

AUGUST 2026

Illinois Country Living



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FEATURE
Through the ages

PRAIRIE TABLE
The secret is in the sauce

FINEST COOKING
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CO-OP
NEWS



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(217) 965-3911

Taylorville
Yard Htg & Clg
(217) 824-4737





Illinois Country Living

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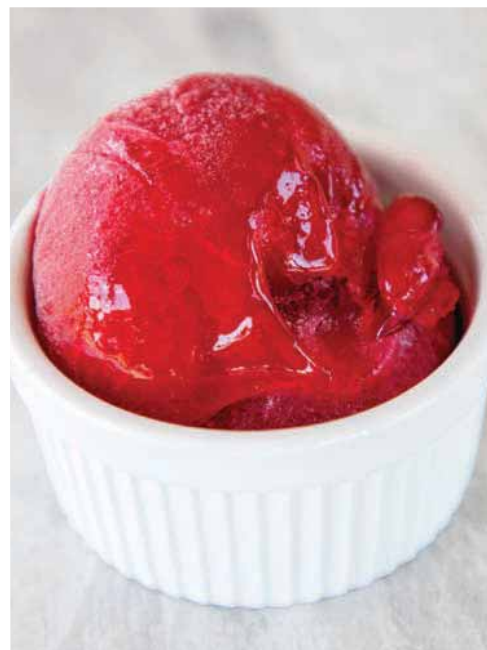
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PHOTO COURTESY OF HOT MESS EXPRESS MEDIA & MORE

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.

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

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Giving away \$1,000 for our 1,000th issue

Illinois Country Living reaches a milestone

I'VE GOT 1,000 REASONS you should pay close attention to this issue of Illinois Country Living (ICL). This edition marks the 1,000th issue of the publication. It's the 1,000th time it has been sent out to electric cooperative consumer-members across Illinois. Also, we are giving away a total of \$1,000.

Our first issue rolled off the press in May 1943. Since then, the world — and this magazine — has changed considerably. In fact, ICL was originally called Illinois REA News. Throughout the decades, we've watched communities grow, technology evolve and the way we communicate transform.

It's seen rural Illinois through more than eight decades of good times and bad. But through it all, ICL has continued to arrive in mailboxes each month, sharing stories

of Illinois' electric cooperatives and the rural communities and people they serve.

Over the years, these pages have introduced readers to interesting people, taken them to unique destinations and shared stories of businesses and restaurants worth a drive. We've offered recipes that have become family favorites, important safety and energy efficiency information, and practical advice for the home.

Most importantly, we've helped Illinois' electric cooperatives communicate with the members they serve.

Reaching 1,000 issues isn't just a milestone for us. It belongs to our readers, too. Many of you have been reading ICL for decades. We often hear from readers who have traveled across the state after discovering a place in our pages and from those who still make recipes clipped from the magazine years ago.

Those connections have kept this magazine going for 1,000 issues. So, we thought a big milestone deserved something special. In honor of our 1,000th issue, we're giving away \$100 to 10 lucky ICL readers — to equal \$1,000 — through our Hidden Object contest this month. You'll find details on how to enter on page 10.

We hope you'll take a moment to enter and celebrate with us. And please feel free to let us know what you think about the magazine. After all, we wouldn't have reached 1,000 issues without you.

While I've only been involved in the past 111 issues, I'm excited to discover what's in store with the magazine right alongside our dedicated readers. The magazine will continue to evolve. But the purpose will always remain the same — to connect cooperative members with information that matters and celebrate the people, places and communities that make rural Illinois special.

A big thank you to the editors, writers, photographers, designers and cooperative communicators — past and present — who have filled these pages of the 1,000 editions of ICL. And thank you to our readers for bringing it into your home month after month. There are endless stories still to come. 📖



Colten Bradford is the editor of Illinois Country Living magazine.



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JUST RELEASED!

Prized Last-Year Coins

Collectors love "lasts" as no collection is complete without the last coin struck. Last year coins are often hard to find and always in demand. Little did master engraver George T. Morgan know the legacy he was creating when he designed what has become known as "The King of Silver Dollars" but it came to an end 104 years ago with the last-year 1921 Morgan Silver Dollar, the most beloved coin in American history.

Public Release - Only 832 Coins Available

Rarcoa®, America's Oldest Coin Company, is announcing the public release of 832 of the very last year 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars, struck at the iconic Philadelphia Mint. Each coin today comes in Brilliant Uncirculated condition, pristine as the day they were struck!

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As August **HEATS UP** keep your **COSTS DOWN!**

- ☀ **Set the thermostat** as high as is comfortable when you're home.
- ☀ **Raise it** when you're away for several hours.
- ☀ Use a **programmable** or **smart thermostat** to automate adjustments.
- ☀ Change or clean **air filters** often during cooling season.
- ☀ Keep outdoor **condenser** units free of grass, weeds and debris.
- ☀ Have the system **professionally serviced** annually.
- ☀ Make sure supply and return **vents are not blocked** by furniture or curtains.
- ☀ **Close blinds, shades or curtains** during the hottest part of the day.
- ☀ **Seal gaps** around windows and doors to keep hot air out.
- ☀ Set ceiling fans to rotate **counterclockwise** to push air downward.
- ☀ **Turn fans off** when rooms are unoccupied – fans cool people, not spaces.
- ☀ **Avoid using ovens** during the hottest part of the day; grill outdoors or use microwaves, air fryers or slow cookers instead.



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AUGUST CHECKLIST

Extreme heat safety



Stay hydrated.
Drink plenty of water throughout the day.

Plan indoor activities.

During the hottest part of the day, limit your time outdoors.



Do wellness checks.

Call or text neighbors, family and friends who may be more vulnerable to heat-related illness.

Double-check the back seat.

Never leave children or pets in a parked vehicle, even for a few minutes.



Before arriving in Washington, D.C., Illinois Youth Tour students visit Gettysburg, where they learn about the pivotal Civil War battle.

Co-op students make their mark in D.C.

Students representing electric and telephone cooperatives across Illinois returned from the 2026 Youth Tour, a weeklong leadership and educational trip to Washington, D.C.

Held June 15-22, the annual program brought together 49 students sponsored by 25 Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives. They joined more than 2,000 students from 44 states to explore the nation's capital while learning about leadership, government and the cooperative business model.

"Youth Tour gives students the opportunity to experience our nation's history and government firsthand while helping them discover their own leadership potential," said Brooke Gross, member services manager and facilitator of youth programs for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC).

Throughout the week, students visited historic sites including Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery, the U.S. Capitol, the National Mall and Smithsonian museums. They also participated in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth Day, joining students from across the country to hear from national leaders and learn how to become more engaged in their communities.

"The experience combines sightseeing with leadership development, encouraging students

to work together, build friendships and gain a broader understanding of civic engagement and the cooperative difference," Gross added.

One highlight of the trip included the chance to meet and speak with U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, who took the time to talk with the students outside the U.S. Capitol.

"It's so awesome that the co-ops are able to do this for us," said Colton Leonard of Corn Belt Energy Corporation, who was selected to represent Illinois throughout the coming year as the state's Youth Leadership Council representative. "Everyone comes from so many different perspectives, and getting to meet other individuals is just so empowering."

By the time students returned home, many said they had gained new perspectives and lasting friendships.

"Students come home with a greater appreciation for our country's history and a better understanding of how they can make a difference in their own communities," Gross said.

For more information about Youth Tour, visit youthtour.coop or the Illinois Youth Tour Facebook page. See more photos on page 8. 📷

AIEC

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.

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

ILLINOIS TRIVIA CHALLENGE

It's time to test your knowledge with a new Illinois Trivia Challenge! This month's questions celebrate the upcoming Illinois State Fair. Answers are on page 33.



