

OCTOBER 2025

# Illinois Country Living

UNDER THE  
FRIDAY NIGHT

# LIGHTS

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Electric Cooperatives


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America's first city

**SUPPORT LOCAL**  
Spicing up southern Illinois

**FINEST COOKING**  
Falling for flavors

 CO-OP  
NEWS



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Snell Pbg & Htg  
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# Illinois Country Living

OCTOBER 2025  
VOLUME 83, NO. 6



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM SAATHOFF

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On the cover: Rochester High School football

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM SAATHOFF

# The many ways co-ops power communities

IF SOMEONE ASKED WHAT an electric cooperative does for a community, you'd probably respond with the obvious: they deliver power to homes, farms and businesses. While that is true, co-ops generate far more than electricity for the communities they serve. October is National Co-op Month — the perfect time to recognize how co-ops stand out from other types of businesses.

Providing a reliable, affordable source of electricity has transformed co-op communities into what they are today. When investor-owned utilities refused to extend their power lines to small communities and rural areas, electric co-ops stepped up to fulfill the need.

Co-ops have a significant economic impact on the places they call home. That includes supporting nearly 623,000 jobs that deliver \$51 billion in annual compensation — and those employees spend much of that at the local supermarket, diner and gas station, supporting jobs there.

In most of the counties and communities they serve, electric co-ops play leadership roles in championing local economic health by bringing new employers to the area and helping established businesses expand. In addition to working directly with growing companies, they invest in community assets like broadband networks and incubators to help local start-ups succeed.

Community members also benefit directly from their co-op's prudent financial management. As not-for-profit utilities, co-ops return any money that's left over after covering the cost of operations, maintenance and improve-

ments to members through what are known as capital credits. When the co-op's finances are strong, the directors may choose to retire some of those credits by converting members' shares into refund checks or bill credits.

Given that Concern for Community is one of the seven cooperative principles, co-ops seek a variety of ways to support organizations and



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.

events in the communities they serve. Whether it's presenting electrical safety demonstrations in schools, helping to organize fairs and festivals or promoting food drives for local pantries, co-ops are involved in extensive outreach.

One of the biggest community priorities for many co-ops involves helping young people develop leadership skills. Perhaps the most familiar and long-running youth-focused effort is the annual Youth Tour, which gives teens from co-op communities throughout America a first-hand look at our nation's capital, and a chance to learn about the political process from the people who make and influence our laws and better understand the impact they themselves can have as citizens.

So yes, co-ops do light up communities by delivering safe and reliable electricity to residents and businesses, but their real power rests in the many other ways they deliver the other kinds of energy communities really need to thrive. 💡

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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A REASON TO CELEBRATE

# OCTOBER IS NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH



This month, electric cooperatives like ours celebrate our past, present and future serving our communities and consumer-members like you.



Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup>  
Cooperatives

## OCTOBER CHECKLIST

Teen Driver Safety Week is Oct. 19-25.

**Talk to your teen.** Remind teens that driving is a skill that requires full attention. Texts and phone calls can wait.



Learn Illinois Rules of the Road.

Enforce its guidelines and talk about the consequences of distracted driving and breaking the law.

### Set consequences.

If your teen breaks the rules, consider suspending their driving privileges, restricting

their driving hours or limiting the places they can go.



### Be a good example.

Be consistent between what you teach your teen and your own driving behaviors.



## IEC Memorial Scholarship program celebrates 30 years

Over the past three decades, more than 200 students from across rural Illinois have received a Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarship. These scholarships aren't just financial aid; they are a way to honor the rich legacy of the Illinois electric cooperative community.

Established in 1994, the first scholarship under the program was awarded in 1996. Since then, the scholarship program has grown from awarding two \$1,000 scholarships to awarding 17 \$2,500 scholarships this year. 2026 will mark another increase, as 17 high school students will earn \$3,000 to go toward their education.

"The scholarship program has thrived over the past 30 years," said Brooke Gross, member services manager at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. "We look forward to assisting deserving students for many years to come."

In 2026, 16 scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors in the electric cooperative family — 10 for those attending a 2- or 4-year college, university or technical school; five for those enrolling at an Illinois community college; and one, the Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship, for the child of an Illinois electric cooperative employee or director.

The 17th scholarship, the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship, celebrates the legacy of a man who dedicated more than 42 years as a co-op lineworker. The McEntires created this scholarship to help future lineworkers follow in LaVern's footsteps. The scholarship helps offset the cost of attending lineworker school at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield.

Applicants are judged based on their academic achievements, work and volunteer experience, and community involvement. Creative, thoughtful responses in the required written essay are key to standing out.

"With scholarships like these, Illinois electric cooperatives are powering not just communities, but futures," Gross says. "Whether you dream of becoming a lineworker or are following a different path to success, these scholarships offer a bright opportunity for deserving students across the state."

If you are an eligible applicant, don't miss your chance. Applications and more information are available through your local electric cooperative, or go to [aiec.coop/iec-scholarship](http://aiec.coop/iec-scholarship). For 16 of the scholarships, the deadline to submit is Dec. 31, 2025. If applying for the lineworker scholarship, that deadline is April 30, 2026. 📍

## 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.

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

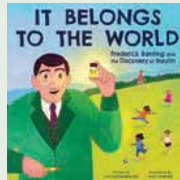


Faith Wheeler (center) chaperones students during the 2023 Youth Tour.

## IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

... CONTINUED FROM THE SEPTEMBER 2025 ENTERTAINMENT

CORNER. Illinois Reads is an initiative of the Illinois Reading Council that aims to promote literacy throughout the state. Each year, the program selects 36 books – six books for each of six age groups. Works by Illinois authors are often included. Below are books chosen for 2025.



### Grades 3-5

- "Cloud Puppy" by Kelly Leigh Miller
- "Detective Sweet Pea: The Case of the Golden Bone" by Sara Varon
- "It Belongs to the World: Frederick Banting and the Discovery of Insulin" by Lisa Katzenberger
- "Legendarios: Wrath of the Rain God" by Karla Arenas Valenti
- "One Cool Duck #1: King of Cool" by Mike Petrik
- "The Great Lakes: Our Freshwater Treasure" by Barb Rosenstock

### Grades 6-8

- "Forget-Me-Not Blue" by Sharelle Byars Moranville
- "I Felt Myself Slipping" by Ray Nadine
- "Kareem Between" by Shifa Saltagi Safadi
- "Rare Birds" by Jeff Miller
- "Stage Fright" by Wendy Parris
- "The Labors of Hercules Beal" by Gary D. Schmidt

... TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NOVEMBER 2025 ENTERTAINMENT CORNER.

## Wheeler named a Co-op Rising Star

Electric co-op employees have a reputation for working behind the scenes to support the communities they serve. For the third year, RE Magazine, the flagship publication of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, selected 20 electric cooperative employees from across the nation for its biennial class of Co-op Rising Stars. Illinois' Faith Wheeler was selected for the 2025 class.

As a marketing major at Indiana State University, Wheeler had plans to move to a large city and work at a fashion company after college. But a summer internship in member services at Shelby Electric Cooperative "completely changed everything for me," she said.

Today, she lives and works in Shelbyville, and she wouldn't have it any other way. "I fell in love with the cooperative way, Shelby Electric and the people here," she said.

Entering her final semester of college, she accepted the position of member services specialist as a part-time employee. Upon graduating and becoming full-time, she made the position her own by going beyond the media and marketing aspects of the job.

When Wheeler isn't assisting with the co-op's social media accounts or working on her next "Faith's Roadtrip"

article for the member newsletter in Illinois Country Living, she's the main point of contact for the co-op's residential solar program, administers classroom visits and is heavily involved with the Shelby County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities class.

Wheeler has also been the coordinator of the CoBank Sharing Success matching grant program since 2023. "It's awesome to be able to give money to people who need help," she said.

Forming community connections and relationships with members drives Wheeler to go above and beyond at work. "I can't imagine not being here and not working with these people and doing what I do," she said. "It's crazy how life works out sometimes."

Co-op Rising Stars shines a spotlight on the smart, dedicated, energetic professionals who are stepping up, leaning in and bringing fresh leadership to co-ops across the country. These are the employees who are helping co-ops navigate the industry's broad ongoing transitions, reimagine member engagement and carry forward the values of cooperation into a new era. 💡

Victoria A. Rocha, NRECA




Illinois Touchstone Energy cooperatives were present at the 2025 Farm Progress Show to share information about co-ops, electrical safety and energy efficiency.

