



THE *Southwestern*

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2020 • VOLUME 72 • ISSUE 12

Powering Up After An Outage

**YOUR SAFETY IS
OUR PRIORITY**

Co-op Rebates

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EV CHARGERS & ENERGY-
SAVING TECHNOLOGY**

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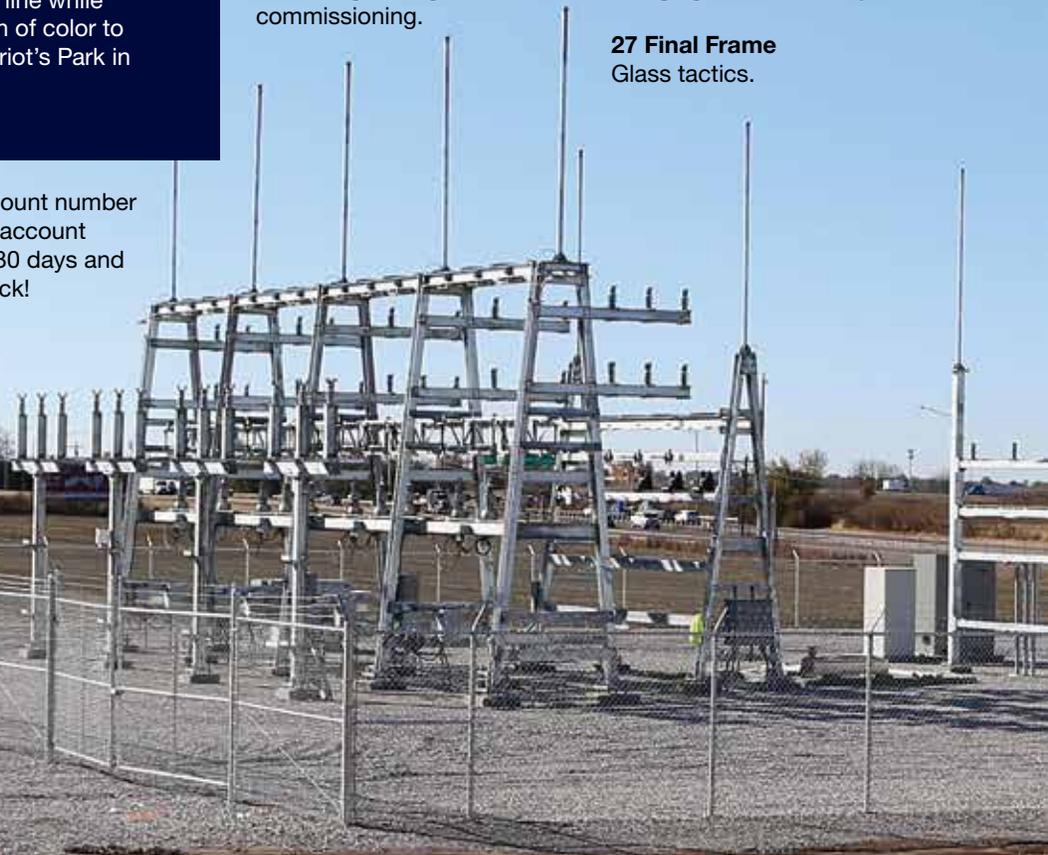


THE TREE'S KNEES

The knobby knees of cypress trees rise above the water line while needles add a splash of color to the winter sky at Patriot's Park in Greenville.

On Account: We've hidden a member-account number in this issue (mailing label excluded). If the account number belongs to you, contact us within 30 days and we'll take \$25 off your electric bill. Good luck!

Maple Grove Substation, Troy



FROM THE EDITOR



525 U.S. Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.
Phone: (800) 637-8667. Office Hours:
Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Visit us on the Web at www.sweci.com.

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Ted Willman Greenville

CEO

Bobby Williams Chief Executive Officer

The Southwestern

Joe Richardson Editor
e-mail: joe.richardson@sweci.com
Mike Barns Art Director
e-mail: mike.barns@sweci.com

Satellite Locations:

St. Jacob Office
10031 Ellis Road, St. Jacob, IL 62281

St. Elmo Distribution Center
2117 East 1850 Avenue, St. Elmo, IL 62458

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Here's Hoping

Like scars accumulated across a lifetime, our words say a lot about where we've been. They offer insight into people we've known, places we've lived, professions we've pursued. Many of us build our sentences almost exclusively from the brick and mortar of common, colloquial words and phrases—and they serve us quite well, thank you very much. Others populate their speech with antiquated terms, trendy slang or insider shorthand.

Regardless of how well-read, well-educated or widely traveled you may be, you have holes in your vocabulary. We all do. You can live a lifetime then suddenly stumble into a phrase common to everyone but you. Similarly, there are words that infiltrate our vocabulary broken, misspoken or misunderstood. I've found a few of those in my own language lately. Most recently, it was the word *hope*.

I saw hope as quiet, passive, polite. You applied the term to circumstances outside your control. *Hope the storm misses us. Hope this finds you well. Hope the cancer doesn't come back.* To hope meant to wish, and to wish meant to wait for.

But the words, while related, are not identical twins. They're distant cousins.

To wish is to yearn, to pine, to long for. A wish is a gossamer, ghostly thing you can sense and say but never quite grasp.

Hope is a hammer. Hope builds. Hope is insight, intention, energy and applied optimism. It is the unshakable understanding that whatever circumstance you find yourself in, you can change it—change the circumstance, change your response, or change yourself. It's knowing that maybe you can't rebuild your world today, but you can drive nails. Begin a bridge. Lay a foundation. Put up or tear down walls. Hope is confidence that by planning and putting in the work here, now, in this hour and the next, we can build a better day, a better week, a better year than the one we're living.

Wishes wait for change.

Hope builds it.

You can wish for a 2021 better than the year you leave behind, or you can hope. You can sketch a plan that moves you from where you are to where you want to be, and begin the work. Given the option of waiting on wishes or building dreams driven by hope, I know my choice.

Here's hoping.

Joe Richardson, editor
joe.richardson@sweci.com

CO-OP REMINDERS

December 14 Payment processing systems will be unavailable from midnight to 4 a.m., while we perform system maintenance. No payments will be processed during this time. We will resume processing payments at 4:01 a.m.

December 24 Offices close at noon for Christmas holiday.

December 25 Offices closed for Christmas holiday.

December 31 Offices close at noon for New Year's holiday.

December 31 & January 1 Southwestern's online billing center will be unavailable from noon Thursday, December 31, through 1 a.m. Friday, January 1, while we perform year-end system maintenance. The billing center will resume operation at 1:01 a.m. Friday, January 1.

January 1 Offices closed for New Year's holiday.

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

We've rebuilt our website! The new site is easier to navigate and displays well on a broad range of devices. It also allows us to accommodate additional material. You'll find updates and a link to this year's board meeting minutes on the drop-down menu under the News & Information tab at sweci.com.

EV CHARGER REBATES

October marked the launch of Southwestern Electric's EV Pilot Program—an initiative that will help the co-op develop EV-oriented incentive rates. Southwestern is offering a \$200 bill credit to the first 50 members who install new Level 2 EV chargers. All brands are eligible.

