

Illinois Country Living

NATURAL WONDERS *of southern Illinois*

PRAIRIE TABLE
Fun and food at The County

FINEST COOKING
From the tin

SNAPSHOTS
Timeless structures



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Electric Cooperatives

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Eye Doctor Helps Illinois Legally Blind To See

High Technology For Low Vision Patients Allows Many To Drive Again



For 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

1-618-566-8899

Office located in Mascoutah, Illinois
Marianne McDaniel, O.D.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUZANNE ASATURIAN

Illinois Country Living

MARCH 2026
VOLUME 83, NO. 11

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAMS AND ADAMS CONSTRUCTION



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On the cover: Devil's Backbone is a prominent, jagged rock formation located within the Bell Smith Springs Recreation Area in the Shawnee National Forest.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUZANNE ASATURIAN



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 200,000, the magazine informs cooperative consumer-members about issues affecting their electric cooperative and the quality of life in rural Illinois.

PRESIDENT/CEO
Craig Sondgeroth
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Rick Rubenacker
EDITOR
Colten Bradford
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CREATIVE SERVICES COORDINATOR
Kayla Adkins

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
Jen Danzinger
Meghan Jenkins

CONTRIBUTORS
Suzanne Asaturian
Nate Birt
Brittney Haag
Jim Winnerman

SALES REPRESENTATIVE
Cheryl Solomon
Cheryl@amp.coop

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The backbone of modern life

How co-ops keep the electric grid reliable and resilient

THE ELECTRIC GRID IS the backbone of modern life. It powers homes, businesses, hospitals and other critical infrastructure. As the grid becomes more interconnected and digitized, it faces growing threats ranging from cyberattacks to extreme weather events.

Keeping the grid reliable and resilient is essential, and electric cooperatives are actively involved in national efforts to secure the grid. Along with other utilities and grid operators, co-ops follow standards set by organizations

like the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), which mandate protections for critical infrastructure.

Cybersecurity measures:

Firewalls, encryption and multi-factor authentication help prevent unauthorized access to control systems. Regular software updates and vulnerability scans reduce risk.

Physical security: Electric substations and control centers are protected with fencing, surveillance and restricted access. Physical breaches or attacks can be just as damaging as cyberattacks.

Resilience: Backup systems and redundant lines ensure power can be rerouted during outages caused by

natural events or attacks. This minimizes disruption and speeds recovery.

Each of these standards creates layers of defense, making it harder for any single failure to compromise the entire grid. As threats evolve, so do the tools to combat them. New tools including drones, remote sensors and advanced controls allow co-ops to be more effective in monitoring and responding to grid threats.

Automated sensors and controls allow real-time visibility across the grid and enable rapid response to emergency conditions, either by a human operator or automated settings. Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a powerful technology to enhance these tools, especially in sifting through large amounts of data to detect irregularities or patterns. But, to be effective, AI tools must be well designed, properly trained and incorporated into cybersecurity protections.

Electric co-ops are also making investments to harden their local systems against the growing threat of extreme weather and other natural hazards. These investments include identifying vulnerable parts of the grid, replacing utility poles, burying lines and adding enhanced technologies that allow greater visibility and control to anticipate and respond to emergencies.

Planning for the unexpected is critical. Utilities and government agencies conduct large-scale exercises to test their readiness for emergencies. One example is GridEx, a biennial event organized by NERC that simulates cyber and physical attacks on the electric grid. Thousands of participants, from utilities to law enforcement, work together to identify weaknesses and improve coordination.

These drills serve two purposes. They expose vulnerabilities before real crises occur, and they build relationships among key stakeholders. In an emergency, rapid communication and collaboration can make the difference between a minor disruption and a widespread outage.

Why does this matter? A secure electric grid isn't just about keeping the lights on; it's about protecting public health, economic stability and national security in co-op communities. It is about helping to build a grid that is reliable and resilient today and into the future. 💡



Michael Leitman writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 local electric cooperatives.



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Farm Family Resource Initiative services are available at no cost to
farmers and farm family members, supported by funding from the
Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health.



YOUR CO-OP CARES

March is Ladder Safety Month.
Here are a few tips to keep you safe:

Carry ladders **HORIZONTALLY**.

Always make sure the ladder is on a **SOLID, LEVEL SURFACE** before attempting to climb.

For every four feet the ladder reaches up a wall, the base should be placed one foot away from that wall to **PREVENT TIPPING AND FALLS**.

Maintain **THREE POINTS OF CONTACT** while climbing by keeping two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand in contact with the ladder.

KEEP YOUR BODY CENTERED between the ladder side rails.

NEVER CLIMB, STAND OR SIT on the top step or straddle the top of the ladder.

NEVER ATTEMPT TO MOVE a ladder while standing on it.

Keep yourself and the ladder **AT LEAST 10 FEET** in all directions from power lines, including service lines.



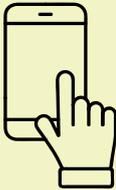
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MARCH CHECKLIST

Consumer Protection Week is March 1-7.

If something feels off, hang up and contact your co-op directly.

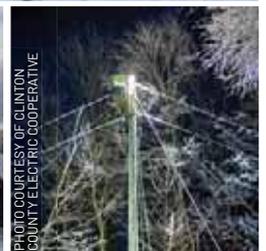
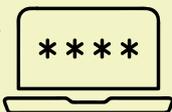
Scammers often pose as electric utilities, demanding immediate payment or threatening service disconnection over the phone.



Protect your personal accounts. Never share your account number or passwords with unsolicited callers. Your co-op will only ask for personal information when you contact them directly.



Reduce your risk of fraud. Use strong, unique passwords for online accounts, avoid clicking suspicious links and monitor your accounts regularly.



Mutual aid crews restore power following Winter Storm Fern

Amid frigid temperatures and widespread damage caused by Winter Storm Fern Jan. 23-27, electric cooperatives across multiple states, including Illinois, mobilized through mutual aid to help restore power to thousands of affected members in southern states.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) reported that co-op outages peaked at about 400,000. While Mississippi and Kentucky were among the hardest-hit states, nationwide, outages exceeded 1 million.

Ice accumulation proved to be the most destructive element of the storm, snapping power lines and poles and toppling trees into energized equipment, creating outages that often lasted for days.

“Freezing rain and ice accumulation don’t stop causing damage when the precipitation ends,”

said Joe Arnold, vice president of strategic communications at Kentucky Electric Cooperatives. “The weight on power lines and trees continues, and when you add wind, the cumulative effect becomes a slow-motion disaster.”

Mutual aid crews from 21 states were dispatched to aid in restoration. Illinois crews assisted Kentucky co-ops Farmers Rural Electric Cooperative Corporation and South Kentucky RECC. Crews assisting South Kentucky RECC remained on assignment for the duration of restoration efforts and were released to return home after power was restored on Jan. 31.

Crews initially deployed to Farmers RECC completed restoration work on Thursday, Jan. 29. With critical needs shifting elsewhere, most of the assisting crews transferred to Tri-County Electric Cooperative

Continued on page 8

Sudoku

by Myles Mellor and Susan Flanagan

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

Solution on page 33.

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

ILLINOIS TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Test your Illinois trivia knowledge. Here are a few questions in honor of International Women's Day. Answers are on page 33.



- Which of these well-known comedic actresses (originally from Illinois) have been nominated for an Academy Award?
 - Jane Lynch
 - Melissa McCarthy
 - Betty White
- Who was the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, who was also from Illinois?
 - Jane Addams
 - Emily Greene Balch
 - Jody Williams
- This Illinois author wrote "The Feminine Mystique" and is considered a pioneer of the women's rights movement.
 - Betty Friedan
 - Jean M. Auel
 - Gwendolyn Brooks
- Which Illinois journalist and activist used her writing to influence national anti-lynching legislation and women's suffrage?
 - Nellie Bly
 - Mary Church Terrell
 - Ida B. Wells

Continued from page 7

in Tompkinsville, Ky., to continue restoration work. Those crews were released Jan. 31. All Illinois mutual aid crews are now safely back in their home territories.

