

THE *Southwestern*

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2026 • VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 10

Youth Tour

LOCAL STUDENTS GET
FULL D.C. EXPERIENCE

DIRECTORS
ELECTED

THREE INCUMBENTS
WIN RE-ELECTION

MEMBERS IN ACTION
SMART METERS

LIHEAP
SCHOLARSHIPS
ENERGY VAMPIRES
HARVEST SAFETY



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

04 News & Notes

We're throwing a Hail Mary in hopes you can't find the football we've hidden in this month's magazine. Intercept it and you could be the winner of a \$25 bill credit.

05 Directors Elected

Three incumbents won re-election to Southwestern Electric's board of directors for a new three-year term. Read more about them here.

06 Members in Action

In August, we held a series of Members in Action town hall-style meetings with no idea how our membership would respond – and respond you did.

07 Operation Round Up

Your spare change by itself may not go very far but pooled together with your neighbors' change it can do great things.

08 Smart Meters

We began the three-year process of installing smart meters across our service area in August. So far, so good.

09 Energy Assistance

Applications for the next round of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are now being accepted. Here's what you need to know.

10 Youth Tour

Two local students had the opportunity of a lifetime to see Washington, D.C. on an all-expenses-paid trip this past summer. Hear about the experience in their own words.

12 Scholarships

It's never too early to start thinking about scholarship opportunities for the coming school year. We've got the details on some scholarships exclusive to electric cooperative members.

14 Energy Vampires

Energy vampires sucking your wallet dry? Take heed of these simple tips to scare away those phantom loads forever.

16 Harvesting Safety

You may not realize it, but farming ranks among the most dangerous occupations in America. We've got a few suggestions to keep you safe through this harvest season.

18 Autumn Leaving

Evergreen? No thanks. When fall rolls around, we'll take our leaves in various reds, oranges and yellows.





20 Who-What-Where

We're transitioning from an item used to help us keep the time to a place that stands as a relic of a time gone by.

22 Co-op Kitchen

Autumn spice, and everything nice.

24 Current Events

Would it really be October without corn mazes, chili cookoffs and haunted trails?

27 Final Frame

Vivid village.

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ON THE COVER

Local students Hayden Leek of Edwardsville and Caden Stewart of St. Elmo, representing Southwestern Electric, were among the 49 students sponsored by 25 Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives who took part in the 2026 Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. Read more about Leek's and Stewart's experience in our story, which begins on page 10.



PHOTO COURTESY ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

CO-OP REMINDERS

October 3 Southwestern Electric will host an e-cycling drive at its St. Jacob Distribution Center.

October 20 Payment processing unavailable 8 - 11 p.m. while we perform maintenance.



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For the latest news and notes, follow us on Facebook and x (formerly Twitter). You'll find us at facebook.com/SWECI and x.com/sweci. Search for Southwestern Electric on YouTube, Instagram & LinkedIn. You can listen to our podcast, Wireside Chat, on Apple Music, Spotify, Audible and anywhere podcasts are found.



Reader Contest

We've hidden an image of a football in your magazine. Your job is to find it. The actual

image may be larger or smaller than what you see below. We may change the color or reverse or alter the image we've hidden to make the contest more challenging. If you find the football, email us or send a postcard with your name, address, phone number, and the page number where

you found the image. Please email us at thesouthwestern@sweci.com or send your postcard to The Southwestern Magazine, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.

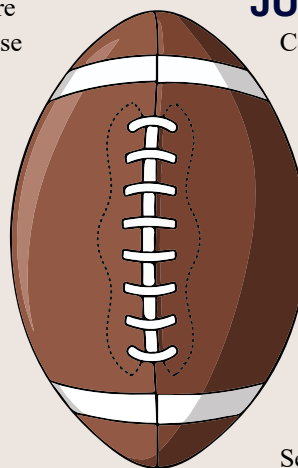
Entries must be postmarked or in our thesouthwestern@sweci.com inbox by the first day

of the month following the month of publication. For our October contest, we'll need your entries in our inbox or postmarked by November 1, 2026.

We'll choose one winner in a random drawing. Our winner will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. We'll publish the name of this month's contest winner in the December issue of The Southwestern.

JULY WINNER

Congratulations to Debbie Hearn of Moro. As the winner of our July Hide & Seek contest drawing, Debbie will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. Thank you to everyone who participated in our July contest. This month's image appears at left. You'll find Hide & Seek rules below.



RULES TO PLAY BY

- One entry per membership per month.
- A membership can only win once per calendar year.
- No phone calls, texts, social media posts, walk-in traffic, carrier pigeons, singing telegrams or other clever means of communication that may occur to you.
- Please respond *only* by emailing us at thesouthwestern@sweci.com or by sending a postcard to The Southwestern Magazine, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.
- Entries submitted by other methods will be disqualified.
- Entries emailed to other Southwestern Electric email addresses will be disqualified, deleted, then disqualified again, just to be safe.
- Entries mailed to other departments or included with other correspondence will likely never find their way to the editor. If they do, they'll be disqualified. Also, he'll add you to his list of people who can't follow instructions. It's a long (and growing) list and not one you care to be part of.
- October contest entries must be in our inbox or postmarked by November 1.
- We'll never hide the image on the front or back cover or on the page where we list the rules.

Warner, Lurkins, Hartlieb Elected to Southwestern's Board of Directors

Three members of Southwestern Electric were elected to the co-op's board of directors during Southwestern's 88th Annual Meeting of Members, held Saturday, Sept. 12, at the American Farm Heritage Museum in Greenville. Southwestern Electric members voted to elect one member from each of the cooperative's three voting districts to serve on the board.

All three candidates were incumbents. From District I, incumbent Marvin Warner of Pocahontas ran unopposed. From District II, incumbent Brad Lurkins of Greenville defeated Clayton "Snipe" Hilderbrand of Sorento, receiving 1,221 votes to Hilderbrand's 612.

From District III, incumbent Annette Hartlieb of Vandalia won re-election over challengers Vance Moore of Brownstown and Cassie Abendroth of Beecher City. Hartlieb received 1,015 votes, Moore received 451 and Abendroth received 339. Each director will serve a three-year term on the board.

Also on this year's ballot was the topic of proposed updates to the cooperative's bylaws. Among the proposed changes were expanding the voting methods for member matters, adding flexibility for meeting formats moving forward and the establishment of a three-year waiting period for former employees of the cooperative before running for a board seat. The changes to the bylaws passed, receiving 1,351 votes in favor as compared to 316 against.

Marvin Warner

Marvin Warner's familiarity with electric cooperatives and their guiding principles dates back to his childhood. Growing up on a farm in Shelby County, he saw firsthand



the benefits of a member-owned cooperative.

"I believe that members of a democratic society need to each offer to do things that benefit their fellow citizens," he said. "I see serving on the Southwestern Board as a way to help give back to the members of Southwestern Electric."

Warner chairs Southwestern Electric's Policy & Bylaws Committee and serves on the Member Engagement Committee, Building Committee and Scholarship Committee. During his first two terms on the board, Warner completed the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership Certificate courses and is currently working toward his Director Gold Credential.

Marvin Warner has been a Southwestern Electric member for more than 20 years. He lives northwest of Pocahontas with his wife of 51 years, Teresa. They have two children and six grandchildren.

Brad Lurkins

For Brad Lurkins, a cooperative mindset is one that focuses on "people over profit."