## Farm Progress Show returns to Decatur

The 2025 Farm Progress Show wrapped up another year in Decatur Aug. 26-28. The annual event draws thousands of visitors from around the globe to celebrate agricultural innovation and the future of farming.

Illinois Touchstone Energy cooperatives were present to share information about cooperatives, safety, energy efficiency and more. Southwestern Electric Cooperative presented its Live Line Safety Demo, showing how electricity gets to homes, farms and businesses, while also teaching important safety practices. Lineworkers also demonstrated their pole-climbing skills.

Guests who stopped by the booth had the chance to register for a drawing to win a Lectric eBike and could climb in a bucket truck for a photo. Cooperative members who showed their Co-op Connections card or app received a gift.

For more than 70 years, the Farm Progress Show has celebrated agriculture by bringing together tradition, innovation and community. Major manufacturers unveil their latest offerings, and attendees have the opportunity to see what's ahead in the future of agriculture. The show rotates annually between Decatur and Boone, Iowa. For more information and updates on future events, visit [FarmProgressShow.com](http://FarmProgressShow.com). 

## It's a matter of principles

Cooperatives around the world operate according to the same set of core principles and values, adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance. These principles are a key reason why America's electric co-ops operate differently from other electric utilities, putting the needs of their consumer-members first. Here is a rundown of the seven cooperative principles.



### Voluntary and open membership

Membership in a cooperative is open to all people who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender or economic circumstances.



### Democratic member control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Representatives (directors) are elected among members and are accountable to them. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.



### Members' economic participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital remains the common property of the cooperative. Members allocate surpluses for any or all the following: developing the co-op, setting up reserves, benefiting

members in proportion to their transactions with the co-op, and supporting other activities approved by the membership.



### Autonomy and independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control as well as their unique identity.



### Education, training and information

Education and training for members, elected representatives, CEOs and employees help them effectively contribute to the development of their co-ops. Communications about the nature and benefits of cooperatives, particularly with the general public and opinion leaders, help boost cooperative understanding.



### Cooperation among cooperatives

By working together through local, national, regional and international structures, cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies and deal more effectively with social and community needs.



### Concern for community

Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies supported by the membership.



## Where is it?

The winners of the August hidden objects contest were Sandra Bent of Spoon River Electric Cooperative and Laurie Pollmann of Clinton County Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

The acorn hidden in the September 2025 issue was on page 24 in the “Back to the wild” feature. 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 Halloween approaches, be on the lookout for a pumpkin, 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](http://icl.coop/hiddenobject) and fill out the entry form (also found under Contact Us on the website) or mail a postcard or letter to Illinois Country Living, Hidden Objects, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. We will NOT accept entries via phone call or email.

All entries for that month must be received by the 25th. 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. 💡



## Meet Buckey, the small truck making a big impact

For years, Illinois Electric Cooperative (IEC) lineworkers visited local schools to teach children about the dangers of downed trees and wires and how to be safe around electrical equipment. While the message was sound, Randy Long, general manager of the co-op, worried that sometimes they weren’t hitting the mark.

“I found that especially with the younger kids, the attention spans weren’t always there, and they just zoned out,” he says.

Enter Buckey, a 3-foot-high, remote-controlled bucket truck that pops wheelies, talks with a twang, winks and blinks and can reach speeds of up to 15 miles per hour. As the new face of the co-op’s safety education program, Buckey — with an assist from his two handlers — is appealing to students in a fun and interactive way.

“The kids are just fascinated with Buckey right off the bat,” says Long. “They’re hanging on to every word he says.”

Buckey’s creator is Special Equipment Technician Sam Surratt, who started at IEC as a journeyman lineman 30 years ago. Surratt got the idea to build the truck after watching a state police officer at the Illinois State Fair operate a remote-controlled squad car with a robotic speaking voice.

Kids “really dug in,” recalls Surratt. “I thought, ‘You know what? We can do this.’ So, I called up friends of mine ... and I laid out my plan.”

Surratt’s friends also “dug in,” lending their time, talents and equipment to bring Surratt’s vision to life. Buckey’s pit crew came from a

variety of skilled trades — including a retired Hollywood special effects technician, a monster truck mechanic and a sign shop owner — and they worked nonstop in the month leading up to his debut at the Beardstown Fall Fun Festival Parade.

Surratt’s heart was set on debuting Buckey at the parade, a fixture on his (and some of the crew’s) schedule for nearly three decades. The group hustled Buckey to the parade a few minutes late, but “the crowd loved it, especially the kids,” Long says.

Surratt, Operations Manager Ryan Little and Buckey now have a routine in schools. Little presents an age-appropriate PowerPoint with props, while Surratt usually stands in the back of the classroom or gym with a microphone.

Children’s reactions to Buckey depend on their age, says Surratt. Those up to age 6 “will walk up and look right into his eyes and ask questions or tell Buckey stories about power outages and thunderstorms. The older ones know he’s not real, but they have fun racing him.”

While Buckey has a fun and lighthearted vibe, actual learning is taking place. The most popular question might be how birds and squirrels can stand on power lines and not get shocked.

“He’s just a blocky, boxy thing on these big tires. But the way he engages, he gets a lot of comments, and he’s really done a lot of good stuff,” Surratt says. 💡

Victoria A. Rocha, NRECA

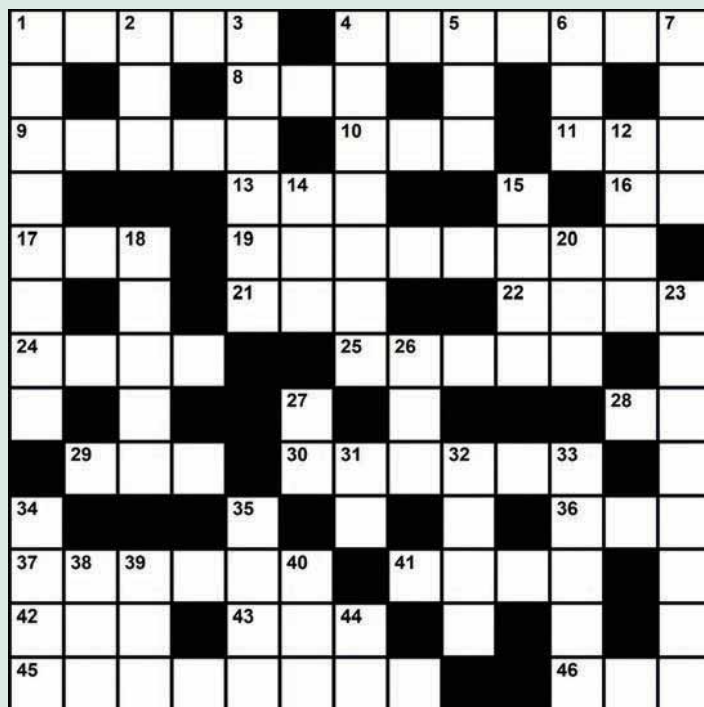
**Across**

- 1 Like a crunchy apple or a chilly day
- 4 It gets blown up at parties
- 8 Swell place
- 9 Frightening
- 10 Touch of frost, e.g.
- 11 Light brown color of some autumn leaves
- 13 \_\_\_ au vin
- 16 \_\_\_ Mans race
- 17 Hawaiian stringed instrument
- 19 Hanging around, as a ghost
- 21 Mineral-bearing rock
- 22 It's shed when one is sad
- 24 Corn sections
- 25 The end of a kid's Halloween cry
- 28 Circumference ratio
- 29 Color of some fall leaves
- 30 Season
- 36 Receding tide
- 37 Another color of fall leaves
- 41 Cat's weapon
- 42 Yale alumni
- 43 Dinosaur's last name
- 45 Frequent Halloween character
- 46 International distress signal

