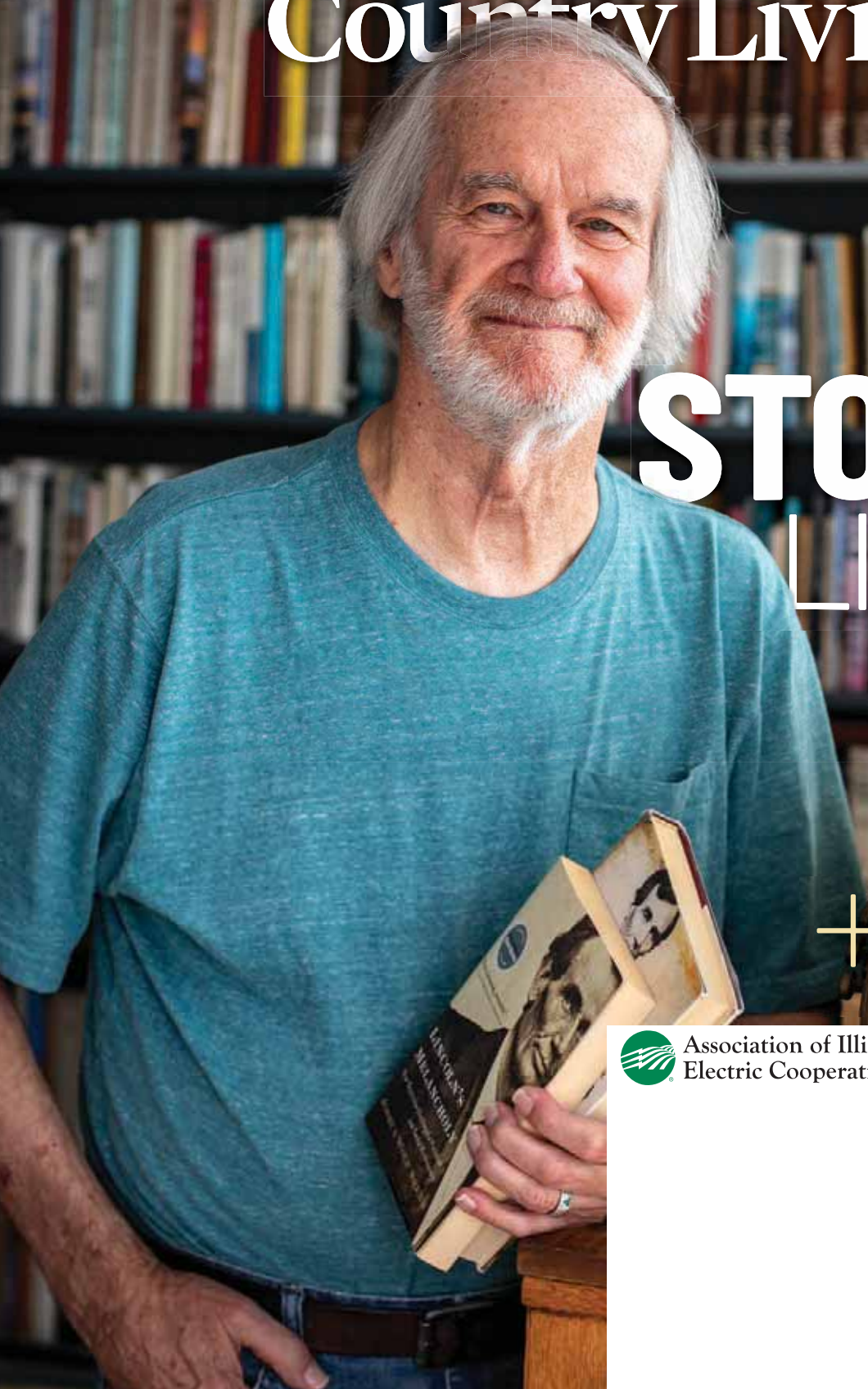


NOVEMBER 2025

# Illinois Country Living



## STORIED LIVES

+  
CO-OP  
NEWS

FEATURE  
**Driving change**

FINEST COOKING  
**Thankful for leftovers**

GARDENWISE  
**Cucurbit curiosities**

 Association of Illinois  
Electric Cooperatives

Your Touchstone Energy®  
Member   
aieccoop

# Eye Doctor Helps Illinois Legally Blind To See

*High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again*



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

"Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss," said Dr. McDaniel, one of only a few doctors in the world who specialize in fitting bioptic telescopes to help those who have lost vision due to macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, and other debilitating eye diseases.

Imagine a pair of glasses that can improve your vision enough to change your life. If you're a low vision patient, you've probably not only imagined them, but have been searching for

them. Bioptic telescopes may be the breakthrough in optical technology that will give you the independence you've been looking for. Patients with vision in the 20/200 range can many times be improved to 20/50 or better.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in people over 50. Despite this, most adults are not familiar with the



*A scene as it might be viewed by a person with age-related macular degeneration.*

condition. As many as 25% of those over the age of 50 have some degree of macular degeneration. The macula is only one small part of the retina; however, it is the most sensitive and gives us sharp central vision. When it degenerates, macular degeneration leaves a blind spot right in the center of vision, making it difficult or impossible to recognize faces, read a book, or pass the driver's vision test.

Nine out of 10 people who have macular degeneration have the dry form. New research suggests vitamins can help. The British medical journal BMC Ophthalmology recently reported that 56% of patients treated with a high-dose combination of vitamins experienced improved vision after six months.

While age is the most significant risk factor for developing the disease, heredity, smoking, cardiovascular disease, and high blood pressure have also been identified as risk factors.

Macular degeneration accounts for 90% of new legal blindness in the U.S. While there is currently no cure, promising research is being done on many fronts. "My job is to figure out everything and anything possible to keep a person functioning, especially driving," says Dr. McDaniel.

"Bioptic telescopes can cost over \$2,000," said Dr. McDaniel, "especially if we build them with an automatic sunglass."

"The major benefit of the bioptic telescope is that the lens automatically focuses on whatever you're looking at," said Dr. McDaniel. "It's like a self-focusing camera, but much more precise."

To learn more about bioptic telescopes or to schedule a consultation, give Dr. McDaniel a call. You can also visit our websites.

[www.mascoutaheycare.com](http://www.mascoutaheycare.com)

**1-618-566-8899**

Office located in Mascoutah, Illinois

**Marianne McDaniel, O.D.**



# Illinois Country Living

NOVEMBER 2025  
VOLUME 83, NO. 7

## 20 **Storied lives**

Tales from rural booksellers.

## 26 **Driving change**

Saving lives, one teen driver at a time.

## 28 **Standing the test of time**

This month, **PRAIRIE TABLE** visits Wittmond's Restaurant in Brussels.



## DEPARTMENTS

### 4 **FIRST THOUGHTS**

#### **"Not-for-profit" means "all for you"**

Electric co-ops prioritize members.

### 7 **CURRENTS**

#### **This month's highlights**

News/Legislation/Trends/Tips

### 12 **DATEBOOK**

#### **Mark your calendar**

Activities for the whole family to enjoy.

### 14 **SAFETY CHECK**

#### **Riding out a winter storm**

Plan now for cold-weather power outages.

### 16 **ENERGY SOLUTIONS**

#### **Winter is coming**

Prep your home for cold weather.

### 18 **POWERED UP**

#### **Digital assistance**

How electric co-ops can innovate with AI.

### 30 **FINEST COOKING**

#### **Thankful for leftovers**

Recipes for the day after Thanksgiving.

### 32 **GARDENWISE**

#### **Cucurbit curiosities**

Pumpkins, gourds and squash, oh my.

### 34 **SNAPSHOTS**

#### **Colors of fall**

Readers capture autumn scenes.

On the cover: John Alexander in his bookstore, Books on the Square in Virden.



## “Not-for-profit” means “all for you”

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE what our daily lives would be like without electricity. Our dependence on electricity grows every year. We act as though it has always been there, often taking it for granted, but even the shortest power outage is an inconvenience.

But 90 years ago, when President Franklin Roosevelt signed the executive order that created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), nobody in America's small towns and wide-open spaces took electricity for granted. That's because most of them didn't have access to it.

As the 19th century ended, wealthy investors were starting electricity utility companies in cities from coast to coast. Building power plants and installing power lines were costly, so investors focused their efforts on places with the highest population density. Few gave any thought to rural America.

Built-up areas offered more customers in smaller spaces, which helped those utilities become profitable. Running power lines to serve a handful of consumers spread across so many acres didn't make economic sense, so most utilities ignored them. After all, they couldn't make as much money serving those places.

Long after their city family and friends became accustomed to enjoying the wonders of electric lighting and the earliest home appliances, folks in remote areas could only dream of those conveniences. The REA was created to change that, providing a source of expertise and financing for a new concept in energy — the rural electric cooperative.

Electric cooperatives are built and owned by the very people they serve. They're led by boards of local residents who are elected by their neighbors to represent them and are responsible for acting in fellow members' best interests.

The primary goal of a co-op isn't to make money, but to provide a safe and reliable source

of electricity at a cost the local community can afford. As not-for-profit organizations, they receive their money from members when they pay electric bills, and use most of that money to purchase and deliver electricity.



In 1935, the REA was created to bring electricity to rural communities, providing a source of expertise and financing for a new concept in energy.

When co-ops earn more than they pay out in wholesale energy and other costs, they keep some of the extra money in reserves or return it to their members through what are known as capital credits.

Because co-ops exist to serve their members, they have an obligation to keep the price of electricity as low as possible. When members spend less for their electricity, they have more money to use on what's important to them.

Co-ops also work to support the area's economic health through activities designed to bring new employers to the community and help existing businesses expand. That's particularly important, because many of the areas served by co-ops face economic challenges. One in four households on co-op lines nationally has an annual income of below \$35,000, making affordable rates a key priority.

When co-op leaders make decisions, they're focused on doing the best thing for their members. Co-ops want to make sure they provide power at the best price possible. That's because they are truly not-for-profit, but all for you. 💡



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.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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.

**PRESIDENT/CEO**  
Craig Sondgeroth

**CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD**  
Rick Rubenacker

**EDITOR**  
Colten Bradford

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**  
Lisa Cherry

**VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Chris Reynolds

**CREATIVE SERVICES COORDINATOR**  
Kayla Adkins

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS**  
Jen Danzinger  
Meghan Jenkins

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
Brittney Haag  
Jim Winnerman

**SALES REPRESENTATIVE**  
Cheryl Solomon  
Cheryl@amp.coop

Illinois Country Living (ISSN number 1086-8062) is published monthly by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. The cost is \$2.88 plus postage per year for members of subscribing cooperatives and \$12 per year for all others. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, Illinois, and additional mailing offices.

© 2025 Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

**COOPERATIVE MEMBERS:** Please report changes of address to your electric cooperative. Illinois Country Living staff cannot process address changes.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Illinois Country Living, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712.

**ADVERTISING:** Acceptance of advertising by the magazine does not imply endorsement by the publisher or the electric cooperatives of Illinois of the product or service advertised. Illinois Country Living is not responsible for the performance of the product or service advertised and reserves the right to refuse any advertising.

icl.coop

800-593-2432 info@icl.coop



Member of AMP network of publications, reaching more than 9 million households and businesses.



# LEAVE A LEGACY

The Enduring Gift of Gold



## Leave a legacy for future generations,

nothing embodies this sentiment quite like the enduring gift of gold from American Gold Reserve. With its intrinsic value and historical significance, **gold represents stability and prosperity across generations**, making it a cherished asset to pass down. Secure your family's future with a gift that stands the test of time, **ensuring a legacy of financial security** and enduring value.

American Gold Reserve is releasing Government issued **\$5 Gold American Eagles** completely free of dealer mark-up for only \$369 each. These beautiful \$5 Gold American Eagles are a perfect way to enter the gold market. They are set for immediate public release and **will sell out fast.**



Since 2015, gold has surged over **166%** — outpacing both the **S&P 500** and the **Dow** during the same period.

PLACE YOUR ORDER TODAY

**\$369** ea.

Minimum order of 5 coins

## GOVERNMENT BACKED U.S. GOLD

- Teach the importance of wealth preservation.
- Great way to pass on wealth to children and grand children.
- A symbolic act of the commitment to your family.
- Gold provides your children and grandchildren with a built-in safeguard during times of financial instability.