- The first Illinois State Fair was held in 1853 and located in what Illinois city?
 - Peoria
 - Springfield
 - Du Quoin
- Which country artist holds the record for the highest attendance at an Illinois State Fair concert?
 - Jason Aldean
 - Reba McEntire
 - Megan Moroney
- The Butter Cow has been an icon of the Illinois State Fair since the 1920s. Approximately how many pounds of butter are used to sculpt it?
 - 500
 - 1,250
 - 3,000
- Beginning in 1946, the Illinois State Fair helped popularize what now-classic fair food?
 - Corn dogs
 - Funnel cakes
 - Elephant ears



Clockwise from top: Illinois Youth Tour participants gather for a group photo at the United States Marine Corps War Memorial during their weeklong visit to the nation's capital; Corn Belt Energy Corporation students Pranika Kurella and Colton Leonard enjoying the evening tour of the National Mall. Leonard was selected to represent Illinois on the Youth Leadership Council; A group of Youth Tour participants poses for a photo at the Lincoln Memorial; Tri-County Electric Cooperative's Katelyn Gogolek and SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative's Iris Mount pose for a photo in front of the U.S. Capitol; U.S. Senator Dick Durbin speaks with the Illinois Youth Tour delegation during a visit to Capitol Hill, where participants had the opportunity to learn more about the legislative process.



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Where is it?

You could win \$100
for August's hidden
object contest

The winners of the June hidden object contest were Julie Topping of Corn Belt Energy Corporation and Lyn Doyle of Monroe County Electric Cooperative. Congratulations! Your ICL prize has been sent.

The eagle head hidden in the July 2026 issue was on page 16 in the Energy Solutions section. Winners' names will be drawn, and they will be notified. Visit Illinois Country Living on Facebook after each month's deadline for a close-up of the object's location and winners' names.

This month's hidden object search marks a special occasion for ICL. This is our 1,000th issue, so we will be giving out \$100 gift cards to 10 lucky ICL readers. All you have to do is locate Willie Wiredhand, pictured above. He can vary in size and will NOT be hidden on this page, page 6, a lettered page (the local co-op pages) or in an ad.

Rules: No purchase, donation or fee is required to enter or win. Entrants must correctly identify the page number of the hidden object and submit the correct answer via online form (icl.coop/hiddenobject) – also found under Contact Us on the website) or by mail (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. Entries must include your name, address, name of your electric co-op and the page number the object is hidden. All entries must be received by Aug. 25, 2026. Only one entry is allowed per household. If multiple entries per household are submitted, only the first will be considered.

All eligible entries with the correct answer and received by the deadline will be entered into a random drawing. Ten (10) winners will each receive a \$100 gift card. Entrants must be at least eighteen (18) years of age and residents of Illinois at the time of entry.

Winners will be notified using the contact information provided with the entry. If a winner cannot be contacted within thirty (30) days after the drawing, declines the prize, or is determined to be ineligible, an alternate winner may be selected.

Winners' names will be published on ICL's Facebook page at the end of August 2026 and in the October 2026 issue of Illinois Country Living. 📍



The watchdog for a reliable electric grid

The country's electric grid has hundreds of thousands of miles of high-voltage power lines. Yet 99.9% of the time when you flick a switch, the lights come on. So, who oversees the bulk power system?

That's the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the official watchdog of the North American bulk power system. The international non-profit sets mandatory reliability standards for all users, owners and operators of the electric transmission grid.

To maintain reliability, NERC oversees and evaluates grid conditions with support from six regional reliability organizations that serve as its on-the-ground partners in identifying potential problem areas. Each summer and winter, NERC releases seasonal grid assessments that evaluate whether electricity supply is sufficient to meet expected demand and highlight regions at risk of shortfalls.

These periodic reports analyze conditions that can increase demand, such as heat waves and severe cold, as well as factors that can constrain generation, including fuel or equipment shortages. They also include recommendations to address current risks and help prevent future problems. When unforeseen threats emerge, NERC issues special assessments.

Every year, the organization also provides a long-term grid assessment looking ahead 10 years at what innovations or

circumstances may impact the reliability of our interconnected electric transmission network.

Providing the electric power industry with timely insight into grid reliability, potential power shortfalls and strategies to address them is essential to keeping the lights on.

NERC holds workshops, technical conferences and trains industry personnel on how to maintain a secure grid and audits owners and operators of the bulk power system to ensure they meet all reliability standards. It also operates the 24/7 Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center (E-ISAC) that provides the power industry with the latest information on cyber threats, trends and possible solutions.

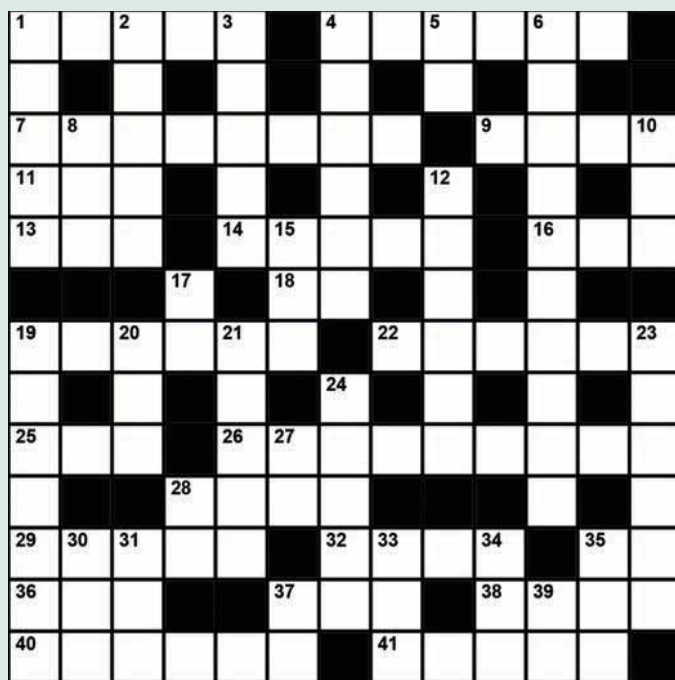
Overall, NERC has come a long way from its humble beginning as an industry-led, voluntary grid watchdog. The big Northeast blackout of 1965 that impacted 30 million people led electric utilities to set up the entity to better coordinate grid dynamics.

Today, it is the nation's Electric Reliability Organization that oversees the operation and planning of the grid throughout North America. Empowered by the Energy Policy Act of 2005, NERC develops mandatory, enforceable reliability standards backed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Utilities like Illinois' electric cooperatives, for the most part, are not regulated by NERC. State agencies oversee the distribution power lines that deliver electricity to your home and surrounding communities. But NERC's authority over the bulk power system is critical to maintaining reliability in every part of the country, including the most rural areas.

NERC helps ensure the electric grid remains reliable, secure and resilient for the millions of people who depend on it every day. By developing and enforcing reliability standards, monitoring the bulk power system and identifying emerging risks, NERC plays a critical role in supporting the safe delivery of electricity across North America. 📍

Cathy Cash, NRECA



Across

- 1 Popular Chicago aquarium
4 Home of the Minor League Baseball team Chiefs
7 Kids' cold treat, 2 words
9 _____ chowder soup
11 Chess pieces
13 Collection of matching items
14 Meat for a barbecue
16 Fishing equipment
18 Commercial
19 "Chicago _____ from the Lake" statue
22 Fair booths
25 Morning moisture on grass
26 Things of sentimental value
28 Cypress _____ Family Aquatic Park in Woodridge
29 Kitchen wear

- 32 Lightly cooked, as a steak might be
35 Afternoon time
36 Catch
37 Tire pressure measurement, abbr.
38 "Fashionably _____"
40 Light English layered dessert with custard and cream
41 Whitewater crafts

Down

- 1 Enjoys the pool
2 Scheduled get-together
3 Pub throwing game
4 Had fun, as kids
5 Not off
6 Body of water that's surrounded by land that's surrounded by water, 2 words
8 Middle grade, abbr.
10 Ran into
12 Roller Derby gear

- 15 Children's chasing game
17 Circumference ratio
19 Glowing with happiness
20 Work with needle and thread
21 Japanese camera brand
23 Seed used in tahini or on burger buns
24 Pints at the pub
27 Electric vehicle, briefly
28 Together with, prefix
30 Expected golf score for a hole
31 Baseball stat, abbr.
33 Balloon filler
34 Tolkien's pointy-eared creature
35 Sports stats, abbr.
37 School sports lesson, briefly
39 Offered _____ a good price

Solution on page 33.