**Down**

- 1 Halloween wear
- 2 \_\_\_ nutshell, 2 words
- 3 Hitchcock's iconic horror movie
- 4 Formal feast
- 5 Circuit around a track
- 6 Halloween mo., abbr.
- 7 Number of lives a cat has
- 12 Simple aquatic plant
- 14 Rowing implement
- 15 Middle Eastern flatbread
- 18 Strangely frightening
- 20 Fishing equipment
- 23 Colorful arcs in the sky
- 26 Furrow
- 27 Peach state, abbr.
- 31 Raise
- 32 Unattractive
- 33 Small amphibians
- 34 Watches closely
- 35 Ripped up
- 38 Large deer species
- 39 Not tell the truth
- 40 Rainy
- 44 Affectionate letter sign-off

*Solution on page 33.*



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 facebook: Illinois Amish Heritage Center

**DEMONSTRATIONS AND ATTRACTIONS BOTH DAYS**

## LET'S GO!

### Oct. 16 Live2Lead

**SPRINGFIELD**  
An annual leadership gathering to promote personal growth and leadership skills

### Oct. 18, 25 Hooves & Honey

**GALENA**  
The collaboration between Shenandoah Riding Center and Dry Creek Beekeeping offers a fall trail ride followed by a honey tasting

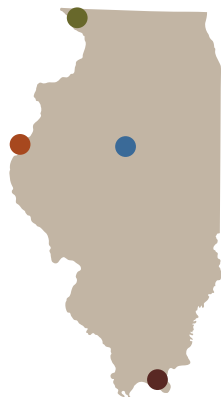
### Nov. 2 Gym Bob's Jamboree

**BIBLE GROVE**  
Enjoy a '50s and '60s show with the whole family

### Nov. 7-8 Hobnob Holiday Market

**SPRINGFIELD**  
It's a festive holiday shopping wonderland inside the Expo Building at the Illinois State Fairgrounds

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



## Fear Forest

OCTOBER 10-11    OCTOBER 17-18    OCTOBER 24

Get ready to scream for the return of Fear Forest, an annual event at Shenandoah Riding Center. Dare to walk in the haunted woods, wander through eerie scenes, see creepy characters and discover unexpected scares lurking in the shadows. Costumes and screams are highly encouraged. Register online at [bit.ly/4nsEn90](http://bit.ly/4nsEn90).

Oct. 10-11, 17-18 and 24, 2025: 7-10 p.m.

- Shenandoah Riding Center, 200 N. Brodrecht Road, Galena  
Admission: varies  
815-777-9550, [shenandoahridingcenter.com](http://shenandoahridingcenter.com)

## Nauvoo Pumpkin Walk

OCTOBER 25

The popular Nauvoo Pumpkin Walk is a family-friendly event with hundreds of carved and lit jack-o-lanterns, fortunetellers, a parade, lots of costumes, photo opportunities, and food and craft vendors. There is no admission fee for the event, but there will be items available for purchase.

Oct. 25, 2025: 5-9 p.m.

- City of Nauvoo, 1445 Mulholland St., Nauvoo  
Admission: free  
[facebook.com/nauvoopumpkinwalk](https://facebook.com/nauvoopumpkinwalk)



## Holiday Cheer & Homemade Market

NOVEMBER 1-2

Enjoy the second Mackinaw Vineyard Holiday Cheer & Homemade Market. Booths are located in the pavilion and outdoor covered patio areas. Shop for vintage items, handmade items, clothing, jewelry, artwork and other fun wares. Coffee, hot cocoa and hot cider will be available, as well as wine, beer and soft drinks. There will be wine tasting and live music both days.

Nov. 1-2, 2025: 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

- Mackinaw Valley Vineyard, 33633 State Route 9, Mackinaw  
Admission: free  
309-645-5054, [mackinawvalleyvineyard.com](http://mackinawvalleyvineyard.com)

## Christmas Barn Sale Trail

NOVEMBER 13-15

The annual Christmas Barn Sale Trail is back and bigger than ever, inviting shoppers to explore a festive trail of 14 stops and more than 15 unique barns across Massac County. Visitors can discover antiques, vintage treasures, handmade goods, seasonal decor and more – all while enjoying the charm of local barns dressed for the holidays. The event kicks off with an exclusive VIP shopping day on Nov. 13, followed by free admission Nov. 14-15. To plan your route and learn more, visit [thechristmasbarnsaletrail.com](http://thechristmasbarnsaletrail.com).

Nov. 13-15, 2025: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

- Various locations in Massac County  
Admission: free on Friday and Saturday  
618-940-0743, [thechristmasbarnsaletrail.com](http://thechristmasbarnsaletrail.com)



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## Frightfully safe fun

### Spooktacular tips for Halloween

IT'S THE TIME OF year to stock up on sweet treats and fill the yard and home with spooky decorations as ghosts, goblins and caped crusaders plan their invasion of your neighborhood. Safe Electricity urges everyone to make sure costumed visitors are kept safe by avoiding potential safety hazards.

#### Light up the night

Before decorating begins, inspect each electrical decoration. Check cords for cracking, fraying or bare wires, as they may cause a serious shock or start a fire. Also, look for damaged plugs. Replace any damaged decorations.

Make sure any lights, animated displays or other electrical outdoor products are safety tested by a reputable laboratory such as UL (Underwriters Laboratory) and approved for outdoor use.

Do not overload extension cords or allow them to run through water on the ground. Plug outdoor

electric lights and decorations into ground fault circuit interrupter-protected outlets.

When decorating outside, always make sure to look up and check that you and any equipment, such as ladders, are at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines. Always carry a ladder or other long object or tool in a horizontal position.

#### Fright night fashion

There are several costume safety tips for children and adults alike. For example, wear costumes that are labeled flame resistant, and make sure trick-or-treaters are wearing bright, reflective costumes. If they aren't, add strips of reflective tape for added visibility. This helps drivers avoid unnecessary accidents.

Do not wear decorative (colored) contact lenses unless you have seen an eye care professional for a proper fitting and instructions on how to use them. Wear makeup and hats rather than costume

masks that can obscure or obstruct your vision. Test the makeup you plan to use in advance for a possible allergy by putting a small amount on your arm.

#### No tricks, just treats

Do not let your little ones eat candy or other treats until they have been inspected at home. Limit your risk of questionable candy by only ringing doorbells attached to homes of people you know.

During inspection, check all labels for potential food allergens. If you have very young trick-or-treaters, remove any choking hazards, such as gum, peanuts, hard candies or small toys, from the goodie pile. Inspect commercially wrapped treats for signs of tampering, such as tiny pinholes, tears in wrappers or anything else unusual.

At Safe Electricity, we hope everyone has a happy and safe Halloween. For more electrical safety tips, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://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

Factor in the difference between the efficiency of the new windows and that of the existing windows before scheduling an installation.

## Smart investments for your home

How insulation and windows pay you back

**FOR MANY PEOPLE, THEIR** home is the biggest investment and the largest purchase they make in their lives. We want to make sure that we make good decisions to protect and maximize the benefits of that investment. Energy efficiency upgrades are potential investments that can save you money by reducing the energy used in your home that pay for themselves over time.

Calculating return on investment (ROI) is a common method used to determine the benefit of an upgrade. It measures the gain or loss of an investment relative to the cost. ROI is calculated by dividing the net profit — the total cost of the investment subtracted from total revenue generated — by the cost of the investment and multiplying by 100 to find the ROI percentage.

The higher the percentage, the better the investment. If you take out a loan, home equity line of credit or use a credit card, add the borrowed money and interest rate to the investment cost.

Let's put this calculation to work on a couple of home project examples. Keep in mind, the numbers

used are hypothetical. Prices will vary based on the scale of your project and the cost of labor and materials in your area.

Adding insulation and air sealing your home are some of the most cost-effective home improvement projects and can save money year-round by reducing the energy needed by your heating and cooling systems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that air sealing and insulation can save an average of 15% on heating and cooling costs or an average of 11% on total energy costs, with higher savings in the north and south because of more extreme temperature swings. Attics, walls, rim joists and floors over crawlspaces should be insulated. The ROI will vary based on your location, existing insulation levels and project cost.

Let's say you spend \$3,000 to insulate your home, saving \$330 per year for the next 20 years. Your net profit is \$3,600. Then, divide the net profit by the total cost of the investment, \$3,000, and multiply it by 100. That's an ROI of 120%.

The energy efficiency impact of new windows in your home depends on the difference in the efficiency of the new windows and that of the existing windows. You will see the most improvement when you go from the least efficient — single pane with no storm windows — to the most efficient new windows. The exact ROI for your home will also depend on your location, energy costs and the efficiency of your heating and cooling systems.