## LIMITED OFFER

Special arrangements on orders over \$50,000

Mention vault release code: **AMS-ICL6**



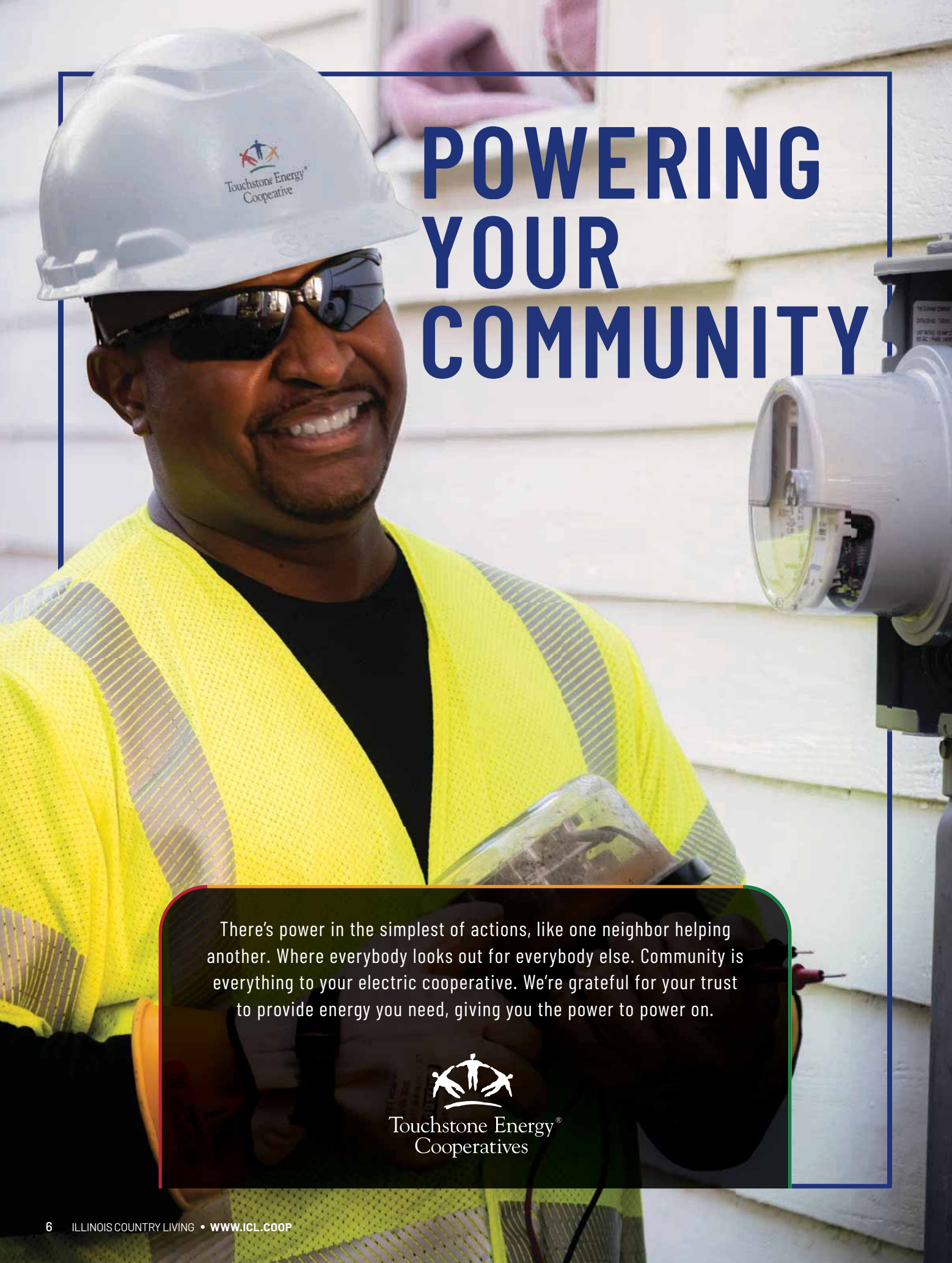
24 hours - 7 days a week



**AMERICAN GOLD RESERVE**

Strict limit of 10 per household, per lifetime. For new clients only.

**1-866-852-3346**



# POWERING YOUR COMMUNITY


There's power in the simplest of actions, like one neighbor helping another. Where everybody looks out for everybody else. Community is everything to your electric cooperative. We're grateful for your trust to provide energy you need, giving you the power to power on.



## NOVEMBER CHECKLIST

**America Recycles Day is Nov. 15.**

### Know what to recycle.

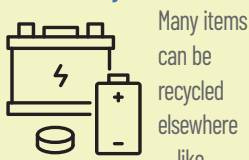
 Check your local recycling guidelines — not everything with a recycling symbol can be recycled. Commonly accepted items include paper, cardboard, metal cans and plastics labeled #1 and #2.

### Keep it clean.

Rinse food and drink containers before recycling to prevent contamination. Leftover food residue can spoil an entire batch of recyclables.



### Think beyond the bin.



Many items can be recycled elsewhere — like electronics, batteries and plastic bags — through drop-off programs and special collection events.

### Reduce and reuse first.

The best way to recycle is to create less waste to begin with. Choose reusable bottles, bags and containers, and find creative ways to repurpose items before tossing them.



Corn Belt Energy Corporation Lineworker Cole Sinn competes in the 40-foot transition climb event during the annual Lineman's Safety Rodeo.

## Illinois lineworkers showcase skills

### Annual Lineman's Safety Rodeo held

Lineworkers from across the state put their skills to the test during the annual Lineman's Safety Rodeo, coordinated by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives on Thursday, Sept. 25.

The event, held at the Lincoln Land Community College Line School yard in Springfield, brought together 18 teams from 13 electric cooperatives and two municipal utilities, along with 10 individual competitors, for a day of friendly competition and safety-focused challenges.


Participants competed in five timed events highlighting the agility, precision and safety practices essential to the line trade:

- **Armor rod install** – Competitors apply a pre-formed armor rod to a conductor, a task that protects power lines from damage and wear.
- **Cutout change** – Lineworkers replace a fuse cutout on a utility pole, a critical skill for maintaining and restoring service.
- **Hurt man rescue** – Simulates rescuing an injured lineworker from atop a pole, testing teamwork, speed and lifesaving response.

- **40-foot transition climb** – Challenges participants to climb a 40-foot pole safely and efficiently.
- **Transition climbing challenge** – Lineworkers compete head-to-head until one is declared the overall winner.

While speed and accuracy are key factors, safety remains the top priority. Scores are determined by completion time, task execution and adherence to proper procedures, with deductions for errors such as slipping while climbing, dropping tools or performing unsafe maneuvers.

Results were announced at the end of the day. Adams Electric Cooperative, represented by Austin Aschemann, Brennan Caspermeyer and Logan Schutte, earned best overall team. Keaton McCart of City Water, Light & Power won best individual. Drayton Davis of Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative won the 40-foot transition climbing challenge.

Go to [icl.coop](http://icl.coop) for a full list of winners. 

More photos 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

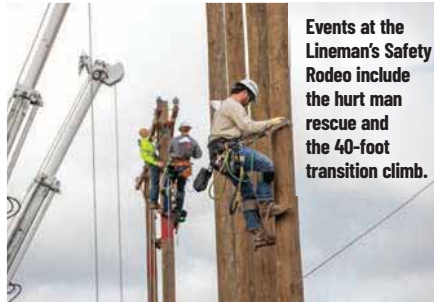
Solution on page 33.

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

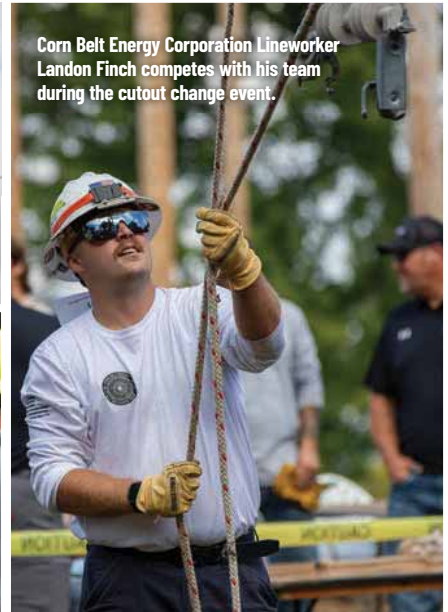
## Scenes from the Lineman's Safety Rodeo



Lineworker Drayton Davis of Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative won the 40-foot transition climbing challenge.



Events at the Lineman's Safety Rodeo include the hurt man rescue and the 40-foot transition climb.



Corn Belt Energy Corporation Lineworker Landon Finch competes with his team during the cutout change event.



M.J.M. Electric Cooperative Apprentice Lineworker Tyler Strack participates in the armor rod install event.



Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative Lineworker Jonah Carney competes in the hurt man rescue event.

## IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

... CONTINUED FROM THE OCTOBER

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 9-12

- "American Wings: Chicago's Pioneering Black Aviators and the Race for Equality in the Sky" by Sherri L. Smith and Elizabeth Wein
- "Dear Wendy" by Ann Zhao
- "Last On His Feet: Jack Johnson and the Battle of the Century" by Youssef Daoudi and Adrian Matejka
- "This Book Won't Burn" by Samira Ahmed
- "This Night Is Ours" by Ronni Davis
- "We Shall Be Monsters: A Novel" by Alyssa Wees

### Adult

- "By Water Beneath the Walls: The Rise of the Navy SEALs" by Benjamin H. Milligan
- "Star Wars Dad Jokes: The Best Worst Jokes and Puns from a Galaxy Far, Far Away ..." by Kelly Knox
- "The Best Lies" by David Ellis
- "The Great Divide: A Novel" by Cristina Henriquez
- "The Wheel of the Year: An Illustrated Guide to Nature's Rhythms" by Fiona Cook
- "Woe: A Housecat's Story of Despair: A Graphic Novel" by Lucy Knisley

# AFFORDABLE LIFE INSURANCE

The Best Idea For ... Personal Insurance - Business Insurance - Mortgage Protection



Copyright 2011 All Rights Reserved

## NON-TOBACCO RATES

### MONTHLY RATES

### MONTHLY RATES

Issue Age	\$100,000		\$250,000		\$500,000*		\$1,000,000*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
30	8.77	7.56	9.71	8.60	13	11	18	16
36	8.77	7.93	10.35	9.44	14	13	22	18
37	8.77	8.15	10.52	9.81	15	13	22	20
38	8.77	8.16	11.19	10.18	16	14	24	21
39	9.13	8.31	11.62	10.55	17	15	25	22
40	9.55	8.48	12.04	10.98	18	16	27	24
41	10.05	8.72	13.10	11.58	20	17	30	26
42	10.48	9.01	14.21	12.30	22	19	33	29
43	10.98	9.36	14.72	13.18	23	20	38	31
44	11.58	9.73	15.67	14.10	25	22	41	34
45	12.17	10.15	16.86	15.16	28	24	45	38
46	12.84	10.64	17.85	15.83	30	25	49	40
47	13.43	11.16	19.03	16.68	32	27	54	44
48	13.48	11.88	20.27	17.37	35	29	58	47
49	13.69	12.33	21.73	18.32	37	31	63	52
50	14.36	12.98	23.00	19.82	40	33	69	57
51	15.37	13.75	25.30	20.65	45	35	78	62
52	16.36	14.87	27.63	22.13	49	38	87	67
53	17.46	15.88	30.95	24.81	54	42	98	73
54	18.68	16.72	33.99	26.20	60	46	110	81
55	20.70	17.50	37.13	27.85	67	50	121	90
56	22.69	19.48	42.01	31.07	74	53	138	96
57	24.69	20.63	45.81	33.43	81	58	150	107

Issue Age	\$100,000		\$250,000		\$500,000*		\$1,000,000*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
58	27.70	21.98	50.43	36.04	89	62	169	116
59	30.37	23.51	55.50	38.76	98	67	186	126
60	33.49	24.28	60.76	41.71	109	73	206	136
61	36.49	25.09	66.43	47.10	122	83	236	154
62	39.88	27.91	73.90	51.32	136	92	262	166
63	43.69	34.01	81.54	57.25	153	102	287	187
64	47.91	38.28	90.20	62.32	170	112	323	200
65	52.81	40.88	100.33	68.23	191	125	361	223
66	58.71	44.61	114.29	75.40	211	135	392	242
67	64.59	49.08	125.27	83.64	234	146	436	261
68	72.24	59.65	143.07	105.55	254	173	485	322
69	79.34	64.22	158.23	129.28	288	188	547	352
70	86.85	68.11	177.24	147.66	318	203	595	375
71	102.45	82.60	203.10	159.34	374	235	702	443
72	113.68	93.16	232.46	172.23	427	272	807	512
73	127.55	106.68	267.15	188.15	493	319	937	596
74	142.08	119.36	303.50	204.84	562	367	1074	685
75	159.25	140.48	346.45	224.56	644	424	1235	789
76	200.03	168.51	418.29	276.67	785	530	1489	982
77	249.54	216.74	505.52	339.94	956	658	1797	1215
78	310.70	268.40	613.27	418.11	1167	817	2179	1504
79	374.78	322.52	726.16	500.00	1389	983	2578	1807
80	450.50	386.47	816.15	596.78	1625	1180	3050	2164

\* \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 monthly rates are rounded up to the nearest dollar. Therefore, actual monthly rates at \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 may be slightly less.