Quick action urged for FEMA reform

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) CEO Jim Matheson testified before a House panel in July to urge Congress to pass legislation that would streamline the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and speed up delivery of crucial relief funds to electric cooperatives devastated by natural disasters.

"Congress should pass the FEMA Act quickly so rural families, farmers and businesses are not left behind when the next disaster hits," Matheson said.

The committee voted last September to advance the bipartisan Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act with support from NRECA. Committee leaders and NRECA advocates are pushing House leaders to bring the bill to the floor for a vote this year. The Senate must also act for the bill to become law.

The FEMA Act would continue the agency's critical Public Assistance program, which Matheson called "a lifeline for electric cooperatives after natural disasters."

"Every year, co-ops lose poles, transformers, power lines, substations and other critical infrastructure to ice storms, tornadoes, floods and other events," he said. The legislation would also help cut through the red tape that can delay recovery for co-ops and the rural communities they serve, he added.

He said the bill would provide improvements aligned with NRECA's five top FEMA reform priorities, which aim to "make FEMA faster, more transparent, and more effective for cooperatives and the communities that depend on reliable power." 

Erin Kelly, NRECA

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER Datebook

LET'S GO!

Aug. 21-22

Cowden Pioneer Days

COWDEN
An annual festival complete with a rodeo, music, carnival and more

Sept. 5

Labor Day Shindig

GALENA
Celebrate the end of summer with equestrian entertainment at Shenandoah Riding Center

Sept. 11-12

Prairieview Fall Festival

DANFORTH
Enjoy live music, vendors, a Kid's Zone and Prairieview's famous fish fry

Sept. 12

Day of the Dozer

BLOOMINGTON
Kids get a chance to see, ride and drive heavy construction equipment

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



Shawnee Hills Trail Races

AUGUST
22-23

Hit the trails for a scenic and challenging adventure at the Shawnee Hills Trail Races. Runners can choose from 100-mile, 100K, 50K and half-marathon distances winding through the rugged Shawnee National Forest. Along the way, the courses traverse sandstone canyons, forests and creek crossings and pass some of southern Illinois' spectacular waterfalls and rock formations. Registration is open through Aug. 14.

Aug. 22-23, 2026

- Camp Ondessonk, 3760 Ondessonk Road, Ozark
Registration: varies
shawneehills100.com

Watseka Family Festival

AUGUST
27-29

Get ready for three days of music, family fun and community spirit at the Watseka Family Festival. The 2026 celebration features live performances by The Kentucky Headhunters and Confederate Railroad on Friday and Rodney Atkins and Eddie Montgomery of Montgomery Gentry on Saturday. Beyond the music, festivalgoers can enjoy a free kids' fun zone, craft and flea markets, a car show, 5K run, food vendors and more.

Aug. 27-29, 2026: Friday and Saturday concerts 5-11 p.m.

- American Legion Park, 958 S. 4th St., Watseka
Admission: varies
watssekafamilyfest.com



Annual Honey Harvest

SEPTEMBER
5-6

Discover the sweet side of beekeeping during Dry Creek Beekeeping's annual "bottle your own" event. During this indoor, bee-free experience, participants will uncapped a frame of honey, crank the extractor, strain the fresh honey and bottle their own 1-pound jar to take home. An optional Beekeeping Experience offers a closer look at how bees make honey, including the chance to suit up and visit the apiary. Multiple sessions are available each day, and advance registration is required. Early registration is encouraged before tickets sell out.

Sept. 5-6, 2026: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

- Dry Creek Beekeeping, 489 S. Clark Lane, Elizabeth
Admission: varies
drycreekbeekeeping.com

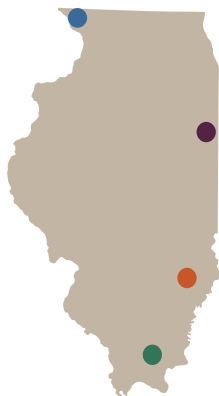
White Squirrel Bluegrass+ Festival

SEPTEMBER
12

Tap your toes to a full day of live bluegrass music at the fourth annual White Squirrel Bluegrass+ Festival. The event brings together local, regional and nationally known bluegrass bands, along with food trucks and a beer garden. Gates open at 10 a.m., with music beginning at 11 a.m. Tickets are \$25 in advance or \$30 at the gate, and children 12 and younger are admitted free.

Sept. 12, 2026: all day

- Olney City Park, 502 White Squirrel Circle, Olney
Admission: varies
whitesquirrelbluegrass.com



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Branson, Missouri

November 3-5, November 17-20, &
December 1-4, 2026

Join us for three Christmas-themed Branson trips, each featuring a different line-up of acts!



Ark Encounter & Creation Museum

April 12-15, 2027

Visit the Cincinnati, Ohio area to see the unforgettable Creation Museum and Ark Encounter!



American Revolution Cruise

April 26 - May 9, 2027

Board the American Legend for a cruise along some of the most memorable sites of the Revolutionary War!



Grand Hawaiian Adventure

January 5-16 & June 14-25, 2027

Experience three stunning Hawaiian islands and visit Pearl Harbor on this ultimate Hawaii trip!



Enchanted Ireland

April 13-23, 2027

Enjoy our signature Ireland trip, taking you to the most beautiful and iconic sites of the country!



Kentucky Derby

April 29 - May 2, 2027

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A degree in safety

Think about electric hazards before college move-in

IT'S THE TIME OF year when college campuses are preparing for students to move all their worldly possessions into their home away from home

Whether you're a parent or a student, here are some safety tips to help keep college life as safe as possible throughout the school year.



— the dorm. While this is an exciting time for the students, it can be a nerve-racking time for parents. Safe Electricity reminds parents and students to keep electrical safety in mind.

When planning to move into a shared space, communicate with roommates before shopping for items for the room. When there is no communication beforehand, rooms end up with duplicates of appliances, which can lead to a circuit overload.

Plus, be sure to check with your university's housing department on its specific housing rules. Many colleges across the U.S. ban cooking appliances from on-campus housing, including hot plates, coffeemakers and microwaves. Many of these institutions provide a designated area for the use of these products.

Electrical safety

- When shopping for items that run on electricity, look for a safety endorsement label, such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories) or ETL (Intertek).
- Do not put a cell phone under a pillow or place it on or under bedding — especially if it is charging. It could overheat or catch fire.
- Keep all electrical appliances and cords safely away from bedding, curtains, paper and other flammable material.
- Make sure outlets near water sources are equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). If they are not, contact the resident assistant, campus housing staff or landlord.

- Use power strips with an over-current protector that will shut off if too much current is drawn.
- Avoid overloading extension cords, power strips and outlets.
- Do not hang decorative lights with nails or tacks; always use plastic hooks.
- Do not run electrical cords across traffic paths or under rugs.

General safety

- Never disable a smoke detector, and never ignore a fire alarm. Every time a fire alarm sounds, calmly and quickly follow practiced procedures and immediately exit the building, even if you think it is just a fire drill.
- Learn about the safety department on campus and how it functions, and ask about the services it offers and the steps it takes to prevent crime.
- Locate emergency call buttons or phones across campus in case of an emergency.
- Walk with friends, especially after dark. There is safety in numbers.
- When attending events or parties, go with at least one person you know and trust. If your friend leaves, do not stay.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and be alert. Avoid being distracted (listening to music or texting, for example) while walking on campus.
- Find out what types of mental health services or counseling the campus offers.

To learn more electrical safety tips, go to SafeElectricity.org. 



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

The efficient home

Upgrades that keep you comfortable year-round

EVERYBODY WANTS A COMFORTABLE

home, but did you know energy efficiency upgrades not only help you save energy, but can make your home more comfortable, too? If you find yourself continually returning to the thermostat on cold winter days or unable to find relief from heat during summer, these are signs your home needs an efficiency upgrade.

