 💡

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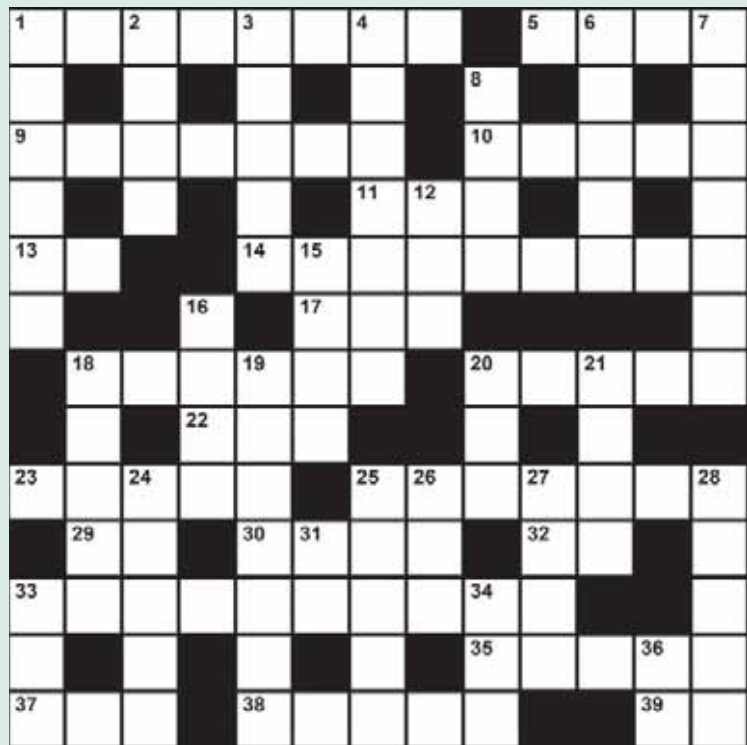
Across

- 1 "It's gonna be a bright, bright, _____ day," lyrics by Johnny Nash
- 5 "April ____ She Will," by Simon and Garfunkel
- 9 Rebirth
- 10 Marsh plants with hollow stems
- 11 Words in a wedding vow
- 13 Compass point direction, abbr.
- 14 Like the place "Over the Rainbow" describes
- 17 60 seconds, abbr.
- 18 Romantic time of day, to many
- 20 Romantic flowers with thorny stems
- 22 Food container
- 23 Light yellow color
- 25 Full of energy and life
- 29 Chemical symbol for nickel
- 30 Extremely eager and enthusiastic
- 32 Indefinite article before vowel sounds
- 33 Begin anew, 2 words
- 35 Purple flower that blooms in spring
- 37 Just out
- 38 Month of showers that bring May flowers
- 39 Expression of understanding

Down

- 1 "____ Vacation," by The Beach Boys
- 2 "Feeling Good" singer _____ Simone
- 3 Eagles and kestrels, e.g.
- 4 There's _____ to your achievements if you believe in them, 2 words
- 6 Daisy-like wildflower
- 7 Spring holiday celebrations
- 8 Cultivate
- 12 Animal's hidden retreat
- 15 Sign of things to come
- 16 Savvy about
- 18 Sweet smell
- 19 He sang, "It Might as Well Be Spring"
- 20 Massage firmly
- 21 Ugly duckling's transformation
- 24 Cat's cry, British spelling
- 25 Staying power
- 26 "Sweet as apple cider" girl
- 27 Indian princess
- 28 "Reach out and _____ somebody's hand," Diana Ross
- 31 Hospital for veterans, abbr.
- 33 "Here Comes the _____" Beatles song
- 34 "____ say!"
- 36 Airline (abbr.)

Solution on page 33.



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APRIL Datebook

LET'S GO!

4

Abe For All SPRINGFIELD

In recognition of National Autism Acceptance Month, this series at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum offers a sensory friendly evening

5

Family Forestry Field Day

KAMPSVILLE
Nature lovers, landowners and forestry enthusiasts can learn, explore and connect with experts in the field

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



2025 Quilt Spectrum

APRIL

4-5

Hands All Around Quilt Guild presents this show featuring multiple vendors and food trucks serving breakfast and lunch. On the last day, a quilt and baskets will be raffled off, and mystery scrap bags will be for sale while supplies last.

April 4-5, 2025: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday

● Interstate Center, 1106 Interstate Drive, Bloomington
Admission: \$10, \$1 for kids ages 6-12
309-530-3654, haaqq.com

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

APRIL

11-13

This reimagining of the biblical story of Joseph, his father Jacob, 11 siblings and coat of many colors is told entirely through song with the help of a main character narrator. The music features a variety of styles, including parody, country-western and calypso, alongside unforgettable classics.

April 11-13, 2025: 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday

● Kirkland Fine Arts Center, 1184 W. Main St., Decatur
Admission: Tickets range from \$20-\$30; \$12 for children
217-424-6318, millikin.universitytickets.com



Gem, Mineral, Fossil & Jewelry Show

APRIL

12-13

Discover a world of gemstones, fossils and minerals at this Southern Illinois Earth Science Club-sponsored annual show. Shop unique finds, enjoy live demonstrations and explore hands-on activities for all ages. Perfect for collectors, hobbyists and families alike.

April 12-13, 2025: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday

● The Pavilion, 1602 Sioux Drive, Marion
Admission: \$2, free for children 18 and under
618-993-2657, thepavilionevents.com

Country Easter

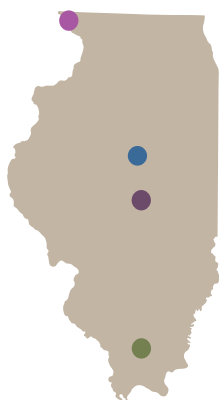
APRIL

19

Enjoy wagon rides, crafts, a hot chocolate bar with cookies and an Easter Egg Hunt. The Easter Egg Hunt will take place promptly at 10:30 a.m. with more than 500 eggs on the property for kids to find. A backup plan is in place for an indoor hunt if the weather does not cooperate. Register online.