**Call Wiley Maddox Today to Request an Application:**

**(203) 637-1544 or (800) 645-1544**

**Monday - Friday 8 am to 5 pm EST**

Premiums illustrated represent 10 year level term insurance with guaranteed level premiums for 10 years. \$100,000 - \$1,000,000 rates are Select-A-Term [policy form no. 07007] Preferred Plus Non-tobacco. This coverage features a level death benefit with fully guaranteed level premiums for the first 10 years with coverage to expire at age 95. The policy may be continued on Annual Renewable Term at the end of the level premium period without evidence of insurability until the anniversary nearest the insured's 95th birthday. The underwriting risks, financial and contractual obligations and support functions associated with products issued by **American General Life Insurance Company (AGL)** Houston, TX are its responsibility. **AGL** does not solicit business in the state of New York. All terms, conditions and limitations of any policy issued shall govern. American General Life Companies is the marketing name for a group of domestic life insurers including American General Life Insurance Company and The United States Life Insurance Company in the City of New York. Policies and riders not available in all states. Premium rates current as of September 2025; rates may vary by state. Premiums available for other rate classes, ages and payment plans. Premium charges depend on evidence of insurability. Premiums increase at the end of the guaranteed term if policy is renewed. Death benefit remains level. The policy may be contested for two years from the date of issue for material misstatements or omissions on the application. Death benefit is limited to return of premium paid in the event of suicide within first two years. Rates subject to change. Standard Marketing Services represents AGL and other fine insurance companies.

All companies identified above are wholly owned subsidiaries of Corebridge Financial, Inc. Corebridge Financial and Corebridge are marketing names used by subsidiaries of Corebridge Financial, Inc.

**U.S. POSTAL SERVICE — STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,  
MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION  
(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)**

Title of publication — Illinois Country Living.  
Publication No. — 258420.  
Date of filing — Sept. 29, 2025.  
Frequency of issue — Monthly.  
No. of issues published annually — 12.  
Annual subscription price — \$12.  
Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication — Illinois Country Living, 6460 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, Sangamon, Illinois 62712-6820.  
Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher — Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, 6460 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, Sangamon, Illinois 62712-6820.  
Full Names and complete Mailing addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor — Publisher, Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, 6460 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, Sangamon, Illinois 62712-6820. Editor — Colten Bradford, 6460 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, Sangamon, Illinois 62712-6820. Managing Editor — Colten Bradford, 6460 S. Sixth St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, Sangamon, Illinois 62712-6820.  
Owner — Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL, 62712-6820.  
Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities — None.  
Publication Name — Illinois Country Living.  
Issue Date for Circulation Data Below — October 2025.  
Extent and Nature of Circulation — Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date  
Total No. Copies — 193,567; 194,236  
Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions- 192,345; 193,018  
Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions - None; None  
Paid Distribution outside mail including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and other Non-USPS None; None  
Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS None; None  
Total Paid Distribution - 192,345; 193,018  
Free Distribution by Mail Outside-County— 516; 516  
Free Distribution by Mail In-County - None; None  
Free Distribution-Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS— None; None  
Free Distribution Outside the Mail— None; None  
Total Free Distribution - 516; 516  
Total Distribution - 192,861; 193,534  
Copies Not Distributed - 706; 702  
Total - 193,567; 194,236  
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation - 99.7%; 99.7%  
This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the November 2025 issue of this publication.  
I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions and/or civil sanctions.

/s/Colten Bradford



## Where is it?

The winners of the September hidden objects contest were Michael Wilburn of Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association and Carol Thomas of Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

The pumpkin hidden in the October 2025 issue was on page 32 in the GardenWise column. 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 Thanksgiving approaches, be on the lookout for a turkey handprint, 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.💡



## IEC MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIPS

### \$51,000 up for grabs in scholarship funds

Seventeen academic scholarships are available to high school seniors through the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric



Cooperatives Memorial Scholarship program. The \$3,000 scholarships will be awarded in 2026 to financially assist students in the electric co-op family.

Ten scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors whose parents are Illinois electric co-op members. Five scholarships are reserved for high school seniors enrolling full-time at a two-year Illinois community college whose parents are Illinois electric cooperative members or co-op employees.

Additionally, the Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship will be awarded to a student who is the child of an Illinois electric cooperative employee or director. The deadline to apply for these 16 scholarships is Dec. 31, 2025. Go to [aiec.coop/iec-scholarship](http://aiec.coop/iec-scholarship) to learn more.

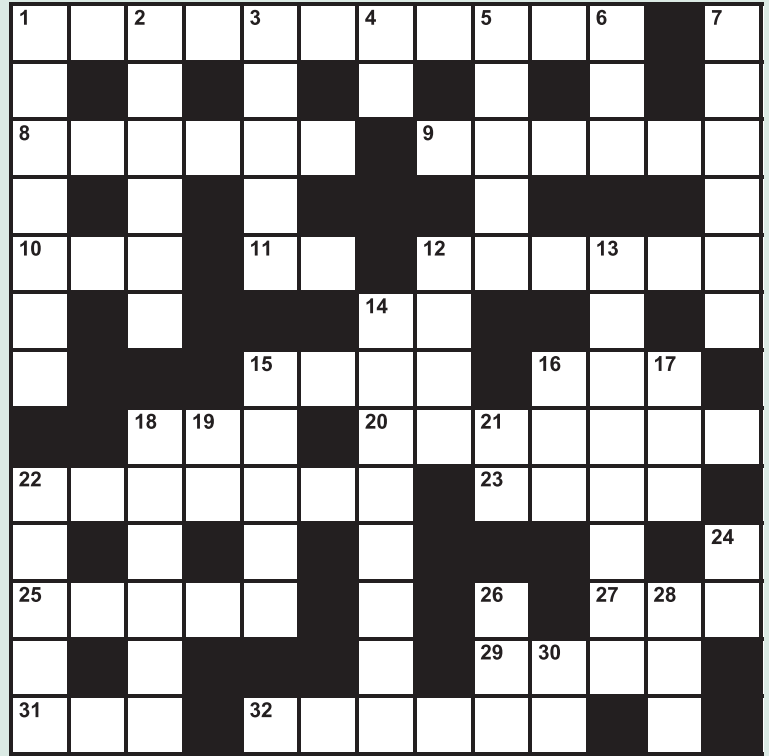
The final scholarship, the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship, helps pay for costs to attend lineworker school conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield. The deadline to apply for this scholarship is April 30, 2026. To apply, go to [aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship](http://aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship).

The scholarship program has grown from initially awarding two \$1,000 scholarships in 1996 to now offering 17 \$3,000 scholarships. The Illinois Community College System Foundation (ICCSF) administers the IEC Memorial Scholarship Fund. For more information regarding the scholarships, contact your local electric cooperative.💡

**Across**

- 1 November 11: a time to honor our military, 2 words
- 8 It's sometimes used to fry green beans, \_\_\_\_\_ butter
- 9 Cook at a low heat
- 10 Drink cooler
- 11 Former
- 12 Sweet Chinese fruit
- 14 St. Louis arch locale, abbr.
- 15 Chicken noodle, for one
- 16 Before, in poetry
- 18 Animal used for beef
- 20 We thank all our military for their \_\_\_\_\_
- 22 Leafy green often used in a Thanksgiving salad
- 23 Emphatic no
- 25 Added to coffee
- 27 Obtain
- 29 Like a cake with frosting
- 31 Bro's sibling
- 32 People who celebrate Thanksgiving together

- 13 Veterans are part of our national \_\_\_\_\_ as they embody and protect the values of our nation
- 14 Porcini \_\_\_\_\_
- 15 Large group of pollinators on the move
- 16 Night before an event
- 17 Environmentalist's prefix
- 18 Fermented apple beverages
- 19 In operation
- 21 Recreational vehicle for camping, abbr.
- 22 Potato holders
- 24 Abbreviation for mountain
- 26 Nothing at all
- 28 College internet address ending
- 30 History-making pitcher, Young



**Down**

- 1 Brussels sprouts and mashed potatoes, for short
- 2 Iconic meat dish at Thanksgiving
- 3 Rear as a child
- 4 Compass direction, abbr.
- 5 White-petaled garden flower with a yellow center
- 6 Sweet potato
- 7 Brave individuals admired for courage
- 12 Run with long strides

# Claim your 2026 calendar today

ORDER

**Illinois  
Country Living**  
**2026  
CALENDAR**

Featuring photos by readers submitted to our SnapShots page!

**\$10, plus tax**

*Free shipping*

**ORDER AT  
ICL.COOP/CALENDAR**



## LET'S GO!

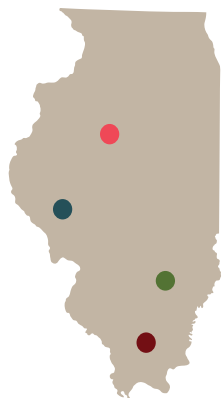
**Nov. 13-15**  
**Christmas Barn Sale Trail**  
 MASSAC COUNTY  
 Make headway on your holiday shopping at 15 locations

**Nov. 23**  
**Holiday Extravaganza**  
 SPRINGFIELD  
 Unique holiday shopping at the Orr Building on the Illinois State Fairgrounds

**Dec. 4**  
**Illuminated**  
 ROCKFORD  
 Anderson Japanese Gardens' wintertime lights experience lasts through Jan. 4, 2026

**Dec. 7**  
**Jamboree Christmas**  
 BIBLE GROVE  
 Classic country, '50s and '60s music and Christmas standards, along with Santa and his helpers

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



## Parade of Lights

**NOVEMBER**  
**22** The East Peoria Festival of Lights kicks off with its annual Parade of Lights, featuring 40 floats, including a 95-foot-long, smoke-spewing Chinese dragon, a 160-foot-long steam engine train and, for the first time in three years, the U.S.S. Peoria of Star Trek fame. The 2-mile route is mostly along East Washington and Taylor streets.

Nov. 22, 2025: 6 p.m.  
 ● East Washington and Taylor streets, East Peoria  
 Admission: free  
 855-833-5327, [cityofeastpeoria.com/153/Parade-of-Lights](http://cityofeastpeoria.com/153/Parade-of-Lights)

## Holiday Shop Hop

**NOVEMBER**  
**28-29** Explore, shop and perhaps win the grand prize: a local shopping spree valued at \$1,000. Start at any participating location to get your shop hop card and guide. Get your card marked at each location. Once completed, turn it into any participating store. All completed cards will receive a discount voucher and be entered into the grand prize drawing for \$1,000 in gift cards.

Nov. 28-29, 2025: Store hours vary.  
 ● 350 Tower Square Plaza, Marion  
[Visitsi.com/events/holiday-shop-hop](http://Visitsi.com/events/holiday-shop-hop)



## 11th Annual Winchester Hometown Christmas

**DECEMBER**  
**6** This day full of holiday fun includes a pancake and sausage breakfast, a cookie and candy walk, vendors at various locations, specials at local businesses, handmade wreaths for sale, a model train display, art show, a decorated Christmas tree contest, treats for children, a resident elf, tours of the historic train depot, Santa, a soup supper, and a lighted Christmas parade, followed by caroling.