The EPA estimates that upgrading single-pane windows to ENERGY STAR-rated windows can save about 12% of your annual energy use. Let's say you replace your existing windows for \$5,000, saving \$360 per year for the next 20 years. The ROI is 44%.

Window and insulation upgrades have the added benefit of making your home quieter and more comfortable. They can also add value if you sell your home.

Most of us have limited funds for investing in our homes. Compare costs and potential savings to make the best decisions for your home and your bank account. 💡



**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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Join us for a magical escape to the 50th state as we explore two of Hawaii's most stunning islands! After a first evening in Chicago, we'll fly to the Garden Isle of Kauai for four nights at the oceanfront Royal Sonesta Kaua'i Resort. Highlights include a guided tour of Waimea Canyon, the Grand Canyon of the Pacific. Take in the view at Opaekaa Falls Lookout, too! Watch the ocean waves propel jets of water through lava rock at the Spouting Horn Blowhole, one of the island's most photographed spots.

Then, we head to the Valley Isle of Maui for another four-night stay at the Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Ka'anapali-- a beachfront paradise with top-tier amenities. Enjoy a day of touring, premium seating at a luau, see the iconic lao Needle and visit the Maui Tropical Plantation, for a start. This season also offers an excellent chance to spot majestic whales just offshore. Perhaps you'll want to book a whale-watching excursion, cruise the Road to Hana to swim in the beautiful pools, or visit Whaler's Village for shopping and dining. Don't miss this opportunity to make the world your oyster in lush, beautiful Hawaii!




## Untamed Alaska

July 6-18, 2026 

Experience Alaska in all its glory! Focus on Alaska's wilderness and wildlife through unique, personalized experiences. The itinerary includes cruising Kenai Fjords for glacier and wildlife viewing, visiting Denali National Park, enjoying the Alaska Railroad's GoldStar service, experiencing a private Iditarod kennel tour, and Katmai National Park to observe brown bears feasting on salmon at Brooks Falls. Our Untamed Alaska trip remains one of our most beloved— don't miss your chance to experience it for yourself.



## Sicily and Its Isles

May 14-28, 2026 

Journey to a quaint and beautiful island paradise nestled in the blue waves of the Mediterranean. Ancient traditions and modern comforts meet in Sicily, where you'll absorb local flair and centuries of culture. See how wine is made in Alcamo, one of Italy's most important wine-producing hubs. Take a hands-on cooking class and learn how locals make delicious, authentic Italian cuisine. Travel to an olive farm in the rustic countryside to see how a local olive oil maker hones his craft while standing up to the rules the mafia imposes on farmers. Explore ancient Greek ruins, medieval streets, and gorgeous Ionian coasts.

There's no place like Sicily to witness the lasting influence of ancient history on modern life. This fascinating and beautiful trip is not to be missed!



## Columbia & Snake Rivers Cruise

July 27-August 5, 2026 

Voyage along the Columbia and Snake Rivers on a relaxing and entertaining river cruise! Begin your journey in Clarkston, Washington, where we'll board our ship, the American Song. From there, enjoy a day cruising the Snake River on your way to Richland, Washington. The sublime vistas of towering cliffs and emerald forests will inspire and amaze you. Explore charming shops and local wineries in Richland before setting out again along the Columbia River. Catch the best views of passing bluffs and hillsides up on the deck, or enjoy them from the comfort of your cabin's private balcony. Stop in Hood River to take in views of the majestic Mount Hood, then continue on to Kalama, Washington, to a private dock. Observe the stunning Cascade Mountains on your way to see the remnants of Mount Saint Helens, where a knowledgeable local guide will recount the gripping tale of the volcano's cataclysmic 1980 eruption and the impact it had on local residents and wildlife. Stop in Astoria to take in the beautiful Victorian homes before cruising along to Portland, Oregon, where your trip will end. Don't pass up your chance to see such wondrous works of nature from the comfort of a luxury river cruise.

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# Cybersecurity starts at home

Tips for a safer digital world

**THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD WITH** internet access uses about 17 connected devices. That figure covers a range of electronics, including smartphones, computers, streaming

When we all work together to stay safe online, we lower the risk of cyber threats to our systems, online accounts and sensitive data. October is National Cybersecurity Month,

greetings, poor grammar or an unusual sender address, it could be a phishing attempt.

If you spot one, report it as soon as possible — and don't forget to block the sender. If you receive a suspicious work email, report it to the appropriate IT contact. Suspicious messages that are delivered to your personal email or social media accounts can also be reported.

## Create strong, unique passwords

When it comes to passwords, remember that length trumps complexity. Strong passwords contain at least 12 characters and include a mix of letters, numbers and symbols. Create unique passwords for each online account you manage and use phrases you can easily remember.

## Enable multi-factor authentication if possible

Multi-factor authentication (also known as 2-factor authentication) adds an extra layer of security to your online accounts. These extra security steps can include facial recognition, fingerprint access or one-time codes sent to your email or phone.

## Update software regularly

Software and internet-connected devices, including personal computers, smartphones and tablets, should always be current on updates to reduce the risk of infection from ransomware and malware. When possible, configure devices to automatically update or notify you when an update is available.

Let's all do our part to stay cyber smart and create a safer digital world for all. Visit [staysafeonline.org](http://staysafeonline.org) to learn about additional cybersecurity tips. 💡



devices, smart speakers, home assistants and more. Given our increasing reliance on internet-connected technologies, the likelihood of new cyber threats is ever-present.

Your electric cooperative is committed to ensuring its local system is safe and secure. It routinely monitors and manages cyber risks, and it works with other co-ops, its generation and transmission cooperative and the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives to share the latest advancements in cybersecurity measures that make us stronger. You can help, too.

and while good cyber hygiene should be practiced year-round, here are a few cybersecurity tips to help you bolster your online safety.

## Learn how to spot and report phishing attempts

Phishing occurs when criminals use phony emails, direct messages or other types of digital communications that lure you to click a bad link or download a malicious attachment. If you receive a suspicious email or message that includes urgent language, offers that seem too good to be true, generic



**Abby Berry** 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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UNDER THE  
FRIDAY NIGHT

# LIGHTS

*A tradition that unites communities, sparks pride and keeps memories alive*



By Les O'Dell

**AUTUMN IS THE TIME** of year when small town conversations turn to high school football. Visit any local diner or hometown restaurant, and you likely will hear table-top quarterbacks questioning coaching decisions, talking about big plays and sharing their opinions on upcoming gridiron stars. Stop in the barbershop, automobile dealership or feed store, and you will soon be up to date on the latest varsity football scores and happenings.

Just don't make your visit on Friday night, because those businesses will be empty. Most of the commentators, analysts and fans — along with hundreds of students and their families — will be at the game. From Massac County to Galena and Danville to Quincy, across the rural parts of Illinois, the Friday night lights of high school football reign supreme.

"The thing is, there are so many kids involved with football. Plus, in a small town, everybody knows everybody, and everybody seems to be interested and feels invested in what's going on," explains Pat Ryan, director of Illinois high school relations for University of Illinois Fighting Illini football. "It's a special thing."

The focus on football is especially significant in small towns for a couple of reasons, explains Kerry Martin, one of the Illinois High School Association's winningest football coaches, who led Carterville High School to a state championship in 1996 and coached at Marion High School for two decades before retiring in 2022.

"A small town is very much school-centered," he asserts. "The school represents what is probably the greatest unifying entity in a small town. The activities that take place there are the things that bring the town together."

Martin continues, "In a big town, schools are important, but there are so many other things that people can do. In the smaller towns, the school is the focus, and so often small communities gain much of their identity from the success of their athletic teams. Many people will relate positively to a community solely based on the success of its high school teams. It's just [more] magnified in a smaller town than in a city or suburban area."

The calendar puts a focus on football, explains Jim Muir, who covered high school sports for radio stations and newspapers in southern Illinois for nearly three decades.

"There's this two- or three-month timeframe where there's nothing happening, and then when you start the fall sports schedule, everybody's ready. The way football works is that you have a nine-week battle, so to speak. If you get beat on a Friday night, you've got a week to lick your wounds and get ready again. Plus, you have to qualify to make the postseason. That puts a lot more importance on high school football every week," Muir says.