April 19, 2025: 10 a.m. to noon

● Shenandoah Riding Center, 200 N. Brodrecht Road, Galena
Admission: varies
815-777-9550, shenandoahridingcenter.com



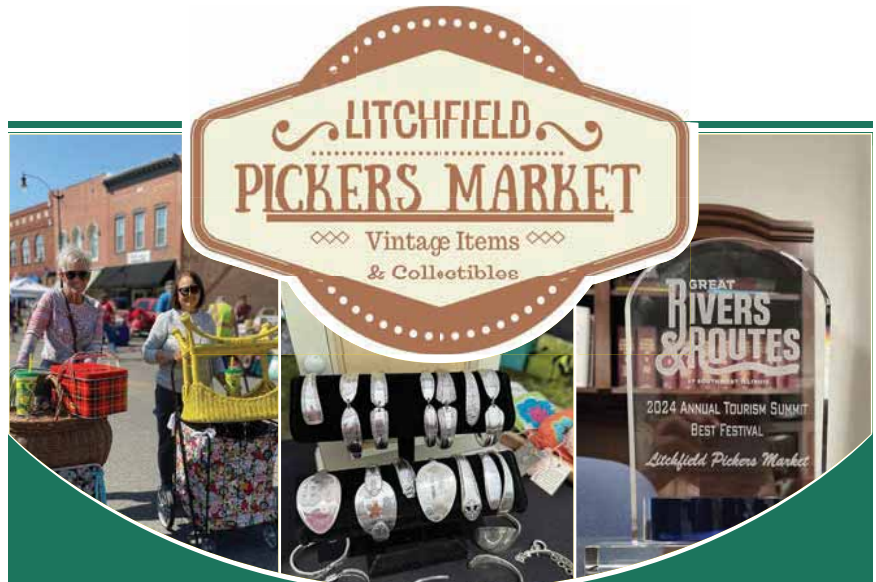


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Help keep line crews safe

Carelessness causes safety hazards for motorists and workers

ORANGE ROAD SIGNS ARE not just for highway construction zones; they also apply to utility work zones. The 2025 National Work Zone Awareness Week is April

Cars or trucks that go too fast do not only endanger workers on the ground. Driving too fast or not moving over can also put a line-worker who is working high up in

than twice as many work zone crashes happen on weekdays compared to weekends, so be extra cautious driving to and from work. To help prevent fatalities and injuries, remember the following guidelines while driving.

- **Stay alert.** Always be cautious when approaching a work zone. Slow down and pay attention to signs, flaggers and workers. Be prepared for sudden stops.
- **Keep a safe distance** between your vehicle and traffic barriers, trucks, construction equipment and workers.
- **Be patient.** Traffic delays are sometimes unavoidable, so try to allow time for unexpected delays in your schedule.
- **Obey all signs** and road crew flag instructions. Work zones have reduced speed limits for a reason. Follow them to keep everyone safe. Respect the guidance of barriers, cones and flaggers.
- **Merge early** and be courteous to other drivers. Don't wait until the last moment to move over when lanes ahead are closed.
- **Use your headlights** at dusk and during inclement weather.
- **Minimize distractions.** Avoid changing the radio station, using a cell phone, eating while driving and other distractions.


21-25. While you should always be a safe driver, remember to take extra caution in a work zone.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, nearly 900 people died in 2022 in a work zone crash. Speed was the most significant factor in 34% of those deaths. Slowing down before entering work zones helps save lives, including the lives of our crew members, who must often work roadside to maintain or restore power.

a bucket in serious danger by causing it to move or sway into high-voltage lines.

Electric utility vehicles and workers often share streets and roadways with motorists in order to access overhead power lines and other electrical equipment. This can be dangerous for workers and motorists.

Safe Electricity urges you to go slowly and be especially careful when you see crews at work. Fatal work zone crashes occur most often in the summer and fall. More

The most common crash in a roadway work zone is the rear-end collision, so remember to leave at least four car lengths of braking distance between you and the car in front of you. Please, take extra care in work zones, and remember, work zones are temporary — death is final. For more information about electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org. 



Erin Hollinshead is the executive director of Safe Electricity, an electrical public safety awareness program of the Energy Education Council.

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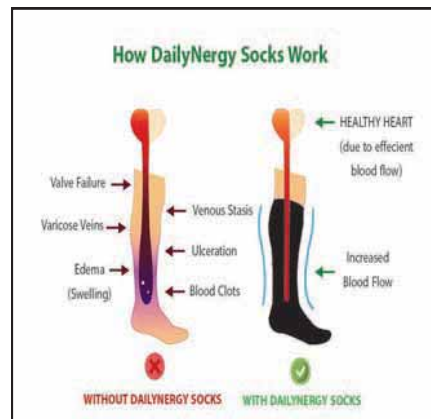
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PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK GILLILAND

Using a fan can make a warm room more comfortable without adjusting the thermostat. Fans cool people (and pets), not rooms. Turn fans off in unoccupied rooms.

Cool savings ahead

Simple ways to boost energy efficiency before the summer heat hits

SPRING IS IN THE air, and before you know it, summer will be here. There are many ways to get a jump-start on preventing summertime's high bills and energy waste.

Add your cooling equipment to the spring-cleaning checklist. An annual tune-up by a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) professional should include refrigerant charge, airflow adjustment and condenser and evaporator fan coil cleaning. This helps maximize your system's efficiency and the lifespan of your equipment, reducing wasted energy and costs.

Some HVAC companies offer discounts for cleaning equipment during the months when they are less busy. Once high temperatures hit, they are more likely to be swamped with calls to repair or replace broken equipment. Signing up for an annual maintenance plan may provide additional savings.

A dirty furnace filter can waste energy by causing your system to work harder. Make sure you have a stack of replacement filters ready to go so you are more likely to replace

them as needed. Filters can be less expensive if you buy them in bulk.

Ductless heat pumps, also known as mini-splits, have a filter in the indoor unit, or head, which should be cleaned. If you clean the indoor filter yourself, be sure to turn the unit off before removing the filter and let it dry completely before putting it back.

As we transition from cool to warm weather, keep an eye on your thermostat settings. The Department of Energy recommends setting cooling temperatures to 78 degrees F when you are home and higher when away. You can save as much as 10% a year on heating and cooling by adjusting your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees from its normal setting for eight hours a day.

One way to feel cooler is using fans in the room you're in or when you're sleeping. Using a fan can make a warm room feel cooler without having to adjust the thermostat. Remember, fans cool people, not rooms. Turn fans off in unoccupied rooms.

If your ceiling fan has a reverse function, make sure you flip the

switch so it blows air down into the living space. The reverse function is great at circulating warm air in the winter, and you can maximize the comfort benefit of a fan by switching the flow of air seasonally.