Southwestern will use data from the Pilot Program to identify demand and usage patterns and set incentive rates. Rates will be structured to reward EV owners, with margin enough to fund infrastructure improvements.

Until incentive rates are in place, EVs will charge at a member's existing electric rate. The co-op's immediate goal is to make electric vehicle ownership an attractive option, encouraging higher EV adoption rates among members. "More EVs mean more power sales," said Julie Lowe, program coordinator. "We can use that revenue to fund more infrastructure improvements while keeping our rates in check."

Incentive rates and prime charging hours will become clear next year as Southwestern reviews data from the EV Pilot Program. For more information about the program, contact Julie Lowe at (800) 637-8667 or julie.lowe@sweci.com.

Coronavirus Response

Southwestern Operations Update

Southwestern Electric Cooperative will continue to keep coronavirus mitigation measures in place through the end of 2020. "Based on the past several months and our current climate, it's likely Illinois and CDC COVID mitigation measures will extend into 2021," said Southwestern CEO Bobby Williams. "It makes sense to extend Southwestern's current office and remote work arrangement into 2021 as well."

In March, the cooperative took precautions to safeguard the health of employees and members and curb the spread of COVID-19. Protective measures included adopting CDC health and safety guidelines, observing social distancing protocols, wearing face coverings when appropriate, and reviewing safety measures with employees. Those

precautions have remained in place since spring.

Williams said the cooperative would reassess conditions in January 2021 and revise its plans or stay the course accordingly.

"We expect our lobbies and drive-up windows to remain closed through the end of 2020," he said. "Our employees will continue to answer your calls, respond to your questions, and repair outages quickly and safely, just as they always do."

Williams encouraged members to manage their accounts, report outages and make payments using the co-op's online payment portal, by using the SWEC IL app, or by calling the cooperative at (800) 637-8667.

For the latest information, go to www.sweci.com.



From the CEO

With the finale for 2020 just weeks away, I find myself reflecting on the year that was. Did I accomplish the personal and professional goals I set at the end of 2019? If so, what contributed to that success? If not, where did I fall short, and what new approaches will equip me to complete tasks that remain undone? It may sound daunting, but this year I'll be mulling over these questions with a sense of optimism.

Taking a positive approach to the year-end review is relatively new to me. Last November I was lamenting over tasks, personal and professional, that I hadn't completed. The professional milestones I had missed, in particular, were souring my mood to the point that a colleague asked me what was weighing on my mind. We ended the day with a great discussion. In the week that followed, I made an effort to recalibrate my thinking. My focus had been off. I needed to adjust my point of view.

Instead of keying in solely on where we'd fallen short, I also inventoried major milestones we'd hit during the year. They were plentiful. Energized by that sense of accomplishment, I turned my attention to projects left undone. I examined each, evaluating how and why we had missed our goals. In the days that followed, I discussed those projects—and our new ones—with my team. Together, we developed plans and timelines for meeting our objectives.

Once you identify and address stumbling blocks, no goal is unachievable. I'm pleased to report we hit our major milestones for 2020. Even with changes in operating tactics that accompanied COVID, we accomplished more in 2020 than I envisioned a year ago.

This year brought us a lot of hard months. It's easy to dwell on expectations that went unmet and all that made 2020 a struggle. Instead, I challenge you to recalibrate your thinking. Inventory what you accomplished. Reflect on all that you, your friends, family and neighbors were able to do in spite of—or because of—the events of the year. At the very least, I think we all have a deeper appreciation for the resilience and adaptability of our local businesses, we're more mindful about preventing the spread of illness, and more than ever, we look out for each other.

The coming year is a clean slate. It's an opportunity to meet objectives you may have missed, set new ones, and achieve goals you have yet to discover. Whatever 2021 has in store, rest assured Southwestern will be prepared to serve you.

I wish you all a healthy, happy holiday season and a prosperous new year.

Bobby Williams, CEO

bobby.williams@sweci.com

Co-op Offers New Rebates for High Efficiency Heat Pumps, Electric Water Heaters, Smart Thermostats

Southwestern Electric offers rebates on the replacement or new installation of air source heat pumps, geothermal systems, electric water heaters and smart thermostats.

Rebates will be awarded on a first come, first served basis until program funding for the 2021 calendar year is exhausted.

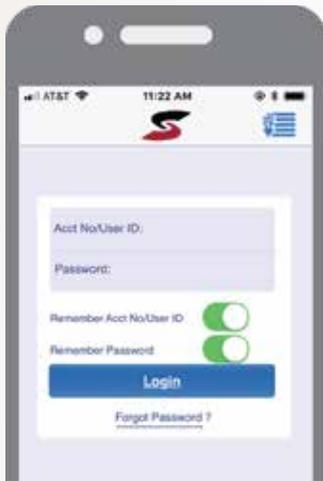
All rebates will be applied as a bill credit upon receiving your completed rebate application and proof of purchase. Rebate forms are available on our website at sweci.com. You can email your completed application and proof of purchase to julie.lowe@sweci.com, or mail it to: Julie Lowe, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246. You're also welcome to leave your materials in one of our office drop boxes.



**Have questions?
Call Julie Lowe at (800) 637-8667 or email her at julie.lowe@sweci.com.**

Swipe & Type

Report your outage in seconds with the SWEC IL app



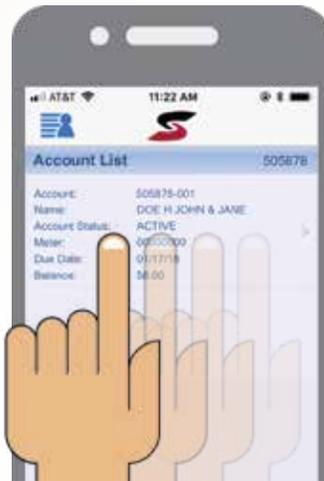
1

Download the app

Download the app free on Google Play™ or from the App Store®. Enter your account number and password.

Don't have a password?

Create one using the My Account tab at sweci.com or call us at (800) 637-8667.

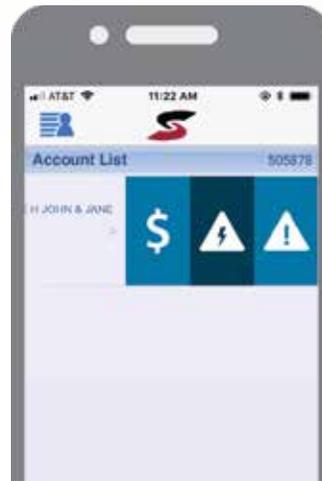


2

Swipe

Swipe your account info

Swiping left across your account information will reveal three icons.

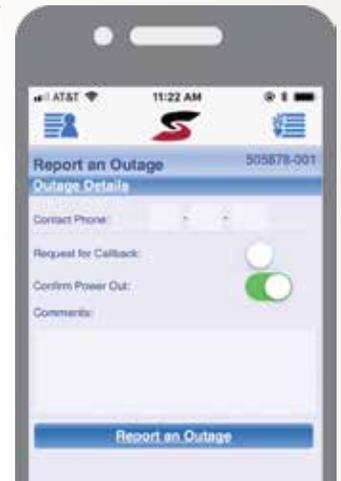


3

Tap

Tap the center icon

Tapping the center icon (the lightning bolt in a triangle) will take you to the outage reporting screen.