No matter the home, energy efficiency upgrades often start with the same basic principle — keep outside air from coming inside and keep conditioned inside air from leaking outside. Some upgrades can dramatically improve the comfort of your home.

A fully insulated home, including attic, walls and floor, is more comfortable. It's like a blanket for your home. Air sealing is a lesser-known efficiency upgrade that keeps air from entering and exiting the home through cracks and gaps. Some air sealing can be done from inside the home, like using expanding foam around plumbing pipes and drains under sinks, adding gas-kets to outlets on exterior walls, caulking around windows or weatherstripping around doors.

Attics and crawl spaces offer additional opportunities to reduce air leakage and increase comfort. In the attic, sealing gaps around top plates, open soffit areas, cove ceilings and balloon framing can help keep conditioned air where it belongs. In the basement or crawl space, seal around plumbing pipes and drains, vents and electrical wires. If you need help, contact a local contractor.

As a self-proclaimed energy geek, my first move when my husband and I bought our first home years ago was to air seal and insulate the attic, walls and rim joists in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK GILLILAND

basement. The difference in comfort was instant. The temperature swings from the furnace cycling on and off were dramatically reduced. The home felt warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer.

Another benefit of insulating was a surprising reduction in noise from outside. We lived about 15 minutes away from the airport and close to a busy road. When the windows and doors were closed, we could no longer hear the airplanes, and the traffic noise was almost unnoticeable.

Duct sealing can also improve the comfort of your home. Your ductwork delivers heated or cooled air in a forced-air HVAC system. If there are disconnections or leaks in the ducts, the air you paid to heat or cool may not end up where you want it. Disconnects and leaks can cause hot or cold spots in a home. An HVAC professional can inspect or test your ducts to make sure they are connected and sealed properly.

Air sealing and duct sealing can also improve the air quality in your

home. Air leakage between the conditioned area of the home and the attic or crawl space can introduce dust, pollen, mold or other allergens you don't want to breathe. Reducing air leakage can reduce the chance of these things circulating throughout your home.

Upgrading to a heat pump can also boost comfort and efficiency. Heat pump technology is often about three times as efficient as electric resistance heat because it uses refrigerant to move heat instead of creating it. If you're upgrading from electric or gas heat, a heat pump can efficiently heat and cool your home, making it comfortable year-round.

If you already have a heat pump or forced-air HVAC system, annual maintenance and regularly changing your filter maximizes system operation and comfort.

Consider improving your home's comfort by completing these energy efficiency upgrades. Your family — and wallet — will thank you. 💡

Energy efficiency upgrades can help you and your two- and four-legged loved ones keep cool this summer.



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

Seniors get new medical alert device

No contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever

FastHelp is the only Medical Alert device that won't break the bank. That's because it comes with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever – which makes FastHelp a great choice for seniors, students and professionals because it connects to one of the largest nationwide networks everywhere cell service is available for free. You don't need a cell phone or a land line.

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

So if you've ever felt a medical alert device was too complicated

or expensive, you'll want to get FastHelp, the sleek new medical alert device with no monthly bills.

The medical alert device slugfest was dominated by two main combatants who both offer old style monitored help buttons that come with a hefty bill every month. But now Universal Physicians, the U.S. based heavyweight, just delivered a knockout blow sending the top rated contenders to the mat with the unveiling of FastHelp. It's the sleek new cellular embedded medical alert device that cuts out the middleman by instantly connecting you directly to highly trained 911 operators all across the U.S. There's absolutely nothing to hook-up or install. You don't need a land line and you don't need a cell phone. Everything is done for you. ■



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

Seniors born before 1964 get big boost

Instantly connects to free unlimited nationwide help with just the push of a button with no contracts, no deposits, and no monthly bills

Seniors born before 1964 get new medical alert device

**Nationwide:
Demand for new Medical Alert Device soars**

The phone lines are ringing off the hook. That's because for seniors born before 1964, it's a deal too good to pass up.

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

"It's not like old style help buttons that make you talk to a call center, only work when you're at home and come with hefty bills every month. FastHelp comes with state-of-the-art cellular embedded technology. That means it works at home or anywhere and everywhere cell service is available whether you're out watering the garden, driving in a car, at church or even hundreds of miles away on a tour or at a casino. You are never alone. With just a single push of the One-Touch E Button you instantly get connected to free unlimited help nationwide with no monthly bills ever," said Jack Lawrence, Executive Director of Product Development for U.S. based Universal Physicians.

"We've never seen anything like it. Consumers absolutely love the sleek new

(Continued on next page)



■ **FLYING OUT THE DOOR:** Trucks are being loaded with the new medical alert devices called FastHelp. They are now being delivered to lucky seniors who call the National Rebate Center Hotline at 1-800-221-2809 DEPT. FSTH192 today. Everyone is calling to get FastHelp, the sleek new medical alert device because it instantly connects you to unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

(Continued from previous page)

—ADVERTISEMENT—

modern design and most of all, today's instant rebate practically pays for it and no monthly bills ever," Lawrence said.

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

The only device that makes you look important, not old

The problem with medical alert devices is, nobody wants to wear them because it makes them look old. Well, that's not the case with FastHelp. That's because it's the first state of the art medical alert device designed to make you look important, not old. Old style monitored help buttons you wear around your neck, or require expensive base station equipment or a landline are the equivalent of a horse and buggy, it's just outdated.

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

But seniors who fall and get immediate help are much more likely to avoid getting sent to a nursing home and get to STAY living in their own home independently.

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

That's why seniors born before 1964 are rushing to cash in the whopping \$150 instant rebate before the 21 day deadline ends.

So there's no need to wait for FastHelp to hit store shelves later this year because seniors born before 1964 can get it now just by using the \$150 instant rebate coupon printed in today's publication before the 21 day deadline ends. If lines are busy keep trying, all calls will be answered. ■

Doctor urges seniors to get new medical alert device

Instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever

Comes with new cellular embedded technology that works at home or anywhere you go so you are never alone

All seniors born before 1964 are getting a \$150 rebate and cover just \$149 making this deal too good to pass up

Nothing to hook up. You don't need a land line or cell phone. It's ready to use right out of the box

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

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

"Seniors are just one fall away from being put in a nursing home," Dr. Howren said. "With a medical alert device, seniors are never alone. So it keeps them living independently in their own home. That's why seniors

and their family members are snapping up a sleek new medical alert device that comes with no monthly bills ever," he said.

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

To solve these problems Universal Physicians, a U.S. company, went to work to develop a new, modern, state-of-the-art medical alert device. It's called "FastHelp™" and it instantly connects you to free unlimited nationwide help everywhere cell service is available



with no contracts, no deposits and no monthly bills ever.

"This slick new little device is designed to look incognito to slip in your pocket. Seniors love them, because it actually makes them look im-

portant, not old," Dr. Howren said.

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

Five Star Customer Reviews

Hurricane Help

"We had two hurricanes recently. I had no electricity for 6 days. I fell, so I pushed the button, and they came right out and picked me up off the floor. I tell many of my friends they need to get FastHelp!" - Virginia, FL

LIFESAVER

"When I got my FastHelp I never thought I'd have to use it, but when I fell and broke my hip it saved my life." - Harold, OH

Very appreciative of having FastHelp

"I did have an emergency. Help RESPONDED quickly and came in a few minutes." - Irving, PA

WE LOVE THE PRODUCT

"We bought it outright with no bills ever." - Rosemary, NY

Safe anywhere

"This little FastHelp device is my guardian angel. I'm so glad my daughter-in-law got it for me." - Pete, FL

A+ Rating: These are unsolicited consumer feedback from satisfied customers as reported to Universal Physicians.

HOW TO GET IT

BORN BEFORE 1964:

Use the rebate coupon to the right and call this Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-221-2809 EXT. FSTH192

BORN AFTER 1964:

You cannot use the rebate coupon to the right and must pay \$299 Call: 1-800-221-9773 EXT. ADFH0826

BOTTOM LINE:

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

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

CONS: Consumers can't get FastHelp in stores until later this year. That's why it's so important for seniors born before 1964 to call the National Rebate Center Hotline within the next 21 days. For those who miss that deadline, the sleek little medical alert device will set you back over \$300 bucks.