Dec. 6, 2025: all day  
 ● 1 E. Market St., Winchester  
 Admission: free  
 217-370-8493, [facebook.com/groups/625572746179720](https://facebook.com/groups/625572746179720)

## A Night in Bethlehem

**DECEMBER**  
**6-7** Visitors are invited to take a stroll through Bethlehem in the time Christ was born. Meet Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, among others, and hear their stories and how they played a role in Christ's birth. Stroll through the Bethlehem Market and visit with merchants. Children can enjoy making a craft, and everyone is welcome to indulge in a few treats from the Bethlehem Bakery.

Dec. 6-7, 2025: 6 p.m.  
 ● Flora Church of the Nazarene, 12 Parsons Lane, Flora  
 Admission: free  
 618-662-2337, [floranazarene.org](http://floranazarene.org)





WHITETAIL PROPERTIES REAL ESTATE  
HUNTING | RANCH | FARM | TIMBER



A DIVISION/TRADE NAME OF  
WHITETAIL PROPERTIES REAL ESTATE

# LAND SALES & AUCTIONS

**ADAM CRUMRIN**  
EAST CENTRAL ILLINOIS  
BROKER, LAND SPECIALIST  
**217.276.2334**



**ROD SHEPARD**  
CENTRAL ILLINOIS  
BROKER, LAND SPECIALIST  
**217.801.5730**



CONTACT YOUR LOCAL LAND SPECIALISTS  
**WHITETAILPROPERTIES.COM**



Whitetail Properties Real Estate, LLC DBA Whitetail Properties, DBA  
Whitetail Properties Real Estate. Licensed in IL - Debbie S. Laux, Broker.

## PROTECT WHAT MATTERS MOST

CALL TODAY:

**(346) 445-6656**

*"Gold is money.  
Everything else is  
credit."* - J.P. Morgan

\$5 Gold American  
Eagles at COST! It's  
that simple. These  
Government issued  
coins are the easiest  
and safest way to  
protect your money  
and your family!  
A 5 minute call can  
change everything.  
DON'T WAIT!



**\$399**

per coin

Vault Code:

**ONG2511**

If you are interested in  
acquiring gold, our goal  
is to make it easy for  
you! We are looking  
forward to EARNING  
your business, not just  
gaining it!



- Free of Dealer Markup.
- Portfolio Diversifier.
- Inflation Proof.
- Ultimate Safety Net.

LIMITED TIME OFFER -  
WHILE SUPPLIES LAST



**SUPREME COIN AND BULLION**

*Your future self will thank you*

## Riding out a winter storm

Plan now for cold-weather power outages

**WINTER CAN BRING BEAUTIFUL** days for taking brisk walks, admiring the fresh snowfall or creating snow angels. Winter's fury can also produce icy roads, subzero wind chills and power outages.

a winter storm long before one is forecast. A good way to start is to put an emergency kit together. Safe Electricity suggests starting with these items:

- A charged cell phone: Most people are used to having their phones with them, but also have a portable, fully charged power bank on hand.


Other basic items include: toiletries, hygiene items, flashlight with extra batteries, a battery-operated radio or an NOAA weather radio, a list of emergency telephone numbers, pet supplies and resources for alternate heating methods, such as a fireplace or woodburning stove.

Before winter, check your trees to see if they are too close to power lines. If so, call your electric cooperative to have a tree-trimming professional remove limbs that could fall on power lines if they become covered in ice or snow. Only certified line clearance tree-trimming professionals are authorized and allowed to trim trees near power lines.

If you plan to use a portable generator during a power outage, remember to use caution. Never use a portable generator indoors, in a garage or near windows or doors, because they emit deadly carbon monoxide.

Never plug a portable generator into a wall outlet. Doing so can create deadly backfeed, which occurs when electricity travels from the generator back through the power lines.

During a winter outage, monitor the temperature in your home. Infants and elderly people are more susceptible to the cold. Also, avoid going outside. Downed power lines could be submerged in snow and ice, making them difficult to identify. Consider all downed and hanging lines energized and dangerous.

For more information about preparing for winter power outages and electrical safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org). 



Unfortunately, heavy snow and accumulating ice can easily bring tree limbs down on power lines, cutting off power to homes and businesses. Even melting ice can be a problem, because it can cause power lines to sag from the added weight. Planning for future outages brought on by severe winter conditions can make riding out a prolonged power outage safer and a little more comfortable.

How long it takes for your power to be restored depends on several factors: the extent of the storm's destruction, the number of outages in your area, and when it becomes safe for utility personnel to get to the affected areas.

Take steps to help keep your family safe and comfortable during

- Water: Stock up on bottled water for consumption. FEMA recommends storing at least one gallon per person, per day.
- Food: Have at least enough food, including nonperishable packaged or canned foods, juices, special foods for infants or the elderly and snack foods, to last a week.
- Utensils: Without electricity, be sure you have a manual can opener, paper plates and plastic utensils.
- Layers and added warmth: Gather blankets, pillows and warm clothing items.
- Medical supplies: Locate a first aid kit, medicine, prescription drugs and any essential medical equipment.



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.

# WHAT IF YOUR BED COULD change with you

Life changes. Your body changes. Your sleep needs change. Sleep Number® beds are adjustable, so you can change for just right comfort night after night — year after year.

**ADJUST FIRMER OR  
SOFTER, WHENEVER  
YOU LIKE**

**RESPONDS TO  
YOU TO HELP KEEP  
YOU ASLEEP**

**DESIGNED TO  
LAST 25 YEARS\***

sleep  number

visit [sleepnumber.com](https://sleepnumber.com) | 1-877-246-9686

\*Based on standard durability testing methods



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK GILLILAND

Check all windows to ensure a tight lock and seal to reduce outdoor air from seeping into your home.

## Winter is coming

Prep your home for cold weather

**YOU'LL BE THANKFUL YOU** prepared in the fall for colder weather when you receive your first winter bill. Just as pulling out your winter gear before you need it, prepping your home for the coming season is a great idea.

The following steps can be taken now to use less energy at home before the winter chill sets in. They also help lower strain on the electric grid during extreme winter weather when energy use is at its peak.

First, let's consider your home's layers. Just like layering up those winter flannels, fleeces and down jackets, your home needs layers, too. Air sealing and insulation protect your home from the elements while locking in the warm air to keep you cozy. The same applies to hot weather, making air sealing and insulation a year-round efficiency upgrade.

To offset the costs, federal tax credits for energy efficiency upgrades are available through Dec. 31, 2025. Homeowners can claim a total of 30% of the cost of installation, up to \$3,200. Tax credits are available for insulation, heat pumps, air conditioning systems and more.

There's even a tax credit for electrical panel upgrades, which might be needed to accommodate new energy-efficient equipment.

There's also a \$150 tax credit for an energy audit, which allows a professional to help determine what your home needs and how to prioritize potential projects. Visit [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) for more information.

When it comes to do-it-yourself projects, there are a few upgrades you can do. Lock in savings with window cleaning and maintenance. Make sure sash locks and window cranks are in working order and clean. Debris can keep them from closing snugly.

I find the crevice tool attachment on my vacuum cleaner, combined with a small, dry scrub brush or an old toothbrush works great. The locks should pull the top and bottom window sashes together tightly. For casement windows, the locks should pull the window tightly to the frame.

Although it might not seem like a significant difference, reducing airflow through and around windows can make your home

more comfortable in the winter. Replacing broken or nonfunctional sash locks can be a reasonable DIY project, but it's best to avoid doing it when the winter winds are blowing. Also, use caulk to seal all gaps around the window trim. If you have operable storm windows, make sure they close.

If you have a forced-air heating or air conditioning system, replace the filter. First, turn the system off to check it. If your filter is dirty, leave it in place until you have a replacement. Running your system without a filter can send any dust or dirt in the ductwork directly into the components and damage your equipment.

Make a note of the filter's size on your shopping list or take a picture of the filter with your phone so you can reference it when running errands. Also, stocking up on filters can save money. I bought a 12-pack of filters for \$72 — \$6 each. An individual filter was \$10.

This fall, look for opportunities to protect your home from the elements and maintain your equipment before the cold of winter. 💡



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



**RENEWAL**  
by **ANDERSEN**  
FULL-SERVICE WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT

Get a **FREE** consultation!  
Call **855-421-9829**

## WINDOW AND DOOR FINANCING EVENT

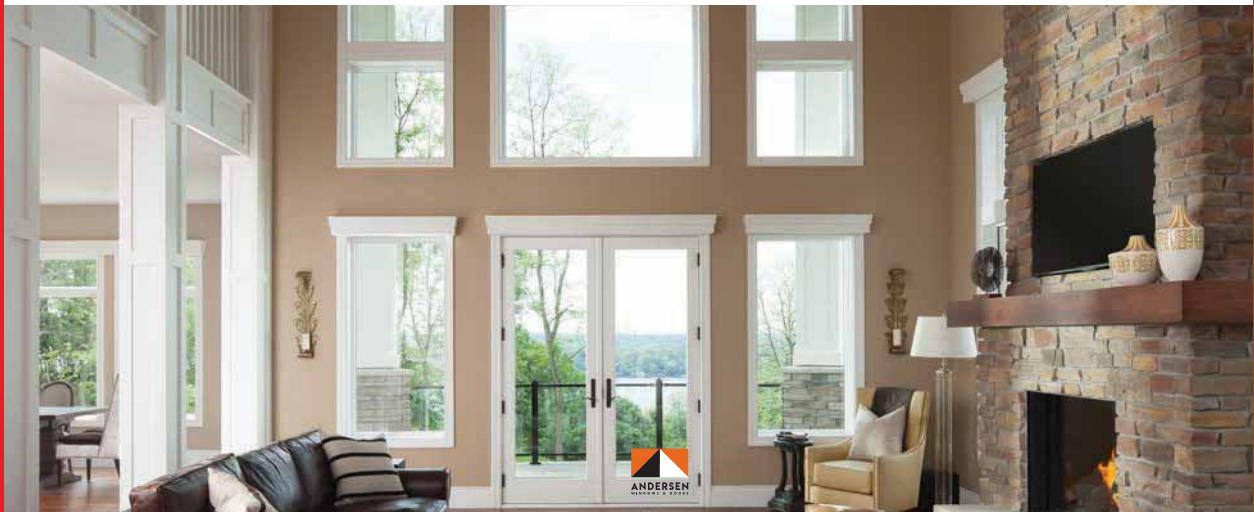
Order now and pay nothing until November 2027!

**NO** Money Down

**NO** Monthly Payments

**NO** Interest for **24 MONTHS**<sup>1</sup>

MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 6 - INTEREST ACCRUES BUT IS WAIVED IF PAID IN FULL WITHIN 24 MONTHS



**TESTED, TRUSTED, AND TOTALLY PROVEN.<sup>2</sup>**



Offer Ends **12/1/2025**

Call for your **FREE** consultation.

**855-421-9829**

**FINDYOURWINDOW.COM**

More 5-Star  
Reviews



Than Other Leading Full-Service  
Window Replacement  
Companies<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>DETAILS OF OFFER: Offer expires 12/1/2025. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Get 24 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase six (6) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 11/1/2025 and 12/1/2025. Subject to credit approval. 24-month Promo Period: when no payments are due, interest accrues but is waived if the loan is paid in full before the Promo Period expires. Any unpaid balance owed after the Promo Period, plus accrued interest, will be paid in installments based on the terms disclosed in the customer's loan agreement. Financing is provided by various financial institutions without regard to age, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or familial status. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at renewalbyandersen.com/license. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. <sup>2</sup>Based on testing of 10 double-hung units per ASTM E2068 20 years after installation. <sup>3</sup>It is the only warranty among top selling window companies that meets all of the following requirements: easy to understand terms, unrestricted transferability, installation coverage, labor coverage, geographically unrestricted, coverage for exterior color, insect screens and hardware, and no maintenance requirement. Visit renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest for details. <sup>4</sup>Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading national full-service window replacement companies. January 2024 Reputation.com. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are trademarks Andersen Corporation. ©2025 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA14201



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATTHEW BORKOSKI PHOTOGRAPHY

AI can quickly scan SCADA, automated meter data or voltage datasets to detect unusual patterns.

