

Illinois Country Living

POWERFUL FUTURES IN THE MAKING

Memories from Youth Tour 2025



 Association of Illinois
Electric Cooperatives

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FEATURE
The adventures of
Walker Hanna

PRAIRIE TABLE
Feeding the soul at
Cedar Oak Farms

SUPPORT LOCAL
Where creativity
comes to roost

 **CO-OP
NEWS**

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(618) 997-6577

Parker Htg & Clg
(618) 357-8951

Paxton/Gibson City
Houston Plmb,
Htg & A/C
(217) 379-2329

Springfield/Virden
Snell Pbg & Htg
(217) 965-3911



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Illinois Country Living

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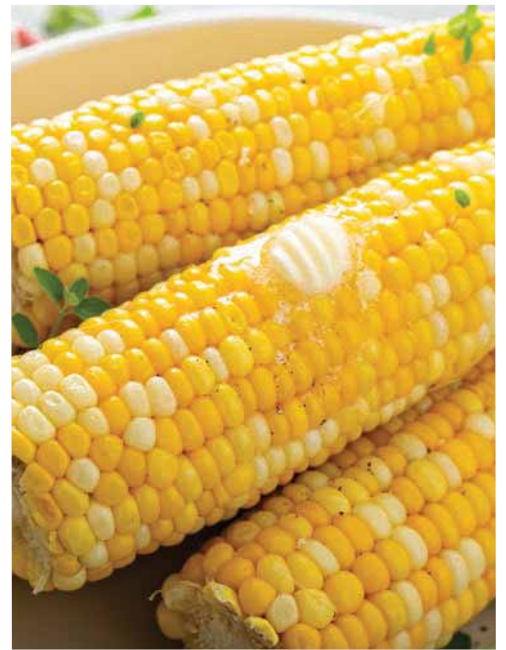
Modern-day Huck Finn invites followers to join him in the great outdoors.

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This month, **PRAIRIE TABLE** visits Cedar Oak Farms in Paxton.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TERESA STURM



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Illinois Country Living is a monthly publication serving the communications needs of the locally owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives of Illinois. With a circulation of more than 192,000, the magazine informs cooperative consumer-members about issues affecting their electric cooperative and the quality of life in rural Illinois.

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What sets co-ops apart

All power providers are not created alike

TRAVEL ANYWHERE IN THE U.S., and you'll find a place to plug in your phone charger. No matter where you go, you'll encounter the same wall socket used to access electricity. While the power charging your phone may be identical, the organizations delivering the electricity are not.

Electricity is delivered through three types of power providers: investor-owned utilities (IOUs), public power systems and electric cooperatives. Two-thirds of American homes and businesses receive their electricity through an IOU. Public power companies serve 15% and co-ops deliver power to 13% of the nation's consumers.

The biggest difference between the three is profit motive. Public power systems and electric co-ops are not-for-profit organizations. That means their primary motive isn't to make a profit, but to deliver electricity to the homes and businesses they serve at the most reasonable cost. In other words, their first objective is service.

Compare that to investor-owned utilities. As the name implies, IOUs are owned by investors. Those investors hold shares of stock in the utility. The goal of the IOU is to earn profits to raise the value of the stock and provide income to the shareholders in the form of dividends. No matter how much effort an IOU puts into being a good power provider for its customers, its ultimate goal is to make money for its owners.

Public power systems are owned by municipalities, which means they're technically owned by the taxpayers they serve. The people who run these government units want to keep the

taxpayers happy, so their goal is to keep rates low. Similarly, co-ops are owned by the members they serve, and their primary motivation is the same — to keep the cost of electricity as low as possible.

Decision-making is another differentiator. IOUs are large corporations. If one of their customers has a concern, they'll likely have a difficult time getting the utility's management to listen. For public power, the same officials elected or hired to manage things like streets and parks oversee operations. A customer can reach out to their government representative if they're unhappy with the service they receive.

Once again, co-ops are different. Their operations are managed by a volunteer board of directors made up of members. Those directors represent their neighbors and have an obligation to consider other members' concerns and preferences. A co-op member who has questions about their rates or concerns about their service can turn to their local director for answers.

Infrastructure needs represent another key difference. Public power providers and IOUs tend to serve areas like cities, suburbs and larger towns that have higher population densities. Most co-op service areas are in rural communities, where members are more widespread. As a result, co-ops average just 7.98 members for each mile of power line, compared to 32.4 customers per mile for the other types of power providers. That means co-ops must manage significantly more infrastructure for the number of homes and businesses they serve.

Because electric co-ops are inherently focused on the needs of their members, they center planning and operations around the region they serve. They also play active roles in building the economic strength within their service territory through community support and economic development initiatives.



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

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AUGUST CHECKLIST

For Back-to-School Safety Month, help keep kids safe as they travel to and from school.



Slow down in school zones.

Watch for reduced

speed limits and always obey crossing guards and school zone signals.

Stop for school buses.



Never pass a bus when its stop arm is out, including on multi-lane roads.



Watch for walkers and bikers.

Be extra

cautious at crosswalks, near parks and around neighborhood bus stops.

Avoid distractions.

Always stay alert while driving,



especially during school drop-off and pickup hours.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS GAINER, NRECA

Supporting summer electric reliability

What the latest grid report tells us

Extreme heat drives up demand for electricity as homes and businesses rely on air conditioning to stay safe and comfortable. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) issues an annual Summer Reliability Assessment, providing an independent view of how prepared the U.S. grid is to meet summer electricity demand.

This NERC assessment is a critical planning tool for electric utilities as they prepare for the summer season. It provides a comprehensive evaluation of the North American Bulk Power System and highlights areas of concern regarding reliability. The 2025 assessment found that while most areas are prepared for typical summer conditions, some regions may experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited due to planned or unplanned power outages.

The electric grid is a vast network comprised of power plants, transmission lines and distribution systems that work together to deliver electricity to homes and businesses. Grid reliability means ensuring enough electricity is always available to meet demand — even on the hottest days of the year.

According to NERC's assessment, the grid is experiencing rapid load growth. Across

North America, the total forecasted peak summer demand has increased by more than 10 gigawatts (GW) since 2024 — more than double the increase seen in 2023. This growth is being driven by continued economic activity, expansion of data centers and industrial facilities, and the increase of electrification across many sectors.

At the same time, more than 7.4 GW of generation capacity has been retired or gone inactive since last summer. Retirements include natural gas, coal, nuclear and other types of generation, which reduces the availability of dispatchable resources that can operate at any time to help balance the grid.

New resources are becoming available to help meet some of this growing demand. Over 30 GW of new solar capacity and 13 GW of new battery storage are expected to contribute to demand requirements this summer. These resources are especially helpful during peak daylight hours but can create operational challenges in the evening, when solar generation tapers off and the demand for electricity remains high.

While most regions are prepared to meet demand under normal summer conditions, the NERC assessment highlights that

Continued on page 8

Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

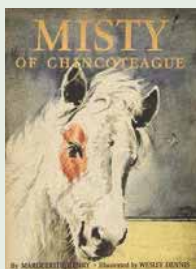
To solve the puzzle, each row, column and box must contain each of the numbers 1 to 9. Level: Medium

Solution on page 33.

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

IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

Readers may vaguely remember a collection of children's novels about wild ponies set on the shores of Assateague and Chincoteague, barrier islands off the coast of Virginia. What you may not know is that the beloved books, penned by Illinois author Marguerite Henry, were based on a true story.



The first book, a Newbery Honor winner titled "Misty of Chincoteague," tells the tale of a 16-year-old Palomino mare who survived a Level 5 nor'easter in a farm kitchen and came to live with two orphans on their grandparents' farm.