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Modern nuclear technologies

Not your Hollywood power plant

NUCLEAR ENERGY OFTEN CONJURES images from TV and movies, such as towering cooling structures, glowing green substances and frantic control rooms. In reality, modern nuclear power plants are far removed from these portrayals.

Today's nuclear facilities operate more like high-tech industrial

scenarios. As nuclear facilities modernize, operators are also trained using advanced digital systems that are replacing older equipment. These upgrades improve automation, diagnostics and situational awareness.

Safety extends far beyond the control room. Organization and discipline define how nuclear plants

require external power or immediate human action. Instead, natural forces such as gravity, pressure and convection keep the reactor stable and cooled if disruptions occur. Passive safety increases resilience during grid outages and extreme weather events.

Another major area of innovation is the development of small modular reactors (SMRs) and microreactors. These reactors are far smaller than traditional nuclear plants and are designed to be manufactured in factories and assembled onsite. Existing U.S. nuclear plants typically produce between 600 and 1,500 megawatts (MW).

By comparison, SMRs are expected to generate about 70 to 350 MW, while microreactors would produce just 1 to 20 MW. The smaller size and standardized designs could shorten construction timelines and allow capacity to be added as energy demand grows.

SMRs and microreactors remain early-stage technologies. Most developers are in the prototype phase, with no commercial deployments yet operating. Widespread adoption is unlikely before the end of the decade, but interest remains strong.

In a time of rapid electric demand growth, nuclear power offers zero-carbon baseload power, a potentially valuable attribute as fossil fuel plants retire and intermittent renewable resources expand. As the energy landscape shifts, nuclear energy may play an important role for cooperatives seeking dependable, long-term generation options.

Electric co-ops are tracking these developments in their long-term planning. For co-ops and their consumer-members, nuclear energy can provide reliable, cost-effective, carbon-free electricity. 💡



PHOTO COURTESY OF GE. FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY.

A major area of innovation is the development of small modular reactors (SMRs) and microreactors. This is a computer rendering of GE Vernova Hitachi's BWRX-300 small modular reactor SMR.

campuses — clean, continuously monitored, extremely secure and designed with multiple, overlapping layers of safety.

In the U.S., nuclear plants are among the most heavily regulated facilities of any kind, with a dense framework of state and federal oversight governing reactor licensing, fuel handling, plant maintenance, material disposal and emergency preparedness to ensure that nuclear plants operate safely and responsibly.

Safe operation begins in the control room. Plant operators must pass demanding written and operational examinations administered by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission before they are allowed to work — and training doesn't stop once operators are licensed.

Personnel are regularly tested on routine plant operations and on rare but high-consequence emergency

are designed and run. Facilities have clearly established security perimeters, controlled access points and rigorous maintenance programs to ensure reliability while protecting workers and surrounding communities. Critical components are housed in reinforced concrete and steel structures and are accessible only to essential personnel.

Reactor technology has also become safer as decades of experience have driven innovation. One of the most significant advances is the increased use of “passive safety” systems, built-in safety features that work automatically.

Earlier reactors relied heavily on pumps, motors and operator intervention to perform critical functions like circulating cooling water. While modern designs still include active systems, they also integrate passive features that do not



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.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FROST BUDDY

Stay frosty

Brothers create universal can cooler

By Kayla Adkins

IT WAS A QUIET evening during Christmas break in Newton. Brock Mammoser was home from Indiana University for the holidays. He was hanging out with his brother Mitch in their parents' hot tub when the conversation turned to business ideas.

At the time, hard seltzers like White Claw and Truly were exploding in popularity. Mitch wondered if anyone made an insulated cooler specifically for the slim cans they came in. A quick online search revealed very few options.

"So, we thought, 'Let's give it a shot,'" says Mitch, who is a member of Norris Electric Cooperative.

The brothers built a website, learned how to advertise online, and divided their responsibilities. Brock focused on growing the business, while Mitch handled shipping and customer service.

For three months, they sold their slim-can coolers. Then they realized something — the product wasn't solving the real problem. Like many people, they owned several different insulated can coolers. One fit a regular soda can. Another fit a slim energy drink. Yet another fit bottled beverages. Instead of making another cooler for another style of drink, why not create one insulated cooler that could fit nearly every can or bottle someone might carry?

The brothers went back to work, redesigning the product from the ground up. The result became one of Frost Buddy's signature products — the Universal Buddy — a drink holder versatile enough to fit a variety of beverages.

Brock took their new product to TikTok. His video went viral, getting around 20 million views in just a couple of days.

Above: Frost Buddy drinkware includes a variety of models and fun designs, all created to keep beverages cold.

Below: Brothers and Frost Buddy founders Mitch and Brock Mammoser.



"That really escalated things, for sure," Mitch says. Within four months on the market, Frost Buddy became the No. 3 thermocooler on Amazon.

The purpose behind all of their products is to keep drinks cold (or hot) while preventing can condensation. While the Universal Buddy was accomplishing that with its variety of compatible containers, the innovators also realized that drinks in cups needed the same help.

Thus, the To-Go Buddy came to be. Just like its universal counterpart, it fits a variety of cup sizes, while also fitting into a standard car cupholder.

Frost Buddy products are primarily sold online, but they are available in several retailers, including Dick's Sporting Goods, Academy Sports, TJ Maxx, Buc-ee's and Scheels.

And, although Frost Buddy has gone nationwide, its roots still reside in Illinois. The company's warehouse in Effingham has a large presence in the community.

Mitch says plenty of people ask him, "Are you guys still messing around with that cup business?" as he sees more of their products in the community. He credits their customer service team for a lot of their success. "I still am a huge believer that we as people need that human connection, and that is not going away," he adds.

"People always ask us, 'Did you ever think you would grow to this?'" Mitch says. "No. It really is just having an idea, jumping with it, solving one problem after another, and knowing that you wake up and your day is literally solving issues and challenges, and seeing where it goes." 💡

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.

Frost Buddy

To learn more or to order your own Frost Buddy, go to frostbuddy.com.

CHASING THE CHECKERED FLAG

Dirt is made for
racing in Brownstown

By Jim Winnerman

ALMOST EVERY WEEKEND BETWEEN March and November in Brownstown, up to 150 custom-built racecars speed bumper to bumper around a quarter-mile, dirt oval racetrack at speeds approaching 100 miles per hour.

"It is definitely entertainment," says Josh Carroll, the owner of the Brownstown Bullring raceway, referring to the roar of the cars in each race, and the anticipation in the crowd for the inevitable spinouts and sparks flying from cars ramming into each other. Spectators watch from a grandstand and behind a high chain-link fence, separated only a few feet from the action on the steeply banked track.

"Keep a top on your drink," Carroll says. "If there is dirt in your beer, they are racing."

At the center of the spectacle are the racecars themselves. The fabricated car bodies are polished until they glisten and are painted in every conceivable combination of vivid colors. Many colors are fluorescent paint that glow as the evening turns to night and the overhead light poles illuminate the track.

Advertisements for local businesses which sponsor a car are prominently displayed on the cars, with more than one of the sponsors ironically being a personal injury law firm.

Even the physical appearance of the racecars is entertain-

ing to a first-time spectator. For less wind resistance and greater speed, car roofs are lowered and resemble the passenger compartment of an automobile that was about to be crushed for scrap before someone in charge of the car smasher changed their mind.

Standing in front of a car, one can't help but notice a decided tilt in the body to the left, as if the car had been crashed into broadside, knocking it out of alignment and leaving it destined to only make left turns. However, the wayward lean allows the car to grip the track better in the turns and enter the two short straightaways at a higher speed.

There are plenty of diehard race fans and backyard mechanics in the stands. But children of all ages are also everywhere, waving green and checkered flags, playing with their Hot Wheels on the bleacher seats, collecting handfuls of mud flung into the stands as the cars roar past, or just enjoying the spectacle alongside their parents clad in a sweatshirt or T-shirt emblazoned with the logo of their favorite driver.