Another consideration before summer hits is your home's impact on peak load — when demand for electricity is highest. This typically occurs in the morning when people are getting ready for work and in the evening when they return home. Consider starting the dishwasher before you go to sleep or starting a load of laundry outside of peak times.

If you have solar panels and are generating electricity, run your dishwasher or do laundry when your system produces the most electricity, which is typically during the sunny midday.

Cooking outdoors in summer is a great way to save energy. Using the stove or oven heats your kitchen, which requires more energy for cooling. Clean your grill now so you are ready to enjoy outdoor cooking.

Incorporate these tips into your summer prep to save energy and lower your bills. 💡



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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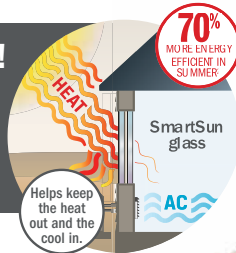
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PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRI WHITLEY

The power of progress

Beneficial electrification trends and rural America

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES HAVE A rich history of improving the quality of life for their members. Since the early 20th century, electric co-ops have brought electricity — or electrification — to rural communities, transforming daily life and boosting local economies.

Today, the modern electrification movement continues this legacy by providing significant cost savings and empowering smarter, more informed electric cooperative consumer-members.

The concept of beneficial electrification focuses on replacing direct fossil fuel use with electricity in ways that reduce overall costs. By adopting electric technologies, members may see financial savings. There are several ways electrification can lead to cost savings.

Electric vehicles

Transitioning from gasoline-powered cars to EVs can significantly reduce fuel costs. Electricity is generally cheaper than gasoline, and EVs often have lower maintenance costs due to fewer moving parts.

Heat pumps

Replacing traditional heating systems with electric heat pumps can improve energy efficiency and lower home heating bills. Heat pumps

use electricity to transfer heat rather than generate it, making them more cost-effective in the long run.

Energy-efficient appliances

Upgrading to energy-efficient appliances can reduce electricity consumption and save money on utility bills. Modern appliances are designed to use less energy while providing the same level of performance.

Smart home technologies

Using smart thermostats and home energy management systems can optimize energy use and reduce waste. Smart devices allow you to monitor and control your energy consumption, leading to more efficient use of electricity and lower energy bills.

Future of rural electrification

Beyond financial savings, electrification has been a cornerstone of improving the quality of life in communities served by electric cooperatives. Since the early 20th century, the introduction of electricity has revolutionized rural areas, providing access to modern conveniences and fostering economic growth.

Today, the benefits of electrification continue to enhance daily life in several ways. Electric technologies, such as heat pumps and smart home

devices, offer greater comfort and convenience. Consumers can enjoy consistent heating and cooling, as well as the ability to control their home's energy systems remotely.

Additionally, electrification can improve indoor air quality and reduce health risks associated with burning fossil fuels. Electric stoves, for example, eliminate the need for open flames and reduce the emission of harmful pollutants.

Smart technologies also empower consumers to make informed decisions about their energy use. Access to real-time data and insights provide a better understanding of energy consumption patterns and identify more opportunities to save energy and money.

Electric cooperatives have a long history of empowering their consumer-members through electrification, and beneficial electrification is a powerful strategy for creating a sustainable and cost-effective energy landscape.

From the early days of bringing electricity to rural areas to today's modern electrification movement, electric co-ops continue to play a vital role in enhancing quality of life. As co-op members embrace electric technologies, they can enjoy immediate benefits while contributing to a smarter energy future. 💡



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.

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Magic in MOVEMENT

Autism therapy embraces brain-body connection

By Lisa Cherry

SOMETHING MAGICAL HAPPENS WHEN humans move their bodies. While the motivation for many people is physical — as are the results we typically notice — there is something far more profound at work on another level. This is true of humans of all ages and abilities, but undeniable when witnessing the power of movement in treating autism and the progress across the board of those who participate in autism movement therapy.

Take Connor, for instance. Connor, who lives in Pana and turns 21 this year, is autistic. He works at Brewin' Hope Coffeehouse and at Save A Lot, the grocery store in town, alongside a job coach. These days, he can speak in short sentences, which was not always the case. His independence has been the result of a journey, not only for him, but for Erica Matthews, owner and lead instructor of Autism and Movement Project (AAMP)/Autism Movement Therapy (AMT) in Pana, and Connor's mother Amanda, who also works for the program.

"My mom was Connor's aide when he was in preschool. When I was in high school and junior high, I would go over to Washington [Elementary] School, where my mom was during summer, and work with all those kiddos over there," says Matthews. "My mom would come home, and she would practice [DTT] with me for Connor."

According to the National Institutes of Health, DTT is an acronym for Discrete Trial Teaching, which is based on applied behavior analysis (ABA). DTT involves breaking skills down into steps. "Connor and I developed this unique relationship where I could get him to do things that he wouldn't do for mom or for the other teachers," says Matthews. "At this time, he was technically nonverbal ... but he could put together a 75-piece puzzle starting from the middle. He could do math problems."

She says that over time, their relationship grew. "If it was just [the two of us] at the house, he would do things for me, talk to me ... when I say talk, he would echo," Matthews explains. "But, when we were in public, it's like I wasn't there. I couldn't get him to focus on me."



The complexities of communicating with him sparked her interest in ABA and working with autistic children. So, when a friend encouraged her to attend an autism therapy program at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) in Charleston, Matthews reached out to Connor's mom.

"I was like, 'Let's just go check it out,'" she says. "We went a few Saturdays, and I could tell Connor was calmer after [participating]."

At a subsequent event, EIU featured speakers Joanne Lara, founder of Autism Movement Therapy, and autistic scientist, professor, author and autism awareness advocate Temple Grandin. During their talk, Lara mentioned her new DVD, "Aut-erobics." Matthews purchased it to try at home with Connor, who was then in second grade and already as tall as her.

"It's a lot of movement. Connor didn't like movement then," she laughs, adding that they were both drenched in sweat by the time she was able to bribe him to finish it. "We did that video, those different exercises, every day after school for two weeks," she says.

Then, something exciting happened. "I remember coming in the back door, and he's sitting at the table eating chips and dip. I said, 'Hey, Connor, where's mom?' — just expecting him to echo it back, and he goes, 'She's upstairs,'" Matthews describes. "I still get teary-eyed over it after all these years. I remember screaming for Amanda to come down. ... I'm like, 'That's it. I have to go.'"

Spurred into action by two small words, but one very big sentence, Matthews flew to Los Angeles for a two-day training session to earn her certification in autism movement therapy. Upon returning, she hit the ground running, opening AAMP/AMT in 2012.