When the author traveled to Chincoteague to write a book about the wild ponies, she visited the Beebe Ranch, home to the real Misty, and was so taken with the horse she had her shipped back home to Wayne, Ill. Misty would often appear at Henry's book signings.

Other books in the series include "Stormy, Misty's Foal," "Sea Star" and "Misty's Twilight." Henry, born in 1902, wrote more than 50 books, some inspired by her home, Idle Hour Farm, and many about horses. The "Misty" books were illustrated by Wesley Dennis, who also illustrated Anna Sewell's "Black Beauty" and "The Red Pony" by John Steinbeck.

"Summer reliability" continued from page 7

some areas — including parts of the Midwest — face elevated risk of supply shortfalls during periods of above-normal demand or low resource availability. These risks may occur during extended heatwaves or when generation outages coincide with high loads.

Grid operators and electric cooperatives rely on the collective actions of individual consumers to help maintain reliability when the system is under stress. This is where co-op consumer-members can help. Stay informed and watch for communications from your electric co-op about peak demand periods or energy conservation requests. Quick actions by co-op members can make a meaningful difference.

Adjusting your thermostat by a few degrees, postponing use of large appliances until evening hours and turning off lights are simple, effective ways you can help ease strain on the grid.

As the electric grid evolves — with changing generation resources, new technologies and growing demand — maintaining reliable service requires careful planning and participation from everyone. Your electric co-op is working closely with power supply providers in preparing for peak demand, and your actions to conserve during these times are equally important.

Jennah Denney, NRECA



Wind power and rural America

While many think of wind energy as a new technology, people have harnessed the power of the wind for more than 2,000 years. American agriculture spread across the plains largely because of windmills that brought underground water to the surface to support crops and livestock. In other

places, windmills ran the grinding wheels that turned grain into flour.

Of course, turbines capable of generating commercial-scale amounts of electricity are a relatively recent development, and electric cooperatives have been quick to embrace the technology. Co-ops have long been among the leaders in deploying wind power, particularly through what's known as distributed wind generation. In fact, electric co-ops across the nation have expanded their renewable energy capacity by 192% over the past decade.

Wind energy provides co-ops and the areas they serve with some advantages. Large-scale wind turbines already offer some of today's lowest-cost power, and advances in technology continue to enhance their output and efficiency. In addition, rural and remote areas served by co-ops are home to some of the nation's highest-quality wind resources.

Nearly 150,000 Americans currently work in the wind power industry, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that wind turbine service technicians represent the decade's fastest-growing career. Besides producing electricity, wind projects generate nearly \$2 billion in taxes and lease payments annually, improving local economic health.

Wind energy also has its disadvantages. Understandably, it is less suitable in areas where the winds are too light or unpredictable, and installing turbines and their associated infrastructure in remote areas can be complex and costly, outweighing potential economic advantages. Maintenance and repairs in remote areas may also carry higher costs.

The operation of the turbines creates some environmental concerns. Birds and bats that fly into blades and towers may be injured or killed. The spinning turbine blades can be a source of noise for people living nearby, and many view the tall structures as eyesores.

It's also worth noting that the economics of wind energy often rely on state and federal incentives. Without those enticements, electric co-ops and commercial developers may find other forms of generation to be more affordable.

Scott Flood, NRECA

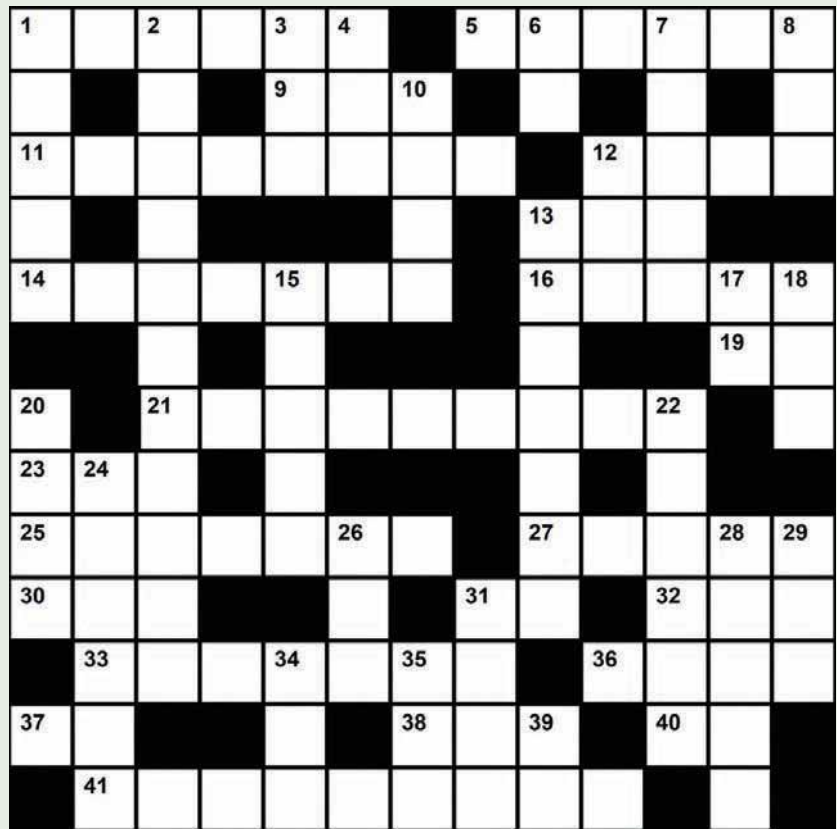
Across

- 1 "1984" author George
- 5 Harry the child magician
- 9 Slippery long sea creature
- 11 Great detective writer, Agatha _____
- 12 "Strangers" writer, _____ Koontz
- 13 "Heller with a _____" writer Louis L'Amour
- 14 John Grisham's book that was made into a movie, " _____ Jury"
- 16 "The Thinker" sculptor
- 19 Santa __, NM
- 21 Popular crime novelist with a recurring character, Alex Cross
- 23 Bill Withers " _____ me"
- 25 "Pirates of the Caribbean" character, Jack _____
- 27 Writer of "The Color Purple," _____ Walker
- 30 Between tic and toe
- 31 Dawn time, abbr.
- 32 Growling sound
- 33 Lee Child character, Jack _____
- 36 The Pequod captain in a famous Herman Melville novel
- 37 Approve
- 38 Proposal to buy
- 40 Yes in Mexico
- 41 "Of Mice and Men" author

Down

- 1 "The Importance of Being Earnest," _____ Wilde
- 2 Leo Tolstoy novel, 3 words
- 3 " _____ Miserables"
- 4 Allow
- 6 "The Wizard of _____"
- 7 Prevailing tendency
- 8 Harry's friend in J.K. Rowling novels
- 10 Calla _____ flower
- 12 Batman and Robin, e.g.
- 13 "The Firm" author, John _____
- 15 Sara Gruen novel " _____ for Elephants"
- 17 " _____ I ruled the world..." song
- 18 NYC part
- 20 Piece of statuary
- 22 Paddock sounds
- 24 "Message in a Bottle" writer, Nicholas _____
- 26 "That's amazing!"
- 28 Daniel who played 007
- 29 Tarzan author's monogram
- 31 "Strength, Courage and wisdom" singer India _____
- 34 Tai _____
- 35 Fall back, as a tide
- 39 Site of the National Art Gallery

Solution on page 33.



VCP **Voices for Cooperative Power**

Tell Illinois Lawmakers

PROTECT AFFORDABLE ENERGY

VISIT AIEC.COOP/ICLVCP TO HELP!



Where is it?