"This restoration effort would not have been possible without the incredible support surrounding us. We are deeply grateful for our support teams, our members whose prayers, patience and encouragement carried us through, and the mutual aid and contract crews who traveled to assist and worked alongside our team throughout the storm," South Kentucky RECC reported on social media.

Thank you to the following Illinois electric co-ops that sent crews to aid in storm recovery in Kentucky: Clay Electric Co-operative, Clinton County Electric Cooperative, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association, M.J.M. Electric Cooperative, Menard Electric Cooperative, Monroe County Electric Cooperative, Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative, Shelby Electric Cooperative, Tri-County Electric Cooperative and Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative.

Editor's note: Additional crews were dispatched following production of this issue. More details to come next month.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEOFFREY MOFFETT, UNSPLASH

Electric co-ops and data centers

Data centers, with ravenous appetites for land and electricity, are top of mind in rural America and for good reason. Expected to raise new U.S. energy demand by 30% by 2030, data centers are setting their sights on electric co-op country, where power is affordable and reliable, and they have acreage to spread out.

Overall, data centers connect the world through digital networks, and that

requires a significant and steady flow of electricity without pause. Their job is to electronically store, manage and transmit tons of internet-based information 24/7 to ensure the fast, uninterrupted operation of the World Wide Web.

A typical data center can require 100 megawatts (MW) of electricity, which could serve nearly 100,000 households, every day. A growing number of data centers are much larger. Known as hyperscale campuses, these centers demand upwards of 600 MW — enough to power Washington, D.C.

So, can electric co-ops take advantage of data centers' gigantic demand and protect consumer-members at the end of the line? The short answer: yes.

"Co-ops are uniquely positioned for this work," said Allison Hamilton, markets and rates director for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "Their commitment to serving all members — not just the large load — means they approach these projects with care, collaboration and a focus on long-term community benefit."

Electric co-ops already are serving almost 300 data centers nationwide, mostly in Virginia, Texas, Illinois, Oregon and Georgia, with another 150 under construction to meet the escalating global needs of artificial intelligence (AI), digital programs and storage.

Lower land costs plus tax incentives for locating a business in rural areas are attractive to data center developers. But perhaps the top draw is the reliable, affordable electricity co-ops offer.

With a footprint larger than a football field, these massive concrete, windowless structures house two huge energy consumers: thousands of computers and significant cooling systems to keep them running.

There are many pluses for co-ops serving data centers. Co-op service areas with data centers are experiencing local business booms with jobs created around the new facility well after its construction. A data center's addition to the tax base also allows for school and road upgrades.

For the co-op, there can be greater efficiency gains and support for system-wide improvements, including broadband fiber for retail internet service.

Having such a constant

Continued on page 10



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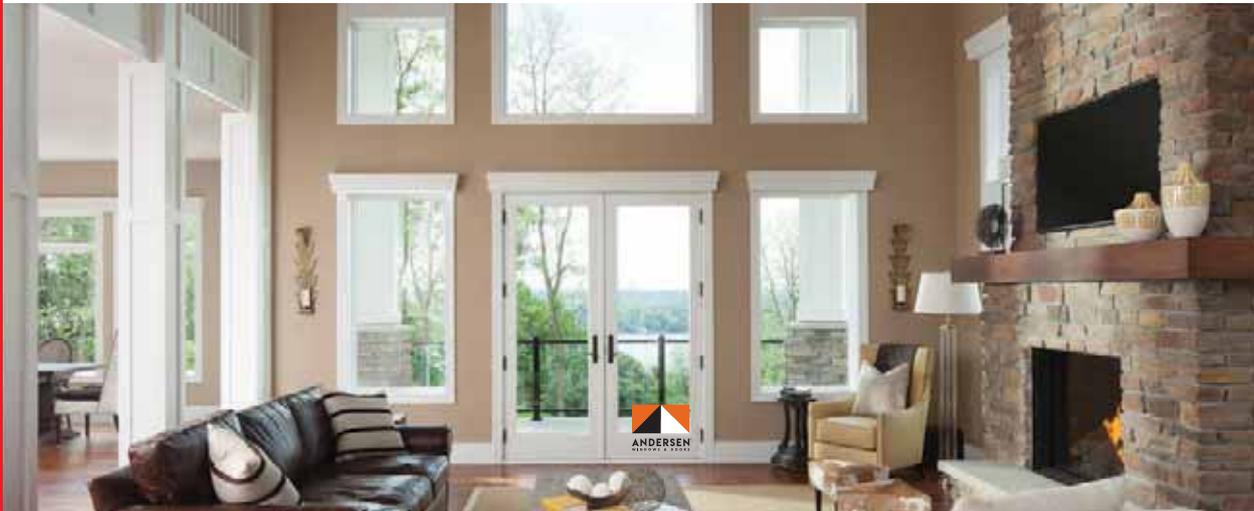
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Where is it?

The winners of the January hidden objects contest were Mary Kay Svoboda of SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative and Ken Mulholland of JCE Co-op. Congratulations! Your ICL campfire mugs have been sent.

The ice skates hidden in the February 2026 issue were on page 14 in the Safety Check section. Winners' names will be drawn, and they will be notified. Visit Illinois Country Living on Facebook after each month's deadline for a closeup of the object's location and winners' names.

It's time for a new hidden object search. With St. Patrick's Day on March 17, be on the lookout for a shamrock, pictured above. The symbol can vary in size and will not be hidden on this page, a lettered page or in an ad.

Entries must include your name, address, name of your electric co-op (nonmembers are also eligible), and the page number and location of the symbol. Visit icl.coop/hiddenobject and fill out the entry form (also found under Contact Us on the website) or mail a postcard or letter to Illinois Country Living, Hidden Objects, 6460 S. 6th St. Frontage Road East, Springfield, IL 62712. We will NOT accept entries via phone call or email.

All entries must be received by the 25th of the publication month. 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. 

Continued from page 8

large energy consumer also offers a means to keep rates steady.

"The predictable, around-the-clock nature of these large loads can create stable revenues and reduce upward pressure on rates for the entire membership," said Hamilton. "For co-ops, data centers offer long-term load growth, revenue stability and potential for broadband and grid modernization. These projects can also bring new tax base, jobs and investment and attract additional businesses to the area." 

Cathy Cash, NRECA



Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative receives a RESAP Certificate of Achievement.

Co-ops earn safety awards

Safety leadership and training were the focus of the 2026 Safety and Energy Conference, held Jan. 28-29 in Springfield. The two-day event brought together electric co-op professionals, safety leaders and industry partners for educational sessions, networking and recognition of outstanding safety performance.

In addition to leadership training and sessions on workplace safety culture, several co-ops earned safety awards. These awards are based on OSHA documentation and underscore a cooperative's dedication to maintaining a safe work environment, exceeding industry safety expectations, and cultivating a proactive safety culture.

The 2025 Best Loss Time Rate Award was given to cooperatives with the lowest amount of lost work time due to workplace injuries, relative to the number of hours worked. Recipients included Adams Electric Cooperative, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Illinois Electric Cooperative, Prairie Power Inc., Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative and Shelby Electric Cooperative.

The 2025 Best Incident Rate Award recognizes the cooperatives with the lowest overall number of recordable workplace incidents, including minor injuries. Recipients included Adams Electric Cooperative, Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative,

Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association, Illinois Electric Cooperative, Prairie Power Inc. and Tri-County Electric Cooperative.