"Being a director, we need to keep members' needs in mind in all decisions we make," Lurkins said.

Lurkins is no stranger to the electric cooperative model. Before becoming a director, he served on Southwestern Electric's Nominating Committee for eight years. His membership in the cooperative dates back 38 years.

As a member of the board, Lurkins has served on the Scholarship Committee and Member Engagement Committee. During his first three-year term as a director, he earned a Certified Cooperative Director (CCD) certificate from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).



Lurkins has been farming since 1980. He has also worked for the Illinois Department of Transportation as a temporary highway maintainer for the past 16 years. Brad Lurkins and his wife, Tammy, live on their family farm southeast of Greenville. They have four children and five grandchildren.

Annette Hartlieb

For Annette Hartlieb, keeping costs low for members while offering reliable service is a "balancing act" that she relishes as a member of the Southwestern Electric Cooperative board of directors.

"We need to ensure reliability in our ever-changing, technology-driven world," Hartlieb said, "while always keeping our members at the forefront when making decisions on finance."

A board member since 2017, Hartlieb grew up on Southwestern Electric lines while being raised on a farm north of New Douglas. In her time as a board member, Hartlieb has earned the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Credentialed Cooperative Director certification, and she has also completed the association's Gettysburg Leadership Experience training. She's currently completing coursework for NRECA's Board Leadership Certificate, with a focus on governance, communication and business models.

Annette Hartlieb and her husband, Dennis, live southwest of Vandalia with their children, Alexi, Bryce and Mason.



A full recap of the 88th Annual Meeting of Members will appear in the November issue of The Southwestern. Additional information can also be found on our website at sweci.com.

A Call to ‘Action’

Members in Action meetings on demand billing deemed a huge success

We asked. You responded. In August, we held a series of Members in Action town hall-style meetings across our service area to educate members on electric demand, how it affects your bill, ways to manage energy use and tools to help you save money. We incentivized attendance by offering a \$10 bill credit to members who attended at least one of the six meetings, hoping it might entice a few more people to come out but anticipating light crowds and muted enthusiasm.

What we saw was the opposite. Members flocked to the meetings in droves, with multiple sessions resulting in standing room-only crowds. A total of 119 members attended the two sessions at our Greenville headquarters, 115 came out to see us at the Carriage House Event Center in Altamont and a whopping 206 members made it to the Gateway Convention Center in Collinsville for our final two meetings. That adds up to a grand total of 440 engaged, interested members who attended at least one of the six sessions spread across the region.

“We’ve never done something like this, so I didn’t know what to expect,” Southwestern Electric CEO Bobby Williams said. “The participation, the conversations, the questions – I was

blown away by the response. It exceeded my wildest expectations.”

All 440 members who registered with us prior to one of the meetings were

“The participation, the conversations, the questions – I was blown away by the response. It exceeded my wildest expectations.”

—Bobby Williams, CEO



Southwestern Electric CEO Bobby Williams, left, watches Manager of Member Services Brooke Scott reveal the name of the winner of the \$500 bill credit grand prize. Southwestern member Kenneth Reuter of Granite City was the lucky winner.

entered into a drawing for one \$500 bill credit grand prize. That prize was drawn on the afternoon of August 25, and Kenneth Reuter of Granite City was the winner.

For those who were unable to make it out, fear not. We recorded one of the sessions and posted it in its entirety on our website for you to be able to watch at your convenience. To see it, visit sweci.com/video and scroll down to the “Members in Action meeting on demand billing” video.

If you were able to attend or watch the video but still need help navigating to the demand management tools discussed during the meeting, those are also available on our website. Visit sweci.com/understanding-demand-billing to find the Energy Demand Calculator, Rate Comparison Calculator, Understanding Demand Billing animated video and some frequently asked questions regarding energy demand.

The town hall-style meetings were the first but, given their success, they likely won’t be the last. Williams said he’s already mulling over topics for future Members in Action events.

“Getting to interact with members is my favorite part of the job,” Williams said. “I can’t wait to do this again.”



SMARTHUB IS YOUR ONE-STOP ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT PORTAL

Haven't yet signed up for SmartHub, our online account management portal? There's no better time to make managing your account faster, easier, and more convenient.

- **Billing & Payments** - No more waiting for your bill to arrive in the mail. Access your bill anytime, anywhere. Save time with easy payment options to avoid late fees and service interruptions.
- **Alerts & Notifications** - Stay informed on important account events via email or text messages. Receive the information you need to make informed decisions about your account.
- **Paperless Billing** - Save some time and a tree when you activate SmartHub paperless billing, an eco-friendly way to instantly access your bill.

- **Usage Monitoring** - Worrying about usage or surprising bill amounts can be stressful. When you know what devices are using the most energy, you can make money-saving decisions about your account.
- **Outage Reporting** - Need to report a power outage? SmartHub is the fastest and easiest way to let us know when your power goes out. When widespread storms knock out power to an entire region, phone lines can become overloaded. With SmartHub, you can avoid busy signals and report outages with a few simple taps on your mobile device.



sweci.com/
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Learn more about SmartHub at sweci.com/smarthub and on our social media channels.

YOUR SPARE CHANGE CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE THROUGH OPERATION ROUND UP

Don't have the time to call us and opt in to Operation Round Up? We get it. That's why we've made it as easy as checking a box on your bill.



Small change.
Big difference.

Neighbors helping neighbors. That's what a co-op is about. And that's the idea behind Operation Round Up (ORU), a charitable program governed, funded and supported by Southwestern Electric Cooperative members like you.

ORU grants support various community projects across the co-op's service territory, including local school programs, STEM projects, food pantries, senior centers and fire departments.



sweci.com/operation-round

Smart Meter Deployment Underway

This past May, we told you about the three-year smart meter installation project we were set to begin in 2026.

That process began in August, when we installed 480 Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meters in the Wright's Corner area of our membership in Fayette County.

To this point, the process has largely been a success. A handful of the 480 meters that were installed encountered issues, but most were producing readings hours after installation. The installation process itself has also gone smoothly, with most members experiencing minimal or no power disruption during the installation.

The meters are being installed to improve the reliability and efficiency of our system. Smart meters provide

timely, in-depth information about your energy usage so that you can be a more informed energy user. The new meters will also give us faster, more detailed



Southwestern Electric 3rd Step Apprentice Lineman Dawson Chesnut installs a new Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meter.

readings so we can provide better service to you, the members.

In advance of work being done in your area, members will receive a postcard in the mail letting you know your meter is scheduled to be changed out in the coming weeks. You will also receive a courtesy call at least 24 hours ahead of your individual meter being replaced. Please verify that we have your current information on file to ensure we are able to reach you.

If you have questions, we've attempted to answer the most common ones on our website at sweci.com/smart-meters. If you're still seeking answers, feel free to call us at 800-637-8667 and a Member Services Representative will be happy to speak with you.



**Voices for
Cooperative
Power**

United for Stronger Communities

You have the power to protect affordable, reliable electricity. Take a stand on issues that impact your cooperative and community.



aiec.coop/vcp

LIHEAP Energy Assistance

The State of Illinois offers assistance to low-income families who struggle to pay their energy bills. Applications for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted. The current LIHEAP application period is Oct. 1, 2026 to Aug. 13, 2027, or until funding is exhausted.

The program will begin taking applications on October 1, 2026, for older adults (age 60 and older), individuals with a disability, families with children 5 years old and under, and households that are disconnected from their utilities/energy vendors, have a disconnect date within 7 days or have less than 25% in their propane tank can start applying for LIHEAP assistance. All other income eligible households can start applying on November 1, 2026.