The winners of the June hidden objects contest were Brian Hartke of Norris Electric Cooperative and Gary Killgrove of SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

The fireworks hidden in the July 2025 issue were on page 28 in the Prairie Table section. 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. As kids get ready to head back to school this month, be on the lookout for a backpack, pictured above. The symbol can vary in size and will not be hidden on this page, a lettered page or in an ad.

Entries must include your name, address, name of your electric co-op (nonmembers are also eligible), and the page number and location of the symbol. Visit icl.coop/hiddenobject and fill out the entry form (also found under Contact Us on the website) or mail a postcard 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 25th. Only one entry is allowed per household every month. If multiple entries 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. 💡

2025 scholarship recipients announced

The Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarship Fund announced recipients for 2025. The fund has grown from initially awarding two \$1,000 scholarships in 1996 to now offering 17 \$2,500 scholarships.

The Illinois Community College System Foundation (ICCSF) administers the scholarship fund. The scholarships are available to high school seniors who plan to enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an accredited 2- or 4-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

Ten scholarships are awarded to students who are the sons or daughters of an Illinois

electric cooperative consumer-member. Five are reserved for students enrolling full-time at a 2-year Illinois community college who are sons or daughters of an Illinois electric co-op member or employee.

The Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship is awarded to one student who is the son or daughter of an Illinois electric co-op employee or director, and the Lavern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship goes to a student attending lineworker school at Lincoln Land Community College.

Congratulations to the 2025 Thomas H. Moore IEC Memorial Scholarship recipients. 💡

College or university recipients



Eliana Woodman
Corn Belt Energy Corporation



Courtney Drake
Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association



Taylor Clark
EnerStar Electric Cooperative



Macie Wright
M.J.M. Electric Cooperative



Brody Cummins
Menard Electric Cooperative



Joshua Gerfen
Monroe County Electric Cooperative



Matthew Held
Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative



Isabella Miller
Shelby Electric Cooperative



Carter Hertenstein
Tri-County Electric Cooperative



Jake Wiseman
Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative

Community college recipients



Macey Golder
Clinton County Electric Cooperative



Hannah Miller
Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative



Megan Brummer
Norris Electric Cooperative



Wyatt Arnold
SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative



Ethyn Bradley
Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship



Anna Biery
Western Illinois Electrical Coop.



Lavern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship



Garrett Neisen
Adams Electric Cooperative

LET'S GO!



41st Annual Tractor Show

AUGUST
16-17
Enjoy a parade, antique tractor pull, stationary engine show, pedal tractor raffles, swap meet, silent auction and games.

Aug. 16-17, 2025: all day
● Butler Haynes Park, 9424 S. Mapleton Road, Mapleton
Admission: free
309-620-1527

2nd Annual Honey Harvest: Bottle Your Own Honey

AUGUST
30
At this two-hour, bee-free event (held indoors), attendees will extract and strain a 1-pound bottle of wildflower honey to label and take home. The honey is included in the admission fee. Register online.

Aug. 30, 2025: multiple sessions throughout the day
● Dry Creek Beekeeping, 489 S. Clark Lane, Elizabeth
Admission: varies
815-297-3366, drycreekbeekeeping.com



Aug. 16 Artisan Demo & Exhibit

GALENA
Learn techniques that shaped daily life in early America

Aug. 16 Pony, Prosecco and Polaroids

GALENA
Adult pony party with Prosecco, wine, cheese and charcuterie

Sept. 5-6 Prairieview Fall Festival

DANFORTH
Activities for the whole family to enjoy at this annual event

Sept. 7 Jamboree Show

BIBLE GROVE
Live '50s and '60s music

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



Grape Stomp and Harvest Festival

AUGUST
31
The Annual Grape Stomp is an homage to Lucille Ball in "I Love Lucy." There will be wine flights all day and live music. Sign up for the stomp when you arrive or enter a Lucy look-a-like contest. All are welcome to dress up and have fun.

Aug. 31, 2025: noon to 6 p.m.
● Mackinaw Valley Vineyard, 33633 State Route 9, Mackinaw
Admission: \$5
309-645-5054, mackinawvalleyvineyard.com

Geneseo Quilt Guild Quilt Show 2025: Fall in Love with Quilts

SEPTEMBER
12-13
With more than 200 quilts on display, visitors will have a chance to vote for their favorite quilts on Friday; ribbons will be displayed on Saturday. Other highlights include a raffle for a quilt, bed turning, demonstrations, vendors and more. Proceeds help fund guild outreach projects.

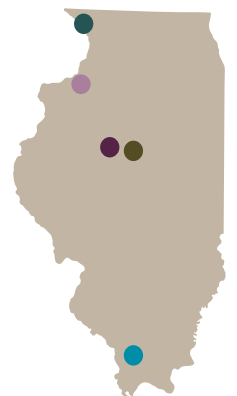
Sept. 12-13, 2025: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday
● Geneseo Community Center, 541 E. North St., Geneseo
Admission: \$5
facebook.com/geneseoquiltguild
geneseoquilters.wixsite.com/geneseocommquilters



The Warming Center Fundraiser

SEPTEMBER
13
Percussionist Kevin Lucas will perform a 3-hour concert at Blue Sky Vineyard for a good cause. The event is a fundraiser for the Carbondale Warming Center, a shelter for the unhoused. Donations are optional.

Sept. 13, 2025: 2-5 p.m.
● Blue Sky Vineyard, 3150 S. Rocky Comfort Road, Makanda
Admission: free, donations welcome
618-529-2184



Doctor urges seniors to carry medical alert device

Seniors snap up new medical alert device that comes with no monthly bills

People don't always do what their doctor says, but when seasoned veteran emergency room physician, Dr. Philip B. Howren, says every senior should have a medical alert device, you better listen up.

"Seniors are just one fall away from being put in a nursing home," Dr. Howren said. "With a medical alert device, seniors are never alone. So it keeps them living independently in their own home. That's why seniors and their family members are snapping up a sleek new medical alert device that comes with no monthly bills ever," he said.

Many seniors refuse to wear old style help buttons because they make them look old. But even worse, those medical alert

systems come with monthly bills.

To solve these problems Universal Physicians, a U.S. company went to work to develop a new, modern, state-of-the-art medical alert device. It's called "FastHelp™" and it instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

"This slick new little device is designed to look like the pagers doctors wear every day. Seniors love them because it actually makes them look important, not old," Dr. Howren said.

FastHelp is expected to hit store shelves later this year. But special newspaper promotional giveaways are slated for seniors in select areas. ■



■ **NO MONTHLY BILLS:** "My wife had an old style help button that came with hefty bills every month and she was embarrassed to wear it because it made her look old," said Frank McDonald, Canton, Ohio. "Now, we both have FastHelp™, the sleek new medical alert device that our grandkids say makes us look 'cool' not old," he said. With FastHelp, seniors never have to worry about being alone and the best part is there are no monthly bills ever.

Seniors born before 1961 get new medical alert device with no monthly bills ever

It's just what seniors have been waiting for; a sleek new medical alert device with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills that instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help with just the push of a button for a one-time \$149 price tag that's a real steal after today's instant rebate

The phone lines are ringing off the hook.

That's because for seniors born before 1961, it's a deal too good to pass up.

Starting at precisely 8:30am this morning the Pre-Store Release begins for the sleek new medical alert device that comes with the exclusive FastHelp™ One-Touch E 911 Button that instantly connects you to unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

"It's not like old style monitored help buttons that make you talk to a call center and only work when you're at home and come with hefty bills every month. FastHelp comes with state-of-the-art cellular embedded technology. That means it works at home or any-



■ **FLYING OUT THE DOOR:** Trucks are being loaded with the new medical alert devices called FastHelp. They are now being delivered to lucky seniors who call the National Rebate Center Hotline at 1-800-330-4294 DEPT. HELP8701 today. Everyone is calling to get FastHelp, the sleek new medical alert device because it instantly connects you to unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

where, anytime cell service is available whether you're out watering the garden, driving in a car, at church or even hundreds of miles away on a tour or at a casino. You are never alone. With just a single push of the One-Touch E Button you instantly get connected to free unlimited help nationwide with no monthly bills ever," said Jack Lawrence, Executive Director of Product Development for U.S. based Universal Physicians.