"The first six kids I had were all ones my mom had at school. Those parents took a leap of faith," she says. These days, the program serves more than 140 clients. "Those six kids and [Connor] have stayed," adds Matthews. "I have some kids who stay for a very long time. I have others who stay for as long as they need to. [It's whatever] the family needs."

Just as the program's numbers have grown, so have its services. Because a lot of her "kiddos" continue to attend as they get older, the need for new programs became apparent. "Those kids [started] becoming adults and transitioning from high school. I didn't realize that after high school, there's not a lot here ... [so,] we started Jumpstart,"

Matthews explains. The class focuses on team-building and life skills to help young adults achieve some level of independence.

In 2019, to further facilitate that part of their education, Matthews, armed with the encouragement of supporters in the community, launched Brewin' Hope, a coffeehouse where her older kids could also learn job skills. Though reluctant at first to take on even more, she feels it turned out to be one of the best things they've done. "It was something we needed to do," she says.

Community support has been a consistent blessing since AAMP's doors opened. From partnering with other local business owners to offer real-life work experience to fundraisers, generous donations, even the gift of a second building and a grant for the construction of an elevator to better equip the growing operation, Matthews says the community has kept them going.

Autism Movement Therapy is a movement-based program designed to help individuals on the autism spectrum improve communication, motor and cognitive skills.

"I always want to make sure that I give back, too," she says. "I want the community to know and see how much we appreciate what they do and how they impact [us]."

A \$20,000 donation came via a partnership between Shelby Electric Cooperative and CoBank's Sharing Success program — an annual fund that matches contributions to charitable donations. "That whole crew, they really did us wonders with the money they raised for us," says Matthews. "I wasn't expecting that, but [it was] a big game changer in the things that we could offer this year."

Contributions like these are critical to their ability to reach and treat children in need of its services, because to encourage frequent sessions, she has made a point of keeping fees low. "I'm not just seeing them once a week," Matthews says. "I want to see [kids] multiple times. I want to see them improve [and] succeed."



Left: Erica Matthews leads a young student through a sequence of movements.

Above: Matthews with Connor, who inspired her passion for movement therapy.



In the long run, her desire is to create a hub for parents and their special needs kids, with space for parents and play areas for siblings, along with physical, occupational and speech therapists, to save families from having to “go all over God’s green Earth to get the therapies they need,” she says. “That’s my end goal.”

Her collaborative relationship with Amber Miller, licensed clinical social worker, equine therapist and certified therapeutic riding instructor at Kemmerer Village in Assumption, epitomizes the type of integrated therapy experience Matthews is hoping to eventually provide.

“She refers kids to me; I refer kids to her,” says Matthews. “Getting the body to move in the correct way on the horse gives a whole different kind of stimulation. The horse gives off energy, and the kids get that energy.” She explains that when children combine riding a horse with exercises taught at AAMP, the combination of sensory experiences becomes exponentially beneficial.

“What you see is a happy kid on this big, strong animal and them having fun and being connected.”

Miller has seen the benefits firsthand in Kemmerer’s Horses for Heroes program. “Each season, I was seeing so many increased verbal skills and better communication and strength, and without fail, whenever I asked the parents what’s going on, what’s helping with this, they would talk about AAMP,” she says. “Eventually, Erica and I got together and started learning [how] to coordinate some of our services.”

Miller goes on to explain how the pairing of their two programs is achieving this level of success. “A lot of the movements in AAMP [center] around crossing the hemisphere. Anytime you have movements that cross the midline [an imaginary line that divides the body into left and right halves], you’re stimulating both hemispheres of the brain at the same time, so you’re encouraging cross-brain connections. You are literally strengthening the brain,” she says. “We do a lot of activities that incorporate that — putting rings on poles or reaching across things — but riding itself, the bilateral rhythmic stimulation of the horse’s movement, is doing that for your entire nervous system while you’re riding.

“It’s exciting. There’s a tremendous amount of research where autism and trauma are overlapping, because it all has to do with neurological development and how to promote increased growth moving forward, and movement is integral to it,” Miller adds. “Particularly if that movement can have some bilateral, rhythmic stimulation to it, it really promotes good cross-brain connections.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEMMERER VILLAGE

At a seminar she attended years ago, she remembers a discussion about how to choose photos of children with disabilities for fundraising purposes. Miller finds it ironic when compared to what she witnesses in the arena.

“What happens when you’re taking pictures of the kids with the horses is the [disability] kind of disappears; you can’t see it,” she says. “Certainly, when you’re interacting with a child with autism while they’re riding, you do still note the social and communication delays, but as you’re approaching them, it’s not the first thing you see. What you see is a happy kid on this big, strong animal and them having fun and being connected.

“The connection, so often with children with autism, there’s kind of that vacant feeling. With the horses, I don’t see that as much. ... Horses don’t connect verbally with people. It’s all in energy and movement and reading one another’s intentions and body language, but much more than body language. Like you’re sitting in a class, [and] you know someone’s staring at you. Horses operate a huge percentage of the time on that sense, and I believe that a lot of people with autism do as well,” Miller continues.

Matthews adds that the different forms of movement therapy can also help the body understand where it is in space. “The majority of my kids wouldn’t be able to walk in and just sit down and know that chair is going to be there. They have to grab it and sit, or, if the room’s dark, they’re not going to be able to walk through ... and not run into something,” she explains. Sequential patterns help with that. For younger kids, the patterns are short; for example, one sequence might be eight arm circles forward, eight arm circles back, eight forward, eight back, followed by play time.

Once one level is mastered, the patterns increase in speed and difficulty. “We build up [to] where they have a longer duration. Once they can do all the dances and transitions easily, they’re ready for group,” says Matthews. “Group is a slow dance, then a faster dance, then games and art. We build up so we can desensitize.”

Other examples begin with bear crawls and crab walks, advancing to “crab walk cross touch” (another cross-midline exercise). “The little kids can’t do that yet. It’s too much, so we increase it as we go along, as they go up,” she adds. “The same thing with

the team-building games; they get harder. The social games, they get harder. ... There are different levels of it, but the core is the sequence, because you have to have that repetition for your brain to make new pathways.”

The passion for progress in their students is obvious when speaking to Matthews and Miller. Both emphasize the importance of collaboration across the different fields of medicine.

