

# Illinois Country Living

## GIFTING MEMORIES

Experiences worth giving  
this holiday season



FEATURE  
**Art for all**

PRAIRIE TABLE  
**A new chapter for Potrillo's**

FINEST COOKING  
**Holiday treats**

**+**  
CO-OP  
NEWS

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# Illinois Country Living

DECEMBER 2025  
VOLUME 83, NO. 8

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# Dreaming of a white Christmas

And other holiday expectations

**GROWING UP, I NEVER** thought Christmas seemed quite right if there wasn't snow on the ground. Everyone dreams of a white Christmas, after all. I distinctly remember my first holiday without snow and thinking the dead grass was unbecoming of such a day. Well, "unbecoming" probably wasn't the actual word I thought, but you get the point.

Fast-forward to many years later. I remember white-knuckling it while I drove my Honda Civic to my grandparents' house for a family gathering. A snowstorm hit during my 2-hour drive, and it quickly went from bad to worse about half way there. I discovered that in some circumstances, a white Christmas was also unbecoming.

That's how the holidays tend to go, isn't it? We build them up in our minds — picture-perfect scenes borrowed from movies or memories of holidays past. We imagine a beautifully decorated house that smells like homemade cookies, and a family laughing and singing carols.

And then reality arrives. The Christmas tree topples over. The flight gets canceled. The

batteries were not included. A mishap turns dinner into a fast-food drive-thru feast. That's just to name a few.

But, somewhere between the expectations and the chaos is where the real holiday actually happens. It's in the small moments that never make the greeting cards. It's watching the family dog sniff out her present under the tree, followed later by the cat leaving a gift behind the tree.

It's the fluorescent green Felix the Cat stuffed toy that gets regifted every year. Or receiving gifts labeled "To Kotton," because my brother-in-law forgot how to spell my name. It's eating Chinese food on Christmas Day with my future wife while wearing homemade ugly Christmas sweaters.

I've learned that Christmas doesn't need snow to feel magical. It doesn't need perfection, either. What we need is to give ourselves a little grace, and have a little patience and the willingness to embrace the season despite its flaws or imperfections.

Either way, it still counts as Christmas. Or Hanukkah. Or Kwanzaa. Or whatever holiday you celebrate this season. And maybe that's the point. On behalf of Illinois Country Living magazine and our extended electric cooperative family, we wish you a happy holiday season. 📍



Colten Bradford is the editor of Illinois Country Living magazine.

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

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2025 Silver Eagle BU  
Eagle Privy Mark

## Just Released: First-Ever American Silver “Double” Eagle and It’s The Lowest Mintage Bullion Silver Eagle to Boot!

For almost 40 years, the American Silver Eagle has dominated the coin market with over 640,000,000 minted to date. These hefty silver dollars are made from one ounce of 99.9% fine silver and have become THE standard for silver coins worldwide!

And now, the US Mint has released a special Silver Eagle that might just become THE greatest of all time...the “Double” Eagle Privy Silver Eagle!

### A Silver “Double Eagle”?

Most people know Double Eagles to be \$20 gold coins struck prior to 1933. An “Eagle” was a \$10 gold coin, so a \$20 coin was a “Double Eagle”.

Now, the U.S. Mint just released a bullion American Silver Eagle with a special eagle privy mark on the obverse. That means there’s an eagle on the reverse AND the obverse, making it the first-ever silver “Double Eagle”!

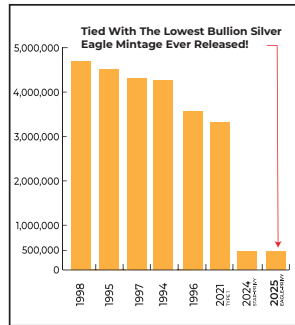
### Special One-Time-Only Privy Mark

The US Mint added an “eagle privy” to the Silver Eagle to support the new mobile gaming app, 8th Era, that marries gaming with coin collecting to inspire the next generation of collectors. It’s an instant “must-have” for Silver Eagle collectors.

### Lowest Mintage Bullion Silver Eagle

Not only is the Eagle Privy the first-ever silver “Double Eagle” it’s also the lowest mintage bullion Silver Eagle, tied with last year’s Star Privy Eagle.

Take a look at this graph for perspective. Prior to 2024, the 1996 Silver Eagle was the lowest mintage with 3,603,386 coins made. The Eagle Privy Silver Eagle has a mintage of only 500,000 coins. That’s SEVEN TIMES LOWER!



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## DECEMBER CHECKLIST

Heading out of town during the holiday season? Here are things to do before you go.

### Lower your thermostat.

Create an “away” schedule with a smart or programmable thermostat to save on heating costs.



### Unplug unnecessary devices.

Some appliances and electronics still consume energy when not in use, including phone chargers, TVs and gaming consoles.



### Set timers for lights.

Make your home look occupied while you're away.



### Pack emergency supplies.

Keep blankets, a flashlight, a first-aid kit, snacks and water on hand in case there's an emergency on the road.



2025 scholarship recipients attended the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperative's annual meeting.

## Last chance to apply for IEC Memorial Scholarships

Time is running out for high school seniors to apply for the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarships. A total of \$51,000 in scholarship funds is available — but the Dec. 31, 2025 deadline is fast approaching.

Seventeen academic scholarships, each worth \$3,000, will be awarded in 2026 to assist students connected to the electric cooperative community.

Ten scholarships will go to high school seniors whose parents are Illinois electric co-op members. Five scholarships are reserved for students enrolling full-time at a two-year Illinois community college whose parents are Illinois electric cooperative members or employees. The Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship will be awarded to a student who is the child of an Illinois electric cooperative employee or director.

In addition, the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship provides financial assistance

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. Apply at [aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship](http://aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship).

Applicants are evaluated on academic achievements, work and volunteer experience, and community involvement. Strong, creative essay responses can make all the difference.

Since its start in 1996, the IEC Memorial Scholarship Program has grown from awarding two \$1,000 scholarships to now offering 17 scholarships worth \$3,000 each. The program is administered by the Illinois Community College System Foundation (ICCSF).

If you're eligible, don't wait — apply today. This is your final opportunity to take advantage of this generous scholarship program. To apply or learn more, go to [aiec.coop/iec-scholarship](http://aiec.coop/iec-scholarship) or contact your local electric cooperative. 📞



APPLY HERE

## Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

Each Sudoku puzzle consists of a 9X9 grid that has been subdivided into nine smaller grids of 3X3 squares. To solve the puzzle each row, column and box must contain each of the numbers 1 to 9. Puzzles come in three grades: easy, medium and difficult.

Level: Medium

Solution on page 33.

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



## Protect roadside crews

When lineworkers are perched in a bucket truck repairing power lines along a busy road, they have good reason to be concerned about their safety. However, most are less apprehensive about problems like working with high voltages or falling. Their biggest worry is also the most unpredictable: a distracted driver slamming into their vehicle or a nearby power pole.

The National Safety Council reported that 891 people were killed and 37,701 people were injured in work zone crashes during 2022. Most of those crashes occur in construction sites, which are usually well-marked. Electric co-op crews are likely to face even greater danger, as they are often working alone along remote stretches of roads, frequently in heavy rain, snow or ice and other adverse weather conditions that can reduce visibility.

The danger of work zone crashes led every state to adopt “move over” laws that require drivers to lower their speed and switch lanes when possible to protect emergency vehicles. The goal is to provide an added safety buffer and minimize the potential for accidents. These laws vary state to state.

Compounding this issue is the dramatic increase in distracted driving. The National Transportation Highway Safety Administration has reported that as many as 1,000 Americans are injured each day because of activities that take a driver’s attention away from the road.

The most common distraction is reading and responding to text messages. If a driver traveling at 55 miles per hour glances

at their phone for just five seconds, they’ll have traveled the length of a football field before returning their gaze to the road.

The design of today’s vehicles contributes to distraction. Many vehicles have complex controls for entertainment and climate that demand the driver take their eyes off the road to make even simple adjustments.

Geography can also be a factor. Co-ops serving rural and remote areas often have power lines along twisty and hilly roads. Locals accustomed to driving those roads at fairly high speeds may be startled and have little time to react when they encounter a work crew past a hill or around a curve.