In addition, several electric cooperatives were recognized with Certificates of Achievement for completing a 2025 RESAP — Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program. The program was developed to maintain a culture of safety at cooperatives. By participating in the program, cooperatives commit to safety as an organizational value through training, educating and assessing its workforce.

The RESAP Certificate of Achievement was awarded to Adams Electric Cooperative, Clinton County Electric Cooperative, Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, M.J.M. Electric Cooperative, Monroe County Electric Cooperative, Prairie Power Inc., SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative, Tri-County Electric Cooperative and Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative. 



Lineworker scholarship available

The \$3,000 LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship will help pay for costs to attend the lineworker's school conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) in Springfield.

The scholarship is awarded annually to an individual who is related to a rural electric cooperative employee or director in Illinois, is the child of an electric cooperative member in Illinois, is enrolled in the LLCC lineworker's school, or has served or is serving in the U.S. Armed Forces or National Guard. The applicant must have a high school diploma or a GED at the time the scholarship is awarded in July 2026.

Scholarships are awarded based on an essay, a biographical statement, references and a recommendation that will be submitted. The deadline to apply is April 30, 2026. Learn more at aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship. 



Springfield Q.U.I.L.T.S. 24th Quilt Show

MARCH
20-21

The "Seam to Shining Seam"-themed quilt show celebrates the 250th year of America and 100th year of Route 66 with special categories of quilts. More than 400 quilts and quilted items will be on display. Visitors will enjoy bed turning, door prizes, a charity sale, demonstrations, vendors and Quilt of Valor presentations. Convenient onsite lunch and drinks will be available.

March 20, 2026: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and March 21: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
● Orr Building, Illinois State Fairgrounds, North 5th Street, Springfield
Admission: \$10
springfieldquilts.com

Maple Syrup Festival

MARCH
21-22

Enjoy maple syrup-making demonstrations, guided nature hikes, lumberjack games, live music, kids' activities, artisans, vendors and more at the Maple Syrup Festival. Admission is free, and nearly all activities – from demonstrations to children's programming – are included at no additional cost. Ticket prices vary for the pancake breakfast, served 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

March 21-22, 2026: 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
● Touch of Nature Environmental Center, 1206 Touch of Nature Road, Makanda
Admission: free
ton.siu.edu/community-events/maple-syrup-festival.php



Spring Break Kids Camp

APRIL
3-4

Shenandoah Riding Center will host two afternoons of hands-on horse adventures. Young riders – ages 5 to 12 – will groom, halter, lead and tie up a horse, learning the ropes of real horsemanship in a fun and supportive environment. Each day includes interactive games, activities and a group riding lesson designed to build confidence and connection with horses.

April 3-4, 2026: 1-4 p.m.
● Shenandoah Riding Center, 200 N. Brodrecht Road, Galena
Admission: \$175
815-777-9550 or register at tinyurl.com/spring-break-kids-camp



Gem and Mineral Show

APRIL
11-12

The annual event brings together collectors, hobbyists and families for a fun, hands-on celebration of Earth science. Hosted by the Southern Illinois Earth Science Club, the show features vendors selling gemstones, minerals, fossils, geodes, jewelry and lapidary art, along with live cutting and polishing demonstrations. Visitors can also enjoy educational exhibits and activities.

April 11, 2026: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and April 12: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
● The Pavilion, 1602 Sioux Drive, Marion
Admission: \$2
siesclub.org/show-flyer



LET'S GO!

March 17 St. Patrick's Day Parade

PEORIA
Family-friendly parade
hosted by the St. Patrick
Society of Peoria

March 20-21 68th Annual Illinois Mennonite Relief Sale

BLOOMINGTON
Proceeds help
those in need

April 3 Danville Olympics

DANVILLE
Teams compete in mini
tailgate challenges
hosted by local groups

April 12 Gym Bob's Jamboree

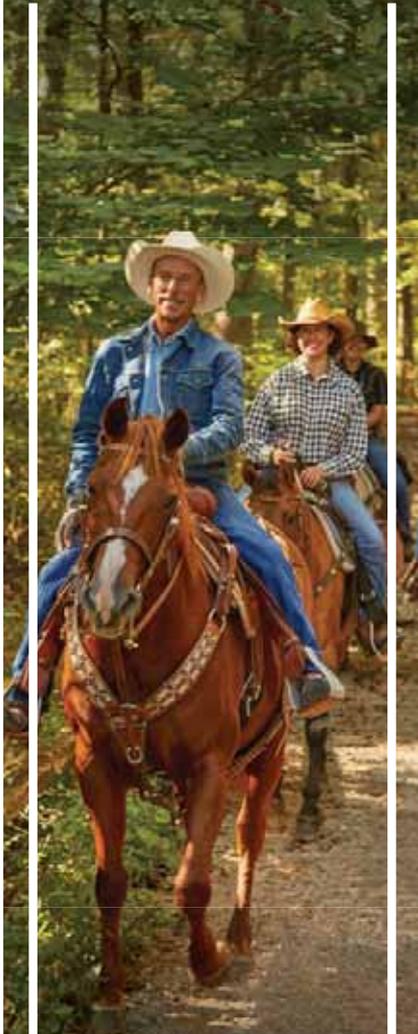
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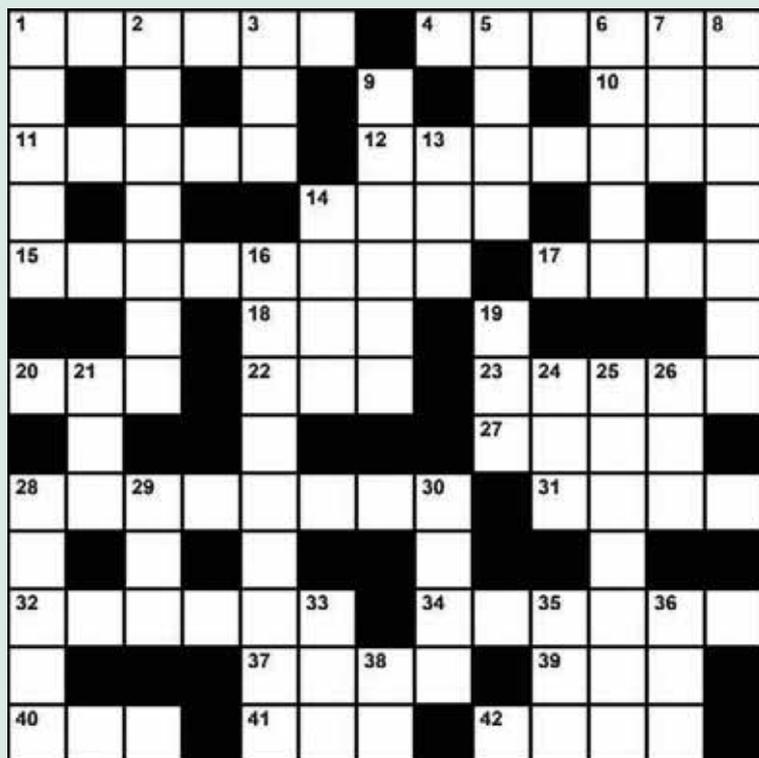
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Across

- 1 Plot for growing flowers and vegetables
- 4 Celebratory march on St. Patrick's Day
- 10 Not bright
- 11 Granny Smith is a green one
- 12 Leafy green vegetable
- 14 Spanish word for house
- 15 Three-leafed plant and Irish symbol
- 17 Aloe ____ plant
- 18 Manning from NY
- 20 Perform on stage
- 22 ____ green (color)
- 23 Receded like the tide
- 27 River valley
- 28 Humorous verse and an Irish city
- 31 Ireland's national emblem (musical instrument)