4

Type

Tap *Report an Outage*

Make sure the **Confirm Power Out** slider is activated. This is essential—it's how the app identifies your message as an outage report. Then tap **Report an Outage**. And that's it. The app will notify us that your account is without power.

Only Tap *Report an Outage* When You're Ready to Report

When you tap **Report an Outage**, your notification instantly appears in our dispatch center. There's no prompt asking you to confirm your information, and no option to recall the message once you've sent it. The app makes outage reporting fast and easy—which is exactly what you're after when the lights are out.

More Than One Account?

If you have more than one account, the app will present each of your accounts on the Account List screen. When you need to report an outage, swipe left across the account that's without power. If more than one account is affected, repeat the process for each account.

If you'd like our automated system to call you when power is restored, enter your phone number and activate the **Request for Callback** slider. You can send comments by typing them in the Comments area. You'll want to take care of those items before you hit the **Report an Outage** button.

After you've successfully registered your outage, the app will indicate your account is without power.

Energy Bill Payment Assistance Available

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.

Please review the income guidelines listed below to see if you qualify. The amount of the payment is determined by income, household size, fuel type, geographic location, and the amount of funding available.

Use the listing below 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 gross income from all household members for the 30-day period prior to application date.
- A copy of your heating and electric bills issued within the last 30 days (if energy paid for directly).
- A copy of your rental agreement (if your heating costs are included in the rent) showing the monthly rental amount, landlord's contact information, and proof that utilities are included in the rent.
- Proof of Social Security numbers for all household members.
- Proof that the household receives TANF or other benefits—such as Medical Eligibility or SNAP—if you are receiving assistance from the Illinois Department of Human Services.

The agency will determine your eligibility based on information you provide and will notify you within 30 days of receiving a completed application.

If your application is accepted, the local agency will make the appropriate payment to your energy provider(s) on your behalf, or in some cases, directly to you. All client and vendor payments will be made by the local agency within 15 days of the application's approval. Electric cooperative members, if approved, will receive assistance in the form of a one-time payment.

Members using Pay-As-You-Go may also qualify for LIHEAP funds. Contact your local community action agency to find out if you qualify for energy assistance.

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) 664-3309 |
| Clay | CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp. | (618) 662-4024 |
| Clinton | BCMW Community Services, Inc. | (618) 526-7123 |
| Effingham | CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp. | (217) 347-7514 |
| Fayette | CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp. | (618) 283-2631 |
| Macoupin | Illinois Valley Economic Development Corp. | (217) 839-4431 |
| Madison | Madison County Community Development | (618) 296-6485 |
| Marion | BCMW Community Services, Inc. | (618) 532-7388 |
| Montgomery | CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp. | (217) 532-5971 |
| Shelby | CEFS Economic Opportunity Corp. | (217) 774-4541 |
| St. Clair | St. Clair Community Action Agency | (618) 277-6790 |

Income Guidelines

If your household's combined income for the 30 days prior to application is at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, as shown in the chart, you may be eligible to receive assistance. If you rent, and your heat and/or electric is included in the rent, your rent must be greater than 30% of your income in order to be eligible to receive assistance.

| Family Size | 30-Day Income | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 | \$2,127 | Additional |
| 2 | \$2,873 | \$553 per |
| 3 | \$3,620 | person monthly |
| 4 | \$4,367 | income above |
| 5 | \$5,113 | 8 people, or |
| 6 | \$5,860 | \$6,630 annual. |
| 7 | \$6,607 | (Note 30- |
| 8 | \$7,353 | day income |
| | | rounded up.) |



For more information on this program, visit IllinoisLIHEAP.com or call the toll-free hotline, (877) 411-WARM.

SOUTHWESTERN ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR 2021



Co-op to Award \$10,000 in Academic Assistance

Since 1995, Southwestern Electric Cooperative's Power For Progress Scholarship Program has provided more than \$266,000 in academic assistance to students pursuing a college degree or vocational school certificate. The tradition continues this year with Southwestern's pledge to award \$10,000 in scholarship money to 10 students in spring 2021 for use in the fall 2021 semester.

Scholarship recipients can apply the funding to tuition at any accredited university, college or technical school in the U.S.

Scholarship applications may be downloaded from Southwestern Electric's website at sweci.com. You may also request an application by calling Susan File at (800) 637-8667.

Separate applications will be provided for high school seniors graduating in 2021 and students who graduated from high school in previous years.

The completed application and supplemental materials—including a cover letter, academic transcripts, attendance records and financial information—must be delivered to Southwestern Electric's headquarters (525 U.S. Route 40 in Greenville), in a single envelope, by 4:30 p.m. on **Friday, February 12, 2021**.





TIPS FROM THE JUDGES

- 1) Follow the instructions carefully. This includes selecting the appropriate application for your situation, gathering and properly assembling all of the required materials, minding the word count in the personal narrative and submitting everything in advance of the deadline.
- 2) Leave nothing blank. If any piece of required material is missing, or a single section is not completed, the application will receive a score of zero points. If a particular question is not applicable to your situation, you can mark it “N/A,” but do not skip the question entirely.
- 3) Focus the personal narrative. The topic of the personal narrative is not open-ended. Keep your narrative focused on answering the question at hand: How will you use your career/education to positively impact your community?
- 4) Leverage the cover letter. Let the judges know about your achievements, aspirations and what sets you apart from other candidates. If there’s something you want to say about yourself, and it doesn’t fit in the personal narrative, include it in the cover letter.
- 5) Allow ample time. Don’t wait until the last minute to start on your application. Each applicant will be asked to obtain several supplemental documents— including academic transcripts and attendance records— which take time to collect.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- 1) The applicant (or the applicant’s parent/legal guardian) must be an active member of Southwestern Electric Cooperative. Southwestern Electric directors, employees, and their immediate families are not eligible.
- 2) The applicant must meet all academic requirements for admission to an accredited university, college or technical school, and be admitted to that institution as a full-time student in the fall of 2021.
- 3) The entire application must be completed in full, and received with the appropriate supplementary materials, in advance of the application deadline, February 12, 2021.

Since 1995, Southwestern Electric has provided more than \$266,000 in scholarship funding, assisting 406 students.

For more information on the Power for Progress Scholarship Program, please contact Susan File at susan.file@sweci.com or (800) 637-8667.

On Account: If your account number is 78692001, call us within 30 days to receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill.

R FOR
Progress
Southwestern
Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



Home Service Repair Plans Offer Assurance, Quality and Convenience

We've all experienced home mechanical and system failures. From dripping faucets to broken bulbs to plumbing and heating and cooling problems, we've battled bothersome—and sometimes expensive—issues that come with home ownership.

When breakdowns involve exterior home electrical lines, members sometimes call Southwestern to request repairs. Many members understandably assume all electrical lines outside their home are owned by the cooperative. But components that connect a member's

home to the cooperative's distribution system—elements like the weather head, insulator, riser, meter base or loop, and service entrance conductor—are owned by the member.