Besides the potential for human injuries, accidents can also damage or destroy expensive service vehicles, reducing a co-op’s ability to respond to outages and other problems. Power poles and other infrastructure may also suffer severe damage.

Additionally, many of the tasks performed by lineworkers, such as reconnecting high-voltage power lines, are inherently dangerous and require their complete focus. When they are distracted by speeding or noisy vehicles, they’re more likely to make mistakes that can complicate the repair or cause injury.

So, whenever you see a roadside crew, be sure to slow down and move over, if possible. Sometimes, a little bit of extra attention is all that’s needed to prevent a serious incident. 💡

Scott Flood, NRECA

## IL ENTERTAINMENT CORNER

ICL readers may not know that a beloved Christmas movie filmed in Illinois was based on a novel by John Grisham. “Christmas with the Kranks,” set on Hemlock Street in the Chicago suburb of Riverside, is a film adaptation of Grisham’s “Skipping Christmas.”



The 2004 comedy features Tim Allen and Jamie Lee Curtis as Luther and Nora Krank. The couple opts out of the frenzy and commercialism of the holiday season, to which a series of hijinks ensues.

It is said that the book was inspired by Grisham’s neighbor, who went to great extremes celebrating Christmas. In an odd twist, the film also stars Dan Aykroyd as Vic Frohmeyer, the Kranks’ domineering neighbor – although there is no information to suggest the character was based on the author’s neighbor.

Whatever way you decide to celebrate, whether with great hoopla or none at all, we at Illinois Country Living wish you a happy holiday season! 💡



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## Where is it?

The winners of the October hidden objects contest were Fred Ingle of Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative and Donna McAllister of Clay Electric Co-operative. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent. The turkey handprint was hidden on page 23 in the November feature story. 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 Christmas approaches, be on the lookout for a Christmas tree, 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 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. 📍



## Battery disposal and recycling

Batteries are part of everyday life — from the ones in our TV remotes and flashlights to the big ones that power electric vehicles and even energy storage systems used by electric utilities. But when batteries are disposed of the wrong way, they can leak harmful chemicals, catch fire and waste valuable materials that we need to recycle.

Globally, electronic waste, or e-waste, is one of the fastest-growing types of trash. In 2022, people worldwide threw away more than 130 billion pounds of it. In the U.S. alone, that adds up to about 46 pounds of e-waste per person each year. Yet only about 22% of that waste is recycled properly.

The good news — safe disposal and recycling options are available, and you can help make a difference. Not all batteries are the same, and how you get rid of them depends on their components.

Some batteries can be recycled easily, while others can be dangerous if tossed in the wrong place — they may leak toxic chemicals or even start fires. That's why the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends following local rules or using national collection programs like Call2Recycle, Earth911 or drop-off bins at hardware stores to make sure batteries are handled safely.

Single-use batteries are designed to be used once, then replaced. These include alkaline and zinc-carbon batteries — the common AA, AAA, C, D and 9-volt sizes used in remotes, flashlights and other small devices. Some areas allow these batteries to go in household trash, but recycling is always the better choice.

Button or coin batteries (used in watches, hearing aids and car key fobs) are often lithium-based. These should never be thrown away in regular trash or recycling bins, because they can

spark fires. Instead, cover the battery terminals with tape or seal them in small bags, and take them to a certified recycling facility.

Rechargeable batteries power many of our everyday devices — cordless tools, phones, laptops and cameras. Types include nickel-cadmium (Ni-Cd), lithium-ion (Li-ion), nickel-metal hydride (Ni-MH), nickel-zinc (Ni-Zn) and small sealed lead-acid batteries.

While these look different, they all share one rule: never throw them in the trash. They must go to a recycling facility. For devices with built-in, nonremovable batteries, recycle the entire device, making sure the battery ends are taped or bagged to prevent sparks.

Automotive and large batteries are more powerful and require special care. Lead-acid batteries, found in cars, boats, motorcycles and ATVs, contain lead and acid, which are hazardous. These should always be returned to a retailer, repair shop or a local hazardous waste program.

Larger lithium-ion batteries — like those in electric vehicles (EVs) and home or utility-scale energy storage systems — are even more complex. They should only be handled by dealers, repair shops or the manufacturer. These should never be discarded in curbside waste or recycling.

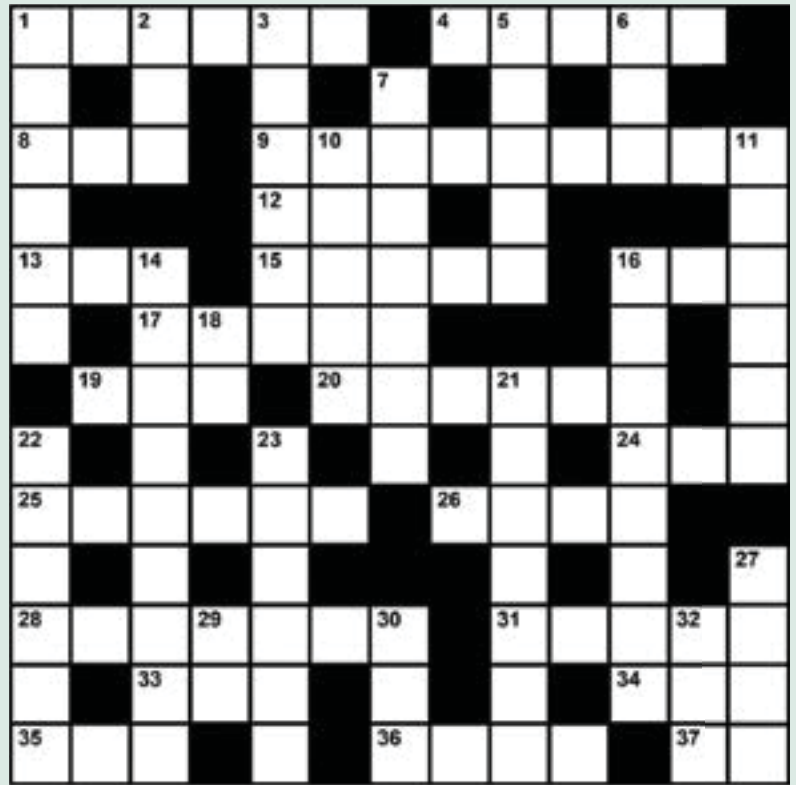
Proper battery disposal is less about danger and more about opportunity. By recycling, we can recover valuable materials, reduce waste and support reliable energy systems in our communities. With a few simple steps, each of us can do our part — and together, we can keep our homes and community a little cleaner and safer. If you have questions about battery disposal, check out programs like Call2Recycle or Earth911 for guidance. 📍