The listings below will help you determine if you're eligible for assistance. Payment amounts are determined by income, household size, fuel type, geographic location and available funding.

Use the listing to find the agency that serves the county you live in, then contact the agency and tell them you'd like to apply for assistance through LIHEAP. The customer service representative who takes your application will explain the requirements, the type of assistance available, and your rights under the program. When you apply for assistance, please bring the following items:

- Proof of past 30-day income through paystub, check or copy of check showing fixed income amount (e.g. SSA, VA, DHS benefits), or other proof of documentation for any income source,

- Copy of most recent bill for heating (usually gas, propane or electric) and/or electric bill issued within the last 30 days (if energy directly paid for).
- Social security card or ITIN for residents who have them. Residents without ITIN or SSN can still apply and your Local Administering Agency will advise accordingly.
- A copy of rental agreement (if renting) showing that heating utility(ies) is/are included, the monthly rental amount, and landlord contact information.
- Proof the household received TANF or other benefits, such as Medical Eligibility or SNAP, if receiving assistance from the Illinois Department of Human Services.

If your application is accepted, the agency will make the appropriate payment to your energy provider(s) on your behalf, or in some cases, directly to you. Payments will be made by the local agency within 15 days of the application's approval.

Electric co-op members, if approved, will receive assistance in the form of a one-time payment. Members using Pay-As-You-Go (see below) may qualify for LIHEAP funds. Contact your community action agency to find out if you qualify for energy assistance. For more information visit <https://dceo.illinois.gov/communityservices/utilitybillassistance.html> or call 877-411-WARM.

To apply for assistance through LIHEAP, please contact the community action agency serving your county.

County	Community Action Agency	Phone Number
Bond	BCMw Community Services, Inc.	618-532-7388
Clay	CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp.	217-342-2193
Clinton	BCMw Community Services, Inc.	618-532-7388
Effingham	CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp.	217-342-2193
Fayette	CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp.	217-342-2193
Macoupin	Illinois Valley Economic Development Corp.	217-839-4431
Madison	Madison County Community Development	618-692-8940
Marion	BCMw Community Services, Inc.	618-532-7388
Montgomery	CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp.	217-342-2193
Shelby	CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp.	217-342-2193
St. Clair	St. Clair Community Action Agency	618-277-6790

Income Eligibility

If your household's combined income for the 30 days prior to application (gross income, before taxes are deducted) is at or below the 300% Federal Poverty Guidelines* as shown in the chart below, you may be eligible to receive assistance. If you rent, and your heat is included in the rent, you may be eligible for a LIHEAP benefit.

**Program Year 2027 Income Guidelines are based on Federal Poverty Guidelines. Households that are customers of federal funded utilities/energy vendors must be at or below 60% of the State Median Income to receive a LIHEAP benefit. The state reserves the right to adjust these levels based on the availability of federal appropriations.*

Family Size	30-Day Income
1	\$3,990
2	\$5,410
3	\$6,830
4	\$8,250
5	\$9,670
6	\$11,090
7	\$12,510
8	\$13,930

Pay-As-You-Go

- Take control of your energy usage.
- No credit checks or security deposits.
- No fees for late payment or reconnection of service.
- Say goodbye to paper bills.

For more information on our Pay-As-You-Go program, visit sweci.com or call 800-637-8667 to speak to one of our member services representatives.

MAKING THEIR MARK

Two local high school students represent Southwestern Electric in D.C.

Story by Nathan Grimm | Photos courtesy Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives

From one Capitol to another, it was a big few months for Hayden Leek and Caden Stewart.

Leek, a student at Edwardsville High School, and Stewart, a student at St. Elmo High School, first represented Southwestern Electric Cooperative at the Illinois Electric and Telephone Cooperatives Youth Day in Springfield, Ill., this past March. From that experience, they were given the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., to see the nation's capital as part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Youth Tour.

Leek and Stewart were among 49 students sponsored by 25 Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives who took part in this year's event, which was held June 15-22. In total, more than 2,000 students from 44 states participated in this year's Youth Tour.

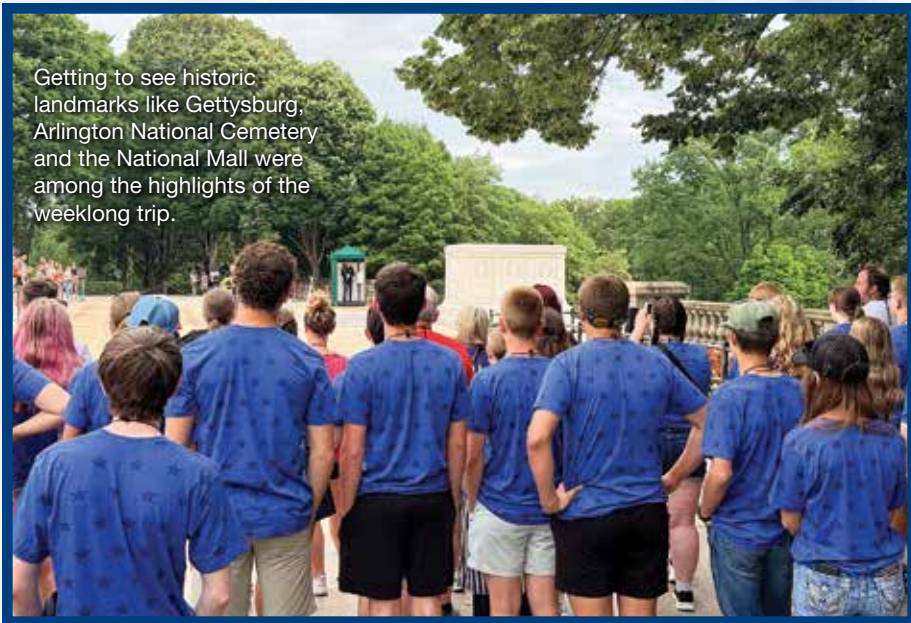
"Electric and telephone cooperatives across the state are investing in the next generation through Youth Tour," said Brooke Gross,



St. Elmo High School student Caden Stewart, left, and Edwardsville High School student Hayden Leek stand near one of the relic cannons at Gettysburg National Military Park.



Getting to see historic landmarks like Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery and the National Mall were among the highlights of the weeklong trip.



member services manager and facilitator of youth programs at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. “It gives students a chance to see our nation’s history and government up close. Just as importantly, it helps them discover their own potential as leaders.”

Central to the Youth Tour experience is the formation of a mock student-run cooperative called Chip ‘n’ Pop Co-op. Students began their journey at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives headquartered in Springfield, where they selected the co-op’s board of directors. The board later interviewed and selected a co-op manager.

Throughout the week, the co-op handled snack sales, decision-making and budgeting — giving participants a hands-on look at how cooperatives operate. All students were members of the co-op.

“Being part of this co-op helps students understand what makes a cooperative different,” said Gross. “It’s all about working together and making decisions that serve everyone — not just one person or company.”

Over the course of the week, students visited historic landmarks, including Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S.

Continued on page 26 ►

“It gives students a chance to see our nation’s history and government up close. Just as importantly, it helps them discover their own potential as leaders.”