“The field of equine therapy is changing. It’s a rapidly developing field,” says Miller. “It’s taken on so many different shapes. You have Refuge Ranch near Rochester ... Greenville College is adding an equine science program. ... There’s a lot of great opportunities.”

Matthews agrees. “I’d really like to have myself and other knowledgeable people, therapists [and] instructors from different areas collaborate,” she says. “I would love to hear ideas or ‘Hey, what are you struggling with? This is what I’m struggling with. I’ve tried this, this and this. [Do] you guys have any ideas on what to do with this, and could [you] help them, too?’

“It would be great to collaborate with other people and get resources for families. I’d like that to eventually come to fruition, too.”

Left: Amber Miller assists a young rider taking part in the Horses and Heroes program at Kemmerer Village.

Below: One of Erica Matthews’ older students prepares an order at Brewin’ Hope Coffeehouse.





RACE ACROSS ILLINOIS

*80-mile relay race connects
Mississippi and Ohio rivers*

Kelsey Burrow of O'Fallon
rounds a curve during the
2023 River to River Relay.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE KIDD

By Les O'Dell

STEVE KIDD SETS HIS alarm for 4 a.m. He has big plans for the day. He's not alone in getting up that early on a Saturday. Friends and colleagues join him in rising before the sun — in fact, 2,000 of them — all with the same agenda. They are going to run across the state of Illinois.

Kidd, of Millstadt, and a host of other runners from around the nation and world descend on deep southern Illinois one Saturday each April for the annual River to River Relay. This 80-mile race features teams of eight taking turns carrying a relay baton through 24 segments, starting from the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River in the northwest corner of Union County, through Johnson and Pope counties, and ending at the usually quiet town of Golconda on the banks of the Ohio River.

Around 6 a.m., as the first runners traverse the 3.6-mile steep gravel downhill that makes up the relay's inaugural section, their teammates make their way to the first exchange zone, where the team's No. 2 runner takes over for the next leg.

"The race itself is crazy," says Kidd, who has participated in nearly a dozen River to River Relay races and plans to in the 2025 race set for April 26. "Once you start running, you're just in and out of the van all day. You play a sort of hopscotch all day long, picking up one runner and dropping the next one off in these exchange zones."

Team leaders spend the days leading up to the race analyzing the segments, trying to match runners' strengths to the maps and graphs in the race packet, each including information on the various segments of the relay. Runner No. 1 (who runs

sections 1, 9 and 17) must like running downhill. Likewise, many teams assign their strongest runner to segments 6, 14 and 22 (the latter notorious for being the most brutal leg of the entire race, thanks to a nearly 350-foot climb in elevation).

"It's split up like a bunch of SK runs," Kidd explains, "so runners are doing three SKs in a day, and everyone's going to run somewhere between 9 and 12 miles in total, depending on which legs of the race they run. You take turns running all day."

He says running with many other athletes and spending seven to eight hours in the van with teammates makes for great camaraderie. He adds that the environment is a huge plus, too. "The scenery is maybe the best part of it; some of the views are great," he adds, pointing out that the route runs through portions of the Shawnee National Forest and the Southern Illinois Wine Trail.

"This is a great event that showcases the opportunities across southern Illinois, not only for running, but [for] hikers, bicyclists and so many others," explains Carol Hoffman, executive director of the Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau. "It definitely benefits the region."

Former Race Director Brad Dillard says those benefits include significant boosts to area businesses. While it has been nearly two decades since an economic impact study was conducted, runners' meals, rental vans, hotel rooms and other experiences add up to millions of dollars. Plus, he adds that many out-of-town and out-of-state runners find the region so welcoming that they return.

But, they come first to run through the southern Illinois countryside and pass a baton, leapfrogging from one exchange point to the next. The race's official website (r2rrelay.com) tries to capture the essence of the race:

"The relay is the equivalent of three hard races in one day. Runners recover as best they can while other team members take a turn, encountering mud, hills, dust, hills, sweat, hills ... They learn to welcome the cramped quarters of a vehicle occupied by seven other muddy, dusty, sweaty, tired people and wonder why they were picked to tackle the terrible hill on section 22. The euphoria on reaching the finish line at the Ohio River, running in together as a team, resolves all the doubt."

Once runners approach the finish line 11 or 12 hours after the race began, it has become tradition that teammates join the anchor runner in the last hundred yards to cross the finish line. Once they've completed the race, they find live music, massage therapists, food vendors and their earned "River to River Relay Finisher" T-shirts, which they almost always don before taking a team photograph on the levee overlooking the Ohio River.

Dillard says the race has become a "must" for many runners. Each year, representatives of more than 500 prospective teams vie for 190 slots when the first-come-first-served online registration system opens each fall. "We've had the website go down several times because of the flood of hits. Every year we get runners from 30 or 40 different states. Runners from all 50 states and even some from overseas have competed."

Some teams have better odds of getting into the relay each year, as organizers hold 60 slots for top-finishing teams from the prior year. And, while the relay's rules and structure are taken seriously, the event is meant to be fun. In past years, runners have worn chicken suits, some exchanges have featured disc jockeys, and Dillard says there's even been one on-course marriage proposal involving a couple who met on the roads of southern Illinois.

The relay's longevity (the initial race was in 1987), is a testament to the volunteers, local government and law enforcement personnel and others who make the event, well, run. "We have several hundred volunteers out on the racecourse, regardless of the weather — amateur radio operators, emergency medical service providers and more. Most relays don't have that," Dillard says.

"It's a great event with a great tradition," current Race Director Kyle Orso told The Southern Illinoisan newspaper. "It is hard to explain to people who do not run, but the emotions and the connections people have with this relay are something you don't get anywhere else." 💡

Top: Jason Swann of Herrin begins a segment of a recent River to River Relay.
Middle: A map of the race depicting the route across three counties in southern Illinois, including Union, Johnson and Pope.
Bottom: A team poses in front of the Ohio River with their relay baton and sporting their commemorative "River to River Relay Finisher" shirts.



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE KIDD



CARTOGRAPHY BY LEONARD WALTHER



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE KIDD



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DRIVE 'N THEATRE

And now, for the feature presentation

Drive 'N Theatre creates an experience for moviegoers

By Kayla Adkins

DRIVE 'N THEATRE IN Newton is kicking off its 72nd season, and owner Tammy Bergbower is ready to create some movie magic. Originally named Fairview Drive-in Theatre, this drive-in showed its first movie in 1953 on a single 72-by-36-foot screen with 250 parking spaces for eager moviegoers.