Steph Joven, NRECA

**Across**

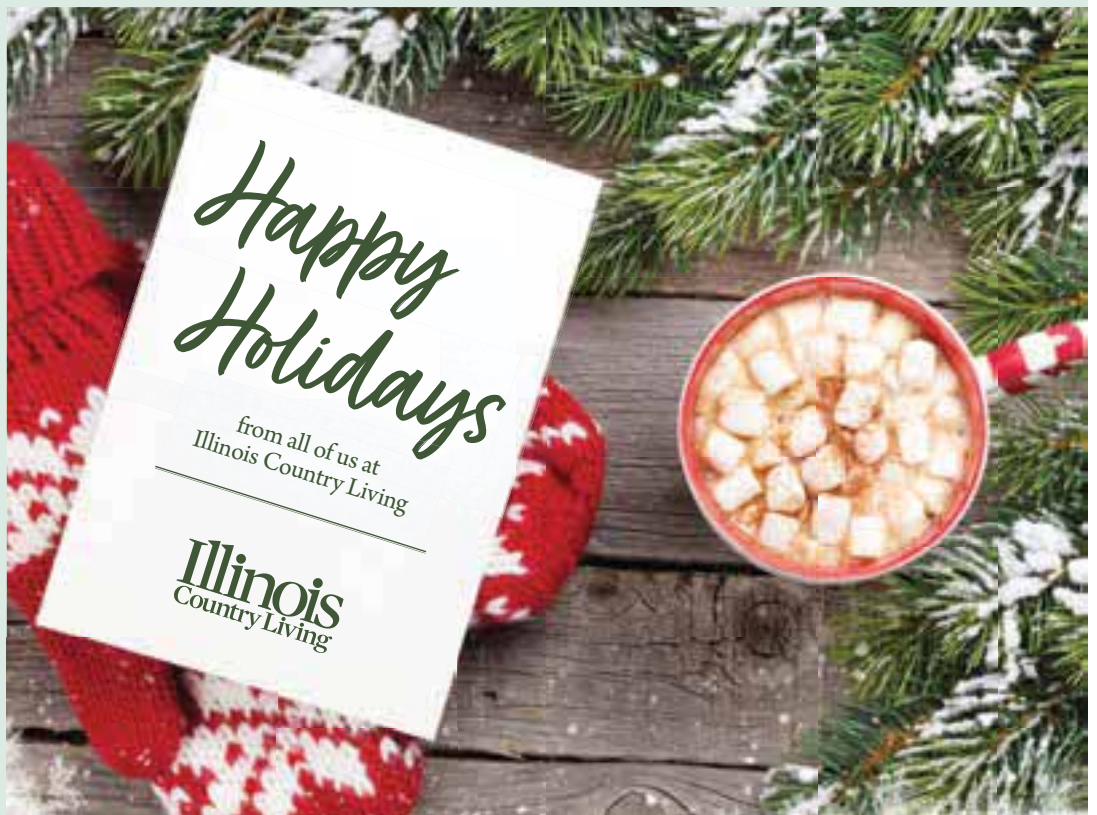
- 1 Christmas tree decoration
- 4 One of Santa's reindeer
- 8 Santa's favorite color
- 9 Salutations
- 12 \_\_\_-profit
- 13 North Pole worker in many Christmas movies
- 15 Prayer starter, 2 words
- 16 Pumpkin or apple, for example
- 17 Like children on Christmas Eve
- 19 Coffee stirrer, abbr.
- 20 Condiments that enhance flavor
- 24 Climbing evergreen plant
- 25 Transparent Christmas tree decoration
- 26 Present
- 28 Listening
- 31 Type of orange
- 33 \_\_\_ of lamb
- 34 Summer, in French
- 35 Bro's sibling
- 36 Lego sets, for example
- 37 Data storage device

- 6 Ending for east or west
- 7 It provides light during Hanukkah
- 10 Angels in a Nativity play, for example
- 11 Dessert wine
- 14 Celebratory events
- 16 Optimistic
- 18 Wire service, abbr.
- 21 Santa often drops down one
- 22 Christmas time illuminations
- 23 Santa's transport
- 27 Downhill winter vehicle
- 29 Concerning
- 30 Understood
- 32 Catchall abbr.



**Down**

- 1 Often a Christmas tree
- 2 Doze (off)
- 3 Christmas drink
- 5 Selected



## LET'S GO!

### Through Dec. 30 Holiday lights DU QUOIN

More than 3 miles of lighted displays

### Through Dec. 31 Very Merry MARION

Ice skating on the square

### Through Dec. 31 Holiday lights QUINCY

Drive through animated light displays in Moorman Park

### Dec. 13 Christmas Stroll MURPHYSBORO

Arts and crafts, live music, puppet shows, food and beverages

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



## Shelbyville Festival of Trees

NOVEMBER 21-30  
DECEMBER 1-28

Enjoy more than 30 decorated Christmas trees in the historic Chautauqua Auditorium through Dec. 28 and vote for your favorite. The festival also features Santa, a craft fair and a hot chocolate and cookies night.

Through Dec. 28, 2025

- Chautauqua Auditorium, Forest Park and East North 9th Street, Shelbyville  
Admission: free  
[Shelbyvillefestivaloftrees@yahoo.com](mailto:Shelbyvillefestivaloftrees@yahoo.com)  
[facebook.com/people/Shelbyville-Festival-of-Trees-Illinois/100088255808152](https://facebook.com/people/Shelbyville-Festival-of-Trees-Illinois/100088255808152)

## Gnome Roam

DECEMBER 1-31  
JANUARY 1-31  
FEBRUARY 1-28

Giant City State Park hosts its annual wintertime "Gnome Roam," inviting visitors to explore seven different trails while searching for whimsical winter gnomes scattered along the trails, just waiting to be discovered. These trails are accessible to most ages and skill levels.

December 2025 through February 2026

- Giant City State Park, 235 Giant City Road, Makanda  
Admission: free  
[217-782-6302, dnr.illinois.gov/parks/park.giantcity.html](http://217-782-6302.dnr.illinois.gov/parks/park.giantcity.html)



## The Dinner Detective True Crime Murder Mystery Dinner Show

DECEMBER 12  
DECEMBER 20  
DECEMBER 27

Solve a hilarious true crime murder mystery during dinner. The event is different from a traditional mystery dinner show. The actors are not dressed in costume and are hidden in the audience for a fun, social and interactive evening suitable for all adults. Register online.

Dec. 12, 2025: 7-10 p.m., Dec. 20: 6-9 p.m. and Dec. 27: 6-9 p.m.

- Maldaner's, 222 S. 6th St., Springfield  
Admission: \$68.34  
866-496-0535, [eventvesta.com/events/120926/t/tickets](http://eventvesta.com/events/120926/t/tickets)

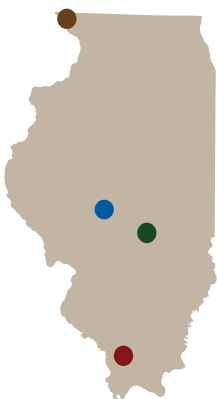
## Night of the Luminaria and Living Windows

DECEMBER 13

Enter a land of enchantment on this magical night, with more than 5,000 candlelit luminaries on streets, steps and sidewalks. Luminaries are typically lit from 5-9 p.m. From 4-7 p.m., store windows on Main Street come alive with holiday-inspired, animated living windows. Many of the businesses offer extended hours, so take advantage of the extra time to do some holiday shopping. At 6 p.m., carolers sing Christmas classics in Grant Park Gazebo.

Dec. 13, 2025: 4-9 p.m.

- Main Street, Galena  
815-281-0673, [gdbaemail@gmail.com](mailto:gdbaemail@gmail.com)





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## Merry and bright

### Tips for decorating safely

**THERE'S NOTHING LIKE PUTTING** up lights and decorations to get into the holiday spirit. It's something

many do every year without incident, yet the holidays are also one of the most hazardous times of the year when it comes to fires and electrical accidents.

Unfortunately, every year people do get hurt while decorating. We tend to get eager to finish so we can enjoy the lights, but it's best to take your time, think before you start, and don't forget to put safety first. Safe Electricity offers several tips as you deck the halls this season.

#### Holiday lights

When using holiday lights, whether indoors or out, look for certification by an accredited independent testing laboratory, such as UL. Make sure the lights are properly rated, and only use lights rated for outdoor use when placing outside.

Many of today's light strands are LED, which produces light without the heat of conventional incandescent bulbs. They are popular for good reason, since the lifespan of LEDs is 25 times that of incandescent lights. They also are much more energy efficient than traditional bulbs.

Before decorating begins, examine the light strands for damaged

plugs and cords, and discard items that are cracked, old or frayed.

Do not run cords under carpets, through doorways or in a way that could cause a tripping hazard. Puppies and other pets love to chew on electrical cords, including light strands and extension cords. Keep cords out of sight or hidden with a cord cover.

Turn off all lights before leaving home and going to sleep. (A timer will help you stay on track.) Also, check that any extension cord you use is rated for its intended use, especially if used outdoors.

#### Use candles with care

Only burn candles where you can keep an eye on them. Extinguish candles before going to bed, leaving the room or leaving the house. Place them out of reach of children and pets on heat-resistant surfaces. Keep candles away from flammable items like trees, decorations, curtains and furniture. The safest option is using battery-operated candles.

#### Fireplace safety tips

A cozy fireplace is a holiday favorite, but it requires careful handling. Decorate wisely. Avoid hanging flammable decorations like stockings and greenery directly on the mantel.