"We've never seen anything like it. Consumers absolutely love the sleek new modern design and most of all, the instant rebate that practically pays for it and no monthly bills ever," Lawrence said.

FastHelp is the sleek new medical alert device with the best of combinations: a quality, high-tech engineered device that's also an extremely great value because there are no monthly bills ever.

Better still, it comes with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever - which makes FastHelp a great choice for seniors, students and professionals because it connects to one of the largest nationwide networks everywhere cell service is available for free.

And here's the best part. All those who already have an old style monitored medical alert button can immediately eliminate those monthly bills, which is why Universal Physicians is widely advertising this announcement nationwide.

"So if you've ever felt a medical alert device was too complicated or expensive, you'll want to get FastHelp, the sleek new medical alert device with no monthly bills," said Lawrence.

The medical alert device slugfest was dominated by two main combatants who both offer old style monitored help buttons that come with a hefty bill every month. But now Universal Physicians, the U.S. based heavyweight, just delivered a knockout blow sending the top rated contenders to the mat with the unveiling of FastHelp. It's the sleek new cellular

embedded medical alert device that cuts out the middleman by instantly connecting you directly to highly trained 911 operators all across the U.S. There's absolutely nothing to hook-up or install. You don't need a land line and you don't need a cell phone. Everything is done for you.

"FastHelp is a state of the art medical alert device designed to make you look important, not

old. Old style monitored help buttons you wear around your neck, or require expensive base station equipment or a landline are the equivalent of a horse and buggy," Lawrence says. "It's just outdated."

Millions of seniors fall every year and spend hours lying on the floor helpless and all alone with no help.

But seniors who fall and get immediate help are

much more likely to avoid getting sent to a nursing home and get to STAY living in their own home independently.

Yet millions of seniors are still risking their safety by not having a medical alert device. That's because seniors just can't afford to pay the monthly bills that come with old style medical alert devices.

That's why seniors born before 1961 are rush-

ing to cash in the whopping \$150 instant rebate before the 21 day deadline ends.

So there's no need to wait for FastHelp to hit store shelves later this year because seniors born before 1961 can get it now just by using the \$150 instant rebate coupon printed in today's newspaper before the 21 day deadline ends. If lines are busy keep trying, all calls will be answered. ■

HOW TO GET IT:

► **IF BORN BEFORE 1961:** Use the rebate coupon below and call this Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-330-4294 DEPT. HELP8701

► **IF BORN AFTER 1961:** You cannot use the rebate coupon below and must pay \$299 Call: 1-800-330-9423 DEPT. HELP8701

THE BOTTOM LINE: You don't need to shop around. We've done all the leg work, this deal is too good to pass up. FastHelp with the instant rebate is a real steal at just \$149 and shipping and there are no monthly bills ever.

PROS: It's the sleek new medical alert device that comes with the exclusive FastHelp One-Touch E 911 Button that instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts or deposits. It connects you to the vast available network of cellular towers for free and saves seniors a ton of money because there are no monthly bills ever making this deal irresistible. Plus it's the only medical alert device that makes seniors look important, not old.

CONS: Consumers can't get FastHelp in stores until later this year. That's why it's so important for seniors born before 1961 to call the National Rebate Center Hotline within the next 21 days. For those who miss that deadline, the sleek little medical alert device will set you back over \$300 bucks.



P7366 OF24025R-1

REBATE COUPON

EXPIRES 21 Days from Today's Publication Date

After Coupon Expires: The FastHelp is \$299.00 plus shipping & handling

\$150 Off

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With no monthly bills ever.

FastHelp, the new medical alert device that instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

USE THIS COUPON: To get \$150 off FastHelp you must be born before 1961 and call the National Rebate Center Hotline at **1-800-330-4294 DEPT. HELP8701** before the 21 day rebate deadline ends.

FASTHELP IS COVERED BY A 30-DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE LESS SHIPPING AND A 1 YEAR LIMITED WARRANTY. FASTHELP IS A 4G CELLULAR DEVICE. FASTHELP WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE 911 CALLS WHEN CELLULAR SERVICE IS NOT AVAILABLE SUCH AS IN REMOTE OR HIGH DENSITY AREAS. WE SUGGEST TESTING CELLULAR CONNECTION BEFORE USE. SEE OWNERS MANUAL. FASTHELP USES GPS TRIANGULATIONS TO APPROXIMATE YOUR LOCATION WHEN YOUR DEVICE IS TURNED ON. DR. HOWREN IS A COMPENSATED MEDICAL ADVISOR AND FRANK MCDONALD IS AN ACTUAL USER AND COMPENSATED FOR HIS PARTICIPATION. OH RESIDENTS ADD 6.5% SALES TAX. UNIVERSAL PHYSICIANS 7747 SUPREME AVE, NORTH CANTON, OH 44720.



Smooth sailing starts with safety

Water recreation tips for summer fun

THE SUMMER HEAT BRINGS many people to the water — whether it's for boating, fishing or swimming. But, mixing water and electricity can be deadly. Water is a powerful conductor of electricity, so water enthusiasts must stay alert to potential electrical hazards in and around lakes or rivers. Whether you're enjoying a day at the lake or lounging on a dock, staying alert and taking safety precautions can help ensure everyone makes it home safely.

Know the forecast

Always keep an eye on the weather forecast before heading outdoors. If a thunderstorm is approaching, get to shelter immediately, preferably inside an enclosed building. Lightning can strike up to 10 miles from where it's raining. The best practice is to wait at least 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder or flash of lightning before heading back outside.

Fishing for safety

When fishing, be mindful of overhead power lines. Maintain at least 10 feet of distance between your boat or fishing equipment and any nearby power lines. If you're casting a fishing line, ensure it is directed well away from electrical

lines. For sailboats, always lower the mast before using a boat ramp.

If your boat ever contacts a power line, stay inside the boat. The surrounding water may be energized. Warn others to stay away and wait for help.

Dock and boat electrical systems

Electrical systems on docks and boats must be installed and maintained properly and inspected annually. All electrical work should be done by a qualified electrician familiar with marine codes. Some key safety measures include:

- Ground fault circuit interrupter breakers are on circuits feeding the dock.
- Metal parts of docks are bonded to the dock's AC safety ground.
- Cords plugged into dock outlets are in good condition — never use ones with cracked casing or exposed wires.

Boat maintenance

Regardless of the boat's size, electrical maintenance should be handled by professionals who understand marine codes. Boats with AC systems should be equipped with isolation transformers or equipment leakage circuit interrupters and

comply with American Boat and Yacht Council standards.

Never replace a repeatedly blown fuse with a larger one. Fuses are meant to protect the wiring — not the appliance. A blowing fuse signals a problem that needs professional attention.

Safe swimming

First, never swim in a marina. It isn't worth the risk of swimming around docks with a power source. If electricity seeps into the water, it could become energized and deadly — this is called electric shock drowning.

If you're swimming and feel a tingling sensation, exit the water immediately — this could be a sign of stray electrical current. However, remember to swim away from the possible source.

If someone appears to be experiencing an electric shock in the water, do not jump in to help. The water may be energized, putting you at risk, too. Instead, turn off the power source if possible and use a fiberglass shepherd's hook or throw a flotation device to assist from a safe distance.