When those elements fail, you find yourself facing bills you hadn't budgeted for. If the issue is related to aging parts and normal wear and tear on the system, your homeowners insurance may not cover the cost of repairs. Southwestern's management team searched for a solution to that situation—and discovered HomeServe.

WHO IS HOMESERVE?

HomeServe USA is an independent provider of home repair service solutions. They offer home service repair plans that protect a homeowner's budget from sudden, often significant expenses that come with water, sewer, electrical and heating and cooling home emergencies.

Over the last 16 years, HomeServe has saved homeowners more than three-quarters of a billion dollars in repairs. The Norwalk, Connecticut-based company has partnered with more than 700 municipal agencies, investor-owned utilities and cooperatives—including

Southwestern Electric—to provide consumers with home warranty options.

While HomeServe offers a variety of home service repair plans, including heating, cooling, plumbing, water and sewer, interior electrical wiring and external electrical lines, as well as plans for major appliances, Southwestern was drawn to the idea of external electrical line protection. HomeServe's external electrical line plan will pay for repair or replacement of items that your homeowners insurance may not cover when the components fail due to normal wear and tear.

If something goes wrong with a system or appliance covered by a HomeServe repair plan, the member can call HomeServe anytime, 24/7, at (833) 334-1874. The company will dispatch a pre-screened, local repair technician to the member's home to diagnose the problem. The technician will fix the issue or replace the covered item as detailed in the home repair plan.

HOW HOMESERVE HELPS

HomeServe is available to take emergency repair calls around the clock, every day of the year. Technicians dispatched through HomeServe are local, licensed and insured. Their work is covered by a one-year HomeServe guarantee.

HomeServe lessens the financial burden of unexpected breakdowns by paying the bill on covered repairs up to

the benefit amount, and eases the stress and inconvenience that comes with the event. You don't have to research repair bids or vet and hire a technician.

And if the work doesn't measure up to your expectations? HomeServe will work to address the issue as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

HELPING US HELP YOU

Southwestern is partnering with HomeServe to offer home service repair plans as an optional member service. No one is obligated to buy a plan. Southwestern recommends that members interested in a plan speak with their insurance agent before buying, to make sure the terms and conditions listed in the plan aren't already addressed by your homeowners policy.

HomeServe will return a portion of the proceeds from plan sales to Southwestern Electric. The funds will be dedicated to support programs and projects like Operation Round Up and the cooperative's Power For Progress Scholarship Program.

If you're interested in signing up for a HomeServe home service repair plan, look for information in your mailbox early next year. The materials in the mail will explain your options in more detail. You can read more about HomeServe at www.HomeServe.com and view nearly 100 informational videos on HomeServe's YouTube channel.



HOMESERVE APP ACTS AS DIY ASSISTANT

Ever have trouble finding warranty information or the user manual for your home appliance or electronic device? HomeServe has an app for that—and you don't have to be a HomeServe member to use it. Whether you're a DIY virtuoso or you'd just like to recycle those maintenance manuals cluttering your kitchen catch-all drawer, HomeServe can help.

Home Library

Download the HomeServe app to your smartphone, then snap a photo of any appliance tag or electronic device label in your home, or type in the brand and model information. HomeServe populates the app with warranty information, user manuals, quick-start guides, how-to videos, and links to replacement parts for your appliance or device.

You'll also receive recall notices and maintenance reminders for products you've stored in your HomeServe App library. From electronics to furniture and appliances, the HomeServe App offers advice on how to install it, use it and maintain it.

The app also acts as a library of everyday DIY project information.

Need help lighting the pilot light on your stove or water heater? Want a little insight into changing your dishwasher or microwave filters? Need a hand identifying a specialty bulb in your bathroom vanity? The HomeServe App can help.

The HomeServe App is available on the App Store and on Google Play.

Learn more about the app's capabilities at www.homeserveapp.com.



Photos courtesy Modern Photographic by Dave Noonan

RESTORING POWER: OUR PRIORITY IS YOU

During an outage, Southwestern Electric works to restore your service safely and quickly. How do we prioritize repairs? We take steps to restore power to the most members in the least time.

Southwestern's outage response team reviews data from the co-op's outage management system, survey reports from operations and engineering crews, and information from member outage calls. The data helps the co-op's operations

and engineering team develop a picture of the scope and scale of the damage.

After we gather data and make initial assessments, our teams look at substations affected by the outage. Energizing substations is a top tier priority.

After crews restore substations, they repair large circuits serving multiple homes and businesses, then address individual accounts.



Powering Up After an Outage

When the power goes out, we expect it to be restored within a few hours. But when a major storm or natural disaster causes widespread damage, extended outages may result. Our line crews work long, hard hours to restore service safely to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's what's going on if you find yourself in the dark:

1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines:

Transmission towers and cables that supply power to transmission substations (and thousands of members) rarely fail. But when damaged, these facilities must be repaired before other parts of the system can operate.

2. Distribution Substation:

A substation can serve hundreds or thousands of consumers. When a major outage occurs, line crews inspect substations to determine if problems stem from transmission lines feeding into the substation, the substation itself or if problems exist further down the line.

3. Main Distribution Lines:

If the problem cannot be isolated at a distribution substation, distribution lines are checked. These lines carry power to large groups of consumers in communities or housing developments.

4. Tap Lines:

If local outages persist, supply lines (also known as tap lines) are inspected. These lines deliver power to transformers, either mounted on poles or placed on pads for underground service, outside businesses, schools and homes.

5. Individual Homes:

If your home remains without power, the service line between a transformer and your residence may need to be repaired. Always call to report an outage to help line crews isolate local issues.

MEMBERS IN FOCUS

Photos allow us to capture and recall a moment. In pictures, we relive a laugh, a smile, a winter snow or summer sun.

Members In Focus is your invitation to share those saved moments with members of Southwestern Electric.

In these pages, you can open our eyes to the people and places that mean the most to you. This is your opportunity to introduce *Southwestern* readers to everything that makes your corner of the world an exceptional place to live, work and play.

Send us your shots of life in Southwestern Illinois. We'll publish some of our favorite photos from time to time in our Members In Focus section. Your subject needn't be on

Southwestern's lines. If you've taken a great photo, and you shot it on the Highland town square instead of the Brownstown back forty, send it. We'd love to see it.

Submission Guidelines

Please include your name, address, phone number or e-mail address, and a brief description of the photo. We'd like to know when and where it was taken, what we're seeing, and the names of any people in your shot. Digital images must be taken in high-resolution JPG or TIF format (300 DPI or greater)—and make sure the date/time stamp is turned off before you shoot.

Digital images may be sent as e-mail attachments or on a CD. Prints are also

welcome. Send photos by e-mail to joe.richardson@sweci.com or by mail to *The Southwestern*, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.

If you're sending prints, please make sure they're copies you don't mind parting with, as we won't be returning them.

Southwestern Electric Cooperative interprets all submissions as unconditional permission to use the photos provided. We also reserve the right to not use photos.

Finally, if you're submitting a shot, it needs to be *your* photo—shot by you. Questions? Contact Joe Richardson at joe.richardson@sweci.com or Mike Barns at mike.barns@sweci.com, or call (800) 637-8667.