## Digital assistance

### How electric co-ops can innovate with AI

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)** IS no longer a trendy, high-tech buzzword for the exclusive domain of data scientists and Silicon Valley firms. Today, electric cooperatives across the country are discovering how AI — particularly generative AI and large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and Gemini — can transform the way they power their local communities. From improving reliability and safety to enhancing member services and streamlining daily operations, AI is helping electric co-ops do more with less.

Cooperatives are known for wearing many hats — from utility operators to first responders and local engines for economic development. But, for many co-ops, limited staffing and tight budgets can make it difficult to explore new technologies.

AI tools, especially LLMs, now offer copy-and-paste workflows that anyone can use. Whether you're a system engineer, a vegetation manager or a communications specialist, AI can act as a digital assistant — automating routine tasks, analyzing data and accelerating insights without any coding skills required.

Even for experienced programmers, AI offers value. Those with technical backgrounds can use AI to rapidly test models, tune code or generate outputs in a timelier manner. But the real innovation is that now, anyone at an electric co-op can access the benefits of advanced analytics and automation. While the specific

tools and datasets may vary, most AI applications follow a simple process:

- 1. Gather data:** Relevant information can be pulled from internal systems or spreadsheets.
- 2. Understand data:** AI can be used to summarize, structure or flag any potential issues in the dataset.
- 3. Apply a prompt:** Use a tested prompt to ask AI to perform a specific task or analysis.
- 4. Put AI to work:** AI-generated insights or outputs can be utilized to inform business decisions or create deliverables.

These tasks often take just a few hours to complete. Yet the time saved — and the ability to tackle previously out-of-reach projects — can have long-lasting, positive impacts across multiple departments.

Let's take a look at some of the most promising applications for AI.

### Load forecasting and peak prediction

AI can analyze historical data on the demand for electricity, weather trends and consumer behavior to forecast future demand requirements. With simple prompt-based tools, electric co-ops can generate accurate predictions — helping them plan for high-demand periods without complex software or deep technical expertise.

### Anomaly detection and phase identification

AI can quickly scan SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) systems, automated meter data or voltage datasets to detect unusual patterns — like early signs of equipment failure before they escalate into power outages.

### Vegetation management

By combining satellite imagery, LiDAR data and AI-powered image recognition, co-ops can assess and prioritize vegetation encroachments more efficiently — proactively preventing disruptions and reducing manual fieldwork.

### Safety and compliance

AI can draft job hazard analyses, summarize safety reports or even generate site-specific assessments — all in minutes. This supports a safer work environment for all co-op employees while easing the documentation burden on safety staff.

### Back-office productivity

LLMs are also proving useful in administrative tasks: crafting job descriptions, summarizing long reports and drafting messaging.

AI certainly isn't a cure-all — but it is a powerful tool when applied thoughtfully. For electric cooperatives, it's not about chasing tech trends — it's about solving real-world problems, reducing strain on limited resources and delivering more value to co-op communities. 💡



Shane Schwartz writes on consumer and co-op affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

# Survival of the Sharpest

*When it's you against nature, there's only one tool you need: the tempered steel Stag Hunter from Stauer—now ONLY \$59!*

That first crack of thunder sounded like a bomb just fell on Ramshorn Peak. Black clouds rolled in and the wind shook the trees. I had ventured off the trail on my own, gambled with the weather and now I was trapped in the forest. Miles from camp. Surrounded by wilderness and watching eyes. I knew that if I was going to make it through the night I needed to find shelter and build a fire... fast. As the first raindrops fell, I reached for my **Stag Hunter Knife**.

Forget about smartphones and GPS, because when it comes to taking on Mother Nature, there's only one tool you really need. Our stunning **Stag Hunter** is the ultimate sidekick for surviving and thriving in the great outdoors. Priced at \$149, the **Stag Hunter** can be yours today for an unbelievable **\$59!** Call now and we'll include a bonus leather sheath!

**A legend in steel.** The talented knifemakers of Trophy Stag Cutlery have done it again by crafting a fixed-blade beauty that's sharp in every sense of the word. The **Stag Hunter** sports an impressive 5 1/3" tempered German stainless steel blade with a genuine deer stag horn and stained Pakkawood™ handle, brass hand guard and polished pommel. You get the best in 21st-century construction with a classic look inspired by legendary American pioneers.

**But we don't stop there.** While supplies last, we'll include a pair of \$99 30x60 HD pocket binoculars *and* a genuine leather sheath **FREE** when you purchase the Stag Hunter Knife.

**Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed.** Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the craftsmanship. If you're not completely impressed, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price. But we believe that once you wrap your fingers around the **Stag Hunter's** handle, you'll be ready to carve your own niche into the wild frontier.

**Stag Hunter Knife \$149\***

**Offer Code Price Only \$59 + S&P Save \$90**

## 1-800-333-2045

**Your Insider Offer Code: SHK387-10**

You must use the insider offer code to get our special price.

**Stauer**® 14091 Southcross Drive W., Dept. SHK387-10  
Burnsville, Minnesota 55337 [www.stauer.com](http://www.stauer.com)

\*Discount is only for customers who use the offer code versus the listed original Stauer.com price.



Rating of A+

**EXCLUSIVE  
FREE**  
**Stauer 30x60 HD  
Pocket Binoculars**  
-a \$99 value-  
with your purchase of the  
Stag Hunter Knife



**BONUS!** Call today and you'll also receive this genuine leather sheath!

**TAKE 60%  
OFF INSTANTLY!**  
When you use your  
INSIDER  
OFFER CODE

Not shown  
actual size.

★★★★★  
"This knife is  
beautiful!"  
— J., La  
Crescent, MN

★★★★★  
"The feel of  
this knife is  
unbelievable...  
this an incredibly  
fine instrument."  
— H., Arvada, CO

- 5 1/3" fixed German stainless steel blade (9 3/4" total length) • Stag horn and Pakkawood™ handle • Includes leather sheath

Stauer... *Afford the Extraordinary.*®

# STORIED LIVES

By Lisa Cherry

## *Tales from rural booksellers*

**THERE'S A ROMANCE TO** thumbing through pages leisurely amid rows of shelves lined with books of all genres, particularly in an independent bookstore. The intangible presence of ideas and the weight of words punctuate the search for that perfect read, whether intended for escape or broadening the mind.

Rural booksellers throughout Illinois are serving purposes greater than providing a mere retail outlet. It may be preserving history and the words of authors that younger generations may not recognize or encouraging parents to read to their children. It could be knowing customers and what they like in order to connect readers with books they'll love but may not know exist. It might be continuing a long-held tradition in the community.

Whatever that greater purpose may be, all have a few things in common — a distinct personality, a love of books and community, and the ability to create a safe place open to ideas that often also serves as a local venue for creatives.

### **Preserving important works**

Decades ago, former Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative members John and Jeannie Alexander opened the doors to Books on the Square in Virden. Today, three buildings on East Jackson Street house

thousands of titles in the Alexanders' flagship store. In 2017, the couple opened another shop in downtown Springfield.

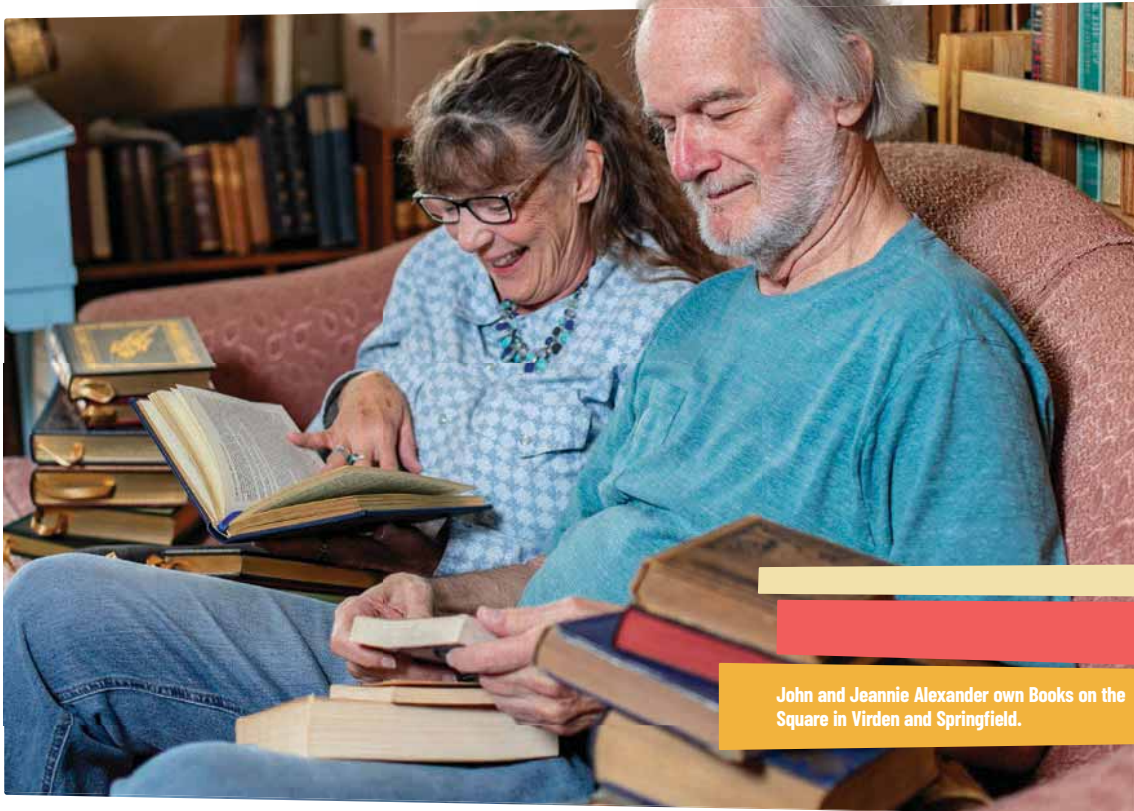
"We've spent a lot of years doing this," says John. "They flew by quickly."

Years prior, John was a political science professor and one of the original faculty members at Lincoln Land Community College, where Jeannie also taught public speaking.

"I had been teaching at the college level a few years and was kind of burned out," he explains. "[I] decided I wanted to do my own thing. I grew up in a retail family ... I was interested in Illinois history and Illinois politics, and teachers get a lot of books free ... so that kind of got me started."

The couple first moved into the retail arena with antiques, health food and a few books. Eventually, they decided that books were really where their interests lie.

"The first thing someone will say when they come in the store, especially for the first time, is [that] it smells



John and Jeannie Alexander own Books on the Square in Virden and Springfield.

like books, and I think that's a compliment," laughs Jeannie. "There are people who still want to hold a book in their hand."

For John and Jeannie, one of the most special aspects of owning an independent bookstore is the role it plays in preserving and passing on important works of fiction and nonfiction.

The couple often travels in search of rare books in good condition.

"We'll go within a certain radius to look," says Jeannie. "John's particular about condition, and he loves it when he sees a book he's never seen before."

Their passion is obvious in the sheer number of books in their Virden location, previously occupied by John's father's shoe business. Between the two, the family has been on Virden's square for 77 years.

Word of their inventory has gotten around over the years. "People who are into books find out about us by talking to other book people,"

John says. "Most of them talk among themselves, and over 35 years of, I hope, treating people right, we get a lot of word-of-mouth recommendations from customers."

While Jeannie says customers love the cluttered ambiance of the Virden store, there's a historic charm to the Springfield location.

"Part of the magic is that this building was built in 1854, so [Abraham] Lincoln was living in Springfield when [it] was built," says John. "When it opened, the second floor [housed] the mayor's

***"There are people who still want to hold a book in their hand."***

office, and the mayor was William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner. I don't know how many times Lincoln walked up these stairs. ... We can feel him here."