- 32 Type of Irish music that often features a fiddle and a tin whistle
- 34 Start a new venture
- 37 Shade of green and a very long river
- 39 Sales agent, briefly
- 40 Actor, Jude
- 41 Space between two things
- 42 New Age singer who often sings in Gaelic

- 9 Garden shrub
- 13 Pose a question
- 14 Slaw type
- 16 Coming back strongly
- 19 Place to grow vegetables
- 21 Windy City where the river turns green on St. Patrick's Day, abbr.
- 24 Exclamation of disgust
- 25 Famous Irish stone you can kiss
- 26 Poetic abbreviation for always
- 28 Neighborhood resident
- 29 "Braveheart" actor, first name
- 30 Trendy leafy green
- 33 U.S. intelligence agency
- 35 Large coffee container
- 36 Tax preparer, for short
- 38 Vinyl record, now a collectible

Down

- 1 Lawn covering
- 2 Move a flower to a new location
- 3 Night before a holiday
- 5 "Mamma Mia" pop group
- 6 "Even in winter, it shall be green in my heart." Chopin, for example
- 7 Turn over the ground
- 8 Green precious stone

Solution on page 33.

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Think before you climb

Use ladders safely

WHETHER FOR A HOME improvement project, clearing the gutters or hanging decorative lights, a ladder is often a necessary tool. However, before rushing into a project, take a few minutes to inspect your ladder and ensure it is the right one for the job.

Each year in the U.S., more than 100 people die and thousands more are injured from ladder-related falls, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). There are five major causes for ladder-related fall incidents, according to NIOSH.

- 1. Incorrect extension ladder setup angle:** In approximately 40% of cases, the cause of ladder-related injuries is a ladder sliding out at the base due to an incorrect setup angle.
- 2. Inappropriate ladder selection:** Selecting a ladder with the proper rating for intended use (duty rating) is also important to avoid structural failure. Select the correct ladder for the job.

- 3. Insufficient ladder inspection:** Reduce the chance of ladder structural failure by practicing regular inspection and maintenance.
- 4. Improper ladder use:** Overreaching, carrying objects, applying excessive force, slips and missteps are frequent causes of ladder-related injuries.
- 5. Lack of access to ladder safety tools and information:** Small companies that account for up to 80% of all construction companies, as well as domestic ladder users, typically do not receive the required safety training on the proper use of extension and step ladders.

Don't skip the inspection. Before using a ladder, check to see if it is broken, in disrepair or not functioning as it should. If this is the case, ensure no one uses it until it is properly repaired. Look for cracks, serious dents, deformed, loose or missing steps/rungs, missing or uneven feet, and defective locks and spreader braces.

If the ladder passes inspection, next look up and look out for overhead power lines before climbing, transporting or positioning a ladder. When moving a ladder, carry it horizontally instead of vertically, since getting too close to or contacting power lines could cause serious injury or electrocution.

Keep yourself and all equipment 10 feet away from power lines. Electricity can arc or jump if a ladder gets too close to a power line or pole, or the ladder could make direct contact with the line.

Only use a ladder during ideal weather conditions. Rain can make the ground slippery. Wind could blow a ladder into a power line.

An aluminum ladder is a great conductor of electricity; however, a wooden ladder can be one, too, depending on the condition of the ladder and whether it is wet or has metal parts. Anything that elevates you can take you too close to a power line if you are not aware of your surroundings. For more information on electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org. 💡



Erin Hollinshead is the executive director of Safe Electricity, a program creating a safer, smarter world by providing lifesaving electrical safety education.

Water heater woes

Should it be repaired or replaced?

WE'VE ALL GOTTEN USED to having reliable hot water in our homes. Nobody wants to get caught off guard with an unexpected cold shower or failed water heater. I tend to live in the “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it” school of thought, but a failed water heater can cause damage to your home and property.

Emergency replacement of a water heater can add unnecessary cost, not to mention inconvenience. Evening or weekend replacement or repair can lead to higher costs charged by a plumbing company. Here are some signs that your storage water heater might be approaching the end of its life.

If your water heater is 10-15 years old, it's time to start planning and budgeting for a replacement.

The typical lifespan of a storage water heater is 10 to 15 years, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). If your water heater is older than that, plan to replace it soon. Don't have records of when it was installed? No problem. Find the serial number on the water heater's sticker or metal plate. Look up the serial number online or call the manufacturer to find its age.

Sediment or water on the floor or at the bottom of the water heater could mean its days are numbered. Sediment can be a sign of corrosion, which leads to a leak or failure.

Seeing rusty or discolored water when you turn on your faucets can be a sign the tank is rusting inside. If water is not getting as hot as it used to, it could be a sign of a failing



PHOTO COURTESY OF J.A. - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

electric element or a gas burner not functioning properly.

Odd noises could indicate an issue with the components. If you're hearing unusual noises from your water heater, schedule a checkup with a plumber. Well-functioning water heaters typically don't make much noise.

A professional plumber may be able to replace failing components. If you are having issues with the tank itself, it's likely time for a new unit.

If you're in the market for a new water heater, a heat pump water heater might be a good fit for your home. These systems are two to three

times more energy efficient than conventional electric-powered tank water heaters, according to the DOE.

Even if your water heater is in great shape, you can save at home by lowering your hot water use. Some easy ways to do this are washing laundry in cold water and installing high-performance aerators on faucets and showerheads to reduce the amount of hot water you use.

Knowing the signs of water heater failure can save you from home damage and offer opportunities to explore options for more efficient equipment to lower your electric use. 💡



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



PHOTO COURTESY OF NRECA

The complex electric grid includes thousands of generators and millions of miles of transmission and distribution power lines that work together to keep electricity flowing day and night.

Power players of the grid

Breaking down electricity delivery

EVERY TIME YOU FLIP a light switch, you're connecting to one of the most complex systems ever built, also known as the North American electric grid. Often called the largest interconnected machine in the world, this network spans the U.S., Canada and parts of Mexico. It includes thousands of generators, hundreds of thousands of miles of transmission lines and millions of miles of distribution power lines all working together to keep the lights on.

How does electricity get from a power plant to your home? And where do electric co-ops fit in? Let's break it down. The electric grid has three major components: generation, transmission and distribution. Each plays a critical role in delivering a constant supply of electricity.

Making the power

In the U.S., most power plants produce electricity by burning fossil fuels or by harnessing renewable resources. To ensure that enough electricity is generated to keep the lights on at an affordable price, two main structures exist.

The first is a vertically integrated model, where in some regions, a single utility owns everything from power plants to power lines and delivers electricity directly to consumers.

In other areas, a second model is used. Instead of one company making and delivering power, many companies sell electricity in

a competitive market. Utilities buy electricity from these generators and deliver it to consumers like you.

In this model, a group called a regional transmission operator (RTO) or independent system operator (ISO) helps keep everything running. They make sure enough power is available at all times. This system is called a wholesale market, and it lets utilities buy extra power when they need it.

Most electric co-ops don't own large power plants. Instead, they purchase power through contracts, wholesale markets or from their generation and transmission cooperative (G&T), a member-owned utility that serves multiple co-ops in a designated region.

G&Ts are owned by their member distribution co-ops. G&Ts often own power plants and transmission lines. They also invest in new generation sources and build infrastructure, all while staying true to the cooperative model: member-focused, not profit-driven.

The energy superhighway

Once electricity is generated, it doesn't stay at the power plant. It begins a long journey to reach homes, farms and businesses. Power must travel across regions to where it's needed most, and that's where the transmission system comes in. These high-voltage lines act like energy superhighways,

moving electricity over hundreds of miles before it's stepped down for local distribution.