Sarah Mulholland of Greenville sent this shot of her backyard tire swing framed in summer shade and pine. It's a pleasant reminder that warmer days are just months away.



After clearing an uprooted tree from the co-op's distribution lines, Robert Wright, forestry foreman, captured this image of a Southwestern forestry truck against the backdrop of a post-storm sunset in Dorsey.

Pat Kious of Greenville found this cleverly camouflaged wasp nest hidden amongst the cone flowers of her native plant garden.



Nancy Hanratty shot this arboreal amphibian in the hollow of a tree at her home in rural Pocahontas.

Brad Townsend sent this splendid summer image of a bluebird haloed in soft light. He photographed the bird at his home south of Sorrento.



Energy Efficient Gift Giving

A savvy shopper's guide to making the holidays green and bright

by Julie Lowe, Energy Manager

There's no place like home for the holidays—and thanks to today's technology, you can make home more energy efficient for everyone on your gift list. Here are eight ideas for energy-saving items you can stuff into stockings or tuck under the tree. Many of these gadgets will save your friends and family energy and money during the holidays, and every day, for years to come.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading my column this year. I look forward to sharing more energy tips and information with you in 2021. Until then, may your days be merry, green and bright!

1. SMART THERMOSTATS

There are many different brands and models of smart thermostats on the market, all aimed at helping you become more energy efficient. Smart thermostats live up to their name—they quickly program themselves to learn your habits and save energy by automatically adjusting the temperature of your home when you are away. They're also adaptable. If your schedule changes, you can control your thermostat using your phone, adjusting the temperature at your convenience. If you're installing a smart thermostat in your home, ask about our \$50 technology rebate!

2. STREAMING DEVICES

If friends and family members on your shopping list don't have a smart TV, consider a streaming device such as an Amazon Fire Stick or Roku as a gift or stocking stuffer. Streaming devices may use up to 30 times less energy than a video game console, which many people use to access their streaming apps.

3. SMART POWER STRIPS

Like smart thermostats, smart power strips come in a variety of models. Some sense when an appliance, such as your TV, is turned off, and switch off related electronics to reduce energy use. Smart power strips are convenient, as they let you turn off several plugged-in appliances at once with a simple flip of a switch.

4. POWER SAVING REMOTE CONTROL PLUGS AND OUTLET WIRELESS ADAPTORS

This gadget set is great for shutting off hard to reach appliances or light switches. You can cut power to electrical devices with a click of the remote, allowing you to reduce your energy consumption by powering off electrical devices left in standby mode.

5. SMART VENTS

These vents divert airflow from rooms that don't need heating or cooling and redirect that air to rooms where you need it, saving energy and shaving dollars from your power bill.

6. LED SMART BULBS

Light bulbs are some of the most frequently used items in your house. LED smart bulbs are energy efficient and, as the name says, smart. Depending on the bulbs, you can turn them on and off remotely using your phone or via a voice control system like Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant.

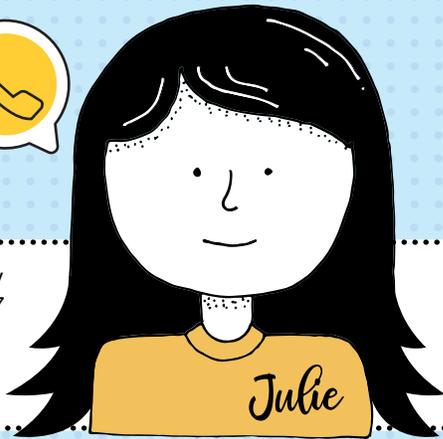
7. LED NIGHTLIGHTS

Have a friend or family member who's difficult to buy for? LED nightlights make great gifts and range from purely practical to whimsical and fun. They can prevent late night falls, be strategically stationed to reassure kids, or used as decoration to add a splash of light and color to a home. If you're buying for younger friends or family members, many companies design colorful, imaginative, LED nightlights specifically for kids.

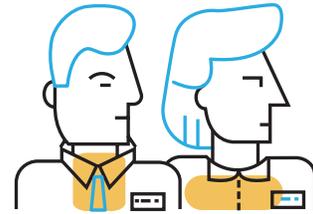
8. LED HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Nothing beats the warm glow of an evergreen wrapped in holiday lights. Not only do LED holiday lights use less energy than their incandescent counterparts, they're also more resilient, so they're likely to survive years of packing and unpacking. LEDs provide brilliant, cheerful color without the heat of traditional holiday lights. With their longer life and low energy use, decorative LEDs can't guarantee a white Christmas, but they can make the holidays more green and bright.

Steps to Solar Commissioning



Contact Julie Lowe, energy manager, at (800) 637-8667 or julie.lowe@sweci.com for our information and commissioning packet.



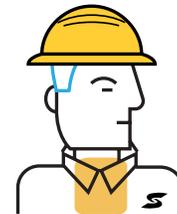
Contact your installer and insurance agent. Ask your installer for a one-line diagram. Request a certificate of insurance from your agent. They're welcome to send those documents to Julie Lowe at Southwestern Electric. Or if you'd like to review them, they can send them to you, and you can pass them along to Julie.



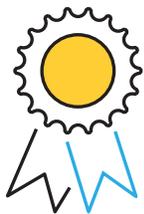
As your installation nears completion, call us. We'll discuss the commissioning timeline. You'll receive a \$500 invoice to cover the installation of your new dual register electric meter, a system inspection, and your array's interconnection to the grid.



After installation is complete, contact us to schedule your system's on-site review and commissioning.



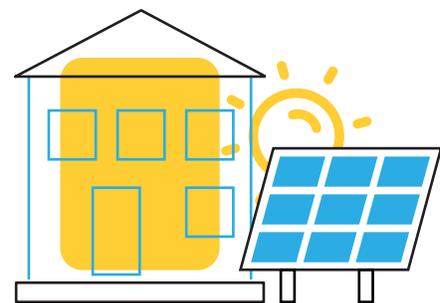
Our commissioning team will visit your site. An engineer will inspect your system to verify it meets our safety specifications. A team member will review a memorandum of understanding with you. You'll sign this document for our files. Note: If you won't be present for commissioning, please schedule a meeting to review and sign the memorandum beforehand. After your system passes inspection, you go live! Your array is connected to Southwestern's distribution system.



We'll send you a certificate of completion, which you'll submit to your installer to receive your solar renewable energy credits, or certificates (SRECs).



Each year, you'll submit documentation to confirm you've renewed your insurance.



Every three years, we'll visit your system to confirm it's connected properly, well-maintained, and that your safety signs are in place.

Catching the Flue

Since Clement Clarke Moore penned “The Night Before Christmas” in 1823, the chimney has played a key role in Christmas lore, providing safe passage for Santa. It’s also a vital part of your home’s heating and ventilation system. The chimney channels dangerous gasses from your fireplace or wood stove and vents them safely outside your home. It’s important to devote time and attention to chimney maintenance, just as you would other critical home systems. Being diligent in the care of chimneys, wood stoves, and fireplaces will help you protect your family from structure fires and carbon monoxide poisoning.

DANGEROUS DEPOSITS

Your chimney’s job is to safely vent combustion by-products—including smoke, water vapor and carbon monoxide—from your home. As these combustion cast-offs fly up the flue, they condense on cooler surfaces. You know the resulting residue by its common name—creosote.