The Fairview closed in fall 2014 and was put up for sale. Bergbower, having been a stay-at-home mom, decided she wanted something new to do as her kids got older. Living with her family right behind the drive-in, the opportunity presented itself to her from her own backyard.

She bought the business, which is on Norris Electric Cooperative lines, and quickly made necessary upgrades, including a new concession building and a digital projector. The newly named Drive 'N Theatre played its first movie in June 2015 during a downpour. But, that didn't stop the community from coming out to watch.

"A lot of times people aren't going to come to the drive-in when it's raining. Let me tell you, people did. They just poured in here," says Bergbower.

Her dedication to her business is obvious. She's there every night and can usually be found walking among the cars, greeting customers and taking photos.

However, she isn't always easy to spot. Depending on the movie, Bergbower will often dress up as a character from the film. Out of the characters she has dressed up as over the years, she considers Joy from "Inside Out 2" her favorite. But it wasn't the costume that made it so special.



Tammy Bergbower

"I could just tell [it was special for visitors] because of all the little kids coming up and just hugging me," she says.

Bergbower also talks fondly about her staff and the environment they have created. She says her high school students work for her each season until they go off to college.


"It's just really a fun environment. The customers, the guests — they are wonderful."

She asserts that despite the number of streaming services and at-home options for watching movies, there is just no comparing the experience of a drive-in theater.

Although the 250 marked spots from the original drive-in remain, more room has been allocated for vehicles, though sometimes that is still not enough. Movie tickets are normally available online, but for highly anticipated films, she only sells tickets on site, since they will likely sell out.

Drive 'N Theatre also hosts events such as Easter egg hunts in the spring and a corn maze in the fall, as well as pop-up events, and participates in local parades. "The community is wonderful,"

Bergbower says. "We have a lot of people who come out, who participate in some of our social media. It's just really wonderful."

The theater's average season runs from May to September, but special showings are sometimes scheduled for popular movies during nice weather. This season has already kicked off with Disney's live-action "Snow White." Updates on movie showings and events can be found on their website and Facebook page. For more information about featured movies and showtimes, go to driventheatre.com. 

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.

Drive 'N Theatre

16045 E. Highway 33, Newton
618-455-3100
driventheatre.com

Better than cannabis, better than CBD

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

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

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

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

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

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

Your Body’s Hidden “Soothing System”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEFORE
Creaky,
aching
knee



AFTER
Soothing,
ache-free
knee



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

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

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

All the Benefits of CBD – Without Cannabis

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

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

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

Additional research linked regular use to lasting comfort.

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

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

Get Moving Again with Mobilify

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

One user even reported getting results the

same day it was used.

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

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

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

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

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

How to Get Mobilify

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

To secure your bottle of this breakthrough natural joint discomfort reliever, buyers should call with Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-341-7198**. “The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers.”

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

The Hotline will be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow them to restock. Call **1-800-341-7198** to secure your limited supply of **Mobilify**. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again! Call NOW to qualify for a significant discount on this limited time offer. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **ICLMB425** when you call.

Busy as a bee

The story behind Benton's beloved Buzz Cafe

By Mary Blye Kramer



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BUZZ CAFE

ONE MINUTE, LEE MEDDERS was having breakfast with her husband at The Buzz Cafe in Benton, and the next minute, she owned it. Or at least that's how it seemed.

"The staff was busy that morning," Medders recalls. "I'd worked in restaurants and knew how to do everything, and I offered to help." The server was grateful and called over the owner, Mary Jane Graham. "It turned out that she was my husband's first boss. He worked for her at Bonanza Steakhouse when he was 16."

A couple of months later, Graham called Medders and asked if she'd like to buy the cafe. That was 18 years ago, and The Buzz Cafe is still buzzing.

From the beginning, Medders wanted to offer fresh food to her customers. "The vegetables don't come from a bag," she says. "We cut them up fresh each morning."

She also buys local seasonal fruits and vegetables and adds them to almost everything — salads, soups and sandwiches. "We experiment all the time," Medders says. "We now have about 30 soups we offer throughout the year."

A few items that previous owners created have been left unampered with, partly because they're delicious, and partly because Medders believes strongly in consistency. She doesn't want her customers to arrive for lunch only to find that something they love has been removed from the menu.

Medders' connection with her customers is one reason why the cafe is packed with regular customers nearly every day. "We have little notes taped behind the counter," Medders confides. "The notes read 'Dana salad' or 'Lisa panini,' for example, because that's what Dana or Lisa orders each time they come in."

Medders and her staff, some of whom have worked at The Buzz for more than a decade, banter about humorous

episodes that come up frequently during the lunchtime rush. "Customers who are regulars have their favorite menu items, and sometimes they forget exactly what the sandwich or meal is called," she says. "I have a great memory for faces, so I know what they're going to order when I'm there, but when I'm gone, it can create a bit of chaos."

So, the last time Medders was headed out of town, the staff created a sign that read, "Medders is on vacation. Please know what you eat."

Medders and the staff love their customers, and Medders says she feels lucky that everyone is so kind and friendly. "When it starts to quiet down," she explains, "we enjoy chatting with the customers, and a lot of times they hang out and talk about whatever might be going on in town that day."

Customers also have helped create some of the menu items. One sandwich is listed on the menu as the Sidekick, named after two girls who work at the courthouse across the street and call each other their sidekicks. Medders says the girls, along with several other customers and the staff, "created" the sandwich by requesting a few tweaks to a menu item, and now the new sandwich is one of The Buzz's more popular lunch offerings: a turkey and bacon sandwich made with sliced apples, Swiss cheese and mango chutney.

Paninis are also popular lunch options. Each is named after a town in Italy and, according to Medders, are basically built starting with the sauces: avocado poblano ranch, pesto/mayo, mango chutney and others. Along with a variety of cheese and vegetables, paninis are made with roast beef, chicken, turkey, corned beef or ham. There is also a vegetarian option.

Most people aren't able to slip away without an after-meal treat. A glass case near the register allows tantalizing views of whatever is available that day, whether it's white chocolate macadamia nut cookies, limoncello cheesecake, salted caramel brownies with pretzel crust or butter toffee pecan cookies.

Lemon bars are available every day simply because Medders has a customer who buys them every day. Cappuccino chocolate chip muffins have been offered for more than two decades because several customers stop by each morning to purchase them for breakfast.