Transmission lines move enormous amounts of electricity efficiently across regions. Most distribution co-ops don't own these lines, but rely on their G&T to handle this part. G&Ts make sure power gets from the plant to your co-op.

However, the electricity carried by transmission lines cannot be used as is because of the high voltage levels. That's the job of the distribution network, which is the final step that brings power to your home.

The last mile

The distribution network is the last segment of the electric grid and delivers generated energy from the transmission network to consumers. The high-voltage power from transmission lines is converted to lower voltages that home appliances and personal devices can use. This is where your co-op comes in to keep local lines maintained and power flowing to members.

Understanding how power moves from generation to your home helps explain why reliability and affordability depend on teamwork and collaboration between your local co-op, its G&T partners and the broader grid. Together, co-ops are preparing for tomorrow's challenges, so you can count on safe, reliable power for years to come. 💡



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

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NATURAL WONDERS

of southern Illinois

Photography by Suzanne Asaturian

JAW-DROPPING ROCK FORMATIONS, ANCIENT rivers and bluffs, and vast overlooks may not come to mind when planning to explore one of the flattest states in the nation, but southern Illinois is full of natural beauty.

Suzanne Asaturian and her husband Rick are members of Egyptian Electric Cooperative Association and oftentimes explore the natural wonders that the region has to offer.

“We are so lucky to live in southern Illinois,” Suzanne says. “I’ve traveled all over the country, but my favorite place to explore and photograph is right here. The landscape changes with every season, and the diversity of plants and animals is incredible.”

While this isn’t an exhaustive list of southern Illinois’ natural wonders, it offers a glimpse of the landscapes waiting to be explored. From hidden waterfalls to forested bluffs and winding trails, there is always something new to discover.



Opposite page: Cache River Wetlands

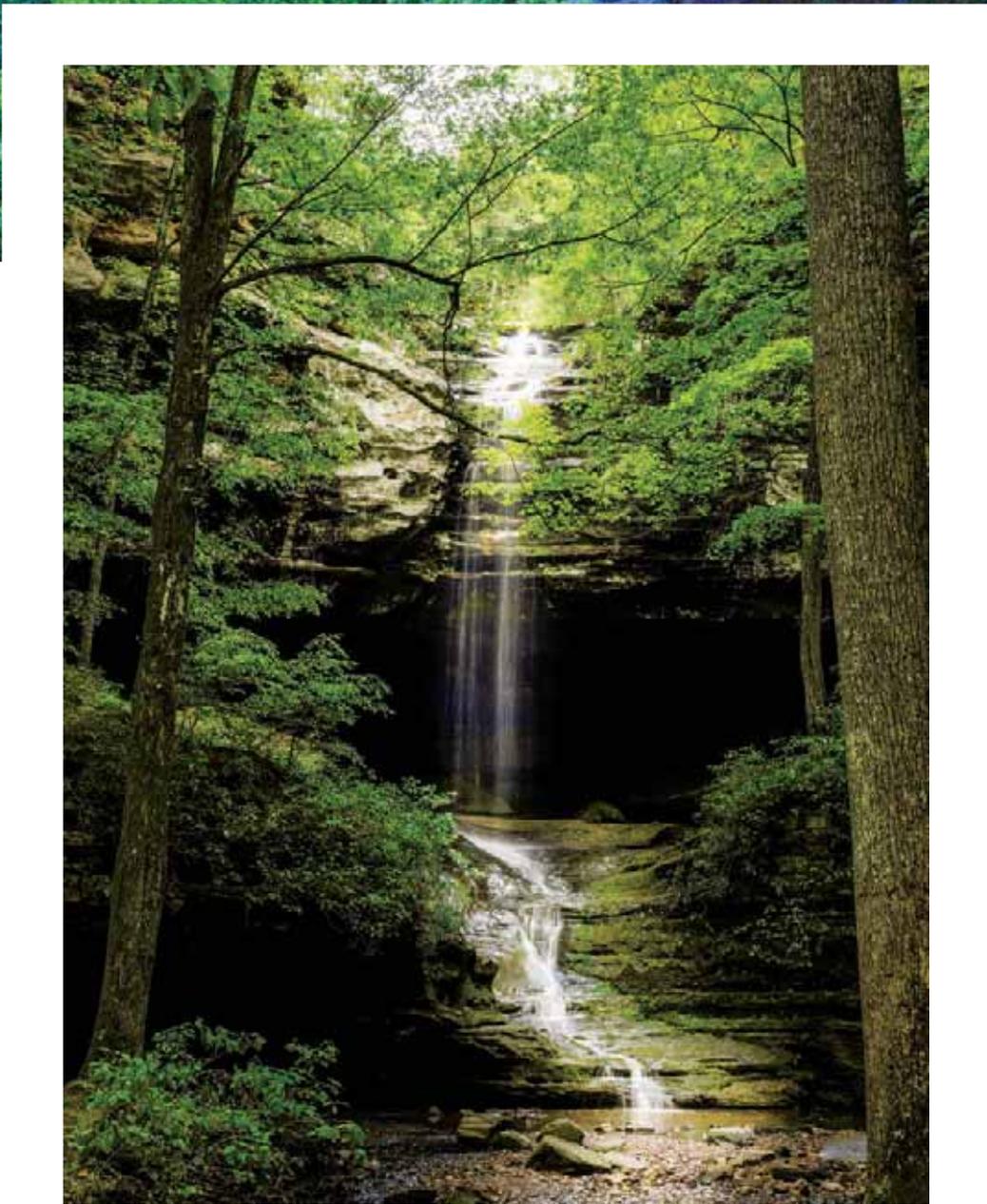
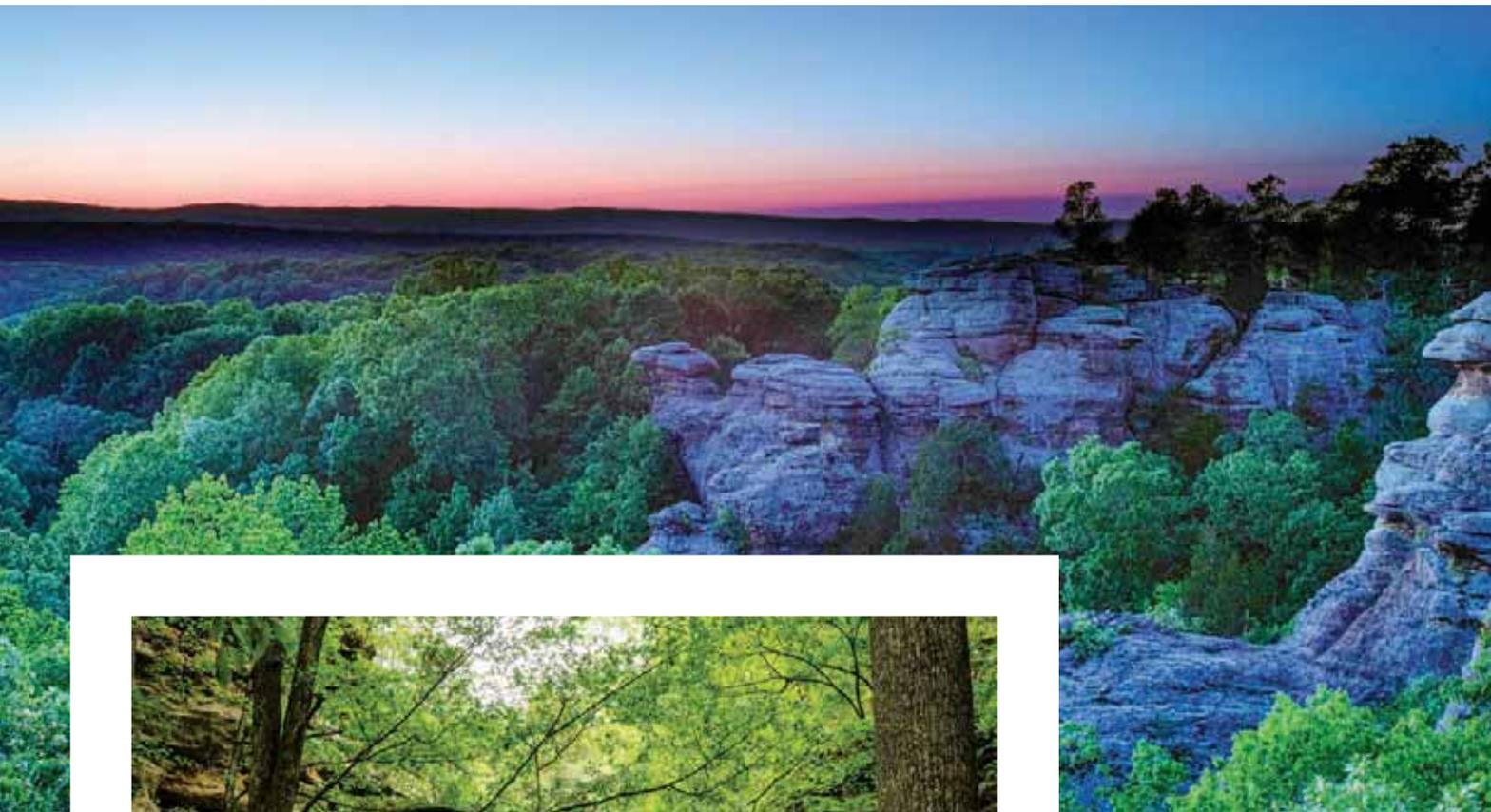
A swamp in Illinois? Find one in the Cache River State Natural Area in Johnson County. This area is home to ancient cypress and tupelo trees and is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems north of the Gulf of Mexico. Visitors can take a canoe or walk the boardwalk trail and enjoy the serene wonder.