—Brooke Gross, Member Services Manager and Facilitator of Youth Programs at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives



Southwestern Students: *Scholarship Opportunities Available*

High school seniors who are members of the Southwestern Electric Cooperative family may be eligible for one of 20 Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarships offered through the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC).

THOMAS H. MOORE IEC MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Nineteen \$3,000 scholarships are available to high school seniors planning to continue their education. Scholarships are divided into three categories:

- 12 scholarships – For children of Illinois electric cooperative members attending a two-year or four-year college, university, or vocational/technical school.
- 6 scholarships – For children of Illinois electric cooperative members, employees, or directors attending a two-year Illinois community college.
- 1 Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship – For a child of an Illinois electric cooperative employee or director attending a two-year or four-year college, university, or vocational/technical school.

Students must enroll full-time (at least 12 hours) and meet the eligibility requirements for their scholarship category. Applicants may apply through only one electric cooperative.

LAVERN AND NOLA MCENTIRE MEMORIAL LINEWORKER'S SCHOLARSHIP

One additional scholarship is available for a student pursuing a career as an electric lineworker. The LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship helps students attend the lineworker school conducted by AIEC at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield.

APPLICATION DEADLINES

The application deadline for the Thomas H. Moore IEC Memorial Scholarships is December 31, 2026. Scholarship winners will be announced by the end of April 2027. Apply by April 30, 2027, for the lineworker scholarship.

Students should review the official eligibility requirements and application information before applying.

IEC Scholarship Application Tips

Southwestern Electric Cooperative doesn't administer, award or provide applications for the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives Memorial Scholarship Fund. The scholarship is coordinated by our statewide trade organization, the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), Springfield, Ill. Students may apply for a scholarship through the AIEC web site at <https://aiec.coop>.

You won't be able to stop the application process and complete it at a later date. Your application must be completed in one sitting. Plan and prepare before you sit down to fill out your application.

YOU MUST HAVE THE FOLLOWING REQUIRED INFORMATION READY:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone Number
- Email
- Name and Contact Information of Parent or Guardian
- Electric Cooperative
- Name of High School Attended
- High School Grade Point Average – 100 point scale (e.g. if your school uses a 4 point scale, multiply your GPA by 25. If your school uses a 5 point scale, multiply your GPA by 20)

- Your parent's or guardian's legal consent to apply
- Brief Biographical Statement – Please include your educational goals, career aspirations, personal character and achievements, including an example of a time you demonstrated leadership. Also, describe a time you contributed to your community and a challenge you have overcome.
- Financial Statement – How will you finance your education? Detail your current financial situation and gaps. Explain your family's financial situation and provide context for your need for assistance.
- Two 500 Word Essays – an essay of 500 words or less in your own words – answer the following questions:
 - Cooperatives in Community Essay: Electric cooperatives care about the communities they serve. Concern for Community is one of the seven cooperative principles. Describe a time when you witnessed your cooperative or the staff making a difference. Be specific when explaining the impact.
 - Character Essay: Describe a time you made a positive difference in someone's life that's not a family member. Be specific by sharing what you did, how you motivated them, and the results of your actions.

POWERING YOUR FUTURE

20 SCHOLARSHIPS
\$3,000 EACH

The electric cooperatives of Illinois are proud to offer scholarships to deserving students in our co-op family. Whether you're a high school senior planning to attend college or interested in a career as a lineworker, there's a scholarship opportunity for you.

Applications are now open for the 2027 Illinois Electric Cooperatives Memorial Scholarships. Apply by December 31, 2026, for most scholarships, or by April 30, 2027, for the lineworker scholarship. Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/IECScholarships> for more details.

OTHER INFORMATION YOU WILL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE:

- Work and Volunteer Experience – List positions held, for what time period, and whether volunteer or for pay. Please do not make any reference to name, county, or home location. (Example: "Volunteer at National Honor Society Events, June 2019, Volunteer") – up to 15
- Participation in School and Community Activities – List activities (both school and non-school) in which you have participated, along with years of membership or participation and offices held. Please do not make any reference to name, county, or home location. (Example: "High School Soccer, 2019, 2020, Team Captain") – up to 15

The use of AI or any other writing tools is highly discouraged. You are encouraged to prepare your cooperative principles essays, brief character essay, and biographical/financial statement in advance, using a word processing program such as Microsoft Word, so that you may proofread your work. You may cut and paste your work into the application.

Top applicants may be asked to create/submit a video answering a few interview questions.



**IEC MEMORIAL
SCHOLARSHIPS**



What We Do in the Shadows

Don't fall victim to energy vampires this spooky season

It's not uncommon to see spooky sights during the month of October. Ghouls, goblins and monsters of all kinds creep in the shadows as Halloween approaches. Soon, they'll be afoot in your neighborhood, asking for candy from behind scary masks and painted faces.

Those terrors don't just exist outside your home, though. Inside your house at this very moment, vampires lurk – energy vampires, that is.

Whether labeled as phantom loads, standby power or energy vampires, it all means the same thing – the devices in your home are drawing power simply by being plugged in, even if they're not in use. The United States Department



of Energy estimates that standby power accounts for 5 to 10 percent of residential electricity use and can cost up to \$100 a year for the average household. That's a lot of power, and money, being drained from you.

The good news is, unlike with those things that go bump in the night, you're not defenseless against energy vampires. Here are a few easy tips to reduce standby power usage and save money on your energy bill.

Use smart power strips. A smart power strip has the ability to detect dormant devices and shut down power to those devices. Many smart power strips also offer users the ability to control them from an app on their phone,

allowing you to decide when things need to be on and when they might be able to take a break.

Unplug unused electronics. Before smart devices made powering down electronics as easy as pushing a button on your phone, you had to unplug them when they weren't in use. Not making coffee until the morning? Unplug the machine before you go to bed. Done with the video game console for the day? Unplug it from the wall and plug it back in when you're ready to fire it up again.

Invest in other energy-efficient devices. High-efficiency models can't completely stop the draw of vampire load, but they can greatly curtail it.

Certified devices such as ENERGY STAR appliances are built to draw very little power in standby mode, often 1 watt or less.

In this day and age, the truth is that it's virtually impossible to eliminate all of the energy vampires hoping to drain your bank account. A few simple steps, though, could leave those vampires feeling hungry and cold.



ARE HOME ELECTRONICS AND APPLIANCES DRAINING YOUR ENERGY?

If you collect your spare change in a jar, all those coins add up over time, usually to a larger amount than you expect.

Small amounts of consumed energy throughout your home add up as well, so plug “energy vampires” into a smart power strip that detects dormant devices or unplug items when not in use, especially those with illuminated controls.

TOP NINE ENERGY VAMPIRES



Safe **LEARN MORE:**
Electricity.org®

Harvesting Safety

Farming ranks among the most dangerous occupations in America. Harvest season can be especially hazardous. Long hours, lack of sleep, and mental fatigue can lead to serious injuries. Here are a few suggestions to help you make it through the season safely.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Just as you'd survey a field before planting, take a minute to look around your work site. Are there power lines nearby? They don't have to be directly overhead to pose a danger. Plot the movement of your equipment around your farm. How many times are you passing near power lines? You can avoid electrical contact accidents by rerouting traffic in ways that will keep you and other workers far from potential points of contact.



PHOTO COURTESY SCOTT FITZGERALD, FOREMAN/POLYPHASE METERMAN & TESTER

When a farmer brought down a pole in the co-op's service area, he immediately called 911 for help. Southwestern Electric crews isolated the site and safely cleared the pole and lines. At the end of the day, everyone went home safe and sound.