Remember: If you're still wet when returning to shore, avoid touching any electrical devices until you're completely dry. For more information about electrical safety, visit 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.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK GILLILAND

Clean the vent cover and remove dust and debris buildup in the vent area under the front of the refrigerator.

The cold, hard truth

Regular upkeep needed to boost refrigerator and freezer efficiency

WHEN EXPLORING WAYS TO be more efficient with refrigerators and freezers, we often find ourselves stuck between convenience and conserving energy. While you can upgrade to newer equipment, habits can be just as important in saving energy.

Here is some guidance on equipment energy use, including tips to keep your current equipment running efficiently and ways to limit overuse of refrigeration in your home.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) helps us understand what to look for in our existing equipment and new appliances. In general, the larger the refrigerator, the more energy it uses. The most efficient models are typically 16 to 20 cubic feet. Models with the freezer on top tend to use less energy than bottom freezers or side-by-side units. A refrigerator 15 years or older uses about 35% more energy than an ENERGY STAR-certified model.

Let's explore some tips to keep your refrigerator running efficiently.

Stay organized. One of the biggest issues with refrigerator energy

use is opening the door or keeping it open. An organized fridge makes food items easier to find, minimizing open-door time and keeping cold air inside. Place items in the same spots so they are easier and faster to find. I tell my kids to take a quick look inside at the options and close the door while they are deciding what to eat.

A refrigerator 15 years or older uses about 35% more energy than an ENERGY STAR-certified model.

Keep it clean. Regularly cleaning the gasket — the flexible strip around the perimeter of the fridge door — ensures a tight seal between the door and the unit to keep cold air inside. If the gasket is not sealing tightly, it should be replaced. Removing and cleaning the vent at the bottom of the unit can help airflow. For the coils at the back, use an extended cleaning

brush instead of moving the fridge and risking injury.

Consider food safety. The DOE recommends setting your refrigerator temperature between 35 and 38 degrees F and freezer at 0 degrees F.

Follow these energy-saving tips if you own a second refrigerator or freezer. Do you need it plugged in year-round? Perhaps you can keep it empty and unplugged for part of the year. Maybe you only really need it during the holiday season. Unplugging it for the months you aren't using it will save energy, and you'll still have it as a backup when you need it.

If you are a hunter or buy meat in bulk, set a goal to empty out your freezer before you restock. This allows you to avoid food waste and unplug the extra appliance when it is not needed. Also consider its location. Using a second fridge or freezer in a cool basement versus a hot garage requires less energy.

Instilling simple cleaning and food storage habits are easy ways to be more efficient with your in-home refrigeration. 💡



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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Ideal times to charge your EV

AS ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVs) continue to grow in popularity, it's increasingly important for owners to understand the impact of charging during peak demand hours and how

spikes in demand, making it more challenging for electric co-ops to keep the grid stable and manage costs.

While electricity may feel unlimited when powering household

A strategic approach

Illinois' electric co-ops play a vital role in managing energy demand and ensuring reliable service for all members. For co-op

members who own EVs, off-peak charging provides a strategic solution to help reduce strain on the grid while also lowering costs — because charging when demand is lower eases pressure on the electric grid. This helps avoid costly infrastructure upgrades and supports a more reliable, efficient system that benefits everyone in the community.

Off-peak periods (typically during early morning hours and late at night) are times when the overall demand for electricity is lower, allowing many co-ops to offer more affordable rates and incentives to shift energy consumption. Smart scheduling

means more affordable EV ownership and better energy budgeting.

Benefits of off-peak EV charging

Off-peak charging provides a win-win solution for members and electric co-ops by offering cost savings, improving grid reliability and benefiting the environment. This practice not only enhances the appeal of EVs but also aligns with the cooperative values of reliability, sustainability and affordability, helping build a smarter and more efficient energy system for future generations. 💡

to leverage off-peak charging rates and incentives effectively.

Thoughtful EV charging, particularly during off-peak hours, can mean lower rates for EV owners, but it also helps electric cooperatives balance electrical load.

What is peak demand?

Peak demand is when electricity use is at its highest in an area, typically during busy energy-use times for homes, businesses and industries. More appliance use, business activities and even weather can create

devices, it's a finite resource constrained by an electric cooperative's capacity to purchase or produce electricity and distribute it throughout the local grid to power the communities it serves.

To serve the grid during times of peak demand, electric cooperatives may need to activate additional generation resources or purchase higher-cost electricity from the market. These efforts, while necessary to maintain reliability, can lead to increased expenses and strain the grid infrastructure.



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





Where creativity comes to roost

Inside The Crafty Coop pottery studio

By Kayla Adkins

WHILE CHICKENS TYPICALLY DO more scratching than painting, the humble poultry inspired the creation of a paint-your-own pottery studio in Macomb. The Crafty Coop invites artists of all ages to hatch their own creativity.

A member of McDonough Power Cooperative, Laci Todd opened The Crafty Coop in October 2018 after entering a city-sponsored small business competition. Although she didn't take home the grand prize, the experience sparked something bigger.

"I wasn't really serious about opening, and then literally, everything just kind of fell into place. People were so excited about it," Todd says. That excitement hasn't faded. Years later, The Crafty Coop has become more than just a storefront. "This is my passion project," she adds.

Inside the cozy studio, visitors can pick from a wide selection of pottery pieces and make them their own with brushes, color and a bit of imagination.

The studio has carved out a loyal following from the community, with customers returning again and again — often with kids or grandkids in tow — to make memories one brushstroke at a time. "It's been nothing but a blessing. The people in Macomb are so supportive," Todd says. "I do my best to give back as much as I can."

She has partnered with several local businesses to bring art into unexpected places: wine glass painting nights at nearby

wineries, mug painting events with a local coffee shop, even a mosaic that now brightens up a picnic table at a public park.

Crediting her grandmother for her love of art, Todd says, "I was always a crafty kid, but I would say the passion for this particular medium came from her." Although her grandma passed away before she could visit the studio, her presence lives on in the space. "I named my kiln after her," Todd adds. "I have several things in here that she made and then passed down to me."

Despite the chicken-themed name, pottery options aren't limited to the barnyard. "The choices are endless," she laughs. From mugs and plates to figurines and seasonal decor, there's something for everyone.

Painters choose their piece, settle in at a table

and get to work. No supplies are needed — everything is provided, along with encouragement from Todd, who assists along the way. Once painted, the pieces are fired in the kiln and ready for pickup within two weeks.

Todd says there is a lot more to the process than painting. It's all about the experience. On special occasions, unique guests visit the studio, including cats, ducks and chickens. One fan-favorite event, "Painting with Baby Cows," invites guests to paint pottery while cuddling with Highland calves.

Reservations are recommended, but walk-in artists are welcome, too. At The Crafty Coop, it's all about creating something together. As Todd puts it, "Birds of a feather create together."💡



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.

The Crafty Coop

206 N. Lafayette St., Macomb
309-331-0965
thecraftycoopmacomb.com





POWERFUL FUTURES IN THE MAKING

Memories from Youth Tour 2025

Photography by Chris Reynolds

EACH JUNE, HIGH SCHOOL students from across rural Illinois travel to Washington, D.C., for a week that's equal parts education and inspiration. This year, 48 students sponsored by 25 electric and telephone cooperatives took part in the 2025 Youth Tour, held June 16-23, joining more than 2,000 peers from 44 states for a deep dive into leadership, history and the cooperative spirit.

The students kicked off their journey in Springfield, where they formed a mock snack co-op, elected a board, hired a manager and handled budgeting and sales throughout the week. The hands-on activity introduced them to cooperative principles in action and emphasized teamwork and shared decision-making.