Alongside an array of dozens of teas and coffees for sale, local elementary children are allotted an entire bookshelf for their artwork — most recently, miniature superhero sculptures and comic books that the children have written and illustrated. Paintings by local artists hang on rustic, antique doors; they add decor, and it's another way to display art for sale.

People who live in Franklin County know that Benton was once home to sisters of two famous people — Beatle's member George Harrison and actor John Malkovich. Medders got to know Malkovich's sister, Becky, after taking over ownership of The Buzz.

"Becky started bringing me mugs from places where she'd traveled," Medders explains. "We hung them along the upper ledge of the wall on one side of the cafe. Before long, other customers started bringing them in, and now we have mugs from all over the world, as well as from every state, except Delaware."

Not long ago, a customer brought back not only a mug, but a story that's one of Medders' favorites. "With all of the different food served at The Buzz, our chicken salad and our bread pudding are customer favorites," Medders says. "Someone will be traveling through town who hasn't been here in 10 years, and the first thing they ask is, 'Do you still have that delicious chicken salad?'" Medders adds that former owners came up with the recipes, served since the restaurant was founded in 1998, and she continues to offer both.

The story? The customer had been traveling somewhere in the southern part of the U.S. and had stopped for lunch at a cafe. After enjoying her meal, she asked about the bread pudding — did they serve it, and if so, how good was it? "It's good," replied the server, "but if you're ever in southern Illinois, make sure you go by a cafe called The Buzz in Benton. They have the best bread pudding I've ever eaten." 📍



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY BLYE KRAMER



Southwest salad



Hot wrap

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The Buzz Cafe

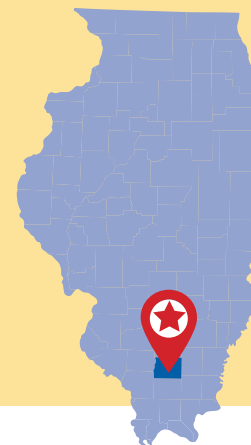
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HOURS

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Piece of cake

CAKE RECIPES OFFER A great and delicious way to explore baking, and there are so many flavor combinations to choose from. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced baker, these recipes will help fulfill your urge to bake and satisfy your sweet tooth. Plus, baking a cake provides the opportunity to share with family and friends. A few ICL readers shared some of their go-to favorites. The Honey Bun Cake is soft, sweet and perfectly spiced, just like the real thing. The lemon flavor adds a brightness to the German Butter Cake. The Yum Yum Cake isn't overly sweet and would pair well with a nice hot cup of coffee. Whichever cake you choose to make, you won't be disappointed. Happy baking. 🍩



Southern Honey Cake

WE NEED RECIPES!

Stone fruit
Drinks
Pastries
New favorites

Please email recipe submissions or questions to 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.



Recipes are prepared, photographed and taste-tested by Illinois Country Living staff.

Honey Bun Cake

Submitted by Sherry Reuter, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association

Servings: 12-16

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 box yellow cake mix | 4 tablespoons milk |
| 1 cup brown sugar | 4 eggs |
| 2 cups powdered sugar | 1 tablespoon vanilla extract |
| 3/4 cup vegetable oil | 8 ounces sour cream |
| 1 tablespoon cinnamon | |

Preheat oven to 325 F. Mix cake mix, oil, eggs and sour cream by hand, about 50 strokes. Put half the batter in a 9X13-inch pan. Combine brown sugar and cinnamon and spread over the cake. Spread the rest of the batter on top. Use a knife to make swirls in the cake. Bake 30-40 minutes, or until done. Blend powdered sugar, milk and vanilla extract, and spread on warm cake.

Fresh Apple Cake

Submitted by Debbie Mitchell, Corn Belt Energy Corporation

Servings: 12-15

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 cup vegetable oil | 1 cup walnuts, chopped |
| 2 cups all-purpose flour | Frosting: |
| 1 teaspoon baking soda | 1/2 cup butter, softened |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon | 1 pound powdered sugar |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | 8 ounces cream cheese, softened |
| 2 cups apples, peeled and chopped | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease and flour an 8X13-inch pan. Beat sugar, eggs and oil together with mixer until well blended. Mix in flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Fold in apples and walnuts. Pour into prepared pan. Bake 30-40 minutes, or until done. Blend all frosting ingredients together and spread on the cooled cake.

Yum Yum Cake

Submitted by Jalayne Lockett, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 9-12

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1/2 cup butter | 1 cup sour cream |
| 1 cup sugar | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 2 eggs | Topping: |
| 2 cups all-purpose flour | 1/3 cup brown sugar |
| 1 teaspoon baking powder | 1/3 cup white sugar |
| 1 teaspoon baking soda | 1 cup pecans, chopped |
| 1/2 teaspoon salt | |

Preheat oven to 325 F. In a medium bowl, cream butter with a hand mixer until soft. Add sugar and cream until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating after each. In a separate bowl, sift flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt together. Add dry ingredients alternately with sour cream into the wet ingredients, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Stir in the vanilla. Pour half of the batter into a 9X9-inch baking pan. Cover with half of the topping. Pour remaining batter over the topping and sprinkle the rest of the nut mixture over the top. Bake for 40 minutes, or until done.



Yum Yum Cake

German Butter Cake

Submitted by Mary L. Ross, Rockford

Servings: 12

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1/2 cup cream cheese, room temperature | 1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour |
| 1 cup butter, room temperature | Glaze: |
| 2 tablespoons lemon rind, grated | 2 tablespoons lemon juice |
| 1-1/2 cups sugar | 1 cup powdered sugar |
| 3 eggs | |

Preheat oven to 350 F. In a medium bowl, beat butter, cream cheese and lemon rind together until smooth. Add sugar and mix well. Add eggs one at a time, beating well with each egg. Stir in the flour and beat lightly until smooth. Spoon into a greased and floured Bundt pan. Bake about 1 hour, or until done. Let rest in the pan for about 10 minutes and invert onto a cooling rack. When the cake is cooled, mix the glaze ingredients together and drizzle over the top.