Perform annual maintenance. Have your chimney and fireplace checked and cleaned at least once a year. Use a screen to prevent embers from landing on floors, rugs or carpet.

#### Tree selection and placement

When selecting your tree, make sure that you consider the safest option for your home. If you are decorating with an artificial tree,

make sure you choose a fire-resistant one.

With a real tree, make sure the needles are green and sturdy with a trunk that is sticky with resin. These are indicators that your tree is well-hydrated. Keep your tree stand filled with water so the tree does not become overly dry and present a fire hazard.


Always consider the optimal placement of your tree. Ensure that it is placed at least 3 feet away from heat sources such as fireplaces or radiators and on a stable platform. When discarding a real tree, place it far from your home and other combustible objects, as dried trees are highly flammable.

#### Decorating outdoors

When decorating outside, respect electrical equipment. Look up and around for power lines. Never throw lights or other decorations into trees near power lines, and do not attach cords or lights to utility poles. Remember to keep ladders, equipment and yourself at least 10 feet from power lines.

Match plugs with outlets. Do not force a three-pronged plug into a two-pronged outlet or extension cord. Only use lights, cords, animated displays and decorations rated for outdoor use. Ensure outdoor outlets or extension cords are equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters.

Never string more strands of lights together than recommended by the manufacturer. Do not staple or nail through light strands or electrical cords. Use plastic or insulated hooks to hang lights.

Safe Electricity hopes your season will be safe, merry and bright. For more information, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org). 



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



## Cooking up energy savings

Simple ways to boost efficiency in the kitchen

**THE HOLIDAY SEASON BRINGS** opportunities to enjoy meals with friends and family, leading to spending more time in the kitchen. Whether hosting a few or a crowd, consider making new energy-efficient traditions this year with these tips to manage your energy use.

Let's start with cooking your meal. Your electric oven is typically the highest-wattage appliance in the kitchen. Yet, people usually don't turn their ovens on for long periods of time. Assuming an average oven wattage of 3,000 and an average cost of \$0.16 per kilowatt-hour, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, it costs \$0.48 an hour. Let's say you use your oven for four hours to make a special meal. That's less than \$2 of electricity. While that may not seem like a big deal now, operating your oven for four hours every day is \$700 a year.

Using smaller appliances instead of your oven can help you save. A slow cooker uses between 100 and 450 watts, which is significantly less than an electric oven at 2,000 to 5,000 watts. That means you can use a slow cooker for a longer period and still use less energy.

Opt for your microwave or toaster oven to reheat or cook smaller items. The microwave uses

significantly less energy than the oven. A toaster oven uses about half the energy of a conventional oven, according to ENERGY STAR.

You also want to avoid turning on your oven and leaving the door open to heat your home. This can break your oven and be a safety hazard, especially with gas ovens that can cause carbon monoxide buildup.

When cooking on the stovetop, match the size of your pot or pan to the burner. Lids help your pots retain heat, which cooks food faster and wastes less heat. Keep your stovetop clean to ensure the appliance heats evenly.

If you're looking to upgrade your stovetop, consider switching to an induction cooktop. It uses an electromagnetic field below the surface to heat pots and pans directly. This provides more precise heat, faster cooking times and higher efficiency. It can also improve the air quality in your home when compared to a gas cooktop.

In my experience, people like to gather in the kitchen during parties. To avoid your guests overheating in a room with a hot oven, turn your thermostat down a few degrees before guests arrive.

Next, let's look for refrigerator savings. The gaskets on your refrigerator doors should make a tight

seal to keep in cold air. Make sure you clean and maintain them or replace them if necessary. Don't let frost build up in the freezer, which can decrease efficiency and make your freezer work harder to maintain a balanced temperature.

Wait until food cools before putting leftovers in the fridge. Putting hot food in the refrigerator results in more energy used to cool it down. Aim for about 30 minutes for food to cool. Perishable food should be refrigerated within two hours after it is cooked, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Setting your refrigerator colder than needed wastes energy. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends 37 degrees F for the refrigerator and 0 degrees for the freezer. Use an appliance thermometer to monitor the temperature.

When it comes to cleanup, run full loads of dishes in the dishwasher — being careful not to block any moving parts. Use eco mode if your dishwasher has that setting. If you are in the market for new appliances, select ENERGY STAR models.

Whatever you choose to cook or how you cook it, keep in mind these simple tips to make your kitchen more efficient and save energy this holiday season. 💡



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

# Boosting your home's IQ

A guide to smarter electronics

**IMAGINE WAKING UP ON** a sunny morning, saying “Good morning, house,” and standing back as the light fixtures flash on, the coffee-maker starts, the outdoor security lighting switches off, and the toaster

comfortable. Smart thermostats learn your daily habits and take over for you. You won't have to lower your thermostat every evening, because it will happen automatically. Because smart thermostats know

exactly when you need electricity and when you don't, they waste a lot less.

## Smart appliances

The second-biggest share of your home's electricity powers appliances, from your refrigerator to your water heater. Smart appliances use Wi-Fi and high-tech sensors to operate more efficiently. A smart washer can sense the size

of your load and adjust the water and cycle times accordingly. Smart refrigerators can warn you when the kids leave the door open. And smart water heaters don't waste energy by heating water while you're asleep.

## Smart plugs and power strips

An easy and affordable way to explore smart technology is with smart plugs, which plug into your wall outlets. You can then plug lighting, appliances and other devices directly into them. You'll be able to control all those devices through a single app, so you can tell the coffeemaker when to start brewing, turn your exterior accent lighting off at dawn or have your favorite music already streaming as you walk in the door.

Smart power strips look like their ordinary cousins but use smart plugs. They're particularly helpful at eliminating waste caused

by what's known as “phantom load” — like leaving your phone charger plugged in when it's not charging.

## Smart shades

You wish your family room didn't face south, because it's always warm during the day. Smart shades and blinds can help. You can set them to automatically open or close depending on the time of day (or year) or based on your home's indoor temperature. They can help your air conditioner keep you cooler for less.

## Smart assistants

When you combine the capabilities of individual smart home electronics with voice assistants like Amazon Alexa or whole-home smart energy management systems, they become even more powerful. You can teach voice assistants to carry out multiple tasks that make up your daily routines. Energy management systems simplify control of all aspects of your home's energy use, and some offer specific tips to help you save even more.

## Be smart (with your smart devices)

While all those smart devices may be able to make your home more energy efficient and your life more comfortable, they're not perfect. Most require an internet connection, so if your service is down, your smart devices won't work, either.

Smart devices typically don't receive frequent system updates like your smartphone or laptop, so be aware of potential security issues. Before you choose any smart home device, make sure it's completely secure and compatible with what you have. Then prepare to be amazed by what smart home electronics will do for you. 💡



PHOTO COURTESY OF HAPPY HUES - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Smart appliances use Wi-Fi and high-tech sensors to operate more efficiently.

oven starts preheating for your frozen toaster pastry? That may sound like something from science fiction, but today's smart home electronics make it possible.

Smart devices use digital technology and Wi-Fi to take your home to a new level of convenience and comfort. They can also help you make better use of your electricity so you can reduce waste and lower your energy bills.

Even if you've already put the many advantages of smart electronics to work for your home and family, you might be surprised by some of the newer devices with the potential to change your daily life.

## Smart thermostats

Heating and cooling use more energy than anything else in your home. Replacing your home's standard thermostat with a smart model can lower your monthly electric bills while keeping you even more



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.

# Always in style

## Fashion for every budget at The Velvet Hanger

By Kayla Adkins

**SOMETIMES DREAMS DO COME** true. They certainly did for Deverie Troutman, a member of Western Illinois Electrical Coop. and the owner of The Velvet Hanger in Carthage. “I have wanted to have a store on the Carthage square since I was probably 6,” she shares. When property became available, she jumped at the chance. Her shop officially opened in May 2025.

The store is branded as an upscale consignment boutique for every budget. “It started out as a joke, because I have way too many clothes and antiques and things like that, so we joked that we were going to just do a pop-up consignment store,” laughs Troutman.

Ironically, the property previously housed a consignment store, so when it closed, the opportunity was too good to pass up. Her inventory includes men’s, women’s and kids’ clothing, shoes, accessories and housewares.