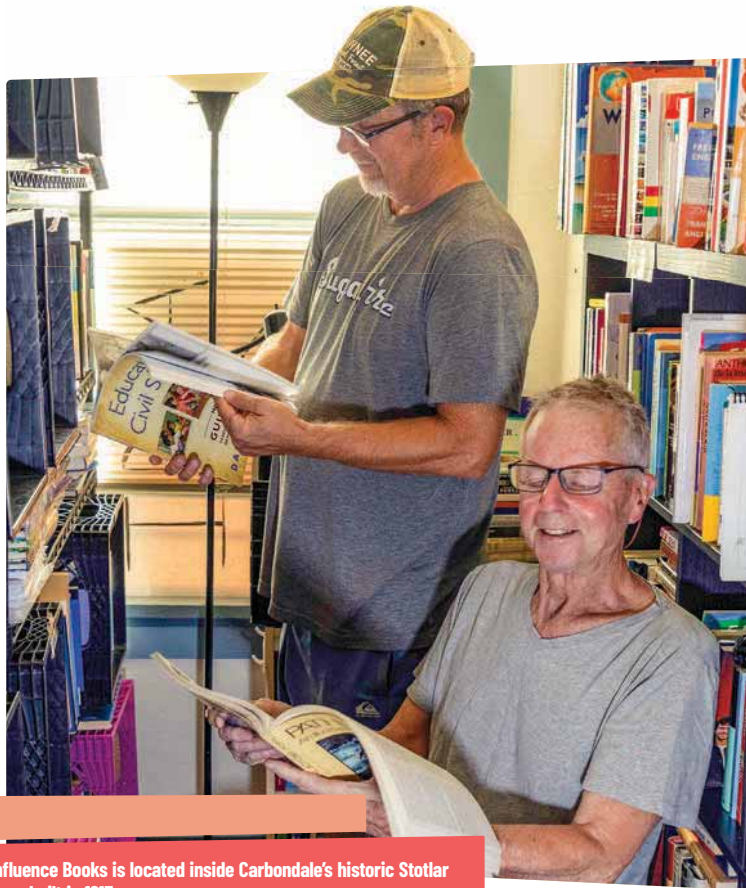
### Equipping the next generation

"Books were always my first love," says Mary Olson, owner of Prairie Fox Books in Ottawa.

Olson, who has a degree in education and secondary education, opened the store in 2016 and owns the shop with her daughter Gabriella.

Among the store's staff are her son Ethan and part-time employee Patty Wagner, who teaches seventh grade literature. "In the past, [I've had] other teachers working for me, and in my experience, teachers are the best employees to have," says Olson. "They're used to multitasking; they're used to dealing with different personalities. They're used to doing stuff all the time, all day long. They're just a good fit."

She believes independent bookstores like hers offer people unabridged access to the written word. She emphasizes that all people are welcome. "Even libraries are seemingly falling to the banning



**Confluence Books is located inside Carbondale's historic Stotlar House, built in 1917.**

of books and whatnot. So, you can curate your collection,” Olson explains. “As a person who was a teacher and who loved reading to my own children, I don’t think people do that enough anymore, and it’s essential for people to learn how to think and to learn how to analyze. ... This is the fundamental thing that you need for the rest of your life.”

Her favorite genres are children’s books and middle-grade books. “They’re so much better than when we were kids. ... Everybody loves the classic [quality] of Nancy Drew, but you read it, and the writing is so stilted and just so different than what we have nowadays,” says Olson. “The books [now] cover so many subjects, social subjects and family issues. [They] deal with hard topics, and they’re well written. And picture books are not only an

introduction to reading and stories, but to artwork.”

Olson believes it is also important to give writers who publish independently an opportunity to show and sell their books. As a result, Prairie Fox does consignment with local authors and hosts an annual Lit Fest featuring their works.

### Creating connections

Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association members Sarah Heyer and her husband Lee Hartman own Confluence Books in Carbondale and have been open for business for five years. “I see us as doing a service for the community, to take books that somebody doesn’t need anymore and to find a reader for those books,” she says.

Heyer was previously the director of Keep Carbondale Beautiful, a nonprofit that initiates, plans and directs cooperative efforts in litter control, recycling, community beautification and environmental



**Sarah Heyer (pictured) and her husband Lee Hartman own Confluence Books.**

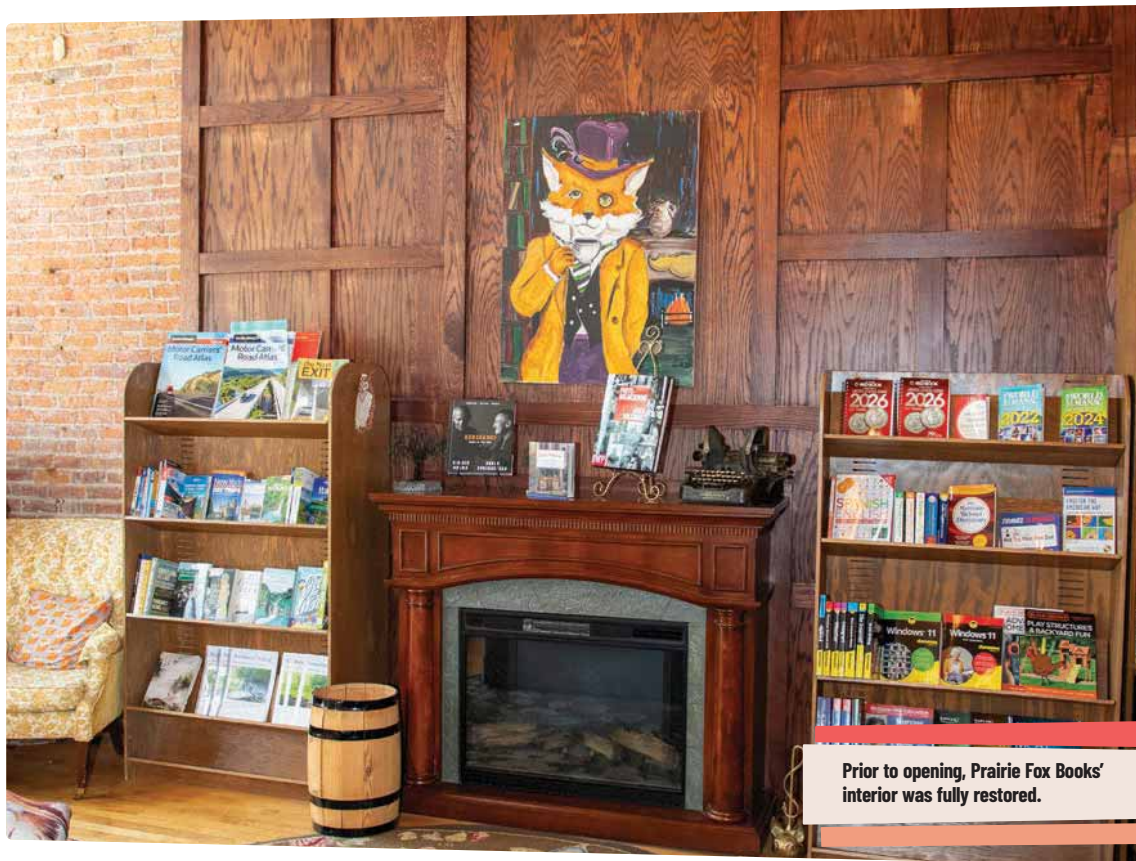
education with the message “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” “I see the bookstore as ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’ [as well],” she says.

Named in reference to the region, the bookstore’s logo shows the Mississippi and Ohio rivers coming together in the pages of an open book. A star represents Carbondale’s location. “It’s a great metaphor for the streams of books and ... keeping things flowing,” Heyer explains. “[Keeping] the flow of books going in and out to people who want them.”

The shop’s location in Carbondale also has meaning. The historic Stotlar House was built in 1917 and was the home of a university professor.

“There [are] people who come in who had him as a teacher. It’s fun to have people come in and say, ‘I remember this house. This was the dining room. I remember playing in this house when I was a kid.’ [The professor’s] daughter came and visited a couple times, and she said, ‘That room upstairs, that’s where my father was born, and that was my room in high school. I used to climb out on the porch and sneak out at night,’” Heyer shares with a laugh.

While they see a lot of Southern Illinois University students, she says half of their traffic is first-time customers. “We get a lot of college students — the more bookish ones. They’re repeat customers,” she says. “Graduate students might be more



Prior to opening, Prairie Fox Books' interior was fully restored.

common than undergraduates, because they have been here for a little while, [but] a lot of people say, 'I've been driving past this place for years and finally came in.'

Her favorite part of the day is connecting someone with a book she has found.

"I obviously don't know all my customers, but I know a lot of them. So, when I see a book, sometimes it makes me think of a certain person, and then I can contact that person and say, 'Hey, this book just came in, and I thought of you,'" she explains. "Making connections is what I like to do."

### Furthering a legacy

More than 20 years ago, McDonough Power Cooperative members Rick and Linda Cox picked up the baton to carry on a longstanding institution in their Macomb community — the local independent bookstore. Today, feline floor managers Pickle and Jocko keep a watchful eye while greeting visitors to New Copperfield's Book Service on the

town square, though they leave book sales to their human counterparts.

"We're just the most recent in a long line of independent bookstores in Macomb since before the Civil War," says Linda. Previously, she worked at another local bookstore. When it suddenly closed, community members panicked.

"They announced on the radio they were going to close. By five o'clock that night, we had seven people asking us to open a bookstore," she explains. A friend of a friend told her, "Even if you just have a little nook someplace ... we need a bookstore in this town." Linda spoke to her previous employer, who, in exchange for keeping "Copperfield's" in the name, worked out a deal for the bookcases and other items.

When the new shop opened, cookbooks and Civil War accounts were all the rage. Today, its owners are most proud of their regional authors section. Along the way, Linda says the ability to adapt to changing tastes is what has kept them in business.

"We keep changing," she says. "We're attuned to what people in this area are buying." Another aspect that sets New Copperfield's apart is their focus on local authors. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shop frequently hosted author events and live music.



Rick and Linda Cox, pictured with Pickle, own New Copperfield's Book Service in Macomb.

"Indie bookstores are sensitive to what their local people want, and their survival depends on being able to clue into [that], and having events, whether it be musical or authors or whatever, [keeps us]

deeply involved with the community,” she says.

### A team effort

Some rural booksellers operate outside the traditional brick-and-mortar storefront. JCE Co-op member P.J. HarteNaus and her daughter, Kelly Bishop, the women behind Whistleslick Press in Galena, sell P.J.’s books both online and on location from the bed of their farm-truck-turned-bookmobile, affectionately named Mary Jane.

They started Whistleslick to self-publish and market P.J.’s books after frustrating experiences with traditional publishers.

“I ended up finding somebody who accepted the book, and I was just thrilled,” P.J. says. “I had no idea then what I was in for. ... It was expensive, and they flattered you ’til the cows came home. ... Then they disappeared.” The company was what is known in the industry as a vanity printer.

“You tried to call them, [but] there was nobody there,” she continues. “It was a mess. I thought, ‘I will never do this again.’”

P.J. did, however. Using a different printer for her second book, a similar scenario unfolded. She decided to go a different route the next time. Kelly was studying

interior architectural design in San Diego, but when she visited home, she applied her design skills to her mother’s third book.

“When we were working on P.J.’s third book, we were approached by a couple authors who said, ‘You know, I’ve got a story, and I’ve always wanted it told ... how did you guys do it?’” says Kelly. “That’s when we decided to help others self-publish their books.”

Since then, Whistleslick has expanded beyond retail.

“We introduce [writers] to our contacts and vendors so they can continue moving forward. We help throughout the whole process,” Kelly explains. Their network includes illustrators, an editor and a printer, who can all be hired directly by the author.

According to both, taking the middleman out of the process allows authors the freedom to not only direct their own marketing efforts, but also to have a voice in how their words are illustrated. Another advantage is a speedier process.

That process basically walks new self-publishers from start to finish. “We do the introduction with illustrators. We do the introduction with the editor, and all the way down to the end, the printer,” says Kelly. “We’re there to help with the storyboarding and work alongside the author and the illustrator. We’re there to help [communicate] with the printer.

“It’s an honor for us to help.”💡



PHOTO COURTESY OF INVASIVE MEDIA

P.J. HarteNaus and Kelly Bishop, seated in the bed of their farm truck/bookmobile, own Whistleslick Press in Galena.