Top: Waterfalls on Rocky Bluff Trail

Along the Rocky Bluff Trail at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, hikers can find picturesque seasonal waterfalls cascading over layered rock ledges and an abundance of beautiful wildflowers in the spring. After rainfall or during spring melt, the falls come alive. The trail is a 2.2-mile loop near Devil's Kitchen Lake.

Left: Cave-In-Rock

Perched above the Ohio River in Hardin County, Cave-In-Rock is an intriguing natural landmark with a bit of a checkered past. The massive riverside cave — carved by wind, water and ancient floods — has drawn travelers for centuries, including as a hideout for river pirates and outlaws. Today, Cave-In-Rock State Park offers hiking trails, river views, camping and easy access to the cave itself at the edge of the Shawnee National Forest.

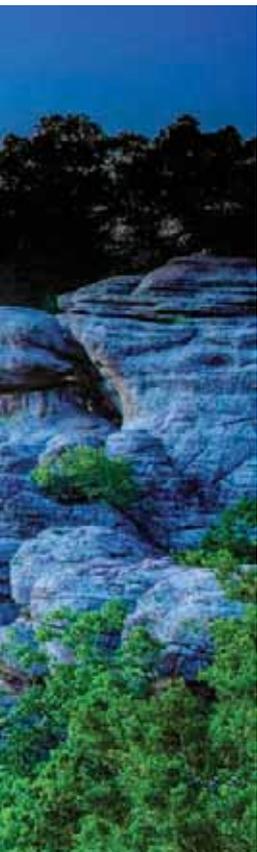


**Top: Garden of the Gods
Observation Trail**

The Garden of the Gods Observation Trail in the Shawnee National Forest offers some of the most breathtaking views in Illinois. This short, accessible loop in Herod winds through dramatic sandstone rock formations shaped by millions of years of erosion, with overlooks that stretch across forested hills and valleys. Two of the most famous landmarks include Camel Rock (pictured) and Devil's Smokestack.

Left: Fern Clyffe State Park

Located near Goreville, Fern Clyffe State Park is known for its rugged sandstone bluffs, shaded forests and a popular, picturesque waterfall. Miles of hiking and mountain biking trails wind through scenic overlooks. It's a favorite spot for outdoor recreation with varied terrain for every season.



Top: Fountain Bluff

Rising above the Mississippi River near Gorham, Fountain Bluff is known for its towering limestone cliffs and panoramic views. The area is popular for hiking, rock climbing, scenic drives and, when the weather is right, ice climbing. Sweeping views stretch across the river valley and into Missouri. In this photo, water from a well was released over the edge during a cold snap.

Bottom: Pomona Natural Bridge

Tucked away in the Shawnee National Forest, Pomona Natural Bridge in Jackson County is a hidden gem, where a natural sandstone arch spans 90 feet long and 30 feet high over a quiet, forested ravine. Formed over thousands of years by erosion, the bridge is the largest natural arch in Illinois and a favorite spot for hikers and photographers. 💡

Refreshing upgrades for an old house

Modern comfort while honoring your rural home's rich past



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MELINDA MCKNIGHT, ENERGY CONSERVATION SERVICES

By Nate Birt

YOU LOVE YOUR OLDER rural house. And you're eager to be true to its history while upgrading it for modern living. So what's a homeowner to do? Start with a mindset of appreciation and plan strategically.

"When you live in a historic home, you really embody a part of our nation's built landscape," explains Katie Adams of Adams and Adams Construction, an Asheville, N.C.-based renovation and historic preservation company. "When you look at it through that lens, and not just 'my old, drafty house,' what an honor to be a part of something so special."

She and her husband Gus co-own their business and are professionally trained historic preservationists. They've found loads of goodies in their 30 years upgrading old homes, including belt buckles, boots, plates and other items found buried in old privies and outhouses.

The stories behind them matter to Katie, Gus and the millions of Americans living in homes built 50 or more years ago — among the key qualifications to be listed on the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places. However, modern living matters, too.

Whether you own a century-old farmhouse, a mid-century ranch or something else entirely, here's what

experts say you need to know to upgrade wisely, preserve character and make your home a joy of modern living whose legacy will live on for generations.

Honoring your home's history

As you begin evaluating renovation options, it's important to start with some appreciation of what you're working with. See your house's strengths and limitations as both an echo from the past and a palette for sketching its next chapter.

"Old buildings are usually constructed very well. They were built at a time when people understood that the quality of their work was a reflection of their character," points out Melinda McKnight, CEO of Energy Conservation Services in Port Ewen, N.Y.

She and her husband Bill own the Building Performance Institute-accredited company and routinely consult on building science and energy efficiency with homeowners whose properties date as far back as the 1600s.

At the same time, it's important to recognize there are "some inherent limitations" in older homes. This means modern preferences for features such as open concept and cathedral ceilings might not be a great fit.

“A lot of times, unless [those features are] ... done with the guidance of a building scientist, those kind of decisions and improvements can actually cause damage, and they can actually end up creating problems if they’re not done properly,” Melinda says.

The same goes for tossing out old windows or woodwork without realizing those items might be restored and retrofitted to provide the desired energy-efficiency benefits.

“Tuning up and saving your old windows is really one of the biggest things you’ll hear about in preservation,” Gus says.

Katie adds, “It’s a really big deal to protect your fireplace mantels and any of your fireplace surrounds, [and] handrails for your banisters. Those are really art — architecturally precious things.”

Other irreplaceable hardware to keep, fine-tune and treasure include old doorknobs, hinges and locks.