For many of today's drivers, the sport has been in their family for generations. Most have a father, grandfather or even a great-grandfather who raced. They were often racing go-carts as children or helping family members prepare a car for an upcoming race.

"I have been 'wrenching on cars' since I was 16," says driver Doug Klein. "I would ride my bicycle home from school and get to work. Racing has been in our family for generations."

The action starts when the cars leave the pit area, with their engines rumbling and backfiring as they make their way onto the track for practice laps. They line up to get into position for a rolling start just before a green flag is lowered from a tower overlooking the track, and the noise becomes so loud it would not be a surprise if the cars took off and started to fly.

As the cars enter the two ends of the oval raceway, drivers apply the brakes, shifting the car's weight toward the front wheels causing the car to turn sideways at a 90-degree angle to the track. Then, as the inside wheels lift off the ground, each driver uses the sliding motion to exit the turn into the 100-yard straightaway for several seconds before the next turn looms in the distance and the sideways maneuver is repeated.

Each night the cars compete in a variety of categories that include classes of racecars titled Modified, Stock Car, Hobby Stock, Late Model, Sprint, Sportsman, Pro-modified and B-modified. Each class has specific rules and regulations regarding the build of the body and the power of the engine, along with other equipment requirements and prohibitions.

"Keep a top on your drink. If there is dirt in your beer, they are racing."

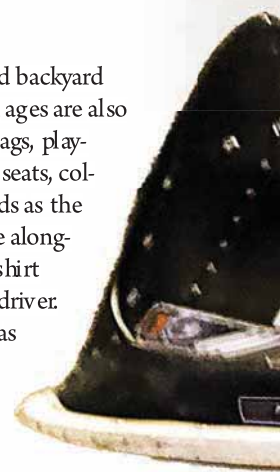




PHOTO COURTESY OF HOT MESS EXPRESS MEDIA & MORE

Races begin with several laps of qualifying heats followed by eight to 12 lap heats to determine position for the final series of races of 25 and 40 laps.

Carroll says attendance is usually about 2,000 fans, and that most drivers come from within 30 miles of the Illinois track. "It is a historic sport," he says. "Dirt track racing started in the U.S. before World War I and became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The Bullring dates to the 1950s, and for decades operated as Dirt Trackers Unlimited and then the Fayette County Speedway. Because of its tight quarters, fans affectionately referred to it as the 'bullring' long before the name became official in 2023 when I purchased the track.

"This is an expensive sport," he continues. "The car frame and everything, but the engine is about \$45,000, and the motor is another \$50,000."

And then there are the tires. Unlike a common pedestrian car tire, which may cost \$150 and is typically good

for a minimum of 30,000 miles, racecar tires last less than 100 laps around a dirt track and cost about \$250 each.

Drivers actually add the grooves to each tire themselves using a heated electric grooving iron to cut away rubber to create, or deepen, tread patterns. This improves traction by giving the tire a sharper edge to bite the track, helps the tread flex to conform to the surface, and channels away mud or debris. Tire pressures range from 6 to 12 pounds per square inch depending on the position of the tire.



Some drivers arrive on race day with their car towed on an open trailer. Others spend up to \$100,000 on the rig hauling the racecar to the track, according to driver Daryn Klein of Fairview Heights. "That includes the camper-like van that tows the trailer behind with the car and the equipment and spare parts inside the trailer. We can build an entire racecar, from what we bring along."

The more sophisticated racecar trailers store cars above the main floor of the trailer and are known as "stacker trailers."



They use heavy-duty hydraulic or winch-driven lifts to elevate the vehicle to the ceiling.

For those who desire to see the racecars up close at the Bullring, a pit pass can be purchased for \$40 which allows spectators unlimited access to pit row, where they can inspect the cars before or after the races and talk to the drivers and mechanics.

There is prize money for winning or placing in a race, but most drivers do it for the thrill of the sport and the camaraderie of being part of a team. Depending on the finishing position, drivers can earn from \$100 to \$1,200 on a weekend, and up to \$20,000 for special races held periodically throughout the season.

Drivers who do not earn a living from racing but consider it just a weekend sport compete in up to 35 races a year.

"Professional drivers who travel track to track every week may race in as many as 100 races across the nation," Daryn says, "but after 35 races, I am ready for deer season."💡

LET'S GO

Brownstown Bullring is located at the Fayette County Fairgrounds at 386 W. Cumberland Road, Brownstown. Prices vary. Look for rain cancellations. Grandstand opens at 5 p.m. and racing begins at 6:30 p.m. Earplugs recommended. To see all upcoming events, visit brownstownbullring.com.



Brownstown's racing history

Racing of some sort has been a part of Brownstown's history for more than 100 years. The sport began with horseracing in the 1920s, followed by homemade cars racing on a straight track in the 1930s and 1940s. When the Bullring opened as the Fayette County Fairgrounds Speedway in the 1950s, races included motorcycles and four-wheelers, as well as stock cars.

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Through the ages

Celebrating generations of women in agriculture

By Lisa Cherry

CONSIDERING THAT 2026 IS the International Year of the Woman Farmer, the work of an organization known as Illinois Agri-Women (IAW) takes on heightened meaning. Two of its initiatives in particular — GoAg3 (Generations of Women in Agriculture Across America) and Women Changing the Face of Agriculture — serve to celebrate both past and present generations of female farmers and inspire young women to explore potential careers in agriculture.

IAW, an affiliate of its national counterpart American Agri-Women since 1974, was organized to promote a better understanding of

agriculture and the family farm system. Members Penny Lauritzen (since 1980), Jenny Larkin and Libby Larkin — mother, daughter and granddaughter, respectively — are each doing their part to spread the word.

Penny, a past president of IAW and a former farm manager, is the driving force behind GoAg3. “The Generations project started about five years ago as a way to entice the American Agri Women to Illinois for their annual convention,” the Lanark resident explains. Unfortunately, that didn’t work out, so IAW decided to carry the project out on its own.

“That was kind of the beginning,” Penny continues. “It was somewhat in honor of my mom. [Phyllis Johnson was] probably not a typical farm girl. She was not really involved in her parents’ farm operation, but when she and my dad got married, she ended up jumping in with both feet.”

One example: In the 1970s, Phyllis recognized the need for a catering business in Bureau County and addressed it using a farm-to-table (or farm-to-fork) approach — long before it became a culinary movement.

The Generations initiative spotlights contributions made by families with three or more living

generations of women who have made and are making an impact in the industry — whether through production farming, agri-business, education or leadership.

Ironically, Penny, Jenny and Libby aren't eligible, as there isn't a full-time farmer among them, which is one of the stipulations. All are active in the industry, however. Penny pays it forward through the organization. Jenny works part-time on her husband's family farm in Pontiac, where they grow corn and soybeans. Libby received the National FFA Organization (FFA) American Degree — the highest degree achievable in the FFA organization — and is now a student in the agriculture program at Western Illinois University.

Jenny, a graduate of Illinois State University, earned her ag business degree before meeting her husband Dale. Later, she returned for a master's in human resources when her career in the nonprofit world demanded it. Eventually, the farm came calling.

"My husband and I [run the farm] now. My father-in-law passed away in February, but we officially took over two years ago," she explains. "We've been farming for about 15 years. When the kids were little, I wasn't on the farm much. ... I showed up on the weekends and occasionally drove a tractor."

It was while her father-in-law was in the hospital that the situation changed. "Dale said to me, 'Do you remember when you told me you had all those vacation days?' I said yes, and he said, 'Well, I need you to run the combine.' I said, 'No, I'm not,'" she recalls. The couple went back and forth until finally Dale told her, "Yes, you can. I will teach you, and you will do just fine."

These days, Jenny works both for the nonprofit and on the farm. "[Now] I ask all the time if I can be a full-time farmer, but he doesn't let me," she laughs.