In D.C., the group toured major landmarks — from Gettysburg and Arlington National Cemetery to the U.S. Capitol, Supreme Court and, for the first time in years, the White House. They visited several museums and bonded during group outings.

While the purpose of Youth Tour is to allow teens to see the nation's capital up close, learn about the political process, and better understand the role they play as citizens, a bigger goal is to inspire the next generation to become leaders in their local communities. 💡



Youth Tour participants walk up the steps to begin their tour of the U.S. Capitol building. "During the trip to D.C., I learned a lot about American history, and it reminded me of how lucky we are to live in America with the rights we have," says Eva Mette, Norris Electric Cooperative.



After an overnight bus ride, Youth Tour participants wake up early to tour Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. Pictured (L to R): Haven Cash, Ella Rogers, Kennedy Bowker, Anna Probst, Carly DeSutter, Madison Voss and Reese Heyen.



Haven Cash of Clay Electric Co-operative and Alaina Worland of Wabash Communications CO-OP walk the National Mall. "This trip is something I will always remember," Cash says. "It is amazingly generous of my co-op to present this once-in-a-lifetime experience to students each year."



Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative's Torrie Rider takes photos in the U.S. Capitol during a group tour.





Jamen Tchapda, representing Adams Electric Cooperative, and Zach Potts, representing Corn Belt Energy Corporation, at Arlington National Cemetery.



Back row (L to R): Eva Mette, Anna Probst, Jamen Tchapda, Drake Vancil, Dallas Alavarez, Lex Abt and Harlan Whiteford. Front row: Peyton Ford, Carly DeSutter, Olivia Dowell and Hazel Harris. "I will be forever grateful for my trip to D.C., because it was a life-changing experience," says Dowell, who represented Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative. "I cannot thank my co-op enough for this amazing opportunity."



Shelby Electric Cooperative's Josiah Porter makes a name rubbing at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. "I [was] constantly left in awe by our heritage and history," Porter says. "I learned the value of sacrifice from Arlington National Cemetery, the Korean War Memorial, and feeling the name of my own cousin etched in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall."



YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Micah Anderson, Illinois' 2025-26 Youth Leadership Council Representative

Adams Telephone Co-Operative's Micah Anderson was selected by his peers to represent Illinois on the Youth Leadership Council for the next year. His duties include attending national and state meetings and events during his term. To students interested in going on Youth Tour in the future, Anderson says, "Take advantage of every opportunity you have. Go to every museum, take every tour and try to make as many friends as possible."



THE ADVENTURES OF **WALKER HANNA**

**Modern-day
Huck Finn invites
followers to join
him in the great
outdoors**

By Lisa Cherry

A BAREFOOT WALKER HANNA leads the way through Wanless Park to the banks of South Fork Sangamon River, hoping to film the catch and release of a large flathead catfish.

As the Rochester High School sophomore navigates his way through the wooded area, with sunshine filtering through dense tree canopies and stinging nettle all around, his mother Becky follows with phone in hand ready to capture Walker's adventure.

Wearing his typical uniform of red St. Louis Cardinals baseball tee and shorts, Walker maneuvers through the undergrowth to the location of bank poles he had built and set up at the base of the river, the water low alongside steep, rooted banks. He checks one, and then another, before noticing movement.

Suddenly, he plunges into the water, struggling to wrangle a huge flathead with his bare hands, exclaiming excitedly, "This is a big one!" Becky videos Walker emerging from the water, fish in hand, grinning ear to ear. He speaks in fast, short, staccato sentences to the camera, adrenaline still racing:

"Holy mackerel! Look at this one. This thing is massive. This is maybe a 25-to-30-pounder, a huge flathead. Look how big the head is, absolutely massive. I know there's bigger in here. I know there's 50s, 40s ... we're going to get a scale on this guy and see how big he really is. It's a huge flathead, guys, definitely my biggest. I'm going to scale him to see what he weighs," says Walker, taking a breath as he attaches the scale. "He's a 20-pounder. Look how big this fish is, guys — an absolute dinosaur fish! This is my favorite catfish. We love these guys. Just amazing, awesome to catch a 20-pounder. I've always loved these fish. Oh, just amazing! Big flatty from Cincinnati!"

About 20 minutes later, a reluctant Walker releases the fish with a kiss on the head and a tender "Bye, buddy," and he and his mom head back home as the fish swims away to freedom.

Stag beetles, bees, snapping turtles, raccoons, opossum, snakes, flathead catfish ... you name it, Walker has caught it, released it, relocated it or made use of it in some way. With the help of his older brother, Jack, he invites others along with him on these "big adventures" via TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. To date, more than 30,000 followers and subscribers across these platforms have accepted the invitation.

Becky says her son's interest in wildlife began as early as age 3. "He was really interested in all kinds of bugs at daycare. He would catch these huge stag beetles ... we'd put them in a cup and have to take them home. He's just always loved bugs and snakes and turtles."

According to Walker, snapping turtles have always been his favorite. "I caught my first one when I was 10, and I've been catching them ever since," he says, adding that he's probably caught close to 100 over the years. "I always let them go or relocate them somewhere else."

His love for the creatures runs deep. "They look prehistoric, and they get really big. They're fun to catch, and they're like the apex predator in their area," Walker explains. An apex predator is a predator at the top of a food chain. "I have this one in the neighborhood pond, and I catch him all the time. His name is Jose," he laughs.

While sequestered at home during COVID, a younger Walker found himself inspired by Coyote Peterson on Animal Planet's "Brave the Wild." "Coyote Peterson does a whole bunch of animal stuff, but he likes snapping turtles. He goes out on the kayak, looks down in the water, jumps off and catches them like that," he says. "He was probably one of my first inspirations."

Another of Walker's inspirations is Ernie Brown Jr, also known as the Turtleman, who appeared on Animal Planet's "Call of the Wildman." "He's just a real country boy. I learned a lot from him. Basically, he would go into small, shallow ponds and stir up the pond, because in the middle of the day, the turtles are in the mud," Walker explains. "You get the turtles agitated, and they walk on the bottom and start swimming around in the mud. Bubbles from the mud start coming up, and you go and grab them. That's what I do, too. ... [Turtleman has] done that ever since he was a kid, too."

He also learned how to make a turtle call. "Anytime we're at our land or we're walking around, if Walker gets something, he'll do this turtle call," says Becky. When he returns with a catch, "he'll do a turtle call, so I know he's home," she laughs.

Around age 11, at the behest of his brother, Walker began taking videos of his catches like his TV mentor's for his brother to edit and post online. "I went on all these crazy adventures, and I [thought] it would be cool to share with people," says Walker. "I trap raccoons and possums and all that, [and] I also like to catch snakes."

They also post instructional videos covering the gamut — egg tanning a squirrel hide, setting raccoon traps, even how to make a fishing hook out of a soda tab. One explains the process of making and using bank poles to catch fish. "It's basically a thin PVC pipe. You tie a thick rope to it using an eye hook, and you shove





[the pipe] into the bank of the river,” he simplifies. “You put bait on it, let it sit overnight and check it. People usually catch flatheads with live bait. The fish like bluegill, carp, stuff like that.”

Becky says Walker came to her with the idea to use bank poles. “I knew nothing about [them]. That was several years ago,” she says. “He’s like, ‘Can you take me to the hardware store to get stuff ... I need this size PVC pipe,’” she laughs.

“I had heard about it [and] seen people doing it before, and I’ve always wanted to go for a big flathead,” Walker adds. “I knew they were in that river (South Fork Sangamon River), because they like rivers. I’m going for a 40-to-50-pounder.”