#### BOOKS ON THE SQUARE

153 E. Jackson St., Virden  
427 E. Washington St.,  
Springfield  
217-965-5443  
booksonthesquare.com

#### PRAIRIE FOX BOOKS

719 LaSalle St., Ottawa  
815-433-7323  
prairiefoxbooks.com

#### CONFLUENCE BOOKS

705 W. Main St. Suite 100,  
Carbondale  
618-525-9740  
confluencebooks618.com

#### NEW COPPERFIELD'S BOOK SERVICE

120 N. Side Square,  
Macomb  
309-837-3052  
facebook.com/  
NewCopperfields

#### WHISTLESICK PRESS

630-639-6008  
whistleslickpress.com

# SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest—but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our **Sedona Turquoise Collection**. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you

could secure 26 carats of genuine Arizona turquoise for **just \$99**.

**Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed.** If you aren't completely happy with your purchase, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price.

The supply of Arizona turquoise is limited, don't miss your chance to own the Southwest's brilliant blue treasure. Call today!

## Jewelry Specifications:

• Arizona turquoise • Silver-finished settings

### Sedona Turquoise Collection

A. Pendant (26 cts)	<del>\$299*</del>	\$99	+s&p	<b>Save \$200</b>
B. 18" Bali Naga woven sterling silver chain		\$149	+s&p	
C. 1 1/2" Earrings (10 ctw)	<del>\$299*</del>	\$99	+s&p	<b>Save \$200</b>
<b>Complete Set**</b>	<del>\$747*</del>	<b>\$249</b>	+s&p	<b>Save \$498</b>

\*\* Complete set includes pendant, chain and earrings.

Call now and mention the offer code to receive your collection.

## 1-800-333-2045

Offer Code SDT127-01

You must use the offer code to get our special price.

\*Special price only for customers using the offer code versus the price on Stauer.com without your offer code.



Rating of A+

# Stauer®

14091 Southcross Drive W., Dept. SDT127-01  
Burnsville, Minnesota 55337 [www.stauer.com](http://www.stauer.com)

B.

26 carats  
of genuine  
Arizona turquoise  
**ONLY \$99**

A.

Necklace enlarged to show luxurious color

Stauer... Afford the Extraordinary.®



# DRIVING

# CHANGE

Saving lives, one teen driver at a time

By Colten Bradford

**2,611**  
people  
were killed  
in crashes  
involving a  
teen driver  
(15-18 years  
old) in 2023.

National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration

**EVERY DAY, EIGHT TEENAGERS** die in motor vehicle crashes, which are the leading cause of death for teens in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control. Many more are seriously injured. In a report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2,611 people were killed in crashes involving drivers between the ages of 15 and 18 in 2023 alone.

For John Anderson and his wife Vivian Pratt Anderson, these sobering numbers are not acceptable. With their nonprofit, Distress Bandanna Teen Driver Safety Initiative, Inc., the couple is making a measurable difference as they promote teen driver safety awareness through education and advocacy.

“It really impacts everyone,” Vivian says. “It could be your family, friends, neighbors, coworkers or someone [else] you know. Our mission is to promote teen driver safety.”

Since 2016, the Menard Electric Cooperative members have addressed more than 90,000 students in person, volunteering their time and resources to deliver more than 2,500 presentations to teens across Illinois and in neighboring states.

Their programs cover everything from distracted and drowsy driving to Scott’s Law, Move Over campaigns, seat belt safety, medical emergencies — even downed power line protocol through partnerships with electric utilities.

In addition, their nonprofit’s “Train Your Brain” campaign is a safety awareness initiative that encourages people to make safe driving practices part of their muscle memory, like slowing down and moving over when approaching a stationary vehicle alongside the road, looking out for motorcycles, and staying off phones, among others.

“The whole point is to engrain driving safety into their heads,” John says, who is also a trained first responder. “The more they say it and the more they think about it, the more likely they’ll do it in a real-life situation.”

Each presentation comes with stories, demonstrations and a practical tool — the Distress Bandanna. Students learn how it can be used as a signal flag in an emergency, as a tourniquet or a sling, or even as a simple reminder to slow down and think about safety.

Distress Bandanna originated when John was returning home from a trip to Sturgis, S.D. He passed a stretch of road dotted with motorcyclists who seemed to be stranded. He stopped several times to ask if someone needed help, but most didn’t. Eventually, he ceased asking, thinking otherwise he’d never make it home.

“I thought there had to be a better way for someone to know you need help,” he says.

Two years later, the Distress Bandanna was born. Simple, portable and highly visible, the bandanna can be waved or tied so its bright orange triangle and reflective strips, developed in collaboration with 3M, can be seen from a distance. It's a small piece of fabric that can be carried in a glove box, backpack or pocket, and could mean the difference between life and death.

Beyond signaling for roadside assistance, it can be used for outdoor emergencies like hunting accidents and natural disasters — even for makeshift medical implements. In the classroom, teens are taught how to use it.

"When we started the idea, we didn't quite know what we wanted to do with it, but we knew that we wanted to use it to help others," Vivian says.

And, thanks to recent legislative victories, they now influence nearly 133,000 teen drivers annually. In 2023, after years of gathering data and pushing for change, they successfully championed the inclusion of stranded motorist safety protocol in Illinois' official Rules of the Road. The bill, written in part by John and Vivian, passed unanimously and ensures every Illinois driver's education student is taught how to protect themselves if their car breaks down on the road.

For the couple, the commitment to the mission hasn't come without sacrifice. They travel extensively for presentations throughout the year to reach schools and students across Illinois and beyond.

They've been inspired by the words of countless students: a girl in Chicago who thanked them for restoring her faith in humanity; a boy from Flora who helped save his mother's life on the road; and the thousands who proudly post "#MoveOverLaw" on social media.

"We don't make a penny doing this," John says. "But just because we don't know you doesn't mean we don't care. ... It gives us that extra boost, knowing we are doing some good and that we're saving lives."

Looking to the future, their goal is to reach 100,000 students in person — and to fill Illinois classrooms with "Train Your Brain" safety posters and resources. However, printing and distributing those materials requires funding.

Readers can help by spreading awareness, inviting the program into schools, or supporting the mission financially. Donations help supply classrooms with posters, kits and training materials, and they enable the nonprofit to expand its outreach. To learn more, go to [distressbandanna.com/train-your-brain-campaign](https://distressbandanna.com/train-your-brain-campaign) or email [distressbandanna@gmail.com](mailto:distressbandanna@gmail.com).

"Our impact is tremendous. Every week, we're impacting students," Vivian says. "Our mission is to save lives, and with more support, we can reach more people, coast to coast. ... Distress Bandanna [has] a legacy of lifesaving advocacy. That pretty much says it all." 💡

*"It gives us that extra boost, knowing we are doing some good and that we're saving lives."*



*"The whole point is to engrain driving safety into their heads."*

**LEARN MORE**

### Distress Bandanna

[distressbandanna.com/train-your-brain-campaign](https://distressbandanna.com/train-your-brain-campaign)  
[distressbandanna@gmail.com](mailto:distressbandanna@gmail.com)

# Wittmond's stands the test of time

Restaurant family-owned and operated since 1847

By *Jim Winnerman*

**FEW BUSINESSES THAT STARTED** as a trading post in the 1800s remain successful today. Fewer still are in the same building with the original fixtures and furniture. But that is not the case at Wittmond's in Brussels, where time seems to have frozen in place.

The business began when Conrad and Mary Wittmond immigrated to Calhoun County from Germany in 1840, opening the mercantile in 1847. "They were here before the church," says current owner and Illinois Electric Cooperative member Charles Burch, whose mother was a Wittmond.

A home was added to the building in 1863, and in the late 1800s, a new generation of the Wittmond family added a hotel above the storage rooms once stocked with supplies for the general store. The following generation converted the storage rooms into a restaurant for hotel guests.

It is all still there in the same long, 10,000-square-foot building. Some of the original dusty merchandise remains on the shelves of the store, which adjoins the restaurant. "If you look hard enough, it all might disintegrate in front of your eyes," Charles says.

"The restaurant menu has remained unchanged for over 75 years. People just come in, sit down and eat," he adds. "There is no printed menu."

Bountiful servings come family-style and begin with separate plates of corn relish, beets, applesauce, apple cider vinegar coleslaw, peach marmalade, rolls and pork sausage, all homemade.

The main course includes fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn and green beans. "I cannot imagine how many chickens we have served," Charles remarks. "There used to be a large chicken coop behind the building."

For dessert, Wittmond's serves peach, apple, pecan or blackberry cobbler topped with vanilla ice cream.

Dining room walls are decorated with large, elaborate gold-framed photos of the five generations of the Wittmond family. Each contributed to making the business a landmark. The building is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

"I started working in the restaurant when I was 9," Charles says, adding that he was born in 1947. "I have done everything there is to do in this building, and then some."



He details the history of each room, pointing out where there was once a post office from 1920 to 1970, where the family living and dining rooms were, the location of the “birthing room” where 14 family members were born, and the room used for funerals. “Fifty family members are buried in the cemetery next to the building,” he says.

A framed newspaper article on the wall recounts how the building once served as a safe stop on the Underground Railroad, sheltering enslaved people seeking freedom until the Civil War ended in 1865.

Although the hotel is now closed, the 10 guest rooms appear ready for guests, complete with original furniture and bed linens. “A lot of people ask to stay here,” Charles says.

The longevity of Wittmond’s is particularly remarkable considering its isolated location on the southern tip of a peninsula of Calhoun County. Wedged between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, it has never been easily accessible.

“In 1847, the only way to get here was by stagecoach or a wagon ride over a dirt road from a steamboat docked a mile away on the Illinois River,” Charles says.

Today, guests must take the Brussels Ferry. From State Highway 100, the 5-minute passage across the Illinois River connects to a narrow two-lane road and a 7-mile drive to Wittmond’s.

“If you live here, you have to take the ferry to get to any kind of store, gasoline station or hospital,” Charles acknowledges. “Even in the modern world, we remain remote.”

Yet, the limited accessibility has never kept customers away, and the restaurant is filled when it is open Friday through Sunday.

Charles estimates 80% of the customers are tourists from Missouri and Illinois. Church groups, car and motorcycle clubs and senior living homes make the restaurant a popular destination, and most make the journey to Wittmond’s an annual event.

The guest book is also signed with the names of people who arrive from every state and from across the globe. “I am dumbfounded how they find us, since we do no advertising whatsoever,” he says, pointing to recent signatures from Croatia and South America.

Asked what is new in the 1847 building, a vacant look comes over Charles’ face. “I cannot think of anything,” he says, laughing, “but after 178 years, the mortgage has been paid off.”

**Top left: Owner Charles Burch stands in the restaurant between pictures of his aunt and uncle.**

**Middle left: Ten upstairs rooms once rented as hotel rooms are kept in immaculate condition and retain their original furniture from the late 1800s.**

**Bottom left: The all-you-can-eat menu has not changed since the mid-1940s. Pictured above the table are owner Charles Burch’s grandparents, who introduced the menu.**

**Top right: Shelves of the old store display merchandise from the early 1900s.**

**Bottom right: Wittmond’s as it appeared circa 1880, before the second-floor hotel was added and the road was paved.**



## LET’S EAT!

### Wittmond’s Restaurant

166 E. Main St., Brussels

618-883-2345

Facebook.com/wittmondhotel

### HOURS

Fri-Sun: 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

Cash only



# Thankful for leftovers

**I AM THANKFUL FOR** leftovers year-round. I love it when I cook one meal that lasts several days. However, one meal is known for its abundance of leftovers — and that’s Thanksgiving dinner. While I certainly don’t mind enjoying the same dishes warmed up days after the holiday, sometimes I just want to jazz it up a little and make it into something else. If you are looking to reimagine your Thanksgiving leftovers, these are the recipes for you. 💡

## WE NEED RECIPES!

- Pastries
- Snacks
- Sugar-free
- 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.



## Stuffing Waffles

*Yields: 8 waffles*

2 eggs  
1/4 cup milk

5 cups prepared stuffing  
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

In a large bowl, beat the eggs and milk, then fold in the cooked stuffing and shredded cheese. Preheat waffle iron and grease with butter or nonstick cooking spray. Place 1/2 cup of the stuffing mixture into the waffle iron, pressing gently to spread evenly. Cook until golden brown and crispy, about 4–6 minutes, depending on the waffle iron. Serve immediately. Optional toppings include gravy, cranberry sauce, fried eggs or leftover turkey. **Note:** If you don’t want to wait for leftovers, prepare two boxes of stuffing mix according to the instructions on the package.