Libby can't recall a time she wasn't out on the farm. "I started working on the family farm when I was, I don't even know how old," she says. "As long as I can remember, I've always been out there doing something, helping, whether it was [with] Grandma making sure everyone was fed ... [or] sitting in the shop, or in the tractors with Dad or Grandpa."

She adds that during the pandemic, she spent a lot of time doing her homework in the cab of a tractor. "I got a lot of questions from teachers when we were required to be on Zoom calls [about] why I was sitting in a tractor," she laughs.

Currently, Libby is working in Macomb, interning as a crop scout at Nutrien Ag Solutions. "The last two summers I worked in Dwight as an intern for the Nutrien there," she says. "[I'm] kind of following the family business [by] going into the ag business world, with a minor in agronomy. Growing up working with crops, I fell in love with it."

Unlike her daughter and granddaughter, Penny faced some hurdles

early on. "I am old enough that when I was in high school, girls were not allowed to join FFA. They didn't allow it until the year after I graduated, so I was not an ag student until probably 15 years after I graduated," she explains. "Then I had a chance to go back ... [and] adapt my college to be ag-oriented, because Jenny's dad and I were farming, so it seemed important for me to get as much education in that realm as I could."

Penny ultimately became a farm manager, representing absentee owners and getting involved with ag real estate and managing properties. "[I did that] on 80 farms [for] 25 years," she says.

During those years, the women of Illinois Agri-Women were her best friends and supporters — Penny calls them her tribe. Later, when Libby and her brother grew more involved with 4-H and FFA, she and her mother also joined IAW's ranks.

"We've both been involved in Women Changing the Face of Agriculture, the career development



Left to right: Penny Lauritzen, Libby Larkin and Jenny Larkin

PHOTO COURTESY OF PENNY LAURITZEN



Libby can't remember a time she wasn't out working on the family farm.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JENNY LARKIN

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Complex, Normal

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[illinoisagriwomen.org/
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event that's held every year," says Jenny. "We've both volunteered at that event. Libby's attended several years, [and] this last year she was one of the scholarship winners."

"The Women Changing the Face of Ag project — the career discovery project that Jenny and Libby are more focused on — they reach out to both FFA and 4-H groups," Penny explains, adding that thousands of Illinois students have benefited from it since the first program in 2010.

"[It] has had a tremendous impact on the young girls who have left high school and college and ended up in the ag career track, because of the mentoring that those women [and] the professionals who get involved with the program [offer], and also with one another," she adds. "Those girls have found out how important that female network and support of one another is once you get out in an ag career."

Having witnessed that herself, Jenny took advantage of an opportunity that came up to meet with the president of Heartland Community

College, which has a satellite campus near her in Pontiac. "They did not have an ag program up until a couple years ago," she says. "[I] became good friends with him, and [along] with him and the executive director, ended up being instrumental in helping raise money to build the ag program and the ag facilities there at the Normal campus."

That program is now in its second year. "They're doing very well," Jenny adds. "When I went to school, the closest school was Joliet Junior College, [because] there wasn't an ag school in this area, so it was nice to be able to bring that to this area."

She also says that while the Women Changing the Face of Ag event has historically been hosted at a university, lately they've opted instead to utilize community colleges, because of the visibility it gives to those smaller facilities, where college may be more affordable.

As Jenny's involvement with that project continues, Libby ponders her own future in agriculture.

"I plan on helping somewhere with farming, whether it's on our family farm or somewhere else, I'm not really sure yet," she says. "I stayed in Macomb this summer to work for Nutrien, just to get a different perspective from the eastern

side of Illinois to the western side, and there is a difference, a major difference. I am currently working on getting my drone license to be able to fly and spray with drones."

Meanwhile, Penny's work with the Generations project is about to celebrate its first major milestone.

"On Aug. 21, we will be announcing the three of what we're calling our legacy families. There will be three families introduced that day who have at least three generations, if not four or five, who have been involved in ag, and one generation is still full-time farming," she says. The event will take place at the new Agriculture Complex Jenny helped spearhead at Heartland Community College.

While the influence of agriculture on the female generations of her own family could be considered a microcosm of IAW's Generations project, Penny is just as excited to recognize and celebrate the generational experiences of other women in the family farm system.

"We were pleased with the applications [for GoAg3], and the families that were willing to fill out the application and give us the information that we needed to judge," Penny adds. "Now we're waiting to see how well the event is attended." 📍

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THE SECRET IS IN THE SAUCE

Johnson's Southern Style Barbecue's fourth generation

By Mary Blye Kramer

THE LINE SNAKES AROUND the gravel road at the drive-thru of Johnson's Southern Style Barbecue in Harrisburg, and no one seems to mind. Engines idle with air conditioners cranked up, fighting off the summer heat. Other customers spread out their lunches at picnic tables inside the screened-in porch.

Indoors, Keith Williams, who has worked at Johnson's for 35 years, carefully prepares each order, handing bags of food out the window with a smile, then leaning out to greet the next customer. Johnson's has no indoor seating, so if the picnic tables are full, people take their meals home or back to work, although a few pull over in the grassy area and dig in.

Customers rave about literally everything on the menu. Chocolate pecan pie with a creamy filling (as well as other seasonal pies), meats with wood-smoked flavor, peppers and onions grilled to perfection, deep-fried mushrooms and tangy sides. After a lunch or two, many people start buying food in quantity — smoked turkey by the pound, racks of ribs or an entire smoked ham.

Rupert Johnson, the restaurant's owner and a member of SouthEastern Illinois Electric Cooperative, got his start in the barbecue business when he was 8 years old, helping his grandfather, who owned a barbecue restaurant in Harrisburg called Ray's Barbecue.

Johnson's dad worked there, also. He eventually opened his own barbecue place, as did his siblings and cousins. As suits a family-owned business, the children did just about everything — washing dishes, waiting tables, cooking and bottling the sauce.

The recipe for the sauce was top secret back then and still is now. That's for good reason. Customers from all over the country order cases of it. Locals buy it by the gallon.

Last year alone, Johnson received 1,500 orders, the majority from other states. Few people eat at Johnson's without mentioning how good the sauce is, which isn't surprising since it's been passed down through four generations so far.

Johnson's grandfather learned how to make it from his father. It's a secret that Johnson continues to guard. The recipe lies in an off-site safe and when Johnson prepares it, he locks the door behind him. "My grandfather gave me the recipe as my inheritance," he says.

Johnson worked in the coal mines for several years after he graduated high school and he gives the mines a lot of credit for teaching him so many skills he found useful when he decided to open his barbecue stand.

Left: Chicken on the smoker.
 Right: Barbecue pork
 sandwich plate.
 Below: Seating includes
 picnic tables inside a
 screened-in porch.

After learning welding, electrical work as a licensed electrician, and carpentry, Johnson built his own smokers, all five of his cookers, wired the office trailer he purchased, and did all the drywall and painting.

During the 40-plus years Johnson has been serving barbecue, he's branched off in several directions. Like his grandfather, Johnson still sells to local grocers, but he also once owned a restaurant in Carbondale. Up until a few years ago, he spent summers setting up mobile carts and selling food at festivals.

Johnson's day starts at 6:30 every morning and he works seven days a week. He helps cook and serve, makes the barbecue sauce and, with the help of Williams, smokes the meat. Before and after lunch and dinner rush, Johnson takes care of online and local email orders, and in addition to all of that, he bottles his own sauce.

Johnson enjoys experimenting with different flavors. When a customer mentioned that his original sauce was a tad too spicy for her, Johnson spent several years developing a second sauce, called Rupert's Sweet & Spicy.

He then worked on and began serving a third sauce that he says is mostly a mix of the two earlier sauces. Johnson has added his personal touch in other ways, also. While his grandpa served chicken, beef and pork, Johnson added Italian beef and brisket. In addition to Grandpa's original potato salad and slaw, he added mushrooms, okra and corn nuggets.