The family also owns land on Adams Electric Cooperative lines in Brown County, where Walker, who is a Boy Scout, traps and hunts. Over the winter, he tans hides and even makes coonskin caps.

“I like hunting, [but] I don’t want to waste the animal. I like using as much [of the] animal as I can,” he explains. “My parents don’t let me eat the raccoon and opossum, so I tan the hides and make use of them.”

Walker says there are a lot of steps to the process of tanning, including skinning, removing fat, drying, rehydrating, a salt bath and an acid-type bath. A degreasing solution with a certain pH kills any bacteria, followed by neutralizer, tanning solution and heating the skin. He says that the final step is stretching. “It turns into a real nice white leather,” he says. “It’s a lot of work.”

Other opportunities have presented themselves along the way as people have learned of him. He has partnered with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) on box turtle and bird surveys. Becky accompanied him two years ago to help catalogue box turtles in different areas. “We worked with IDNR people and a vet that specialized in amphibians and reptiles. We met them early

in the morning, and it was an all-day thing,” she explains. “We went to different locations ... Turtle dogs retrieved these box turtles and brought them back to the dogs’ owner.

“We sat down in a group, and they did all these metrics on the turtles, and Walker got to notch their shells. The vet took blood and heart tones and measurements and swabbed for infections. It was really interesting,” Becky adds.

This year, Walker went solo with IDNR on a bird survey. The survey consisted of stopping and listening to birds for three minutes every mile for 20 miles, and identifying and counting the number of birds heard along the route.

He has become well-known in his own neighborhood as well. A neighbor who owned beehives taught him about beekeeping. Eventually, Walker bought his own colony. Another neighbor fishes with him at the neighborhood pond and taught Walker the art of fly fishing.

When an abundance of moss accumulated in the pond, residents complained to the homeowner’s association, and the association hired Walker to clean it up, since he was there so often. Another resident in their subdivision asked Becky in the street if Walker would take her son fishing.

“He’s busy from sunup to sundown and always outside, like 100% of the time ... always barefoot,” she adds. “He’ll ride his bike down to the pond, and then he’ll ride [back] with a snapping turtle in his hand like a pizza or bring a huge catfish or whatever. Everyone’s always like, ‘Yep, we call him Huck Finn.’”

And, though this modern-day Huck Finn has created a platform, Walker is all about keeping it simple. To other kids thinking about creating a channel, he says, “Just be yourself and do whatever you like to do. ... Don’t take it too seriously — push when you want to. If you’re still a kid, it’s not a full-time job, [so] just have fun.” For Walker, that means more adventures, preferably with snapping turtles and a 40- or 50-pound flathead. 🐢

FOLLOW ALONG

Follow Walker on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok at Walker’s Big Adventures.



YouTube



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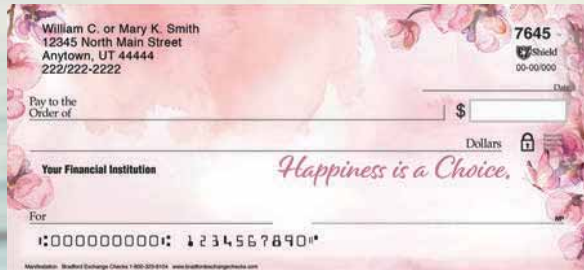
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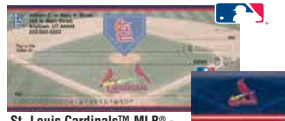
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A SEAT at the TABLE

Feeding the soul at Cedar Oak Farms

By Colten Bradford

CEDAR OAK FARMS ISN'T a restaurant — at least, not in the traditional sense. Rather, it's a 4-hour journey through food, as described by owner Teresa Sturm.

Tucked along the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve outside of Paxton on Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative lines, Sturm describes the area as an ideal, peaceful location — a place where visitors can relax, enjoy nature, take in the sky as the sun sets and the stars steal the show, and enjoy a five-course meal that turns strangers into friends.

"I love feeding people," Sturm says, who is also known as Chef Ella to her guests. "There's no greater

joy, in my opinion, than to watch their faces light up from the experience; it's just a unique thing to watch."

Sturm spent years working as a CPA before retiring early to chase her true passion — cooking. "I've always been a passionate cook," she says. "Accounting just paid the bills."

What started as a modest farm market and bakery quickly grew into something more. She remembers people stopping in for bread or doughnuts and really enjoying the food. Some asked if she would consider having private dinners. Sturm put her chef's hat on and gave it a try. The dinners took off.



Now in its second full season, seats for the dinners sell out fast — and for good reason. Only 24 guests are seated at the long farm tables each month in a restored, temperature-controlled barn. Sturm keeps it intimate by design. “We walk out as family,” she says. “I’d hate to lose that.”

Each dinner begins with a “golden-hour” social — drinks in hand, guests wander gardens, admire the scenery and flowers, and take turns on the porch swings. This is designed for guests to get to know their dinner companions. Sturm says that by the time the doors open to the dining room, laughter can be heard, and friendships are forming.

Once inside, dinner begins. Carefully choreographed, the evening celebrates local food and the season’s freshest flavors. The main event starts with a “nibble board” featuring local cheeses, followed by an appetizer, soup or salad, the entree and dessert.

“We’re inspired by whatever’s popping in the garden,” Sturm says. “If it is ready in the garden, you’re going to see it on the table that evening.”

From edible flowers to handmade bread made with Janie’s Mill flour (a nearby organic grain mill) every element is chosen with care. Local cheeses, herbs snipped from the garden, meat from nearby farms — Cedar Oak Farms seeks to incorporate quality local ingredients to support central Illinois agriculture. Even the drinks are supplied by neighbor distillery Silver Tree Beer and Spirits.

“We want a slow food experience,” Sturm says. “We want farm-to-table, hyperlocal ingredients. That’s very important to us.”

While the atmosphere shifts with the season — sun-drenched in summer, cozy in fall — the sense of togetherness never wavers.

“Good food is good food,” Sturm says. “But what you get here is more than that. It’s a sense of warmth and family and coming together with one another. Remember those old-fashioned dinners when we all used to sit at the table and talk to one another? That’s what we’re bringing back.”

The team behind the scenes is small but mighty. Sturm leads the kitchen with support from a sous chef, two wait staff and a dishwashing crew she calls “the unsung heroes.” Without the hustle of a traditional restaurant and because of the set menu, the team’s energy is focused on making sure the dinners run smoothly.

Looking ahead, she plans to grow slowly. Maybe a few pizza nights on the patio or cocktails and small bites will pop up in the future. Sturm is in no rush and remains focused on the monthly farm dinners. “We’re still pretty new,” she says.

For those hoping to attend, it’s wise to act fast. Tickets — available only online — are limited to 24 per dinner and often sell out weeks in advance. As of publication, there are three monthly dinners remaining in the 2025 season, and September is sold out. Signing up for the farm’s newsletter on its website offers early access, sneak peeks and surprise pop-up events.

“I fell in love with the people in the community,” Sturm says. “I love [how these farm dinners] bring people together. I will have strangers come to the dinners, and by the end of the night, they’re exchanging phone numbers and making plans. For me, that’s what it’s all about.”

Left: Each month, Cedar Oak Farms welcomes 24 guests to dine at their farm tables in a restored, temperature-controlled barn.

Below: Each dinner celebrates local food and the season’s freshest flavors.

Bottom: Dinner begins with a social where guests wander the gardens and admire the scenery and flowers.



LET’S EAT!

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Corn creations, revisited

CORN AGAIN? YEP, IT'S the second month we're all about corn. While these are mostly from a can, you can always substitute a can of whole kernel corn with corn cut fresh from the cob. From creamy casseroles to sweet-and-savory sides, these corn recipes are quick to prepare and guaranteed to please. 💡

WE NEED RECIPES!