Additional tips to keep in mind:

- When you're moving equipment, use a spotter — someone with a broader view of the equipment and its surroundings.
- Familiarize your coworkers with the location of overhead power lines on or near your property.
- Keep in mind that non-metallic materials — lumber, tree limbs, tires, ropes and hay — will conduct electricity.
- Plot your route in and out of fields, to and from bins and elevators, and down public roads to avoid power lines. If someone transports equipment for you, specify a safe route and explain why certain routes are necessary.
- Use ladders with caution.
- Be aware of power lines and cords during construction projects.

ALERT TODAY, ALIVE TOMORROW: HEADS UP FOR FARM SAFETY



Stay safe around downed power lines. Consider all lines, equipment and conductors to be live and dangerous.



If the vehicle is on fire, or you must exit for other safety reasons, follow these steps:

- 1.** Jump clear of the vehicle. Do not let any part of your body or clothes touch the ground and the machinery at the same time.
- 2.** Land with feet together and hop away in small steps to minimize the path of electric current and avoid electric shock.
- 3.** Keep going until you are at least 40 ft. away.
- 4.** Call for help. Make sure no one gets within 40 ft. of the downed line.
- 5.** Do not re-enter the area or vehicle until emergency responders and your electric co-op crews determine it is safe.



IN CASE OF CONTACT

If you're driving a tractor, combine, or other onboard machinery and it comes into contact with a power line, stay onboard. Call 911 immediately. They'll be able to figure out who the line belongs to and contact the proper people to get it de-energized so that you can safely move your machinery.

If your equipment catches on fire and forces you to abandon the vehicle, leap as far as possible from the machinery. Don't allow your body to come into contact with the equipment and the ground at the same time.

If you realize your machinery is touching a power line after you've left the vehicle, don't attempt to move it. Call 911 and explain the issue. They'll be able to figure out who the line belongs to and contact the proper people to get it de-energized so that you can safely move your machinery.

Safety Tip

Always use a spotter when there is potential for equipment to encroach overhead power lines. A spotter's perspective provides a much broader vantage point than the view from a cab. If your equipment brushes or contacts a power line or pole, stay in the cab and call 9-1-1.



Safe
Electricity.org

CALL 811 BEFORE YOU DIG

If you're planning a project that requires digging, call JULIE (Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators) at 811 before you dig. Tell the operator where you're planning to dig and what type of work you'll be doing. JULIE will notify the necessary utilities. The utilities will send a locator to mark the approximate location of their underground lines, pipes and cables, so you'll know what's below and be able to dig safely.



Autumn Leaving

Words by Nathan Grimm | Photo by Mike Barns

*The colors change, but my feelings
about the four season don't*

It's usually in the dead heat of summer or the freezing cold of winter that someone wishes aloud that they could trade in the Midwest for California's homogeneous weather patterns.

I always assert the opposite. Stockholm syndrome? Perhaps, but I can't shake the feeling that I would get bored in such a place. Anything fewer than four distinct seasons is too few for me.

Autumn is Exhibit A. The changing leaves, swapping out shorts and t-shirts for jeans and jackets, bonfires and hayrides and corn mazes and pumpkins – I wouldn't trade fall for the world.

If you're like me, then this month's feature is for you. We've scoured the region for the best autumn views so that all you have to do is get yourself there. Hurry, though – unlike some other climates, the trees will soon be bare, and the ground will soon be frozen.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

ON FOOT

Beaver Dam State Park (Plainview, Ill.)
Located in Macoupin County seven miles southwest of Carlinville, Beaver Dam State Park is home to white squirrels and four miles of hiking trails, with one loop. For more information call (217) 854-8020.

Bremer Sanctuary (Hillsboro, Ill.)
In Montgomery County, about a mile north of Hillsboro, you'll find Bremer Sanctuary—a protected area for birds and other wildlife. Home to the Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, this 203-acre property offers several interconnected hiking paths, including the two-mile Bluebird Trail. For more information, visit the "Bremer Sanctuary, Hickory Hills Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society" page on Facebook.

Eagle Creek State Park (Findlay, Ill.)
Situating along Lake Shelbyville in Shelby County, about four miles southeast of Findlay, Eagle Creek State Park offers three marked nature paths through woodlands and a 12-mile backpacking trail. For more information call (217) 756-8260.

Eldon Hazlet State Park (Carlyle, Ill.)
In Clinton County, three miles north of Carlyle, Eldon Hazlet State Park is a favorite spot for birdwatchers and leaf peepers. The park offers three loop trails, each about a mile long, through woods along Carlyle Lake. Trails are closed from Wednesday through Sunday during pheasant-hunting season. For more information call (618) 594-3015.

Hidden Springs State Forest (Strasburg, Ill.)
About seven miles southwest of Strasburg in Shelby County, you'll find Hidden Springs State Forest. Formerly known as Shelby State Forest, the woodland offers four marked trails covering a total of 5.5 miles. Big Tree Trail was named after a sycamore that once stood measuring 78 inches in diameter, one of the largest trees in the state. For more information call (217) 644-3091.

Horseshoe Lake State Park (Granite City, Ill.)
Located off Highway 111 in Madison County, Horseshoe Lake State Park's four-mile hiking trail, with loops of 1.5 and three miles, wanders through the natural area on Horseshoe Island. During fall and spring migrations look for snowy egrets, great blue herons and black-crowned herons. For more information call (618) 931-0270.

Pere Marquette State Park (Grafton, Ill.)
In any season, Pere Marquette is one of our area's star natural attractions. Located in Jersey County, five miles west of Grafton, the 8,000-acre park offers unparalleled views of fall foliage framing the Mississippi River and scenic overlooks. Pere Marquette State Park offers about 12 miles of marked trails, with options for hikers of all experience levels. It's a bit of a drive if you live east of Bond County, but in exchange for your time, you'll be treated to lush forests, towering bluffs, sweeping views of fall color, and on cooler days, a crackling fire in the park lodge's mammoth stone fireplace. For more information call (618) 786-3323.

Ramsey Lake State Park (Ramsey, Ill.)
Situating in Fayette County a mile northwest of Ramsey, surrounding Ramsey Lake, the park covers nearly 2,000 acres. Ramsey Lake State Park has a one-mile hiking trail. Many visitors also use the unmarked fire lanes as walking paths. For more information call (618) 423-2215.

Shelbyville State Fish & Wildlife Area (Bethany, Ill.)
Few area locations can top Shelbyville State Fish & Wildlife Area for the viewing of marsh, woodland and prairie birds. Located along the Kaskaskia and West Okaw Rivers southeast of Bethany, Ill., the park features a 4.5-mile nature trail circling a waterfowl area. Trails are open to hikers during

hunting season; you're advised to wear orange blaze during that time. For more information call (217) 665-3112.

Wildcat Hollow State Habitat Area (Mason, Ill.)
In Effingham County two miles north of Mason you'll find Wildcat Hollow State Habitat. Wildcat Hollow offers 520 acres of forests and fields, and offers a 3.5-mile hiking trail with a double loop. For more information call (618) 547-3381.

Wolf Creek State Park (Windsor, Ill.)
Located in Shelby County, eight miles northwest of Windsor and across Lake Shelbyville from Eagle Creek State Park, Wolf Creek State Park offers seven hiking trails. Along with prime fall foliage, you may spot deer, pheasant, rabbits, wild turkeys and songbirds. For more information call (217) 459-2831.