Football season encompasses the built-in excitement of a new school year, and Martin says games are a sort of kick-off (pun intended) for the academic year. "There's just a lot of enthusiasm going into the season with a new senior class and a new group of kids ready to write their own history," the Illinois Coaches Association Hall of Fame inductee says. "As the school year starts, everybody has the same record, and there's just a lot of anticipation. I think that's just an advantage that football has."

**"Everywhere you go, people are talking about football."**

Muir says, "Everywhere you go in some of these towns at the start of the season, there's talk about how good the team is going to be, who they have back from last year and who's going to fill what position. People are always just looking forward to seeing them play, and it's contagious. Everywhere you go, people are talking about football."

For Ryan, who ranks 14th in most wins by an Illinois high school football coach and is a member of the Illinois Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Friday nights involve more than those who put on football cleats.

Left: Marion High School football team  
Below: Rochester High School football team



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM SAATHOFF

“There are so many opportunities for kids to get involved with football, besides offense, defense and special teams,” he says. “You’ve got the band involved, you have cheerleaders, you have the student section, you have clubs that run the concession stands. When you look at those things, there’s a large percentage of students who

are there every Friday night in some capacity. It gives them a common bond, something positive to do and something to talk about.”

The environment surrounding small-town football is unique, according to Martin.

“The whole thing is what makes it special. If you only had a football game without all the other distractions, it would be much less exciting and less enjoyable. It takes everything from the students performing in the half-time show, to the announcers, to the cheerleaders creating the tunnel for the players to run through, to the ticket takers and those selling concessions. It is everything, and that’s what makes it special.”

“Friday nights in the fall mean more than just football — they represent community, tradition and pride,” says

Daniel Sheehan, athletic director at Monticello

High School. “When our team takes the field, the entire town rallies together under the lights, united by the motto, ‘Our Town, Our Team.’”

A successful football program becomes a rallying point for the community and a draw for its citizens. “It’s a reason to gather. It’s a reason for excitement in the community and generates a sense of pride. The kids get it, too. They understand that they are playing for the name on their shirts. For them, it becomes the real deal, playing for their hometown,” Ryan says.

Taylor Bell covered high school sports mostly for the Chicago Daily News and Chicago Sun-Times for more than 30 years and authored “Dust, Deek, and Mr. Do-Right,” a 2010 book described as a colorful history of high school football in Illinois. He recalls traveling around the state to preview the gridiron season each year.

“It was obvious when we visited some of the smaller schools that football was a big deal, and the entire town got behind the teams — not just the students, the players, the parents and the alumni — it’s everybody,” he explains. “It’s a great opportunity for the community to get some recognition, and it is a morale boost for the community itself.”

“Football is a community event, and if you’re having success, it becomes that much more of an event,” Muir adds.

In fact, in many rural communities, civic groups and clubs check the football schedule before planning their own events. Light poles feature cutouts of uniforms with players’ names, and practically every business window sports a sign urging the team to victory. Churches even host Thursday night dinners for teams in preparation for Friday night’s matchups.

Football is unique. “No other

***“Friday nights in the fall mean more than just football — they represent community, tradition and pride.”***

**Below: Marion High School football team**



sport is like football,” Muir points out. “You’re running track two or three times a week, you’re playing baseball three or four times a week, and maybe even playing basketball two or three times a week, but for football, it all builds up to Friday night.”

For some places — Illinois high schools like Metamora (where Ryan coached for 30 years before joining the Fighting Illini staff), Rochester, Geneseo, Du Quoin, Lena-Winslow and Mount Carmel, for example — one winning autumn has evolved into perpetual winning seasons — to the point of football success becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, Martin explains.

Bell agrees. “There are some schools that have been in the state playoffs year after year, and you wonder how they do it,” he says. “Every year, they come up with talent, but that’s just what they do. They build these programs by having little league programs, where kids start early and learn what the varsity is doing. Once it gets going, it just starts rolling. As they grow older, even from age 10 or 12, they all learn the same offense, the same defense, so as they move up the ladder, they learn to play the game the way it is played at the high school level.”

“There’s an excitement and an expectation that comes year after year; it’s a tradition,” says Martin. Additionally, those who have success on the football field become almost legendary. Before they became household names in pro football, collegiate competition and elsewhere, success and fame got its start on Illinois high school football fields. Consider this: Dick Butkus, Red Grange, Otto Graham, Ray Nitschke and Kellen Winslow all played high school football in Illinois. So did President Ronald Reagan.

“I think one of the things that high school football does well is that players are not forgotten. People remember the names and moments that occurred on the field. One of the things we, as coaches, try to teach our players is that you will leave a legacy and people

will remember and talk about you. If we do well together, on the field, you will not be forgotten,” Martin adds.

Making memories is just part of the high school football experience. Coaches say it builds long-term bonds among players, families, students and even communities. Ryan says in the case of school consolidation or cooperative sports programs, football helps heal the wounds of former long-time rivalries.

“I think everybody realizes that when the kids get out there and play, it’s about the kids,” he says. “If there are two communities on the jersey, as long as they’re rooting for the same guys, it serves the same purpose. When you’re winning games, the old rivalries go away pretty quickly.”

While sounding cliché, high school football is more than just a game. Sheehan says, “In Monticello, Friday night lights aren’t just about football. They’re about celebrating our town, our youth and our shared dream of excellence — together.”

***“Friday night lights aren’t just about football. They’re about celebrating our town, our youth and our shared dream of excellence — together.”***

Coaches think about and try to convey the importance of community to their football players. Sheehan says a strong sense of school and civic pride can give teams a distinct homefield advantage throughout the season.

“The thing I always tried to promote is that our stadium is the place to be on a Friday night,” Martin stresses. “And if you weren’t there, boy, you missed out, not just on the game itself, but on something bigger. This is where we come together, where we sit shoulder-to-shoulder and have something in common. It’s more than football, and it is special.”

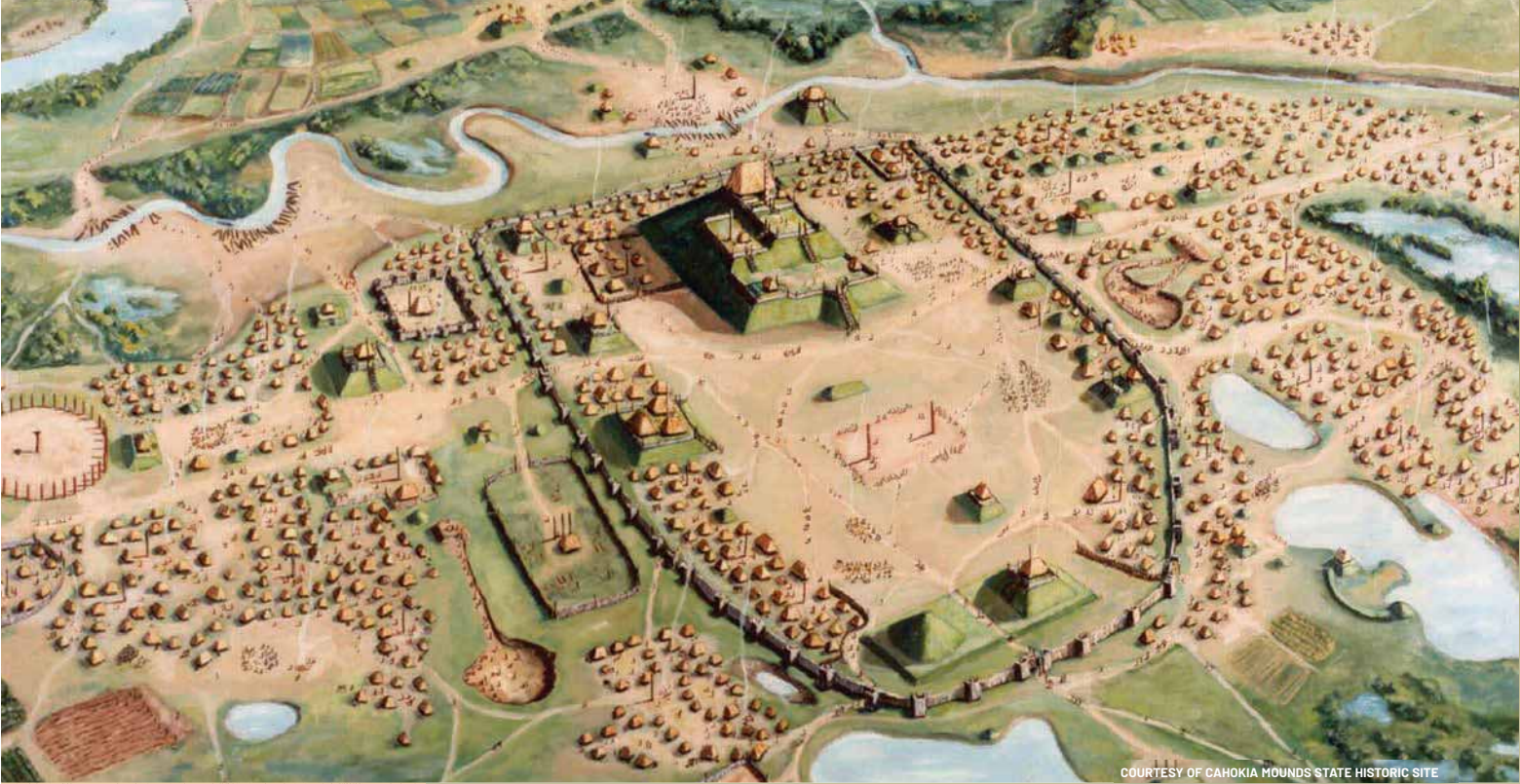
“For many of these communities, football is just the most important thing in town on Friday night,” Bell says. 💡