## Thanksgiving Stock

*Yields: 8-10 cups*

Turkey carcass, including bones, wings, neck and any other leftover parts  
Leftover vegetables, including onion skins, carrot peels, celery tops, garlic cloves, mushrooms and peppers

Fresh herbs, including parsley stems, thyme, rosemary and sage  
2 bay leaves  
10–12 cups water

Break down the turkey carcass so it fits into a large stockpot. Add vegetable scraps and herbs. Cover with water, about 1–2 inches above the ingredients. Bring to a gentle boil and immediately reduce to a simmer. Simmer 4–6 hours, occasionally skimming off foam or fat from the top. Allow to cool and strain the stock through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl. Discard solids. Cool completely, put into containers and refrigerate for up to 5 days or freeze for up to 3 months. This will be a perfect base for soup, replacing vegetable or chicken stock in recipes. **Note:** Avoid using starchy vegetables like potatoes.

## Grandma Dean's Mashed Potato Doughnuts

*Yields: 3 dozen*

- |                       |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 cup mashed potatoes | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 3/4 cup sugar         | 2-1/2 cups flour           |
| 1/2 cup heavy cream   | 2 teaspoons baking powder  |
| 2 eggs                | 1 cup powdered sugar       |

In a large bowl, combine mashed potatoes, sugar, cream, eggs and vanilla. Slowly add flour and baking powder until just incorporated. Roll into tablespoon-sized balls. This dough is sticky, so spray your hands with cooking spray. In a fryer or a pot, heat 3 inches of vegetable oil to 350 F. Carefully add a few dough balls at a time; don't overcrowd. Fry for 2-3 minutes, turning once, until golden brown on all sides. Use a slotted spoon to remove the doughnuts and drain on paper towels. Let cool slightly before coating with powdered sugar. **Note:** This recipe may not work well with herbed mashed potatoes. Add 1/2 teaspoon salt if using plain, unseasoned mashed potatoes.



## Pumpkin Pie Milkshake

*Servings: 1*

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 slice pumpkin pie                | Whipped cream, optional                 |
| 1-2 scoops vanilla ice cream       | Pumpkin pie spice or cinnamon, optional |
| 1/4 cup milk, adjust for thickness |   |

In a blender, add the slice of pie, ice cream and milk. Blend until smooth. Add more milk for desired thickness. Pour into a glass, top with whipped cream and garnish with pumpkin pie spice or cinnamon. **Note:** Pumpkin pie can easily be swapped out with any slice of pie, like apple, blueberry or sweet potato.

## Pulled Turkey Sliders with Cranberry Barbecue Sauce

*Yields: enough sauce for 1-2 pounds of meat*

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1 14-ounce can whole or jellied cranberries | 1/2 teaspoon onion powder |
| 1/2 cup ketchup                             | 1/4 teaspoon black pepper |
| 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar                 | 1 pinch of salt           |
| 1/4 cup brown sugar                         | 1/4 cup water             |
| 2 tablespoons honey                         | Turkey                    |
| 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce           | Dinner rolls              |
| 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder                  | Coleslaw                  |

In a medium saucepan, combine first 11 ingredients. Over medium heat, bring to a gentle boil and reduce to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Simmer for 10-12 minutes, or until sauce thickens. Add a little more water if it gets too thick. Let cool to room temperature. In a bowl, shred warmed turkey. Stir in enough barbecue sauce to coat. Cut dinner rolls in half. Top with turkey and coleslaw. **Note:** Adjust the ingredients based on the amount of cranberries you have.





## Cucurbit curiosities

Pumpkins, gourds and squash, oh my

**FRESHLY HARVESTED PUMPKINS, GOURDS** and squash now decorate front porches across the state, adding festive charm to the autumn season. These fruits are members of the cucurbit family, along with cucumbers and melons. They serve as multifunctional fruits in the fall, often used as both flavorful food and natural art and decor.

These vining plants are planted in the spring and grow large leaves and long, sprawling vines that easily reach 20 to 30 feet by the end of summer. After the flowers are pollinated by bees and other pollinators, tiny green fruit begins to form, gradually ripening into the colorful, unique produce we associate with autumn.

Pumpkins are 90% water and contain hundreds of seeds within their fleshy interior. They thrive in hot, dry weather, but when actively growing in the summer, they need at least 1 inch of water per week for good fruit development. The high water content makes pumpkins a delectable, low-calorie food. Pumpkin seeds can be harvested from the inside of pumpkins when carving and roasted in the oven for a nutritious, crunchy treat.

Turnips, beets and potatoes were first used as jack-o'-lanterns to scare away evil spirits. Today, we use the classic orange pumpkin to carve intricate designs for a glowing nighttime display. While these pumpkins are perfect for carving, they do not make good baking or pie pumpkins. Instead, choose a buckskin pumpkin with sweet, orange flesh, just like pumpkin canneries use.

The largest pumpkin ever grown weighed 2,749 pounds, which a horticulture teacher from Minnesota proudly grew for a new world record in 2023. If growing one of these massive fruits is on your bucket list, beware that they take meticulous maintenance and care. These jumbo varieties, which require around 120 days to mature, are often started indoors before spring temperatures are warm enough to plant outside.

Gourds are hard-shelled fruits that are not edible. Once used as utensils, musical instruments, toys and storage containers, they are now typically used for painted crafts, birdhouses and ornamental decorations for fall.

Squash is categorized as either “summer” or “winter” fruit. Summer squash, like zucchini, is harvested throughout the summer as young fruit. Winter squash is harvested in the fall and is typically grown for winter storage. Depending on the variety of winter squash, they can be stored in a cool, dry, well-ventilated space for anywhere from one month to six. Winter squash adds a rich flavor to hearty autumnal recipes, including soups, casseroles and baked goods.

Crops in the cucurbit family can cross-pollinate with each other, resulting in a unique harvest the following year if the seeds are allowed to grow. Some may consider the fruit deformed or unsightly, while others will find it a fun experiment to see what new monstrosity grows.

If you want true-to-type pumpkins, gourds or squash, it's best to buy new seeds every year. Garden centers and seed companies have a plethora of old and new varieties. Plan carefully, as cucurbits are notorious for taking over a garden . . . but their colors and delicious flavors make it worth the space. 🍂



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

**HODGSON**  
LUMBER & LAND IMPROVEMENT

**Buyers of Standing Timber and Cut Logs**

**Todd Cole Gary**  
217-473-1009 217-801-3088 217-801-7975

21046 CR 800 N. • Kilbourne, IL 62655

**Illinois**  
Country Living

Connect with us

To advertise in  
Illinois Country Living  
email [info@icl.coop](mailto:info@icl.coop)

**Designed to Last. Generations.**

Most companies advertising post-frame buildings are selling you materials produced somewhere else, by someone else. We manufacture our custom-designed buildings right here in Illinois. That way we control quality, cost, and time of delivery for you.

Scan the QR Code  
or Call:  
**217-963-7471**

**MANSEA METAL**

**DIMENSION BUILDINGS**  
*Best Buildings at the Best Price*

For a Complete 30x50 Deluxe Pole Barn Package **only \$3,650** not building pictured

CALL (618) 997-9568  
[www.dimensionbldgs.com](http://www.dimensionbldgs.com)  
All Sizes Available Marion, IL

**Insulation.** 4x8 sheets, foil-backed foam. All factory seconds. [www.nichols5.com](http://www.nichols5.com). Contact Ken Nichols, 800-424-1256.

**ENERGIZED**  
— GRAPHICS —

**YOUR SOURCE FOR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS.**

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

1	V	E	2	T	E	3	R	A	4	N	S	5	D	A	6	Y	7	H
	E	U		A		W		S		A		A		A				E
8	G	A	R	L	I	C		9	S	I	M	M	E	R				
	G		K		S					S								O
10	I	C	E		11	E	X		12	L	Y	C	13	H	E	E		
	E		Y					14	M	O								S
	S				15	S	O	U	P			16	E	R	17	E		
			18	C	19	O	W		20	S	E		21	R	V	I	C	E
22	S	P	I	N	A	C	H			23	V	E	T	O				
	A		D		R									A			24	M
25	C		R	E	A	M				26	N		27	G	E	T		
	K		R							O		29	I	C	E	D		
31	S	I	S					32	F	A	M	I	L	Y				U

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

## Colors of fall

- BONNIE FISCHER**  
*Clinton County Electric Cooperative*  
Mississippi Palisades State Park,  
Carroll County
- NAOMI KENNEL**  
*Corn Belt Energy Corporation*
- JEFF SCHERER**  
*Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative*  
Little Grassy Lake, Makanda
- CRYSTAL NULL**  
*Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative*  
Dutchman Lake, Johnson County
- PAULA THROCKMORTON**  
*Menard Electric Cooperative*  
Lake Petersburg, Menard County
- FRANK GOUDY**  
*Spoon River Electric Cooperative*  
Fairview Reformed Church,  
Fairview

### UPCOMING THEMES

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



## SUBMIT A PHOTO

Online: [icl.coop/snapshots](http://icl.coop/snapshots)


Email: [cbradford@aiec.coop](mailto:cbradford@aiec.coop)

**Rules:** Include high-quality digital files. When submitting, include details about the photo, artist's name and the co-op name.

**Deadlines:** Submissions are due 30 days before the publication month.

**Terms of use:** By submitting any photos to Snapshots, whether online or by email, you agree to grant Illinois Country Living and [icl.coop](http://icl.coop) royalty-free, perpetual and nonexclusive rights to use, display, edit, publish or archive it in whole or in part online or in print. You further warrant that you have all legal, moral and other rights that may be necessary to grant the license specified above.

Visit [icl.coop/snapshots](http://icl.coop/snapshots) for full terms and conditions.



Act now to receive a  
**30% Federal tax credit  
through 2025\***

**7 Series**  
*Ultimate comfort  
and efficiency*



## Time is running out to take advantage of a 30% tax credit for geothermal

You may not realize it, but right beneath your feet is an almost unlimited reservoir of stored solar energy. A WaterFurnace geothermal system taps into this free and renewable resource to provide savings of up to 70% on heating, cooling, and hot water—with a comfort you have to experience to believe. Right now, you can save thousands on installation, thanks to a 30% federal tax credit. But don't wait—this credit ends on December 31st, 2025. Contact your local WaterFurnace dealer today to learn more!

### **Bloomington/Normal**

Design Air  
(217)423-4713

Hinrichsen Htg & A/C  
(309) 965-2604

Popejoy Plmb, Htg,  
Elct & Geo  
(815) 692-4471

### **Carbondale**

D&C Htg & Clg  
(618) 997-6577

### **Champaign/Urbana**

Hoveln Htg & Clg  
(217) 643-2125

**Damiansville**  
Toennies Service Co.  
(618) 248-5130

### **Decatur**

Design Air  
(217)423-4713

### **Fairbury**

Popejoy Plmb, Htg,  
Elct & Geo  
(815) 692-4471

### **Gifford**

Duden & Silver  
(217) 568-7954

### **Goodfield**

Hinrichsen Htg & A/C  
(309) 965-2604

### **Harrisburg**

D&C Htg & Clg  
(618) 997-6577

### **Macomb**

Arnold Bros. Htg & Clg  
(309) 833-2852

### **Marion**

D & C Htg & Clg  
(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

# Enjoy Again

 **Top 5% Nationally**

Sarah Bush Lincoln Orthopedics was recognized by Women's Choice Awards Best 100 Hospitals. The award is based on its:

- clinical performance
- patient experience scores
- advanced technology



The largest orthopedic group in downstate Illinois.

# Orthopedics



Sarah Bush  
Lincoln

Trusted Compassionate Care

## **MATTOON**

SBL Orthopedics & Sports Medicine  
Prairie Pavillion 2  
1004 Health Center Dr., Suite 100  
217-238-3435

## **EFFINGHAM**

SBL Bonutti Clinic  
1303 W. Evergreen Ave., Suite 200  
Effingham  
217-342-3400