For natural area updates and fall foliage reports, visit the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at www.dnr.illinois.gov and the Illinois Great River Road website at www.greatriverroad-illinois.org.

BY CAR

Madison and Jersey Counties
Follow the River Road north to Grafton. With limestone cliffs framed in foliage to the east and the Mississippi River to your west, you'll want to rope a passenger into doing some of the driving so you can focus on the view. Leave plenty of time to explore Pere Marquette State Park.

You'll also find nice views along Route 4 from St. Jacob through Lebanon to Fairview Heights. The rolling hills provide beautiful overlooks.

Bond County
Follow Highway 40 east from Pocahtontas. Traveling toward Greenville, you'll find county roads meandering north. Pick one and enjoy the hills, curves and color. As you approach Greenville, look for Rocky Mountain Avenue. It overlooks trees bordering farm fields and a small creek.

Fayette County
Follow Route 51 north from Vandalia to Ramsey State Park. As you approach the Fayette-Shelby County line, you'll find plenty of hills to explore. Don't miss Ramsey State Park.

Effingham/Fayette/Shelby Counties
From Highway 40 west of Altamont turn north onto Route 128. Follow it north to Cowden. Explore the area. East of Cowden you'll find the Thompson Mill Covered Bridge. It's a nice place to stop and admire the season.

WHO • WHAT • WHERE

The item in our September Who-What-Where puzzle gave a lot of you a hard ... time.

Even Bill Malec, our resident internet sleuth, was stumped at the outset, calling the item a “real head scratcher.” Alas, he eventually got to the bottom of the issue, as did a handful of other sharp-minded readers.

The item is, in fact, an antique watch staking tool kit. The tools work together as a precision micro-press that uses interchangeable steel rods, as shown, and bottom supports. Tapped gently with a hammer, the rods are used to assemble, rivet or reshape delicate watch components, of which there are more than 100 within a simple mechanical wristwatch. Likewise, a comprehensive staking set will have more than 100 pieces, allowing watchmakers to work on a range of wristwatches and pocket watches.

For our October location, we transition from an item used to help ensure you’ve got the correct time to a destination that

aims to remember a place in time. As you may be able to tell from the picture, the gas pumps outside this service station no longer function in their original purpose but rather serve as relics to remember a bygone era.

It’s fitting that we highlight it now, since the service station is celebrating a milestone birthday this year – built in 1926, it turned 100 years old in 2026. Incidentally, but not coincidentally, Route 66 also celebrates its centennial this year. The service station was built for the purpose of fueling those traveling the Mother Road and, like many other spots along the route from Illinois to California, the service station is on the National Register of Historic Places for its historical significance.

We’ve said too much, though. Perhaps instead of simply identifying the service station you might include a personal anecdote, either about the station or Route 66 itself. We can’t wait to hear what you have to say.

It’s a staking tool for a watchmaker.
—*Sherri Vogel, Farina*

The object shown in the image appears to be a vintage watchmaker’s staking tool set. A staking tool is used by horologists to repair, assemble, and adjust pocket and wristwatches, serving as a specialized instrument for precision work in watchmaking.

—*John Gorenz, Alhambra*

Pictured is a watchmaker’s staking tool for repairing watches.

—*Darrol Gasawski, Troy*

The September 2026 ‘What am I?’ started out as a real head scratcher. At first look, I thought the photo was of a self-contained unit but determined later it was all the various tools of the system packed in its carrying case. That said, pictured is an Antique Watch Staking Tool Kit Invecto No18 by Kendrick & Davis, circa 1940. I don’t believe the



Who-What-Where is a contest that challenges your knowledge of people, places and objects in and around Southwestern Electric Cooperative’s service area. Here’s how it works: Each month, we run a photo. Your job is to tell us who’s pictured, what we’ve photographed, or where we shot the photo. You can email your response to thesouthwestern@sweci.com or send it by mail to The Southwestern magazine, c/o Southwestern Electric Cooperative, Inc., 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246. Please include your name, mailing address, and hometown. If you have a story about our photo topic, include that as well—we love these! The puzzle solution—possibly accompanied by a few words from you—will appear in a future issue of The Southwestern.



brass tipped hammer pictured comes with the set.

I found an insightful video on YouTube which showed the tool in action repairing the innards of a pocket watch of the era. It requires a steady hand and a keen eye which doesn't come with the kit.

The Kendrick & Davis production plant in Lebanon, New Hampshire, closed in 1991.

—Bill Malec, O'Fallon



WHERE ARE WE?



CO-OP KITCHEN

Autumn Spice



Crockin' Pumpkin Spice Latte
prepared & photographed by
Mike Barns, mike.barns@sweci.com

PUMPKIN PIE DIP

Ingredients

- 1 (15 ounce) can pumpkin
- 1 (3 ounce) package vanilla pudding mix
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1 (8 ounce) container Cool Whip thawed

Directions

1. Put all ingredients into a large zip lock bag and squish until well blended.
2. Pour into individual serving cups and chill.
3. Serve with graham cracker sticks.

PUMPKIN CRUMCAKE

Bread Base Crust Ingredients

- 1 package yellow cake mix (save one cup for topping)
- 1 egg
- ½ cup melted butter

Directions

1. Blend together and pat into greased 13 x 9 inch pan.

Filling Ingredients

- 1 can pumpkin pie filling
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup brown sugar

Directions

1. Beat together and pour over crust.

Topping Ingredients

- 1 cup cake mix (saved from crust)
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup chopped nuts
- 3 tablespoons butter

Directions

1. Combine ingredients and crumble over filling.
2. Bake at 350° for 50 - 55 minutes.

CROCKIN' PUMPKIN SPICE LATTE

Ingredients

- 8 cups milk
- 6 cups strongly brewed coffee
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1-2 tablespoons vanilla extract
- whipped cream for topping
- ground cinnamon for topping

Directions

1. Combine milk, coffee, sugar, pumpkin pie spice, pumpkin, and vanilla in slow cooker and whisk together.
2. Set on high for two hours.
3. Serve warm with a dollop of whipped cream and sprinkle of cinnamon.

PUMPKIN WALNUT COOKIES

Ingredients

- ½ cup margarine
- 1½ cups brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ½ teaspoon ginger
- 2½ cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

Directions

1. Cream together margarine and sugar.
2. Beat in eggs.
3. Stir in pumpkin, vanilla, and ginger.
4. Add flour, baking powder, salt, pie spice, and walnuts.
5. Drop by tablespoons onto greased baking sheets.
6. Bake at 375° for 25 - 35 minutes.

PUMPKIN BREAD

Ingredients

- ½ cup butter
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 eggs beaten
- 2 cups flour
- ¾ cup milk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ginger
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1 cup pumpkin
- ½ cup nuts

Directions

1. Cream butter, sugar, and eggs.
2. Sift dry ingredients.
3. Combine dry ingredients with butter, sugar, and eggs.
4. Stir in pumpkin and nuts.
5. Pour into two greased and floured loaf pans.
6. Bake at 350° for 25 - 35 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.

CURRENT EVENTS

October 1-30 ART EXHIBIT BY DAN & B WILLIAMS, Highland. Come see and enjoy the art work of Dan & B Williams. Their work is photography and mixed media involving encaustics, the use of wax to create an ethereal textual quality. Latzer Memorial Public Library, 1001 9th Street. Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. For more information, email burnskathy11@gmail.com or visit highlandlibrary.org.