**Below: Rochester High School football**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARION HIGH SCHOOL

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM SMITH OFF



COURTESY OF CAHOKIA MOUNDS STATE HISTORIC SITE

# America's first city

*Walking through history at Cahokia Mounds*



The Cahokia Mounds Bird Man tablet

Top: Cahokia Mounds at its height of habitation as envisioned and painted by William Iseminger

By Jim Wimmerman

**ALMOST 1,000 YEARS AGO**, the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site in Collinsville had a population of as many as 20,000 Native Americans. Today, the site is owned, managed and protected by the state of Illinois.

Cahokia Mounds is one of only 13 cultural locations in the U.S. designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site. The designation officially recognizes Cahokia as a place of significant cultural heritage in world history. Additionally, it is a U.S. National Historic Landmark.

Referred to by historian and archaeologist William Iseminger as “America’s First City,” Cahokia site Superintendent Lori Belknap says that at its peak, the ancient metropolis encompassed over 4,000 acres covering six square miles.

“It is the largest pre-Columbian site north of Mexico,” Belknap says, adding that “it was occupied between 1050 to 1350 A.D.”

Known as the Mississippian Period, the era was characterized by the development of complex societies, agriculture and large-scale mound building and marks a distinct cultural shift from preceding Woodland Period traditions in North America.

The Cahokia inhabitants, after whom the site was named, were members of the Illinois, a confederation of different tribes who were inhabiting the areas of present-day Illinois, Iowa and Missouri.

What distinguishes Cahokia are the 72 earthen mounds that remain within the site boundaries where the city once thrived. About

40 other mounds have been plowed over or lie outside the site boundaries.

Evidence suggests that dirt for the mounds was excavated from nearby borrow pits and carried in 40-pound baskets attached to a person by a strap worn over their forehead.

Dominating the Cahokia site is the rectangular Monks Mound, first referenced by frontiersmen in 1811 as a “stupendous pile of earth.” Built between 900 and 1200, it is the largest earthen structure in the Americas. Covering 14 acres at its base, it rises 100 feet. Measuring 955 feet in length and 755 feet in width, it is equivalent in size to the Great Pyramids of Egypt.

The current belief is that Monks Mound, as the central and most prominent structure in Cahokia, represented the power and organization of the city. It is thought it was the site of a large structure, likely used as a council house or an important meeting place, and possibly the residence of the Mississippian chief.

While there have been close to 100 separate archaeological excavation projects at Cahokia, less than 1% of the site has been studied by archaeologists.

Some of the most intriguing discoveries at Cahokia were uncovered between 1967 and 1971 during an excavation at what has been designated as Mound 72. Surprises began when a man’s torso was found buried on top of a carpet of 20,000 beads made from conch shells now known to have originated in the Gulf of Mexico.

Further digging yielded more insight into just how extensively the Cahokia inhabitants traded with other tribes. Two bushels of mica were uncovered and traced to the Smokey Mountains in North Carolina. Unearthed copper had origins around Lake Superior. Arrowheads found were made of stones from Oklahoma, Missouri, Wisconsin and Tennessee.

The story of Mound 72 did not stop there. The burial sites of about 300 people spanning hundreds of years were discovered in positions and alignments that led to a variety of interpretations of how and why their deaths occurred.

The treatment of some skeletal remains indicated they were of different social status. Several individuals had exotic goods buried with them as well as possible attendants whose bodies were buried alongside. The study of other remains revealed they had suffered violent deaths and had been tossed into a pit with little respect.

Another find at Cahokia is known as the Bird Man tablet, unearthed on Monks Mound. This mysterious sandstone tablet, only about 4 inches tall, shows a man wearing a bird-like mask or headdress, representing an eagle or peregrine falcon. The reverse side features a crosshatch design that may depict a snakeskin.

The symbolism is open to interpretation, and the figure has sparked much debate and speculation among archaeologists. Some believe the Bird Man may have held a significant spiritual or ceremonial role within the complex society of Cahokia. Others suggest a more practical function, such as representing a leader or warrior. Regardless of the meaning, the Bird Man remains a symbol of the ancient Mississippians and has been adopted as the official logo for Cahokia.

In the 1960s, archaeologists discovered the remains of a series of holes equally spaced in a circle. Studies revealed that posts had once filled the holes, forming a solar calendar that marked equinox and solstice sunrises and sunsets used for timing agricultural cycles and religious observances throughout the year.

Because of the similar use of the stone circles in England known as Stonehenge, Cahokia's version of a solar calendar has become known as "Woodhenge."

Today, the primary objective of site management is to preserve and respect the sacred history of Cahokia. Future excavations are not planned. "By its nature, archaeological excavation is destructive, so we are mindful about disturbing the ground," Belknap says.

From the peak of its popularity in 1100, occupation dwindled over a period of 200 years. By 1400, the once-popular site was deserted, a departure that remains shrouded in mystery.

"It may have been due to crop failure, a prolonged drought, a failure in leadership, floods or a combination," Belknap says. "It is known that near the end of inhabitation the remaining Native Americans were not using the entire site and had moved to a small area before leaving entirely."



**Monks Mound, the largest earthenwork at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, is a popular spot for visitors to climb and take in views of the ancient site.**

While the lack of a written language makes it impossible to know exactly what happened, evidence suggests the Native Americans living on the site joined tribes in the Midwest. Although none had mound-building traditions, their political and social structures, and the symbols in their imagery, demonstrate links to Cahokia.

Members of the Cahokia tribe, after whom the site is named, inhabited the site briefly and lived on Monks Mound from 1735-1752, before leaving as their ancestors had done.

Today, Cahokia is visited yearly by people from every state and 80 nations. In addition to local and international visitors, Native Americans are frequent guests.

"They consider Cahokia a sacred site and often mention they feel a spiritual connection to their ancestors. It can be quite emotional," says Angela Cooper, a site services specialist tour guide. "We have made it known that they are welcome to perform ceremonies here if they desire. Sometimes they request to have a moment alone for quiet reflection."

Belknap adds, "To stand on Monks Mound and realize how important the site was to Native Americans and visualize the effort it must have taken to build is profoundly moving."💡

## LET'S GO

30 Ramey St., Collinsville

Admission: free

Grounds open daily from dawn to dusk.

For more information, go to [cahokiamounds.org](http://cahokiamounds.org).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAM MAURO

## Nothing mild about Pink Tiger Farm

Spicing up southern Illinois, one jar at a time

By Kayla Adkins

**PINK TIGER FARM ISN'T** your typical patch of farmland in southern Illinois. Partners in both life and business, Brian Elias and Kyle McAdams grow and grind artisanal spices to add bold flavors to food in a simple way. They focus on farm-to-jar, growing most of their ingredients and locally sourcing those they don't.