Troutman says the community has responded eagerly. Within the first couple of days, there were more than 300 bags of clothing to put out for consignment. Since then, she has seen visitors both local and traveling, with many of the former coming back regularly to peruse new items.

One of her hottest items is designer purses. “The nicer boutique clothes move pretty quickly, too,” says Troutman, explaining that consignment pricing encourages people to buy items they might opt not to purchase new at a high-end store. She makes sure to go through every piece and only puts out the items in the best condition. “A lot of our stuff will come in literally new with tags, and it flies off the shelves,” she says.

Due to its success, the store has already moved down the street into a bigger building. “I like to tell people that she opened

it on May 8, and we outgrew it on May 12,” laughs Debbi Marmion, Troutman’s mom and full-time employee. By the end of the following month, the new building, which is almost three times larger than the original store, had been purchased.

While inventory quickly changes, there are items that don’t sell, which Troutman donates. “Every single thing in here, at the end of 60 days, gets donated to Tri-State Family Services,”



Debbi Marmion and Deverie Troutman

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE VELVET HANGER

she says. “It doesn’t just go in a landfill. It does get back to the community one way or another.”

Although she admits this endeavor has been more work than she originally expected, Troutman says she’s having fun and takes pride in her business. “I cannot imagine doing anything else. I mean, being self-employed is the most challenging, but most rewarding. It is worth it.” 💡

## SHOW SUPPORT

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

### The Velvet Hanger

604 Wabash Ave., Carthage  
[facebook.com/thevelvethanger25](https://facebook.com/thevelvethanger25)

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# GIFTING MEMORIES

## Experiences worth giving this holiday season

**CHRISTMASTIME IS OFTEN THE** season of packed schedules and last-minute shopping. There's pressure to buy the perfect gifts for loved ones, but the best presents don't always come wrapped in paper and bows. Sometimes, the greatest gifts are experiences and memories made with loved ones.

Choosing to give an experience gift can be a refreshing change. It's a way to focus less on things and more on moments to look forward to long after the holidays are over. Whether it's learning new skills, enjoying thrills or staying somewhere unique, there are opportunities across Illinois that go beyond traditional gift-giving this holiday season.

This year, trade the checkout line and online retail for something more lasting. Explore Illinois Country Living's list of experience gift ideas found throughout the Prairie State, each offering its own way to create memories.



## ADVENTURES FOR ALL AGES

### All aboard

[irm.org](http://irm.org)

Gift a journey through railroad history with a certificate to visit the **Illinois Railway Museum** in Union. Ride vintage electric or steam trains, explore historic rail cars and step into a living railway museum. With more than 400 vintage rail cars and trolleys, it's the largest transportation museum of its kind in the U.S. Plus, it is an interactive and educational experience for kids, too. Note that the museum is open seasonally.

### Go on safari

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

Give someone a wild and wonderful day out at **Aikman Wildlife Adventure**, tucked between Arthur and Arcola. At this unique drive-through wildlife park, families can cruise through a mile-long loop in their own vehicle, getting up close to zebras, camels, antelope and more. There are also wagon and off-road adventures, as well as a walk-through area with smaller animals.

### Summer fun

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

There's nonstop family fun at **Knight's Action Park** in Springfield — a summer-day playground open seasonally that's packed with rides, water thrills and classic park charm. There are amusement park rides, like the Big Wheel and Paratrooper, a go-kart track, mini-golf courses and the main attraction — Splash Kingdom, with its lazy river, wave pool and water slides.

### Up close to wildlife

[peoriazoo.org](http://peoriazoo.org)

Give the gift of wonder with a trip to the **Peoria Zoo**, nestled in Glen Oak Park in Peoria. This 14-acre gem is home to nearly 100 animal species and offers immersive, beautifully designed habitats to explore. A day pass creates space for discovery, conservation and animal encounters, as well as several educational experiences. For a lasting gift, consider a membership, which includes unlimited visits, early member mornings and gift shop discounts.



### A petting zoo experience

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

Gift a hands-on, animal-filled day at **Rainbow Ranch Petting Zoo**, a family-run farm in Nashville. On a guided 60- to 75-minute tour, guests walk through historic barns and pastures to meet more than 200 animals — everything from baby goats, sheep and pot-bellied pigs to more exotic friends like zebras, kangaroos, emus and even a “zedonk” (zebra-donkey). The zoo is open seasonally and accepts cash, Venmo or check only.

### A hike with goats

[hoofit-galena.com](http://hoofit-galena.com)

Treat someone to a quirky and memorable adventure with a voucher for **Hoof It Goat Treks** in Galena — an experience where you don't just walk in the woods, you walk with goats. The 45-minute to 1-hour guided goat trek takes you through meandering trails with curious goats at your side. The trek is suitable for all ages and abilities. It's outside, immersive, playful and unlike the usual outing — perfect for animal lovers, families and friends seeking something different.

### Discover science and history

[peoriariverfrontmuseum.org](http://peoriariverfrontmuseum.org)

Give the gift of inspiration and discovery with a visit to the **Peoria Riverfront Museum** in Peoria, a multidisciplinary destination that brings together art, science and history under one roof. The interactive galleries let families explore hands-on science, historical artifacts and modern art. The Dome Planetarium offers immersive shows for all ages. The Giant Screen Theater shows educational films that entertain and enlighten.





## PLACES TO STAY

### Family fun

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

Give a getaway that combines family fun, nature and relaxation at **Grand Bear Resort**, tucked just off I-80 in the scenic Illinois River Valley near several state parks. The 24,000-square-foot indoor waterpark — Grand Bear Falls — includes a wave pool, lazy river, water slides, splash tower and a big hot tub. The area is also perfect for hiking, waterfalls and exploring Starved Rock, Matthiessen and Buffalo Rock state parks.

### Grain bins and cabooses

[wildlifeprairiepark.org](http://wildlifeprairiepark.org)

Give someone an experience that's as wild as it is cozy — staying overnight at **Wildlife Prairie Park** offers an unforgettable getaway in the heart of nature, with some unique accommodations. While there are rustic cabins overlooking bison and elk pastures, grain bin cottages and train cabooses add to the experience. Visitors can also enjoy full access to the park, hike trails and unwind in nature under the stars.

### Historic lodge and cabins

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

Giant City State Park offers hiking, rock climbing, horseback riding and overnight stays at **Giant City Lodge**. The lodge was built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps and features native sandstone and white-oak timber that give it a rustic, timeless feel. There are also three types of cabins available.

### A mountain escape

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

Visit a mountain without leaving Illinois at **Chestnut Mountain Resort**, perched above the Mississippi River in the hills outside Galena, offering beautiful views. In



winter, guests can ski or snowboard on Chestnut's 19 trails. In warmer months, there's an alpine slide, zip-lining, Segway tours, a mountain bike park, mini golf, disc golf and hiking. The resort has more than 100 slope-side rooms, as well as a restaurant with panoramic river-valley views.

### Cabins and tree houses

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

Give someone a one-of-a-kind getaway tucked in the Shawnee Hills — **Timber Ridge Outpost & Cabins** located near Elizabethtown offers real treehouses, antique and Amish-built log cabins, and private homes for a rustic yet refined escape. It is located in close proximity to Shawnee National Forest, Garden of the Gods, hiking trails and more southern Illinois outdoor adventures.

### More cabins and tree houses

[tenacretreehouses.net](http://tenacretreehouses.net)

Enjoy a unique stay in western Illinois near the charming community of Nauvoo. **Ten Acre Treehouses** offers stays in rustic cabins, whimsical tree houses and even an off-the-grid experience. It's the perfect rustic and peaceful getaway for those who want an escape from everyday life.

### Art and nature

[allerton.illinois.edu](http://allerton.illinois.edu)

Here's a gift idea for a serene, art-and-nature-infused getaway — **Allerton Park and Retreat Center**, located near Monticello, is more than a park — it's 1,500-plus acres of forest, formal gardens, meadows and sculptures. The lodging options are historic and charming, including stays in the mansion, a secluded 1917 house in the woods, the former gardener's home and a rustic lodge.