October 1-31 MOURNING COL. STEPHENSON, Edwardsville. Explore the solemn traditions and customs of early 19th-century grief at the historic 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House. This immersive exhibit commemorates Colonel Stephenson's passing on October 10, 1822, with select rooms throughout the house staged to reflect the realities of illness, death, and grief in a frontier home. Tours are available Thursday-Saturday 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.; Sunday noon - 3 p.m.; tours are not conducted after 2 p.m. Colnet Benjamin Stephenson House, 409 S. Buchanan Street. Visit stephensonhouse.org.

October 1 - November 30 SILAS COGGESHALL ART EXHIBIT, Highland. Come view the painted landscapes artwork of Silas Coggeshall. This small people friendly gallery features an original artist every two months. Work is not only on display, but is also for sale. Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Latzer Memorial Public Library,

1001 9th Street. For more information, email burnskathy11@gmail.com or visit highlandlibrary.org.

October 2 - November 1 GREAT GODFREY MAZE, Godfrey. On Friday and Saturday nights, the maze will be open after dark. The maze will also be open on Sundays during the day. Other activities include cow train, corn crib, hay wagon ride and jumping pillow. Fridays 6 - 10 p.m.; Saturdays 11 a.m. - 10 p.m.; Sundays noon - 6 p.m. Fees apply. Robert E Glazebrook Park, 1401 Stamper Lane Visit godfreyil.org or call 618-466-1483.

October 2-4, 9-11 ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, Breese. A theatrical presentation by Clinton County Showcase. October 2, 3, 9 and 10 at 8 p.m.; October 4 and 11 at 2 p.m. General admission is \$15. Historic Avon Theatre, 535 North 2nd Street. For reservations, call (618) 526-2866 or visit clintoncountyshowcase.com.

October 3 & 4, 10 & 11 VINTAGE VOICES, Alton. Step back in time on these guided, gentle-walking tours to visit different stops and meet actors as they portray prominent persons from Alton's rich history. Noon - 2:15 p.m. Adult \$15; students \$10. Tours will leave every 15 - 20 minutes from the main gate of the City Cemetery at 5th and Vine Streets. For tickets, call (618) 531-6641 or visit facebook.com/vintagevoicestours.

October 7 - November 8 1926 EXHIBIT, Edwardsville. It was this year that Route 66 debuted in the U.S., connecting travel-

ers from Chicago to Los Angeles, including a path through Edwardsville. In honor of Route 66's centennial, this exhibit takes a look at the news, fashions, sports and happenings of 1926. Wednesday - Sunday. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission is free. West End Service Station, 620 St. Louis Street. Visit cityofedwardsville.com/749/west-end-service-station.

October 9 & 10 CHILI COOK-OFF, Belleville. Features the culinary creations of individuals, local organizations and area businesses. Event includes more than 40 food vendors, live music and adult beverages for purchase. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. both days. Admission is free. Veterans Memorial Fountain and along Main Street. Visit bellevillechili.com.

October 9-11 TOUCHSTONE ENERGY BALLOON FEST, Shelbyville. Get ready to soar with hot air balloon rides available Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Sunday morning for \$350 per person. Or, join us for paid tethered rides during Saturday evening's cookout glow for \$20 per person. Call 217-774-3986 to book your flight. Balloon rides are at pilots discretion and weather dependent. If your flight does not happen you will receive a refund. Balloon rides are prepaid, tethered rides will be paid at the event. Friday 4 - 6 p.m.; Saturday 5 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Sunday 5 - 8 a.m. Visit facebook.com/balloonslakeshelbyville.

October 10 BARK IN THE PARK DOG CONTEST, Maryville. Fun dog contest for mixed or pure bred dogs. Prizes for various categories.

Noon - 2 p.m. Firemen's Park, 300 North Donk Avenue. Visit maryville.il.us/98/parks-recreation, email parksandrec@maryville-il.us or message us (618) 223-8965.

October 10 BOOK SIGNING, Vandalia. Join us for a book signing by Brady J. Crytzer, author of "The National Road, George Washington, and America's First Highway West". Brady, a historian, has written a book about America's first highway project. Inspired by George Washington's vision of crossing the Allegheny Mountains to connect the east and west. 8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the National Road Interpretive Center, 106 South 5th Street. Book discussion will be at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. at City Hall next door. Tours of the interpretive center 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. tours and book discussion are free. Books will be available for purchase. Call 618-283-9380.

October 10 CHILI CHASE 5K, Belleville. Kick off your morning with a fun and festive race through the heart of Belleville. This event is perfect for runners of all ages and abilities. Enjoy a lively atmosphere, great competition, and the chance to earn awards in multiple age categories. Plus, kids can join the Pepper Dash for their own medal and a big dose of fun. 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. East Main & Church Streets. For details, visit bellevillechili.com/chili-chase-5k-kids-pepper-dash.

October 10 EARS MICROCHIP EVENT, Effingham. On-site microchipping. No appointment needed. No geography or number limit. 10 a.m. - noon. Freewill donation. EARS -

Call to Confirm

Listings are provided by event organizers or taken from community websites. We recommend calling to confirm dates, times and details before you make plans. All are subject to change.

Submissions

To submit an event for consideration in our calendar, email your event information to mike.barns@sweci.com. Please use our Current Events format (as seen on these pages) to write your submission. Include a contact number or email and submit your listing at least two months prior to your event.

Effingham Animal Rescue Sanctuary, 408 East Fayette Avenue. Visit effinghamanimal-rescue.com.

October 10 SUMMER CONCERTS, Vandalia. From sunset acoustic sets to high-energy weekend shows, your favorite local artists are taking the stage all season long. Grab your crew, sip something cold, and let the music carry you through the summer nights. Charter's Patio, 401 West Gallatin Street. For a complete schedule, visit facebook.com/ChartersPatio.

October 16 & 17 HAUNTED TRAIL Carlyle. Brave souls embark on a hayride from Dam West Boat Ramp to the Little Prairie Nature Trail, where your hike on the Haunted Trail will begin with ghosts, goblins and ghouls awaiting you. Not recommended for children below 10 years of age. Strollers or wagons are not permitted. Parking and food vendors available at the Dam West Boat Ramp parking lot at 14500 Lake Road. 6:30 - 10 p.m. Admission is \$10. All proceeds will go to support the Fireworks Spectacular. For more information, visit call (618) 594-2484 or visit carlylelake.com

October 17 BUILD MARYVILLE MUSICFEST, Maryville. Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy a day of live bands, food, trucks, drinks all afternoon and evening. Noon - 9 p.m. Firemen's Park, 300 North Donk Avenue. Visit maryville.il.us/98/parks-recreation, email parksandrec@maryville-il.us or message us (618) 223-8965.

October 17 & 18 OWL FEST, Dow. Stop by to meet our education animals, visit our clinic and flight cage. Event will feature children's activities, raffle, education booths and talks and artisan and craft vendors. 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. TreeHouse Wildlife Center, 23956 Green Acres Road. Visit treehousewildlifecenter.com/owl-fest.

October 18 CHILI COOKOFF, Alton. Event encourages local

chili chefs (amateur and professional) to match their favorite recipe with others in similar categories. \$100 prizes awarded to winners in 4 categories. The team chosen as "People's Choice" will receive the coveted silver ladle and bragging rights. Noon - 3 p.m. Adult \$10; children 12 years of age and younger \$5. Flock Food Truck Park & Bar, 210 Ridge Street. Visit downtownalton.com.