- Pastries
- Snacks
- 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.



Crunchy Corn Medley ▲

Submitted by Gloria Stanfield, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association
Servings: 10

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 2 cups frozen peas, thawed | 2 celery ribs, chopped |
| 1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained | 1 medium green pepper, chopped |
| 1 15-ounce can white or shoepeg corn, drained | 1/2 cup vinegar |
| 1 8-ounce can water chestnuts, drained and chopped | 1/2 cup sugar |
| 1 4-ounce jar diced pimentos, drained | 1/4 cup vegetable oil |
| 8 green onions, thinly sliced | 1 teaspoon salt |
| | 1/4 teaspoon pepper |

In a large bowl, combine the first 8 ingredients. In a small bowl, combine vinegar, sugar, oil, salt and pepper. Pour over corn mixture and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours. Stir again before serving with a slotted spoon.

Sandra's Corn Pudding

Submitted by Joan D. Teal, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Servings: 10

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| 2 tablespoons sugar | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour | 1/2 teaspoon pepper |
| 3 eggs | 1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained |
| 1/2 cup milk | 1 15-ounce can creamed corn |
| 1/4 cup butter, melted | |

Preheat oven to 350 F. In a large bowl, combine sugar and flour. Whisk in the eggs, milk, butter, salt and pepper. Stir in the corn and creamed corn. When combined, pour into a greased 1 1/2-quart baking dish. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean.



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

Oat & Corn Pancakes ►

Submitted by Thomas Judd, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative
Yields: 24

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| 5 cups water | 1 16-ounce roll of frozen white, sweet creamed corn, thawed* |
| 4 cups old-fashioned rolled oats | 1 16-ounce package of frozen yellow sweet corn, thawed |
| 1 teaspoon salt | 1/2 cup vegetable oil |
| 1/4 cup almonds | |
| 1/4 cup honey | |

In a blender, puree the oats, water, salt, almonds and honey until creamy. Pour into a large bowl. Stir in the corn and oil. Preheat large electric skillet, large frying pan or a griddle to 350 F. Apply a light layer of cooking oil to the surface. Pour 1/2 cup of batter to make 4 1/2-inch pancakes. Cook each side 3 1/2 to 4 minutes. Serve with butter, applesauce, maple syrup, or favorite jam or jelly. Cool, cover and store leftovers overnight in the refrigerator. Warm them up the next morning in the oven at 350 F until hot. ***Editor's note:** I could not find the roll of frozen creamed corn, so I substituted a 15-ounce can of creamed corn.

Ms. Carole's Corn Casserole

Submitted by Dorothy Carole Yaw, EnerStar Electric Cooperative
Servings: 8-10

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 15-ounce can creamed corn | 1 8-ounce container sour cream |
| 1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn | 1 8-ounce box Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix |
| 1 stick butter, melted | |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Mix all ingredients together and pour into a greased 9-by-13-inch casserole dish. Bake for 1 hour, or until done.

Corn Scallop ►

Submitted by Sherry Reuter, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association
Servings: 8-10

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| 2 eggs | 1/4 teaspoon black pepper |
| 1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn | 2 cups coarsely crushed saltine crackers |
| 1 15-ounce can creamed corn | 1 12-ounce package pepper jack or Swiss cheese, diced |
| 1 6-ounce can evaporated milk | |
| 2 tablespoons butter, melted | |
| 2 tablespoons onion, minced | |

Preheat oven to 325 F. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Beat eggs slightly in a large bowl. Stir in whole kernel corn and creamed corn. Add evaporated milk, butter, onion and pepper. Fold in cracker crumbs and diced cheese. Spoon corn mixture into the prepared dish and bake 1 hour or until set.

Cowboy Crack

Submitted by Susan Creasey, McDonough Power Cooperative
Servings: 6-8

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| 1 8-ounce brick cream cheese | 2 cups sweet corn |
| 4 ounces Red Cactus Salsa | |

In a medium saucepan, combine cream cheese, salsa and corn. Heat over medium-low, stirring occasionally, until the cream cheese is fully melted and everything is well combined and heated through. Serve warm with tortilla chips.



In the shade of giants

Caring for mature trees

I FREQUENTLY RECEIVE CALLS and emails about trees that appear diseased or are failing in some way. In many cases, the homeowner is distraught — the tree has been part

Service article found the typical street tree lives between 19 and 28 years.

As community trees face environmental stress and invasive pests, foresters work to replant trees and

(ISA) certifies arborists through training and testing. Visit treesaregood.org to find nearby ISA-certified arborists.

Arborists can have specialties. For evaluating mature trees, an arborist with expertise in tree health assessment and pathology would be best for the job. Often, by the time someone notices something wrong with a tree, it's too late. Regular inspections by certified arborists can spot a problem before it becomes serious.

When inspecting a tree, arborists assess its growth by examining new leaf and flower buds, leaf size, annual twig growth and dead spots in the canopy. If these indicators align with the known growth patterns of the species, the tree is likely healthy. Arborists also look for abnormalities. Fungal growth, dark spots on the trunk, splits and cavities are signs of internal rot.

A soil test can determine soil pH and nutrient levels. Trees do not often require fertilizer, but a soil test can determine if something is missing. Over time, soil around trees can become compacted. Arborists can relieve soil compaction using vertical tilling and air spading.

Mulching the root zone helps insulate the soil, reducing extreme fluctuations in moisture and temperature, mimicking conditions found on a forest floor. Ideally, mulch should decompose over time, enriching the soil. While turf-grass isn't the best companion for tree roots, planting shade-loving perennials within the dripline adds texture and color to the landscape.

Let's do our best to protect our older shade trees. They provide many benefits, and with a little maintenance today, they can continue to serve generations to come. 🌱



Research shows that people drive slower along tree-lined streets.

of their lives for many years or may have even been planted by a family member long ago. It's important to remember that trees are living things, and like all living things, they have a beginning and an end.

A tree's lifespan depends on its species, location and the challenges it has faced over the years. Some landscape trees, such as redbud, crabapple or dogwood, are considered old at 50 years. Meanwhile, large shade trees like maple and hackberry can live for more than 100 years. Oaks and bald cypress can live several centuries.

However, according to a survey of certified foresters and arborists, many urban trees struggle to survive beyond 10 years. A USDA Forest

restore a living canopy overhead. A large, healthy shade tree provides many benefits: cooling the surrounding area, easing the burden on storm sewers and calming traffic. Yes, trees can slow down cars — research shows that people drive slower on tree-lined streets.

As reforestation communities becomes more challenging, protecting mature trees is essential. Beyond environmental benefits, trees offer economic value. A healthy, mature shade tree can boost property value and reduce heating and cooling costs, so it's important to invest in the health of your mature trees.

Mature trees near homes need regular maintenance. The International Society of Arboriculture



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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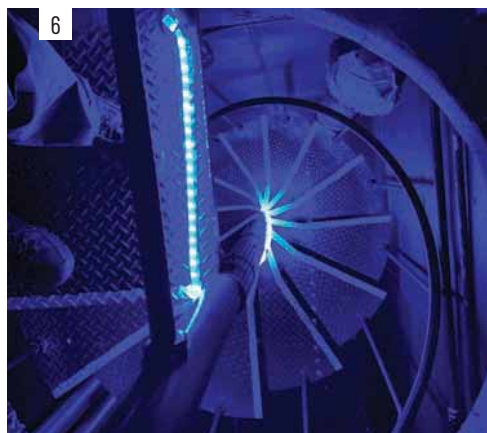


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UPCOMING THEMES

- October – Spooky
- November – Fall colors
- December – No theme
- January – People



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