## THRILLING GIFTS

### Escape reality

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

Invite someone to step into the story at **CU Adventures in Time & Space**. Located in downtown Urbana, its escape rooms offer themed adventures where teams have 60 minutes to uncover clues, solve puzzles and escape. The experiences are imaginative, fast-paced and perfect for groups of friends, families or coworkers. There are also online adventures that can be played at home.

### A canopy tour

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

Treat someone to an unforgettable outdoor thrill at **Shawnee Bluffs Canopy Tour** in Makanda, set on 83 wooded acres in the heart of the Shawnee National Forest. This eco-friendly canopy course features eight zip lines (with the longest stretching more than 1,100 feet), three aerial suspension bridges and scenic short hikes through the trees. It's ideal for anyone craving an adrenaline-laced escape from the everyday who loves nature.

### Soar above the clouds

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

Lift someone into the skies with the unforgettable experience of hot-air ballooning just outside Galena with **Galena on the Fly**. Their flights depart from the grounds of Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa and soar above Jo Daviess County's rolling hills, historic landscapes and scenic countryside. Weather permitting, the rides are offered at sunrise or sunset, delivering breathtaking views. Gift certificates are available — perfect for giving now and scheduling later.

### Enjoy the views

[aeriesresort.com/skytour](http://aeriesresort.com/skytour)

It's an adventure with a view — **Grafton SkyTour** at Aerie's Resort is an easy-to-access thrill for all ages. From a choice of open-air chairs or enclosed gondolas, this sky-high ride carries guests to the top of the bluff overlooking the dramatic confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. The ride is suitable for families and couples.



### Taking a dive

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

Surprise someone with the thrill of a lifetime and the ultimate adrenaline experience — a tandem skydive at **Skydive Chicago** in Ottawa. Perfect for first-time jumpers, the tandem format means a licensed instructor handles the dive while the recipient enjoys the ride, all while taking in the Illinois countryside.

### Paranormal thrills

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

Invite loved ones into the shadows of history with **Amelia's Galena Ghost Tours** in Galena. A climate-controlled luxury shuttle carries guests on an after-dark expedition through haunted sites and hidden stories of the city. Equipped with ghost-hunting tools like EMF detectors, every stop explores the paranormal. It merges historical intrigue with eerie exploration and works for thrill-seekers, ghost-story fans or simply a memorable night out.

### Aim and throw

[thegame-yard.com](http://thegame-yard.com)

Axe throwing is a test of skill at **The Game Yard** in Highland. This is not your average axe-throwing experience — participants step up to high-tech projected targets in a relaxed, social space complete with a full-service bar. In addition to axe throwing, The Game Yard also offers other activities, including a golf simulator, giant Jenga, iRacing and more.

## HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES

### Forge a knife

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

Give the gift of fire and steel — a knife-forging experience at **Edge of Normal Workshop** in Bloomington. Participants will work with an experienced bladesmith, learning how to heat, hammer and shape a piece of steel into their own knife. This is perfect for someone who likes hands-on adventures and metalworking. Plus, the finished piece is theirs to keep as a tangible memento of the experience. More options include knife sharpening, tomahawk and bottle opener forging.

### Spoon carving

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

Perfect for someone interested in woodworking, **Galena Spoon Co.** offers three-hour spoon-carving workshops. Located in downtown Galena, the class is designed for beginners and takes participants through wood selection, tool handling, shaping and finishing their very own hand-carved wooden spoon. Since the class is taught in a small group (up to six people), buy yourself a spot, too.

### Recipes for success

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

Surprise someone with a culinary experience at **Lori's Kitchen Store**, located in Washington. The cooking classes aren't just demonstrations — they're engaging, hands-on experiences in a cozy and welcoming kitchen-store setting. Attendees receive recipe handouts and learn how to cook and bake a variety of dishes. Classes cover a variety of themes, including sourdough basics, pizza making, chocolate basics, dumplings and much more.

### Paint your own pottery

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

Treat someone to a colorful, hands-on adventure at **Shewey's Paint Your Own Pottery Studio**, set in a welcoming, family-friendly space in Paris with hundreds of ready-to-paint pottery pieces, glass fusing, clay, canvas, mosaics and more. Ideal for someone who likes hands-on experiences and art, this gift offers the freedom to walk in during business hours, pick their piece and paint. Gift cards can be purchased online.

### Create your own pottery

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

Surprise someone with a creative evening (or eight) at **Mudslide Pottery Studio** in Greenville. There are lively one-night wheel-throwing workshops — complete with instruction, clay and an informal, fun setting — or dive into an 8-week pottery class that guides students from the first steps to finished pieces. This gift is perfect for anyone curious about the craft and ready to try something new.

### Become an artist

[artgeckostudio.org](http://artgeckostudio.org)

Give the gift of creativity at **Art Gecko Studio & Gallery** in O'Fallon — a studio offering art classes for all ages and skill levels. Choose from adult drawing or watercolor classes, or pick a fun session for youth (preschool, elementary, junior or anime art). If you don't want to pick a class, e-gift cards are available. The studio has a creative, supportive environment and a team of dedicated instructors helping people tap their artistic side.

### The gift of music

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

Treat someone to the joy of music with a gift voucher to **Taylorville Music Lessons** in Taylorville. Whether they're a complete beginner or ready to level up, this friendly local studio offers instruction across nearly every instrument — from piano, drums, voice and guitar to violin, ukulele, trumpet and more. Lessons can be held in person or online. 💡



# ART FOR ALL

*Community involvement fuels center's success*

*By Lisa Cherry*

THE BUCHANAN CENTER FOR the Arts in Monmouth opens doors to the appreciation and experience of art to the members of its rural community and those surrounding. From outreach to local schools and public service organizations to collaboration with the nearby college and local library, its impact can be felt throughout Warren, Mercer and Henderson counties. That impact is fueled by the efforts of community members past and present filling a myriad of roles.

The center, founded in 1989, is the legacy of former resident Grace Buchanan, described as “a country girl at heart who developed a passion for the arts.” Her belief that all people should have access to the performing and visual arts ultimately led to the provision of those opportunities in the area through her estate. Members of the center and donors continue to further her mission monetarily.

Its home base, a building that housed the first public library in the state of Illinois, hosts changing exhibits in its Pattee and James Keefe galleries. A dedicated gallery space in the classroom features works by Harlow Blum,

a former art professor at Monmouth College, and an exterior wall boasts a mural celebrating the arts created by a former artist in residence.

One of the center’s major outreach efforts is its Art Presenter Program, originally created by Blum’s wife Lila and a group of fellow teachers to promote the arts to children in grades K-5. “Schools are in dire need of arts education, considering the cuts that are happening,” says Rebecca Quick, Buchanan’s program coordinator and social media curator.

Buchanan board member Sarah Mayfield manages the program, which includes scheduling its 60-plus volunteers. “She gathers all the volunteers for the schools in the area,” Quick explains. “It is sectioned off into each grade level, so kindergarten [for example] will have different pieces [of artwork], and those will rotate through the schools each month.”

Quick teaches in the center’s newly renovated classroom space. “I teach classes to anyone from [ages] 5 to 105,” she laughs. “I try to make classes that are specific for kids as well as adults. I [also] teach a summer art series [and] implement things [kids] might not do [in school], like plaster craft and paper mache.” The recent renovation included a new kiln for the classroom, which has further expanded class options.

Quick became involved with the center as a former artist in residence herself, which eventually led to her current role. “Being an avid artist and fan of the arts, I believe [art is] an integral part of education, giving kids the chance to be creative and diversify their knowledge,” she says.

Classes take place outside the facility as well, whether it be home school Fridays at Warren County Public Library or during visits to the Warren Achievement Center, an educational facility for the mentally and physically disabled. The center also coordinates with Monmouth College. “We do a lot of collaboration,” says Quick. “I do different fairs and events they have on campus to promote the center.”



Buchanan Center for the Arts also has authority as a regranteeing agency for the Illinois Arts Council Agency (IACA). This designation allows the center to grant IACA funds, along with matching funds raised locally, to arts groups, organizations, schools and artists in Warren County. Recent grant recipients include the Immaculate Conception School, Monmouth College and the local dance studio, among others.