October 18 LECLAIRE PARKFEST, Edwardsville. The event offers live music, festival food, a beer and wine garden, craft booths, a used book sale benefiting the American Cancer Society, children's activities, a vintage vehicle exhibit and trolley tours of the Leclaire Historic District. 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Admission is free. Leclaire Lake Park, 900 Hale Avenue. Visit historic-leclaire.org.

October 18 SAXOPHONICS PERFORMANCE, TROY. 2 p.m. Tri-township Park Gazebo, 410 Wickliffe Street. In case of inclement weather held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church Sanctuary, 112 North Border Street. Visit troyband.org.

October 20 SOROPTIMIST OF VANDALIA BUNCO AND POTATO BAR, Vandalia. Play Bunco with a chance to win a prize and enjoy our baked potato bar. Enjoy an evening of fun with a patriotic flair. Reserve your seat or pay at the door. Doors open at 6 p.m. 8th Street Venue, 1405 Veterans Avenue. To make a reservation, call Judy Wasmuth at 618-267-7637 or Leigh Hedgpeth at 618-292-4687.

October 21, 28; November 4, 11, 18 ADULT CLAY HAND-BUILDING CLASS, Highland. Join seasoned art teacher, Courtney Sellers, as she leads you through the process of hand building clay using slab construction. You will work with her to make 2 - 3 projects that will be fired upon completion of class. You will learn vocabulary and clay terms as you work with the forgiving medium of

clay. For 14 years of age and older. All materials, tools and supplies will be provided. 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. Class fee is \$95. Class size is limited. Highland Middle School, 2813 IL-160. Email burnskathy11@gmail.com for questions or visit highlandartscouncil.org for easy sign-up.

October 24 ALTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA HEROIC CONFLICT AND RESOLVE, Godfrey. Start the ASO season with a concert of reflection, endurance, and resolution. This program consists of Beethoven's "Egmont Overture", Colridge-Taylor's "Bamboula (Rhapsodic Dance)", Fauré's "Pavane, Op. 50", and Mendelssohn's "Symphony No. 3 (Scottish)" as our title piece. 7 p.m. Adult \$10; children age 18 and younger \$5. Lewis & Clark Community College, Ann Whitney Olin Theatr, Hatheway Cultural Center, 5800 Godfrey Road. Visit altonsymphonyorchestra.org.

October 29, 31 - November 1 ALTON LITTLE THEATER: ROCKY HORROR SHOW, Alton. A theatrical presentation by the Alton Little Theater Company. October 29 at 7:30 p.m.; October 31 at 11:59 p.m.; November 1 at 2 p.m. Admission is \$25. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, visit altonlittletheater.org.

November 6-8 THE 39 STEPS McKENDREE THEATRE PERFORMANCE, Lebanon. A man with a boring life meets a woman with a thick accent who says she's a spy. When he takes her home, she is murdered. Soon, a mysterious organization called "The 39 Steps" is hot on the man's trail in a nationwide manhunt that ends in a death-defying finale. Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday at 2:30 p.m. General admission is \$5; free for McKendree students, faculty and staff. The Hett Center for the Arts, 400 North Alton Street. For tickets, visit thehett.com.

November 8 CITY OF THE SUN 5K TRAIL RUN, Collinsville. Race begins at 9 a.m. Entry fee is \$35. Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, 30 Ramey Street. For details, call (618) 344-7316 or visit cahokiamounts.org.

November 13-15, 19-22 ALTON LITTLE THEATER: THE OUTSIDER, Alton. A theatrical presentation by the Alton Little Theater Company. November 13-14 and 19-20 at 7:30 p.m.; November 15, 21-22 at 2 p.m. Admission is \$25. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, visit altonlittletheater.org.

November 14 5K/1M TURKEY TROT, Maryville. 5K race and 1 mile accuracy walk/race to benefit local CC teams. 8 - 11 a.m. Drost Park, East Division Street. Visit maryville.il.us/98/parks-recreation, email parksandrec@maryville-il.us or message us (618) 223-8965.

November 14 SAUSAGE SUPPER, Grantfork. Dinners include fresh homemade pork sausage, mashed potatoes and milk gravy, sauerkraut, green beans, applesauce, and a piece of pie. Serving from 2 - 7 p.m. Drive thru only. All meals are \$15. Packaged fried sausage available for sale by Grantfork UCC Men's Fellowship. Grantfork United Church of Christ, 206 South Locust Street. Call 618-978-5541.

November 22 ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS CRAFT & VENDOR SHOW, Effingham. More than 80 crafters and vendors. Gift card giveaways. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission is free. Thelma Keller Convention Center, 1202 North Keller Drive. Email Brandi at baentertainment21@gmail.com or call 618-322-4774.

► Continued from page 11

Capitol, where they had the opportunity to meet U.S. Senator Dick Durbin. They also strolled the National Mall and explored the Smithsonian museums.

Perhaps most importantly, though, they also got the chance to meet and interact with other students from across the state and around the country, something Stewart said ended up being one of the unexpected lasting memories from the week.

“Going into this trip, I wasn’t expecting to meet so many new people that I would get close to in just a week,” Stewart said. “I was mainly just excited that I was getting a free trip to Washington, D.C. and going to all the museums and landmarks that I’d always wanted to see in person, but Youth Tour was so much more than that. My favorite part of the trip was going through the museums with my group and seeing all the history, facts, documents, and diverse stories that this country has been built on.”

Midweek, students took part in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Youth Day, where they joined hundreds of other teens from across the country to hear from national

At right, a special treat during the trip was the chance to meet U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, an Illinois native. The students also mixed in some fun with their learning, like below, re-enacting the charging of the battlefield at Gettysburg.



“My favorite part of the trip was going through the museums with my group and seeing all the history, facts, documents, and diverse stories that this country has been built on.” —Caden Stewart

leaders and learn how to use their voices back home.

In addition, a student was selected to represent Illinois on the national Youth Leadership Council (YLC). Corn Belt Energy Corporation’s Colton Leonard was selected as the 2026-2027 YLC representative for Illinois.

“It’s so awesome that the co-ops are able to do this for us all,” Leonard said. “Everyone comes from so many different perspectives, and getting to meet other individuals is just so empowering.”

The week concluded with a farewell dinner and dance, and by the time students returned home on June 22, many said they felt changed by the experience.

“From touring Washington, D.C.,

to learning the cooperative difference, Youth Tour is much more than a trip,” Southwestern Electric Manager of Member Services Brooke Scott said. “It’s an experience they will carry long after high school.”

Stewart encouraged prospective Youth Tour participants in the future to push past any reservations they might have and just go for it.

“This experience went so far past my expectations,” Stewart concluded. “It was one of, if not the best experience of my life – from the speakers during a couple of the evenings, to the people on the tour, and all the places we went. I would highly recommend this tour to anyone who is not sure about it.

“Yes, I was definitely nervous, but don’t let that be the reason you’re not pursuing this. It is a life-changing experience, and I am so glad that I didn’t let that stop me from going. So please do the same and try to go on this trip, because it is worth it and so much more.”

High school students who live within Southwestern Electric’s service area are eligible to participate in the annual program. To learn more about Youth Tour, go to youthtour.coop or facebook.com/ILYouthTour. 





Fall colors
surround the
village of Elsayh.

THE FINAL FRAME