Creosote develops in different forms. Depending on the fuel, heat intensity, and heating system design, it may appear as a black or brown deposit, a crust or flakes, have a smooth sheen, or be tacky and tar-like. Restricting a fire’s air supply, burning unseasoned wood, and unusually cool interior chimney temperatures (which promote condensation) contribute to creosote accumulation.

SLOW BURN

Chimney fires conjure notions of dark flames rising above the brick, a churning column of dense smoke, and the resonant rumbling associated with a roaring flame. While those characteristics

certainly can apply to a chimney fire, more often than not, it’s a subtle, quiet event—which makes the fire harder to detect.

“Many chimney fires go unnoticed,” noted Russ Dimmitt, education director for the Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) and the National Chimney Sweep Guild (NCSG). Dimmitt explained that chimney fires often start when a homeowner adds wood to a stove or fireplace, and heat rises up the flue, igniting flammable residue.

Most chimney fires are slow-burning. They lack the air or fuel to burn

vigorously. But slow burning chimney fires generate as much heat as their visible counterparts, deliver the same damage to your chimney or stove pipe, and they can ignite combustible elements of your home.

HEAT STRESS

Fires in masonry chimneys can destroy mortar, crack tiles, and collapse liners. A fire in a wood burning stove pipe or factory-built, prefabricated metal fireplace may cause the structure to warp, buckle and separate. In either case, the fire compromises the structure’s integrity, providing a path for flames to reach combustible elements in your home.

You can determine the condition of your chimney by hiring a reputable sweep to inspect it. During the course of the inspection, a chimney sweep will look for:

- Puffy creosote deposits
- A warped damper, smoke chamber connector pipe, or metal chimney
- Cracked or collapsed flue tiles
- A discolored or distorted rain cap
- Heat damage to antennas attached to your chimney
- Creosote flakes outside your home, on the roof or ground
- Heat-damaged roofing material
- Cracks in your exterior masonry
- Smoke escaping through mortar joints or tile liners

If you suspect you’ve had a chimney fire, Dimmitt recommends you call a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep to schedule an inspection. If you’ve had a chimney fire, your sweep can recommend steps for ensuring your family’s safety and bringing your system into compliance with fire and safety codes.



KEEPING A HEALTHY HEARTH

The Chimney Safety Institute of America offers these reminders regarding fireplace safety:

1. Have chimneys inspected annually and cleaned as necessary by a qualified professional chimney service technician. This reduces the risk of fires and carbon monoxide poisonings due to creosote buildup and chimney obstructions.
2. Keep branches a minimum of 15 feet from the chimney top.
3. Install a chimney cap to keep out debris and animals.
4. Choose the right fuel. For burning in wood stoves or fireplaces, use wood that's been split and seasoned for a minimum of six months and stored in a covered, elevated location. Never burn Christmas trees, treated wood or wrapping paper in your fireplace or wood stove.
5. Place firewood at the rear of the fireplace on a grate. To start the fire, use kindling or a commercial firelighter. Never use flammable liquids.
6. Keep the hearth area clear. Combustible material near a fireplace or wood stove can easily catch fire. Station your furniture at least three feet from your hearth.
7. Use fireplace screens. They can prevent sparks and embers from igniting your carpet or flooring.
8. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Place detectors throughout the house and check the batteries when you set your clocks for Daylight Saving Time.
9. Never leave a fire unattended. Keep a close eye on children and pets who may venture near your wood stove or fireplace. Before you turn in for the night (or take a long winter's nap), make sure your fire is fully extinguished.
10. Discard ashes in a closed metal container and place it away from the house until the ashes have fully cooled.

FIRE CALL

If you suspect your chimney is on fire, evacuate your family to a predetermined meeting place a safe distance from your home and dial 911.

CHIMNEY SWEEP CREDENTIALS AND QUALIFICATIONS

The National Fire Protection Association and Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) recommend that homeowners have chimneys inspected annually. A professional sweep will thoroughly inspect and clean your chimney and perform or suggest repairs. Your sweep may also offer maintenance recommendations depending on the fuel you burn and how often you use your fireplace or stove.

The CSIA recommends that you have your inspection performed by a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep. CSIA certified sweeps are regularly tested on their understanding of techniques, technology, and the complexities of chimney and venting systems. They've passed exams addressing fire codes, clearances and standards for the construction and maintenance of chimney and venting systems. Chimney sweeping companies with CSIA certification are required to have a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep sign off on every job.

"This is the busiest time of year for certified chimney sweeps," noted Russ Dimmitt, education director for the Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) and the National Chimney Sweep Guild (NCSG). Dimmitt cautioned consumers to be skeptical of individuals who use pressure tactics or offer cut-rate, immediate evaluations of chimney and venting systems. Those same people are often difficult to find if homeowners have questions about the inspection or chimney maintenance, Dimmitt noted.

Dimmitt suggests scheduling a chimney inspection at the end of each burning

season. An end-of-season inspection allows homeowners several months to repair any faults before cold weather returns.

CSIA recommends that you ask these questions before hiring a sweep to service your home:

- How long has the sweep or company been in business?
- Can they provide references?
- Are there unresolved complaints filed with city or state consumer protection agencies or the Better Business Bureau?
- Does the company or individual carry a valid business liability insurance policy to protect your home and furnishings against accidents?
- Does the company ensure that a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep will be on the job site?

The National Chimney Sweep Guild is non-profit trade association encouraging professionalism and ethical accountability among sweeps, and advancing the chimney and venting industry through public awareness of the trade.

The Chimney Safety Institute of America is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to chimney and venting system safety. CSIA is committed to the elimination of residential chimney fires, carbon monoxide intrusion and other chimney-related hazards that result in the loss of lives and property.

For more information about chimney safety and maintenance or to locate a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep, visit www.csia.org.

Photos courtesy Chimney Safety Institute of America



Light Up the Holidays

For families across the country, it's an annual tradition. On Thanksgiving weekend, parents and grandparents load kids into cars and head to a nearby neighborhood, park or town. Once there, they carefully navigate city streets or rural roads while their passengers marvel at something they haven't seen since last December—Christmas lights.

Some of us will seek out quiet cul-de-sacs aglow with animated reindeer, or holiday dioramas arranged around the town square to tell a story, or quiet country lanes with homes, barns and buildings outlined in starlight. Others will look for stunning displays made of a million and more lights. In Southwestern Illinois, your Christmas light viewing options are limited only by your willingness to explore and the patience of your passengers.

If you're a longtime local, you'll likely find a few of your favorite holiday light locations listed here. If you're new to the area—welcome. Enjoy the views and savor the season as you establish a family tradition.

Happy holidays. And may all your Christmases be bright.



Bethalto Christmas Village

Courtesy Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau



Ho-Ho Land Christmas Lights, Altamont

BE MERRY, BE SAFE

You can enjoy these displays from the comfort of your vehicle. That said, some events may offer additional activities. When you visit public places, please be mindful of your health and the well-being of those around you. Follow CDC guidelines. Wear a mask when appropriate. Engage in social distancing, wash your hands thoroughly before you leave home and again when you return, and keep hand sanitizer in your car or coat pocket.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

Schedules and event availability are subject to change. Please confirm times and dates before planning your visit.