Operated by a staff of only three — a soon-to-be full-time executive director, a creative assistant and Quick — volunteers are a much-needed resource. Quick says that she sees more than 100 people contribute their time during any given season. “Throughout the year, we have people coming in to help us hang and tear down shows,” she explains. “I see 25 kids in each of [our art] sessions, and I see two sessions a day, so it’s a lot of hands on deck to make sure everything is cleaned up and ready for the next class.”

There are six shows each year — the first, which takes place January-February, originates with a call to artists. “That one is a changing exhibition,” says Quick. “March and April is our Town & Country Art Show, which features artwork from local schools. It’s open to any child wanting to submit their work. I believe last year we had just under 400 pieces in [that] show.”

May and June is another call to artists, followed by Art from the Heartland in July and August, which features work from regional artists. The 64 Arts National Juried Exhibition — which brings works by artists from across the nation — runs September-October, and the Security Savings Bank Amateur Photography Show finishes out their calendar year.

Of the six, two of the exhibitions are juried — 64 Arts, named in honor of the 64 spaces on the Monmouth public square, and Art from the Heartland. “64 Arts [is a] national juried show, probably our most prestigious show of the year. This year, we have 43 artists from 13 different states,” she says. Community members often serve as jurors for the shows. “Generally, it’s either an artist or an arts teacher in the area,” adds Quick, who also served as a juror prior to working at the center.

Despite the many facets to the center’s current programming, more are planned, including renovations to the building’s currently unused second floor. “We’re just finishing a capital campaign and beginning construction,” says Ann Tenold Rogan, the center’s newly appointed executive director. She says plans include installing an elevator. “The second floor right now is not a usable space, [but] it’s a beautiful space. ... When it opens, it’s going to double the space we have available. ... Upstairs will be a whole new venue.”

Rogan says they would like to host plays and other performing art pieces in the new space, perhaps even square dance lessons. “We’re talking about partnering with local mental health groups to do some art therapy classes upstairs,” she adds.

Rogan grew up in Monmouth and recently returned. “My mother was a potter. My dad, when he retired from the bench, started a woodcarving career,” she says. “Both of my parents were pretty artistic.” When it became clear art wasn’t where her own talents lay, she went into nonprofit management.





“I want us to get a donor database and work on our community connections and partnerships and things like that,” Rogan explains. “[Our] board of directors has a membership of 15 and is incredibly involved — there are eight different committees. They meet almost every month, and they are very hands-on.”

She believes their level of involvement helps the center be seen as a true community partner. “Board members and staff will go and talk about different programs and partnerships we have [on local radio],” says Rogan. “We just joined the Monmouth Greater Chamber of Commerce. I met with the executive director there, and we’re talking about what Buchanan can do for Christmas on the square.”

Another outreach effort in the works involves the oral tradition of storytelling. “Back in the ’80s, an arts council did a writing project with the senior citizens of each county,” explains Rogan, adding that Warren County residents participated in that undertaking. “What we would like to do is pull those archives, create a companion writing piece for today’s senior citizens, [and] do some programming on how those stories compare. We got that idea from the Twin Rivers Arts Council, [which] spearheaded the original writing program.”

The breadth of their projects epitomizes the broad definition of the word “art,” she says. “It’s not just fine arts hanging on a wall to be viewed. It’s also your own personal experiences with it, creating memories with the people you are with while you [have] those experiences,” Rogan continues. “We were also talking about having intergenerational art programming. ... You could do that with all sorts of different types of relationships. ... That’s what we’re thinking for the second floor.”

She remembers her mother having exhibits at the center and is almost sure her father was on the board of directors at some point. “It’s a nonprofit that has deep roots for as old as it is,” she says. “If the vision

isn’t carried on or adopted by the community, it [only] lasts a generation. [The center’s longevity] is a testament to the stability of the organization ... and how important it is to a rural community like this.”

Robust membership also contributes to its longevity, and free programming for members and children bolsters its impact. “There are probably 100 people who come to each art opening, and hundreds will see a show between when it goes up and when it comes down,” she adds, noting that she expects those numbers to increase with the more interactive experiences planned for the additional space upstairs. “I think you’re going to really see it popping.”

While not an artist herself, Rogan loves the stories that different works of art reveal about the time of their creation. “The further away you get from it, the more you can tell about it,” she explains. “Different interpretations of a single piece will change over history, because you’re looking at it through the filter of your life. ... Something may mean one thing in 1600 and may mean something else completely in 1800. It might have been loved in 1900 and hated in the year 2000. I just [find it] fascinating how complex ... and subjective it really is.”

From its founder to its board and staff members, donors, volunteers, members, artists, professors, students, teachers, jurors and visitors — Buchanan Center for the Arts also tells a story — the story of a rural community coming together to offer the arts to all.

“Everyone has a spot at the table for art,” says Quick. 📍

## LEARN MORE

For more information about Buchanan Center for the Arts, go to [bcaarts.org](http://bcaarts.org).

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# Making **MOVES,** **MEALS** and **MEMORIES**

*A new chapter for Potrillo's Mexican Grill*

By Lisa Cherry

**IN SPANISH, THE WORD** potrillo means foal; for Grevil and Angel Sagastume, who own and operate Potrillo's Mexican Grill alongside their family, the foal symbolizes a new chapter, full of promise. While the restaurant has been open for a few years in two locations, Auburn and Carlinville, the latter recently moved into a new building on M.J.M. Electric Cooperative lines.

The Sagastume family members — Grevil, wife Ana and brothers Angel and Brayan, to name a few — are excited about the new space. “This is a better spot, bigger,” says Ana. “It’s a big opportunity for us, because we own the building.

“We want to create something special for the community,” she continues. “A special place, where the people can come, enjoy, [experience] another environment, relax [and make] memories.”

The Carlinville community has supported the move to the new building, which previously housed The Glades, a fine dining establishment that was known for its rattlesnake appetizer — marinated, breaded and fried filet mignon served with a special butter sauce.

“This building has a lot of history,” Ana explains. “The owners at that time were like us, very social, very close to people. ... When people come in, they [re]live those memories. You can see it on their faces, how they feel it.”

She loves to hear older generations reminisce about visiting as children. “We [want to] continue creating memories,” she adds.

Some of those memories are made behind the scenes, tackling challenges and celebrating wins. “We have been in this business for years. ... But, as owners, you get many surprises, some things you wouldn’t even think of,” says Ana. “You have a challenge, you’re going to learn from it. This [has been] our experience, and this is what we learned, and this is how we grow. It’s nothing for us [as a] family to tackle it.”

She says the family enjoys working together, despite the long hours. “We all work together. We are a team. We are more than family — everyone has a role,” she explains. “Some days, you have to work like 16 to 20 hours, and the next day, no matter what, you have to wake up and continue the routine.”





PHOTO COURTESY OF KARIN DOOLIN/TENSIXTEEN PHOTOGRAPHY

A major part of that routine takes place in the kitchen, under the supervision of her brother-in-law, Chef Angel. Ana says they frequently try out new menu items and weed out those that are less popular. Still, the menu is quite extensive, which keeps things hopping.

“You have maybe 25 tickets in the kitchen, and they’re coming and coming — [the kitchen crew] handles the pressure very well,” she describes. “I don’t know how they mentally prepare [and] are so 100% there [in the moment].”

“It’s incredible. You have to see it to believe it, how they are connected,” she continues. “One ticket [can have] 20 meals, and they have 20 meals already at the moment.”

At any given time, customers are ordering from a long list of appetizers, soups, salads, lunch specials, quesadillas, enchiladas, burritos, chimichangas, tacos and fajitas. In addition, the kitchen serves up a number of chicken, steak and seafood entrees. There is also a selection of special entrees, like the Carnitas Dinner, consisting of tender pork tips topped with fried onions and served with rice, refried beans, lettuce, guacamole, Pico de Gallo and three tortillas.

Fajitas are a bestseller, but Ana says the Arroz con Pollo is the “teenagers’ meal” — grilled chicken over a bed of rice, covered with cheese dip and served with three tortillas. “Chicken, cheese and rice,” she laughs.

For more diverse palates, Ana recommends the carnitas, the Camarones shrimp dishes and steak

dinners. Patrons would also be remiss to forego one of Potrillo’s desserts — from chimi cheesecake to fried ice cream, flan, churros and sopapilla.