Enhancing energy efficiency

Plenty of home-improvement TV shows suggest modernizing your home with glamorous color palettes and visually striking details. These experts, though, say the biggest bang for your modernizing buck comes from investing in the hidden details that will keep your utility bills lighter.

“Achieving improved comfort and efficiency in buildings requires air sealing and insulating the bottom and top of the building envelope — the area you pay to heat and cool,” Melinda says. “Begin with the attic and basement or crawl space. We don’t generally recommend starting with walls and windows. Our goal is always to address the bottom and the top of the building envelope. That’s usually the low-hanging fruit.”

The reason is in the physics of how air moves through a house. Warm air rises and escapes through the top, while cold air gets pulled into your house through the gaps and leaks located along the bottom.

“Only 30% of net heat gain and loss goes out the side of your house,” Gus explains. Otherwise, the cool air goes down and heat rises. That’s the remaining 70%. “So, the two most important things, as far as insulation goes, are insulating the attic and crawl space or basement.”

In addition to using the right type of insulation, evaluate other places where cold air enters or warm air escapes and plug those holes. Rim joists are one such example, Melinda says. These are locations where your house’s wooden frame and wooden floor joists meet.

“Wherever wood meets wood, that’s an air leak,” she points out. “It’s important to air seal and insulate that for a couple of different reasons. The first is that outdoor air getting into conditioned space can create condensation,

“Only 30% of net heat gain and loss goes out the side of your house ... So, the two most important things, as far as insulation goes, are insulating the attic and crawl space or basement.”



Fiberglass insulation in attics contains lots of holes that can allow cold air to enter your house. It’s also attractive to mice and other rodents.



A more energy-efficient alternative to fiberglass insulation is this cellulose-based material. Boric acid is often infused in the cellulose to deter pests.

and potentially [mold]. And, anywhere there’s an air leak, it’s an opportunity for a rodent to make entry.”

For optimal air sealing, Melinda recommends purchasing a can of professional-grade foam, a metal gun that can be used to apply it, plus an acetone-based gun cleaner. Avoid foam kits with a plastic straw that can get clogged and prevent you from using all the foam.

Other popular energy-efficiency upgrades include mini-splits (units that enable you to heat and cool individual rooms in buildings without adequate space to run ductwork according to code) and air sealing (filling air gaps with caulk or one-part foam).

With these strategies in mind, it’s time to step outside and consider how your older house’s exterior could benefit from some modern touches.

Window performance

When it comes to energy upgrades, windows often are among the first features homeowners want to replace. But experts say they're also one of the least cost-effective.

"Windows are expensive, so they have a long pay-back. They're not the biggest bang for your buck," explains Melinda. Unless they're cracked or leaking, your original windows can often be upgraded.

Replace air sealing and not the glass itself. "A lot of installers will just tuck fiberglass inside the frame, and then they put trim on," Melinda says. "Use a one-part

low-expansion window-and-door foam instead of fiberglass. Then put the trim on. There'll be a much better result, and you'll see much less draft."

Use pulley covers, window felts and door sweeps. These treatments can make a surprising difference in comfort and energy savings.

Install interior storm windows. Products such as Climate Seal are used by the National Park Service to add efficiency in historic houses without changing their appearance. These acrylic interior windows can be custom measured and magnetically affixed.



Unless they're cracked or leaking, your original windows can often be upgraded.

Exterior investments

When it comes to preserving your house's history and structural integrity, water management is everything, Melinda says.

"A common issue that we see is gutter downspouts not being run far enough away from the building [and] that water coming back in," she cautions. A good rule of thumb is to ensure downspouts run at least 8 feet away from your house, if possible.

Also pay attention to your roof. If you spot a leak inside your house, you might think the whole roof needs to go. But you might just need to replace some flashing, which are pieces of metal installed to prevent water entry in your roof.

"If there are roof lines that come together or valleys, you want to have flashing there," Melinda explains. "You also want to have step flashing along chimneys and stack pipes."

Know your DIY limits

There are plenty of tasks a handy homeowner can take on, though it's also essential to know your limits and the risks you might incur without expert help.

"There is a lot that a homeowner can do to improve comfort and efficiency, especially if you're handy," Melinda explains. "Air sealing — sealing up gaps, cracks and penetrations — is more important than insulation. For example, air sealing of gaps around plumbing and electrical penetrations. It's hard to make a mistake with basic air sealing unless you use the wrong material."

If you decide to take down trim, scrollwork, windows or other items in the house, don't discard them, these experts say. Keep them safe in a basement or another location, because future homeowners might want to restore those features. Plus, you'll be keeping those items out of landfills.

For more intensive modernization, such as changing a house's entire electrical system or major plumbing renovations, it's imperative to hire a licensed and insured professional, Gus advises. That will help you mitigate the risk of a future house fire or water damage.

Also hire out exterior painting projects to experts who specialize in painting older homes, Katie says. Modern paints can trap moisture, meaning you might end up damaging your home and repainting more often than necessary.

"As a steward of a historic home, treat it kind of like it's an archaeological site," Katie concludes. "It's important to leave the original fabric [of] the home, because you're caretaking it for now." 🏠

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Left: Clint and Sarah Flowers own The County in Aviston.

Below: Chicken sandwich with curly fries



Fun and food for all at **THE COUNTY**

By Jim Winnerman

WHEN CLINT AND SARAH Flowers bought a vacant lot on the main street in the center of Aviston in January 2024, they had no idea what they would do with the property. They just knew that after owning an insurance agency for 21 years, Clint was ready for a career change.

Thoughtful consideration was given by the couple to build a retail store, but research revealed the area lacked a family-friendly restaurant and sports bar. Construction commenced in May 2024, and the couple opened the doors of what they named “The County” only 120 days later, on Sept. 1.

“We went in head and feet first,” Clint says. “I had no restaurant experience whatsoever. All we knew was that our first objective was a family-friendly restaurant which appealed to a wide clientele, and a bar second.”

Without experience in the industry, Clint and Sarah, who are Clinton County Electric Cooperative members, turned to family and friends for menu suggestions. “We started with what we like to eat ourselves and added what we thought would be a good variety,” Clint recalls. “A lot of input came from a cousin who is a professional chef in Las Vegas.”

The result is a menu which includes a wide selection of sandwiches, such as a mushroom Swiss burger, a chicken bacon ranch wrap and a Philly sandwich, along with a myriad of unusual selections like steak, shrimp or chicken Poke bowls, and Santa Fe chicken egg rolls.

Daily specials change each weekday and include an entree, drink and a side dish for \$10. A unique starter is a “French Fry Flight.” Guests can choose a plate of any three of seven styles of fries, including steak, curly, waffle, crinkle cut, sweet potato, tater tots or homemade chips.

“If we have time, we will even make something not on the menu [that] a guest requests,” Clint says. “Our chefs are unbelievably creative and enjoy any challenge.”

Success has come quickly. The Flowers have already expanded the menu three times. Lately, they have started offering anything on the menu in large quantities for takeout or consumption by a group in the party room. “If you need 30 hamburger pizzas, we will take care of it,” Clint says.

In addition to the menu, Clint and Sarah tried to think of anything that would attract people to the restaurant for reasons other than food. The result is several niches off the main dining area, which appeal to different ages and groups.

A party room is available to groups free of charge and accommodates 60 guests. It has been the location of special events like engagement parties and alumni reunions and is also a popular venue for groups from nearby McKendree University.

To accommodate children, another area features 10 arcade games. To entice golfers inside during inclement weather and at night, two golf simulators able to screen 32 PGA courses occupy two side bays and rent for \$45 an hour. "Guests usually bring their own clubs, but we have some, too," Clint adds.