Christmas Lights In the Park, Carlyle

Courtesy City of Carlyle

December 1 - 27 CHRISTMAS WONDERLAND, Alton. Drive through the park to view more than 4 million lights, cascading waterfalls of lights, lighted trees and displays. Monday - Friday 6 - 9 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 5 - 9 p.m. Suggested donation of \$7 for cars and small vans; \$1 per person for 10 person or more passenger vehicles. Rock Spring Park, 2100 College Avenue. Call (800) 258-6645.

December 1 - 31 CHRISTMAS LIGHT WONDERLAND, Greenville. See our unique and extensive collection of light boxes, Christmas displays and lights, and holiday scenes. 5 - 9 p.m. Donations accepted for admission to display. American Farm Heritage Museum, 1395 Museum Avenue. Call (618) 664-9733 or visit americanfarm-heritagemuseum.com.

December 1 - 31 FANTASY OF LIGHTS, Centralia. Experience thousands of lights including whimsical twinkling candy canes, golfing Santa, and Rudolf catching some rays. 5 - 11 p.m. Admission is free. Foundation Park, 600 North Pleasant Avenue. Visit seecentralia.com.

December 1 - January 1 BETHALTO CHRISTMAS VILLAGE, Bethalto. Take a stroll through the Arboretum's 1/2 mile paved path with lighted trees, glass cottages, wire art, nativity, and more. The display is created for all ages, by all ages. 6 - 9 p.m. Admission is free. Bethalto Arboretum, East Central Street. Call (618) 377-8051.

December 1 - January 1 FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS, Shelbyville. Drive Thru Forest Park and enjoy the light displays. Sunday - Thursday 5:30 - 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 5:30 - 10 p.m. Donations are accepted at the little red house at the exit of the park. Forest Park, 325 East North 9th Street. Visit lakeshelbyville.com.

December 1 - 31 WAY OF LIGHTS, Belleville. Wintertime sparkles as the Annual Way of Lights Christmas display illuminates the grounds. This breathtaking display focuses on the birth of Christ. 5 - 9 p.m. Donations are accepted. Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas and New Year's Day. National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, 442 South DeMazenod Drive. Call (618) 397-6700 or visit snows.org.

December 1 - 31 WINTER WONDERLAND, Lebanon. A drive-through display of holiday lights. Sunday - Thursday 5 - 9 p.m.; Friday - Saturday 5 - 10 p.m. Donations accepted. Horner Park, 11113 Widicus Road. Visit lebanonswinterwonderland.org.



Christmas Wonderland, Alton

Courtesy Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau

December 1 - 31 WOBURN CHRISTMAS DISPLAY, Greenville. Over 200 animated characters in 44 displays acting out various Christmas scenes. 5 - 9 p.m. 1481 Woburn Road. Call (808) 772-0054.

December 1 - January 1 NUTCRACKER STROLL, Centralia. Take a stroll along the lighted path to enjoy our life size nutcrackers. Open all day. This is a free self-guided tour. Centralia Carillon, 114 North Elm. Visit seecentralia.com

December 1 - January 3 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS IN THE PARK, Carlyle. Take a drive through the park to enjoy our magical display with thousands of lights, animated features, dancing trees and more. 5 - 11 p.m. Admission is free. Carlyle City Park, 1090 Lake Road. Visit carlylelake.com.

December 1 - January 3 WONDERLIGHT'S CHRISTMAS, Madison. See a dazzling display of Christmas lights synchronized to traditional and newer music, played through your car stereo. Look for shooting stars, floating snowflakes, dancing candy canes and lollipops, giant Christmas trees, and five enchanting tunnels of lights. 5 - 10 p.m. \$7 per person; children age 3 and younger are free; carload pass is \$30 (up to seven passengers). For advance tickets, visit wonderlightschristmas.com/st-louis. World Wide Technology Raceway, 700 Raceway Boulevard. Call (618) 215-8888.

December 1 - January 3 WONDERLAND IN LIGHTS, Effingham. Tune into Christmas music on 90.7 FM while you drive through the holiday light display. Sunday - Thursday 5 - 9 p.m.; Friday & Saturday 5 - 10 p.m. The tour is free, but donations are welcome. Community Park, East Temple Avenue. Call (217) 342-5310 or visit visiteffinghamil.com.

December 4-6, 11-13, 18-20, & 24-26 HO-HO LAND CHRISTMAS LIGHT DISPLAY, Altamont. Drive through light display. 6 - 10 p.m. Donations accepted. Schmidt Park, south of East Cumberland Road/Route 40 on US Route 128.



Wonderland In Lights, Effingham

Courtesy Effingham Convention & Visitors Bureau

WHO • WHAT • WHERE

We don't say it often enough, so we'll make sure to say it here: thank you. We deeply appreciate the cards, letters and emails we receive from you each month. Your voices and the stories you share make Who~What~Where one of the liveliest, most engaging segments of the magazine.

And a special thanks to those of you who shared your antiques and attic finds with us this year. The best mystery items you identified in 2020 were contributed by co-op members. While our puzzle pages don't deliver vital information like other parts of the publication, they do remind us that we're linked by culture and community. We come together for work, play, conversation, and the common good.

In other words, we're a cooperative.

Finally, thank you for reading *The Southwestern*. We look forward to

meeting you here again in 2021. Let's get the conversation started with the antique on page 23. Recognize the item? Have a story associated with one of these? We'd love to hear from you. Meanwhile, here's what you had to say about our November challenge.

.....

You are at Kaskaskia College in Centralia, Ill. This is a very nice and wonderful tribute to our veterans. I have several family members' names on these walls. This memorial was built when I was attending KC, and they continue to add on to it.

—*Tammy Bumgardner, Ramsey*

The November 2020 "Where are we?" proved to be particularly challenging. After two days of e-sleuthing I made like a "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" contestant and called in a lifeline. A

tip of my hat to Air Force Major Matt Dougherty, who hails from O'Fallon but is currently stationed in Colorado, who pointed me in the right direction...east!

The veterans tribute pictured is located on the campus of Kaskaskia College in Centralia. It honors the men and women who have served, are serving, and will serve our country in the future.