Asked if there will be a fifth generation running the barbecue restaurant, Johnson looks hopeful. "I have a grandson who's interested," he says, "but running a business isn't just about smoking meat." He glances around his office, lined with framed permits and licenses, an enormous stack of orders sitting at his elbow. "He has a lot to learn," he adds. 💡



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Recipe rewind

AS WE CELEBRATE THE 1,000th issue of ICL, it's impossible not to think about the thousands of recipes that have filled these pages over the years. From family favorites to popular dishes from days of yore, our recipe archive offers a delicious glimpse into rural electric co-op history. For this issue, I decided to try something different. I randomly selected five issues from ICL's archive and challenged myself to create an entire meal using recipes from those editions. Some stood the test of time, while others needed an update. I hope you enjoy this culinary journey of bringing the past into the present. 🍴

WE NEED RECIPES!

New and old favorites

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



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



Peanut Stuffed Pork Chops

Illinois REA News, May 1949

Servings: 4

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 4 thick-cut pork chops | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 1 teaspoon onion, minced | 1 dash cayenne |
| 3 tablespoons butter, divided | 3/4 cup evaporated milk, divided |
| 1 cup breadcrumbs | Salt and pepper, to taste |
| 1 cup dry roasted peanuts, finely chopped | 1 cup flour |
| | 1/2 cup water |

Preheat oven to 350 F. Prepare pork chops by slitting a pocket in the side of each for stuffing. In a skillet over medium-low heat, cook the onion in 1 tablespoon of butter for 3-5 minutes. Turn off heat and add breadcrumbs, peanuts, salt and cayenne. Moisten with 1/4 cup evaporated milk. Mix well. Fill each pork chop with the stuffing. Sprinkle the chops with salt and pepper on each side and dredge them in flour. In a large, oven-safe skillet over medium heat, melt remaining butter and heat until it bubbles. Brown both sides of the pork chops, about 3-4 minutes per side. Mix the water and remaining 1/2 cup evaporated milk and pour into the skillet. Cover and bake for about 30 minutes, or until the pork reaches an internal temperature of 145 F. Remove the chops to a serving platter and let rest for 3 to 5 minutes. Meanwhile, place the skillet over medium heat and simmer the pan juices, stirring frequently, until the gravy thickens slightly, about 3 to 5 minutes. If it's too thick, add a splash of water or milk. If it's too thin, continue simmering for a few more minutes. Spoon the gravy over the pork chops before serving.





Swiss Creamed Peas

Illinois Rural Electric News, November 1985

Servings: 8-10

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2 pounds frozen peas | 1 teaspoon dried savory or thyme |
| 1/2 onion, finely chopped | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 1 tablespoon butter | 2 cups half-and-half |
| 1/3 cup all-purpose flour | 1 cup Swiss cheese, shredded |
| 1/2 teaspoon grated lemon peel | 1/3 cup chopped pimiento, drained |

Cook peas according to package directions and drain. In a large saucepan over medium heat, saute onion in butter until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in flour, lemon peel and spices until smooth. Remove from heat. Gradually stir in half-and-half. Add back to heat and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Boil and stir for 1 minute. Remove from heat and stir in cheese until melted. Add peas and pimiento. Heat through but do not boil.

Bean Salad Germania

Illinois Rural Electric News, July 1975

Servings: 8

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2 14-ounce cans whole green beans, drained | 1/4 cup onion, chopped |
| 1 celery rib, thinly sliced | 4 slices bacon, cooked crisp and crumbled |
| 1/4 cup French dressing | 2 hardboiled eggs, sliced |

Combine beans, celery, dressing and onion in a skillet. Cover and cook over low heat for 10 minutes. Add bacon and eggs and toss lightly. Heat and serve warm.

Cajun Potato Soup

Illinois Country Living, February 2005

Servings: 10

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 celery rib, thinly sliced | 1/2 teaspoon Cajun seasoning |
| 1 small onion, chopped | 1/4 teaspoon pepper |
| 1 green onion, thinly sliced | 4 cups milk |
| 2 tablespoons butter | 1 cup chicken or vegetable stock |
| 2 envelopes chicken gravy mix | 3 pounds yellow potatoes, cubed and cooked |
| 1/4 teaspoon celery salt | 16 ounces Velveeta cheese, cubed |
| 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin | |

In a large saucepan over medium heat, saute celery and onions in butter until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in gravy mix and seasonings. Gradually add milk and stock. Bring to a boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes. Reduce heat and stir in potatoes and cheese. Simmer until the potatoes are heated through and the cheese is melted.



Cranberry Sherbet

Illinois Rural Electric News, December 1963

Servings: 10-12

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 4 cups cranberries, fresh or frozen | 1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin |
| 2-1/2 cups water | 1/2 cup cold water |
| 2-1/4 cups sugar | 1/3 cup lemon juice |

In a medium saucepan, cook cranberries and water over medium heat until the skins pop. Rub cranberries and juices through a sieve. Discard pulp. Return to saucepan and add sugar. While stirring, return to boil and remove from heat. Skim off any foam that develops. Soften gelatin in cold water and add to hot cranberry mixture. Stir until dissolved. Cool, add lemon juice and freeze.

Doggone lawn problems

Protecting the yard from dog damage

IT NEVER FAILS. EVERY time I present a topic on lawns, I am always asked, “How do you prevent lawn damage if you have dogs?” Being a dog owner for as long as I can remember, I have had my fair share

is much too high and burns the turf, much like an over-application of lawn fertilizer.

Often, dead spots in turf caused by dog urine are bordered by dark green, healthy grass. This is because

in encouraging male dogs to mark their territory on those items rather than your prized rose.

Clean up their mess. Use baggies to remove dog waste or a rake to break up piles of excrement. Canine waste (or feline for that matter) should NOT be added to compost piles or used as any type of soil amendment.

Dilute potty spots. Yes, this means having a watering can on hand and following your dog around and watering where they voided their bladder. It does work to reduce the burning of vegetation, but you will still get darker green patches in these areas from the extra nitrogen.

Rotate. Just as a rancher rotates their livestock to different pastures, so too can you rotate your pet around your yard to allow for lawn recovery. While this doesn’t necessarily prevent damage, it does help keep portions of your lawn healthy.

Supply your pet with plenty of water. A dehydrated pup’s urine has a higher concentration of nitrogen; therefore, let your dog drink water as they need it. Supplements marketed to “neutralize dog urine” are generally ineffective and not recommended.

Go on walks. Grab your leash and your dog and stroll around the neighborhood. Be a good neighbor and don’t just transfer your lawn problems to someone else. Pick appropriate spots for your dog to do its business and clean up after them. Plus, walking with your dog is great exercise and a wonderful bonding experience.

Most of these are simply suggestions, as there is no magic bullet when it comes to our four-legged friends and damaged lawns, save not having a dog. For me, that’s not an option. ☹️



of ragged lawns and muddy paw-prints. Let’s start by examining the why and the how in which our lovable pooches are so efficient at destroying our turf.

First is the foot traffic — or should I say paw traffic? A typical suburban backyard is no substitute for what your dog’s range would be in the wild. Often, backyard dogs will wear down paths in the lawn from circling or pacing. Not only is this hard on the lawn itself, but it also leads to compacted soil, making reestablishing turf in these locations more difficult.

Then you have the No. 1 issue when it comes to lawns and dogs. Dog urine is high in nitrogen. While nitrogen is your lawn’s favorite nutrient, what your dog delivers

these peripheral grasses don’t get hit by the high nitrogen but enjoy a good boost as it leaches over in the soil.

So, what is a dog owner to do? Here are my suggestions based upon sound turf practices and experience with my own dogs and lawn.

Train your dog where to do its business. This follows a basic reward training system. Take your dog out on a leash to a designated spot in your backyard. Reward with a treat when they go. This is a training exercise of conditioning their mind, so it requires persistence.

Create a non-turf area. Create a spot covered in wood mulch, gravel or leaves with no other landscape plants. Placing some type of vertical element like a wood post or birdbath pedestal can aid



Chris Enroth is a horticulture educator with the University of Illinois Extension, serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough and Warren counties. This column also appears in the “Good Growing” blog at go.illinois.edu/GoodGrowing.

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TRIVIA ANSWERS:

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