German Butter Cake

Southern Honey Cake

Submitted by Rosemary Wiley, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Servings: 12-16

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1/4 cup pineapple juice | 2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour |
| 1/4 cup water | 1 teaspoon baking powder |
| 3/4 teaspoon baking soda | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1 cup sugar | 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon |
| 3 eggs | 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice |
| 1 cup vegetable oil | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 1 cup honey | 1/2 cup pecans, chopped |

Preheat oven to 325 F. Combine pineapple juice and water in a small saucepan. Bring it to a boil. Stir in baking soda and set aside. Combine sugar, eggs, vegetable oil and honey and beat at medium speed in a mixer until well blended. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and allspice. Add the dry ingredients and the pineapple juice mixture alternately to the creamed mixture, beginning and ending with the flour mixture. Mix after each addition. Stir in vanilla and pecans. Spoon batter into a greased and floured 12-cup Bundt pan. Bake for 1 hour or until done. Cool for 10 minutes in the pan before inverting on a cooling rack.



Honey Bun Cake

Don't commit a lawn order violation

Wait before applying your spring lawn fertilizer

SPRING LAWN CARE IS useful for maintaining a healthy and vibrant stand of turf throughout the year. However, timing and proper techniques are essential to avoid common mistakes. Patience is an important word when it comes to spring lawn care. After being stuck indoors all winter, Illinoisans are

When lawn fertilizers appear on garden center shelves in mid-March, it seems logical to assume it is time to feed our lawn. Contrary to how we refer to fertilizer as “plant food,” fertilizers do not provide energy.


Plants get their food from photosynthesis, not fertilizer. Applying fertilizer to the lawn is like giv-

sacrifices energy that would have gone to root development.

For most spring fertilizer applications, the goal is not to wake up the lawn from winter but to give it a boost after it finishes its normal vigorous spring growth. The exact timing for spring fertilizer application varies based on weather patterns, but typically it's late April to early May for southern Illinois, early to mid-May in central Illinois, and mid- to late May in northern Illinois. A good gauge for spring fertilizer application is when you start to see the grass begin to slow down from initial spring growth.

If you fertilize your lawn only once a year, spring is not the recommended time to apply it. Instead, it is suggested to apply it in the late summer to early fall. This application window helps cool-season Illinois lawns recover from hot, dry summer months.

Crabgrass preventer with fertilizer (weed & feed), contains herbicide and fertilizer and is an example of a convenience product that sacrifices the ideal timing of one product over another. Crabgrass germinates when soil temperatures reach 55 degrees Fahrenheit for five days. Soil typically reaches this threshold early to mid-April for central Illinois, which is too early for fertilizer.

The allure of spreading lawn fertilizer in early spring is tempting; however, it's crucial to exercise patience and apply fertilizers at the right time to ensure long-term turf health and vitality. By understanding the needs of your cool-season lawn and timing your fertilizer applications appropriately, you can promote strong root development and prepare your lawn to withstand the challenges of the hot, dry summer months. For more tips, visit the Illinois Extension's website at go.illinois.edu/lawns. 



eager to start lawn care at the first sign of green. However, applying fertilizer too early is a common sight on many Illinois lawns.

Late last fall, cool-season grass was passing from active green growth to dormancy for the winter. In doing so, the turfgrass was storing a lot of energy in preparation for spring. Stored energy is needed to resume the lawn's growth when winter ends so the lawn can begin to grow vigorously and build a resilient root system for the hot, dry summer. All that stored-up energy is why we mow so much in the spring — sometimes more than once a week.

ing plants vitamins, which trigger a growth response. When applying nitrogen to a lawn, that growth response is to grow more leaf blades, which use up the plant's energy.

More leaves mean a greener and lusher lawn; this is true. An early fertilized springtime lawn will be practically glowing; however, these are short-term gains and mean lots of extra mowing. The goal of the cool-season lawn is to photosynthesize and begin to develop a root system that will help the plant survive the hot, dry summer months ahead. Because lawn fertilizer triggers a vegetative growth response, this increase in springtime leaf growth



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

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Mirrored moments

1. **PATRICIA A. GEAR**
*Shelby Electric Cooperative
Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia*
2. **SANDY THOMPSON**
*Norris Electric Cooperative
Timmy the cat*
3. **JOLENE HUSEMAN**
*Egyptian Electric Cooperative
Association*
4. **TIFFANY KELLER**
Norris Electric Cooperative
5. **JANE MILBURN**
Corn Belt Energy Corporation
6. **RICHARD BINGHAM**
*Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative
Crystal Lake near Ouray, Colo.*

UPCOMING THEMES

- June – Roads
- July – Forest scenes
- August – Stairs
- September – Art

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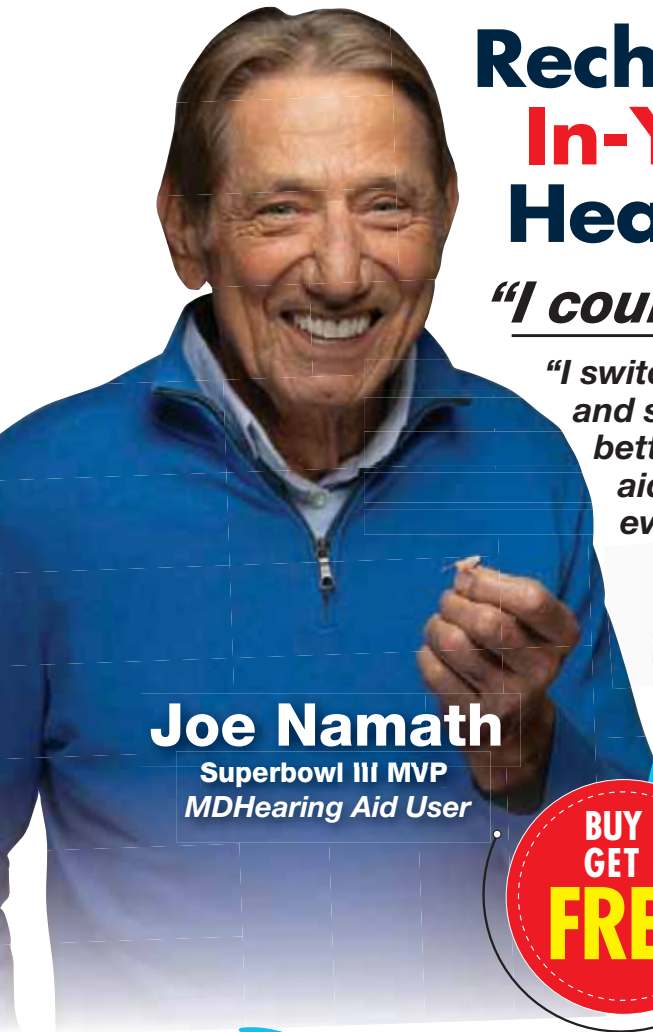
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