In the sports bar portion of the restaurant, large screen televisions feature any sport being televised. Throughout the spring and summer, a patio behind the restaurant is popular for outdoor dining and musical entertainment. "Local musicians request to use the space to perform, and we are happy to let them," Sarah says.

"We have had as many as five grade school and high school teams eating in the restaurant at one time," Sarah adds, commenting on the family-friendly atmosphere inside The County.

The success of the restaurant is not lost on Clint and Sarah, who seem to know and greet everyone by name. "It is not so much how fortunate and successful we have been, as much as it is how grateful we are," Clint says.

There is one problem facing The County, however. "We run out of parking spaces every weekend," Clint says, "but it is a good problem to have." 📍

Below: Buffalo chicken wrap with steak fries

Bottom: The patio features local musical entertainment.



LET'S EAT!

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From the tin

WHEN IT COMES TO making an easy meal, I oftentimes go straight to the pantry and grab a can of tinned fish — whether it's tuna, salmon or sardines. While I think chicken, beef and pork are best fresh (and they certainly smell better), canned meat will definitely get the job done in a pinch. So whether you find one of these recipes intriguing or you need a quick homemade meal, dust off that can of meat in the back of your pantry and get cooking. 🍳

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



Corned Beef Hash ▲

Servings: 4

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 12-ounce can corned beef, diced | 1/2 teaspoon pepper |
| 4 cups shredded hash browns, frozen | 2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil |
| 1 small onion, diced | 1 tablespoon butter |
| 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped | Eggs, for serving |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | Green onions, for serving |

Mix the corned beef, hash browns and onion in a large bowl. Add parsley, salt and pepper. Heat oil and butter in a nonstick skillet over medium heat. When pan is hot, add the hash mixture and spread out evenly. Cook until the potatoes are done and browned on the bottom, about 10 minutes. Flip the hash over and continue cooking until browned, about 8 minutes. Serve topped with eggs of your choice, additional chopped parsley and sliced green onions.

Sardine Pasta ►

Servings: 2

- | | |
|--|--|
| 6-8 ounces pasta of choice | 1 4-ounce tin sardines, undrained |
| 1-2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil | 1 tablespoon lemon juice, or to taste |
| 1 small onion or shallot, finely chopped | 1/4 cup Pecorino Romano cheese, grated |
| 1 pinch red pepper flakes | 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped (or 1 teaspoon dry) |
| 1 clove garlic, minced | |

In a small pot, cook pasta according to package directions in salted water. Over medium heat, add olive oil to skillet and heat until shimmering. Add onion and red pepper flakes and cook for 5-7 minutes, or until translucent. Stir occasionally. Add garlic and cook another minute. Add a tin of sardines with oil and break down the fish with a wooden spoon or silicon spatula. Cook until liquid thickens. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice. Drain pasta and combine it with the sardine mixture. Stir in cheese and parsley. Add more cheese and lemon juice to taste.

Chicken Quesadillas ▶

Servings: 2

- 8 corn tortillas
- Olive or vegetable oil
- Mexican blend shredded cheese
- 1 5-ounce can chicken, drained
- Cilantro, chopped
- 2 green onions, sliced
- Sour cream, for serving

Heat a skillet or griddle over medium heat. Brush one side of each tortilla with oil. Lay one tortilla in the skillet, oil side down. Sprinkle a layer of cheese over the tortilla, followed by chicken, cilantro, green onions and more cheese. Top with tortilla, oil side up. Cook for 2-3 minutes until golden brown. Flip carefully and cook until the other side is golden brown, about 2-3 minutes. Repeat with remaining three quesadillas. Cut each in half and serve with sour cream.

Spam Fried Rice ▶

Servings: 4

- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 12-ounce can Spam, diced
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup frozen mixed vegetables
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups day-old cooked white rice
- Yum Yum sauce and/or Kewpie mayo, for serving
- Green onions, for serving

Combine first six ingredients and set aside. In a wok or large skillet, heat oil over medium heat until shimmering. Add the Spam and cook until crispy. Remove and set aside. Add the onion and saute until translucent. Add garlic and cook until fragrant. Add frozen vegetables and cook a few more minutes until cooked through. Push the vegetables to the side and add butter. Add beaten eggs to the melted butter. Scramble the eggs and mix them with the vegetables. Add the cooked rice and break apart. Add sauce and cook until thickened and absorbed, while mixing. Serve with a drizzle of Yum Yum sauce and/or Kewpie mayo over the top. Garnish with sliced green onions.

Tuna Melt ▶

Servings: 2

- 1 5-ounce can tuna, drained
- 1/4 cup mayo
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/2 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/8 cup bread and butter pickles, finely chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 1 green onion, thinly sliced
- 1 pinch black pepper
- Butter or mayo, for spreading
- 4 slices bread
- Shredded cheddar cheese

In a bowl, mix the tuna, mayo, Dijon, soy sauce, Worcestershire, pickles, celery, green onion and black pepper. Stir until well combined. On a stovetop, heat skillet to medium. Spread butter or mayo on one side of each slice of bread (this will be the outside). On the unbuttered side, layer shredded cheddar, a generous scoop of tuna salad, more cheese and the other slice of bread. Cook sandwiches butter-side down until golden and crispy, about 3-4 minutes per side, pressing gently with a spatula. Flip and repeat until the bread is toasted and the cheese is melted. Slice in half and serve.



Add global flavor to your garden

Turmeric takes root in Illinois

GROWING FRESH VEGETABLES, FRUITS and herbs in your backyard can seem like a lot of work, but the bountiful, flavorful harvest at the end of the season makes

containers or in the ground, in more temperate climates such as Illinois. As the main ingredient of curry powder, it has been used in Indian cuisine for thousands of years.

For best results in Illinois, rhizomes should be started indoors in late winter and transplanted outdoors once temperatures consistently remain above 70 degrees.

Commercial production occurs in tropical climates, where plants receive eight to 10 months of uninterrupted growth before the mature rhizomes are harvested. Because turmeric struggles in temperatures below 50 degrees, it behaves as an annual in Illinois.

The bright golden-orange rhizome, or underground stem, has an earthy, peppery flavor and is widely used in soups, sauces and stews. Both ground turmeric and fresh rhizomes are commonly available in grocery stores. Although it received the Herb of the Year title, turmeric is botanically classified as a spice.

Herbs come from the leafy parts of plants, while spices are derived from roots, seeds or flowers.

Beyond its culinary uses, turmeric is also a striking ornamental plant. It forms clumps and can reach 3 to 6 feet tall, with bright green foliage that gives gardens or patio containers a tropical appearance.

Turmeric rhizomes are also used to create natural dyes. The vivid yellow hue beautifully colors fabrics and textiles and is commonly used to dye foods such as mustard, sauces and chips.

As the International Herb Association's Herb of the Year, turmeric is both attractive in the garden and useful in the kitchen. Also, consider planting past winners in your garden: German chamomile, violet, parsley, anise hyssop, coriander/cilantro and savory. 💡



it worthwhile. Turmeric, named the 2026 Herb of the Year by the International Herb Association, is a plant we don't typically grow in Illinois gardens and often find easier to buy at the grocery store. However, with a little extra planning and care, turmeric can be grown successfully in Illinois.

To receive the Herb of the Year honor, a plant must stand out for its decorative, culinary or medicinal qualities. Turmeric, native to southeast Asia and India, is a perennial in hot, humid regions but can be grown as an annual, either in

Turmeric prefers morning sun and afternoon shade to prevent leaf scorch. It does not tolerate waterlogged soil or complete dryness. The plant thrives in hot, humid conditions and requires temperatures of at least 68 degrees Fahrenheit to grow well.

Turmeric is propagated from rhizomes. Although it produces a stalk of yellow blooms, the flowers are sterile and do not set seed.



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.



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