Another distinguishing feature of the restaurant is its decor. “It’s another view of Mexican restaurants, something different,” she explains. “Mexican restaurants can be different than the culture and colors. We decided to do something else.” She adds that its ranch style is a nod to Carlinville’s farming community.

“Since the beginning, we have had a lot of support,” says Ana. “[Customers] express how well the [staff was] with them, how good the food is, how nice it is to come in and talk with people.”

She emphasizes that the family has two main priorities, one being the quality and presentation of the food they serve. “We care about how the plate goes to the table,” Ana says.

Their other priority is providing the highest level of service. “We train everyone ... [The customers] have to remember you — the service, the interaction,” she adds.

“When people are happy with what you are creating for them, it gives you energy, it gives you more motivation — that’s very important to all of us.” 📍

Opposite top: Carnitas Dinner (foreground) and Chimichanga Fajita

Opposite bottom: Sopapilla

Above left: Potrillo’s ranch style is a nod to Carlinville’s farming community.

Above right: Brayan, Ana, Grevil, Angel and Jose Sagastume

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

### Mini Angel Food Cakes

Submitted by *Jenny Lenz, McDonough Power Cooperative*  
*Yields: 6 mini cakes*

- 9 egg whites
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 F. Place egg whites in mixing bowl and let sit for 10 minutes. Sift flour, powdered sugar and cream of tartar in separate bowl. Set aside. Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form and then continue to beat while adding the granulated sugar until well mixed. Add vanilla while mixing and then the flour mixture until well combined. Pour into greased and floured mini cake or loaf pans. This recipe should make around 6 cakes. Bake for 30-35 minutes until golden light brown. Take out and turn upside down on wire rack to cool. Garnish with favorite berries, whipped topping and powdered sugar.



### Sugar and Spice Nuts

Submitted by *Jalayne Luckett, SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative*  
*Yields: About 4 cups*

- 1/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 egg white
- 1 cup salted cashews
- 1 cup pecan halves
- 1 cup dry roasted peanuts
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries

Preheat oven to 300 F. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, cinnamon and cayenne. Set aside. In a large bowl, whisk the egg white until frothy. Add nuts and cranberries. Sprinkle with sugar mixture and toss to coat. In a single layer, spread onto a greased or parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Bake for 18-20 minutes, stirring once halfway through. Cool before storing in an airtight container.

### Brown Butter Sugar Cookie Rice Krispies

*Servings: 15*

- 3/4 cup butter
- 1 10-ounce package marshmallows
- 1/2 cup sugar cookie mix
- 5 cups rice cereal
- 1/3 cup sprinkles, red and green

Grease a 9-by-13-inch glass dish. In a large, light-colored saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Continue cooking until golden while stirring or swirling the contents of the pan. The butter will foam, then turn golden brown and smell nutty. This will take about 6-8 minutes. Add in the marshmallows and stir until almost melted. Add in sugar cookie mix and stir until combined. Remove from heat and stir in rice cereal. While still warm, stir in the sprinkles. Don't overmix — you want to still see the festive red and green colors. Pour into prepared dish and let cool. **Note:** Browning the butter will give a caramel flavor. If you would like the sugar cookie flavor to stand out more, just melt the butter instead of browning it.



## Snowball Surprises

Submitted by Kathy Lingle, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative  
 Yields: 3 dozen

- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 3/4 cup powdered sugar, divided
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1-3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup pecan halves, finely chopped
- Hershey's Kisses, maraschino cherries and gumdrops

Preheat oven to 350 F. Lightly grease cookie sheets or line with parchment paper. Beat butter and 1/2 cup powdered sugar in large bowl until well blended. Add vanilla and beat until blended. Gradually add flour and salt, beating after each addition. Stir in pecans. Shape dough into tablespoon-sized balls. Press one chocolate, cherry or gumdrop into each ball, working dough around to cover. Place balls 1-1/2 inches apart on prepared cookie sheets. Refrigerate 30 minutes, or until dough is firm. Bake for 13-15 minutes, or until edges are lightly browned. Cool on wire rack and sprinkle remaining 1/4 cup powdered sugar over warm cookies. **Tip:** If using maraschino cherries, freeze them first. Remove the cherries from the jar and pat them dry. Arrange on a tray so they don't stick together, and freeze for about 30 minutes, or until the cherries are firm. This makes it easier to insert in the cookie dough.

## Chow Mein Noodle Candy

Submitted by H. Martin, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative  
 Yields: 3 dozen

- 1 12-ounce package butterscotch chips
- 1 cup crunchy peanut butter
- 2 cups chow mein noodles, dry
- 2 cups mini marshmallows

Melt butterscotch chips and peanut butter in a heavy saucepan on low heat. Add noodles and marshmallows. Stir together and drop by spoonful onto wax paper. Let cool until candy sets.



Viking Cinnamon poinsettias

## In bloom for the season

How the poinsettia became a holiday staple

**DID YOU KNOW** THE most popular potted plant is not sold during the warm growing season? Nearly all sales of this plant happen between Thanksgiving and Christmas. As the

Mexican communities, the plant was traditionally used to decorate churches to celebrate Christmas.

In 1825, President John Quincy Adams appointed the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Joel

Roberts Poinsett, a politician with an interest in botany and co-founder of the Smithsonian. Wandering the countryside of Mexico, Poinsett took cuttings from a shrub with red flowers (technically bracts) growing next to the road.

He sent these to his greenhouse in South Carolina, thereby introducing the poinsettia to the U.S. Poinsett has a disreputable history of involvement with the Trail of Tears and slavery, and was eventually kicked out of Mexico for his behavior toward the Mexican government. Regardless, his name has stuck to one of the most popular plants sold around the world.

Today, poinsettias are sold mostly in the U.S., Mexico, Canada and Europe. Greenhouse growers can manipulate the day length to mimic the 12-hour light/dark cycle of southern Mexico to induce the plant to form flowers, even in the northern reaches of Canada.

Each year, poinsettia breeders and wholesale buyers (larger

grocer and florist chains) gather at a greenhouse near Millstadt, Ill., to showcase next year's poinsettias. The wholesale buyers vote for their favorites and place orders for next year's poinsettia crop. I was fortunate to attend last year and am interested to see what poinsettias will be for sale in 2025.

Poinsettias are also trying to break out of the Christmas holiday market. Imagine rustic orange, tan and dull yellow poinsettias for fall and Halloween. And bright pink, white and yellow poinsettias for spring.

With more than 35 million poinsettias sold in the U.S. each year, it's likely that you will have to take care of one this holiday season. Here are some tips to keep your poinsettia alive, at least until the relatives leave.

Place your poinsettia in indirect light. Keep the plant from touching cold windows. Keep poinsettias away from warm or cold drafts from radiators, air registers or open doors and windows.

Cooler temperatures of 60-70 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and nighttime temperatures around 55 F prolong poinsettia blooms. Move the plant to a cooler room at night, if possible. Check the soil daily. Make sure the decorative foil has holes for drainage, and discard any excess water collected in the saucer. 🌱



PHOTOS COURTESY OF U OF I EXTENSION

Luv-U-Pink poinsettias

winter days reach their shortest, many Americans decorate their homes with the festive colors of the poinsettia.

Indeed, the poinsettia is a major economic driver for the nursery industry, accounting for a quarter of sales each year. These are impressive numbers for a plant that most will toss once the colors start to fade. But there's more to the poinsettia than just modern-day economics.

Native to southern Mexico, the poinsettia has a long history with humans, with known cultivation going back to the Aztec civilization. In its native range, poinsettia blooms during December. As Catholic teachings spread through indigenous



**Chris Enroth** is a horticulture educator with the University of Illinois Extension, serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough and Warren counties. This column also appears in the "Good Growing" blog at [go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing](http://go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing).

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**UPCOMING THEMES**

- February – Pets*
- March – Old buildings*
- April – Pop of color*
- May – Flora and fauna*



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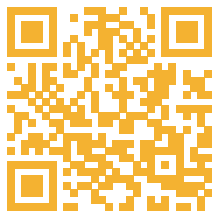
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