The idea for the farm came about 15 years ago, but it wasn't kicked into action until COVID hit and McAdams' job situation changed. Having grown a variety of vegetables while living in Chicago, the couple was ready to start planting once they moved to the southern part of the state for their new life venture.

With its logo inspired by Korean tiger art, Pink Tiger Farm's name is personal. "Pink was because we're gay, and my Dad always used to call me Tiger," Elias explains. Long before the farm came to fruition, and as the pair brainstormed ideas, Elias remembers thinking, "How funny would it be to have this neon pink tiger on a rural farm sign?"

The two men, who are members of Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, spent a year going to farmers markets in the area, looking to fill the gap on food options, hoping to stand out among the other sellers.

"A lot of times people think about the farmers market, and they think pickles or jam," McAdams says. "People don't expect to get smoked Hungarian paprika ... [they] don't expect things like roasted carrot hummus or black bean dip. ... Hopefully [it] expands their perception of what is available."

Nature has posed its own challenges. Elias and McAdams have worked through obstacles like flooding, disease and pests, explaining that farming is a process of trial and error.



Kyle McAdams and Brian Elias

Diversifying their planting and expanding into crops that may not be typical of the area has allowed their operation to not only survive, but flourish, with new crops and even a storefront on the horizon.

Their efforts to diversify have led to two varieties of ginger, four of turmeric, 10 types of chilies, multiple varieties of berries and herbs, grapes, lemongrass and cactus. Elias and McAdams are currently in the process of building another 500 square feet of raised beds to incorporate even more. They also are putting a minimum of 30 percent of the land back into native habitat and native species, saying they are looking forward to building out the nature side of the farm.

Products vary seasonally since they are all locally grown. Of their favorites, Elias names Hawaiian Red Turmeric and for McAdams, it's Turkish Tiger, or Aleppo cumin coriander. Their unique offerings also include smoked garlic, pecan-smoked poblano, candied habanero and chipotle honey drizzle, among others.

Giving back is another part of their business plan — a portion of all sales made through Pink Tiger Trading Company online are donated to charity. Pink Tiger products can be found at a variety of events and farmers markets throughout southern Illinois and on their website.

Whether you're buying Pink Tiger spices at a southern Illinois farmers market or products from any small business across the state, Elias and McAdams say, "Just go and shop local. Go to your local farmers market. Learn who is growing stuff. You'll vibe with somebody there. ... You'll find food that you really love, and you'll be supporting a local farmer." 📍

### SHOW SUPPORT

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

### Pink Tiger Farm

Shop online or find markets and events at [pinktigerfarm.com](http://pinktigerfarm.com).

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15-00764-001-E38502

# Five decades of flavor and family

*Serving up more than slices at Manny's Pizza*



Sharon Woodhurst, Jessica Ervin, Kathy Kingery, Manny Castro, Michelle Plattenberger, Wendy Sipe and Terrah Castro in front of the Manny's Pizza in Savanna.

*By Peggy Francomb*

**IN THE EARLY 1970S**, after working seven days a week at a local pizza place for a few years, a young couple decided to strike out on their own. They convinced the owner of a local pub to let them convert an unused room into a small pizzeria.

That modest beginning sparked a beloved institution that has been serving up pizza, tacos and memories for more than 50 years in Savanna. The family-run institution captured the town's attention and appetite — fueling five decades of pizzas, tacos and community spirit.

Manny Castro and Sharon Woodhurst (who were married at the time) were working at Hilda's Pizza on Savanna's Main Street when they had the idea to open their own business. "We were there seven days a week," Manny says. "So, we thought, if we can do this for them, we can do for it ourselves. If it works, it works. If not, no big deal."

When the pair went looking for a building to house their dream, they discovered the owner of Canavan's Pub had an empty room.

"We said, 'We got an idea that we'd like to start a little business; we'll fix up that room, and you guys can have the bar part, and we'll have the pizza part,'" Manny recalls. The owner took them up on the idea, and Manny's Pizza opened its doors, operating in the rented space for eight years.

Manny learned to make pizzas during high school while working shifts at Ballas Tavern. He and Sharon combined that experience with what they had learned at Hilda's to create their signature thin crust pizza. Their original sausage, mushroom and onion pie remains a customer favorite, alongside "The Works" — a loaded pizza with sausage, mushrooms, onion, green peppers and pepperoni.

Soon after opening, tacos were added to the menu. "It was just something my mom used to make at home for us. She also used to make them for the railroad guys on Saturday nights at a place called Doc's Tavern," Manny says. "They really liked them, so when [Mom] asked, we said we'd give it a try."

The pan-fried tacos, topped with homemade hot sauce made from tomatoes grown in Manny's father's garden, quickly became a weekend staple and a must-order item for regulars.

As the business grew, Manny and Sharon purchased two adjoining buildings on Main Street — the old Irish Inn and Hilda's Pizza — giving them space to accommodate more customers and expand the menu. When customers began wanting appetizers, garlic bread and nachos were added — but the focus remained on their pizza and tacos.

Eventually, additional locations were opened in Fulton and Freeport to meet growing demand and ease the load on the original kitchen, bringing the flavor closer to fans across the region.

From day one, Manny's has been family-run. Today, Manny and Sharon remain as co-owners, along with Sharon's sister, Wendy Sipe. Their four daughters help manage and operate the Savanna and Fulton locations. Their son opened the doors in Freeport, which has since transferred to Sharon's brother and run by his daughter.

Then came November 2010. A fire devastated the Savanna building — but just nine days later, Manny's reopened in a former Happy Joe's location, thanks to tireless family efforts and overwhelming community support.

"Without the community helping, we wouldn't have been able to open," Manny says. "And we have a big family who all pitched in, too," added Wendy.

On March 1, 2012, Manny's unveiled its rebuilt space, incorporating three additional storefronts. The new location, which is on JCE Co-op lines, seats more than 425 guests and includes a bar and the Fiesta Room, a banquet space for up to 225 people.

Over the years, Manny's has evolved with the needs of the community and customer demands. After the fire, Manny's introduced a lunch menu featuring sandwiches and mini pizzas.

"If you want to come by yourself, you don't want to eat a 12-inch pizza," Manny says. "You can order a mini pizza and an order of tacos, giving you the best of both worlds."

New appetizers like mozzarella sticks, mini tacos and nachos were added, along with broasted chicken on Wednesdays and seasonal specials like Friday night fish. Patrons will also find more specialty pizza options, from taco, Hawaiian and BBQ to meat lovers, chicken bacon ranch and veggie.

The family says all the additions have helped keep them in business. Community members have raised their families on food from Manny's. Their clientele has expanded, with regulars now coming from even an hour away.



Popular items at Manny's Pizza include tacos and "The Works" pizza, which includes sausage, mushrooms, onion, green peppers and pepperoni.

Manny's is a go-to spot for locals heading to and from sporting events. Coaches often call to order 10 large pizzas, and the buses swing by to pick up orders for hungry teams.

Manny's Pizza has long supported local schools through share nights, donating a portion of proceeds to help area schools, their teams and organizations. "It's a mutual relationship," says Jessica Ervin, Manny and Sharon's daughter. "Their support helped us succeed, and we're committed to giving back."

Over the years, the family has enjoyed watching their customers' families grow. "We especially enjoy visits from those family members who live out of state," Jessica noted, "and Manny always enjoys running into a former Savanna athlete or classmate."

Of course, time brings change. "We've also lost some great family members and Manny's Pizza family over the years," Jessica adds. "It was tough, but we always got through it together — along with our staff, because our staff is part of our family. ... Without the unwavering dedication of our staff, we couldn't be where we are today."

Looking back at those early days, Manny recalls, "When we first started out, we made eight or nine pizzas. [We] wondered, 'Is this a mistake?' But we knew people would come. It just took time."

Five decades later, Manny's Pizza is more than a restaurant — it's a cornerstone of Savanna's Main Street, built on family, flavor and the unwavering support of a community that made it all possible. 📍

## LET'S EAT!

### Manny's Pizza

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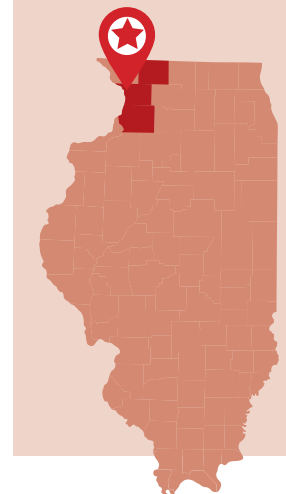
1121 W. Empire St., Freeport  
815-232-7992

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

#### HOURS

Tue-Thu: 11 a.m.-8:30 p.m.

Fri-Sat: 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.



## Falling for flavors

AS THE WEATHER TURNS colder in the autumn, flavors also change to everything pumpkin spice. While I certainly don't understand the hype (as I only eat pumpkin pie if it is the only option available), there are so many other flavors of fall to champion. Apples, cranberries, cinnamon, brown sugar, herbs, root vegetables, beans — the options are endless. Heck, I would even grab a bowl of cabbage soup before a pumpkin spice latte. People like what they like. Who am I to judge? Like them or not, here are some recipes perfect for fall. ♡

### WE NEED RECIPES!

Pastries

Snacks

New favorites

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



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



### Cabbage Soup ▲

Submitted by *Brenda Moehring, Corn Belt Energy Corporation*

Servings: 4-6

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 tablespoons olive oil    | 1/4 teaspoon Italian seasoning |
| 1/2 onion, chopped         | 1 head cabbage, chopped        |
| 1 carrot, peeled and diced | 4 cups chicken broth           |
| 1 celery rib, diced        | 1 16-ounce can diced tomatoes  |
| 1 clove garlic, minced     | Salt, to taste                 |
| 1/4 teaspoon pepper        |                                |

Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion, carrot and celery and saute about 5 minutes. Add garlic, pepper and Italian seasoning and cook for another minute. Add in the cabbage and cook for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Pour in the broth and diced tomatoes. Stir and bring to a boil. Lower the temperature and simmer for 20 minutes. Salt to taste.

### Hot Cranberry Cider ►

Submitted by *Cindy Burch, Shelby Electric Cooperative*

Yields: 2 quarts

- |                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 quart apple cider     | 8 whole cloves      |
| 1 quart cranberry juice | 1/3 cup brown sugar |
| 1/2 cup lemon juice     | 2 cinnamon sticks   |

In a large saucepan, combine ingredients. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until ready to serve.

## Tangy Pit Beans ▶

Submitted by Sherry Reuter, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association

Servings: 16-24

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2 tablespoons prepared yellow mustard | 1 15-ounce can red kidney beans, drained and rinsed |
| 3 cups ketchup                        | 1 15-ounce can chili beans                          |
| 1 cup onion, diced                    | 1 15-ounce can butter beans, drained and rinsed     |
| 1 green pepper, diced                 | 1 15-ounce can navy beans, drained and rinsed       |
| 1-1/2 cups brown sugar, packed        | 5 slices bacon                                      |
| 1/2 cup honey                         |   |
| 2 tablespoons soul seasoning          |   |
| 1 28-ounce can pork and beans         |   |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Mix the mustard, ketchup, onion, bell pepper, brown sugar, honey and soul seasoning together in a large bowl, making sure to work out all brown sugar lumps. Add the beans and stir gently just enough to evenly distribute the mixture. Pour into a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Lay the bacon strips across the top. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 45 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 15 minutes or until bubbly.



## Slow Cooker Cinnamon Apples ▶

Submitted by Sarah Cannon, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

Servings: 8-10

- |                                   |                                    |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1/3 cup brown sugar, packed       | 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg                |
| 2 tablespoons corn starch         | 3 pounds apples, cored and chopped |
| 1-1/2 tablespoons ground cinnamon | 2 tablespoons butter, cubed        |

In a small bowl, mix brown sugar, corn starch, cinnamon and nutmeg. Wash, core and thinly slice or chop apples (no need to peel). Place apples in a greased 4- or 5-quart slow cooker. Add sugar mixture and toss to coat. Top with butter. Cook on low for 5 hours or until apples are tender, stirring once. Serve warm or chilled as a side dish, dessert or topping for ice cream.



## Chicken and Dressing Casserole

Submitted by Julia Vestal, Shelby Electric Cooperative

Servings: 6-8

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts | 1/2 cup butter, melted                                  |
| 1 can cream of chicken soup                 | 1/2 cup chicken broth                                   |
| 1 can cream of mushroom soup                | 1 6-ounce box stuffing mix, plus ingredients on package |
| 13 ounces milk                              |   |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add chicken and boil until cooked through, about 15-20 minutes. Remove chicken from water and dice or shred. In a large saucepan, heat together the chicken soup, mushroom soup, milk, butter and chicken broth. Prepare the box stuffing according to package directions (use water from boiled chicken). Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Layer in half the dressing mixture, top with the chicken and top with the remaining dressing. Pour soup mixture over top. Bake for 35-45 minutes. Serve as the main dish along with any side vegetable.



## Think twice before burning those leaves

Take advantage of the free autumn resource

**IT'S THAT TIME OF** year again. Farmers toil in the fields, families meander through corn mazes and neighborhoods prepare for masked

What is a homeowner to do with all these leaves? Here are some ways to use your leaves as a resource for your yard.

much for the mulching mower, we can pile them up or bag them to be used in other parts of the yard.

Depending on your preferred maintenance style, fall leaves can be left in landscape beds until they decompose, or clean out the leaves in the spring. The leaves act as a mulch and insulator for your landscape plants. Leaves can be spread out in the spring so perennial plants don't smother.

My preferred mulch for landscape beds and the vegetable garden is shredded fall leaves. This is a great way to use excess leaves from the lawn. The shredded leaf mulch decomposes by the end of the summer, and at that point, I'm left leafless, anxiously awaiting autumn.

The goal of using fall leaves in the landscape is to return nutrients to the soil. Composting is a great way to expedite that process. Leaves collected off the lawn with a mower have both shredded leaves (carbon) and grass clippings (nitrogen), which are perfect ingredients for a compost pile. Compost is valuable to soils of all types, hence the nickname "black gold."

In a successful compost pile, you need carbon and nitrogen, ideally at a ratio of 30:1. Carbon is your fall leaves and will be the bulk of a compost pile. Nitrogen is the fuel in the composting process. Sources of nitrogen are lawn clippings, vegetable scraps, coffee grounds or any living green plant material. Some home composters will add nitrogen fertilizer.

Hopefully, if you're a leaf burner, I've stayed your hand from lighting the match this fall. Every soil benefits from compost, and nearly every yard needs mulch somewhere. Consider the underutilized source of fall leaves to meet your soil's needs. 💡



and hooded goblins and superheroes. Everything becomes pumpkin-flavored and — cough, cough — people start burning leaves.

Although many municipalities ban leaf burning, it can often go on unabated, especially in rural areas. If you are a leaf burner, this article is for you.

Where some view fall leaves as a nuisance that must be disposed of, I see fall leaves as free nutrients for plants. Locked inside that leaf are nutrients ready to be recycled back into the soil. Trees pull that energy from the soil, use it in all types of plant growth and development, and then the leaves fall to the ground to return some of that energy to the soil. Burning leaves rob the soil of that recycled energy.

Leaves are a part of the natural habitat of a forest. In natural wooded areas, there is no need to manage the leaves. They will decompose on their own and return nutrients to the soil microbes, which in turn will support the plants.

Lawns are where we often find ourselves putting in the work on leaf removal. A thick layer of leaves will smother the lawn if they mat down. A quick way to deal with leaves on the lawn is to shred them with a mower.

Shredded leaves can benefit a lawn. Research from Michigan State University shows that shredded leaves in turf add organic matter and cover bare patches of soil, blocking potential germinating weed seeds. If the leaves are too



**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](http://go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing).

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

## Spooky season

1. **AMANDA BURTON**  
SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative  
Temple Hill Church, Pope County
2. **NANCY DANICO**  
JCE Co-op
3. **SHANNON DAKIN**  
Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative
4. **LINDA MILLER**  
EnerStar Electric Cooperative
5. **JENNY LENZ**  
McDonough Power Cooperative
6. **LAURA DULLE**  
Clinton County Electric Cooperative

### UPCOMING THEMES

- January — People
- February — Pets
- March — Old buildings
- April — Pop of color



## SUBMIT A PHOTO

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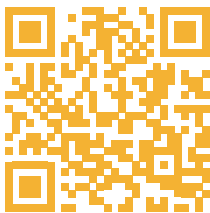
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