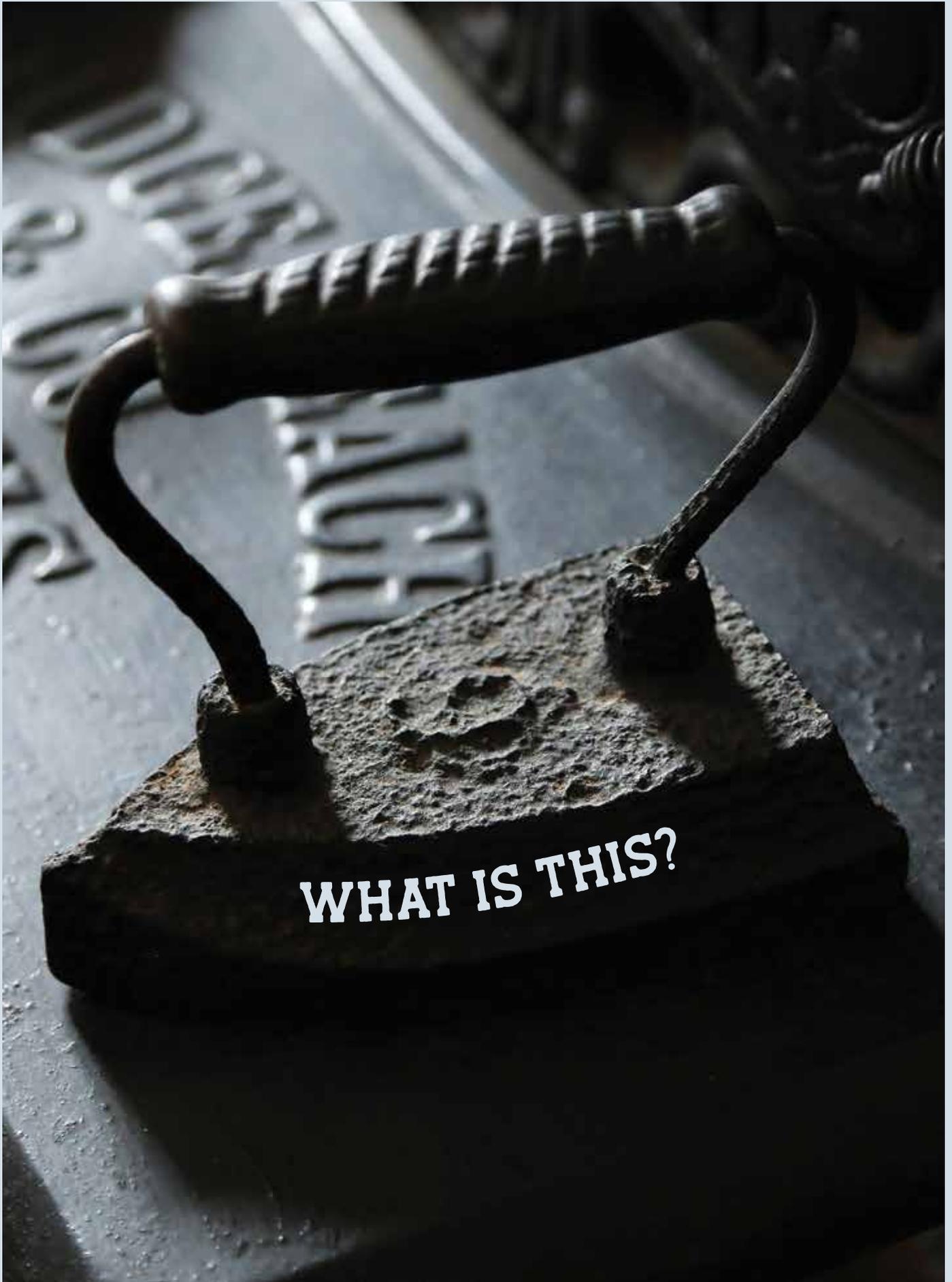
Dedicated on June 6, 2014 (the 70th anniversary of D-Day), the Jim Beasley Veterans Tribute currently features the names of more than 40,000 veterans and their branches of service engraved in granite on four walls. It also features a bronze eagle sculpture and the five military service seals.

Beasley, a U.S. Army veteran, has served on the KC board of trustees for over 28 years and chaired the project. The tribute is a self-supported project with all funds coming from donations and fund-raising initiatives.

—*Bill Malec, O'Fallon*



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 joe.richardson@sweci.com or send it by mail to Joe Richardson, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 U.S. 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*.



WHAT IS THIS?

CO-OP KITCHEN

Cookies for Santa



CHOCOLATE CHIP CAKE MIX COOKIES

Ingredients

- ½ cup brown sugar packed
- ½ cup butter or margarine
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 (16 ounce) box yellow or white cake mix
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- ½ cup chopped nuts (optional)

Directions

1. Cream together butter and brown sugar.
2. Mix in eggs and vanilla.
3. Mix in cake mix.
4. Stir in chocolate chips and nuts.
5. Drop batter by teaspoonfuls onto lightly greased cookie sheets.
6. Bake at 350° for 10 - 12 minutes until edges begin to brown.
7. Let cookies cool 5 minutes before transferring to cooling racks.

NO BAKE PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES

Ingredients

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup corn syrup
- 1 (12 ounce) jar crunchy peanut butter
- 5 cups crisp rice cereal

Directions

1. Melt sugar and corn syrup together.
2. Add peanut butter, then cereal and mix together.
3. Form in 1 inch balls, place on wax paper, and let cool.

This month's recipes are courtesy of Edwardsville Garden Club's *Favorite Recipes* (no bake peanut butter cookies), Fayette County Museum *35th Anniversary Cookbook* (chocolate chip cake mix cookies, cookies for staying on track, and old fashioned sugar cookies) and Michelle Barns of Altamont (Grandma Della's chocolate chip cookies).

COOKIES FOR STAYING ON TRACK

Ingredients

- 3 cups ripe bananas mashed
- ⅓ cup apple sauce
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¼ cup almond milk
- 2 cups quick oats
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cup raisins (optional)

Topping Ingredients

- ½ cup pecans chopped
- ½ cup Stevia
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Directions

1. Combine mashed bananas, apple sauce, vanilla and milk. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl mix oats, cinnamon, and raisins together.
3. Mix together the wet mixture with the dry mixture.
4. In separate bowl combine pecans, Stevia, and cinnamon for the topping.
5. Drop cookie dough a spoonful at a time on greased cookie sheet.
6. Sprinkle cookie dough balls with the topping mixture.
7. Bake at 350° for 15 - 20 minutes.
8. Let cool on cookie sheet before transferring to cooling rack.

GRANDMA DELLA'S CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

Ingredients

- 1 cup margarine
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sour milk or buttermilk
- 3½ cups flour divided
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 cups chocolate chips

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Cream together margarine, sugar and eggs.
3. Stir in milk and half of the flour.
4. Add remainder of flour, salt, baking soda, and vanilla and mix together.
5. Stir in chocolate chips.
6. Drop by teaspoonful two inches apart on greased cookie sheet.
7. Bake about 10 minutes.

How To Make Sour Milk

To make 1 cup sour milk for baking (milk that's gone sour naturally is spoiled—don't use it), add 1 tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice to 1 cup of milk. Stir and let stand for 5 minutes before using.

OLD FASHIONED SUGAR COOKIES

Ingredients

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup oil
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 4 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- granulated sugar (can be colored decorative sugar)

Directions

1. Mix together butter, sugar, oil, vanilla, and eggs until creamy.
2. In separate large bowl mix together powdered sugar, flour, baking soda, cream of tartar, and salt.
3. Combine creamy mixture with dry mixture.
4. Roll dough into teaspoonful balls and roll dough balls in granulated sugar.
5. Place cookie dough balls on cookie sheet and use a glass tumbler to flatten.
6. Bake at 375° for 12 minutes.

Charge Your EV for Free!



Own an electric vehicle?

From now through June 30, 2021, Southwestern Electric members are invited to charge their EVs for free at our charging stations at Holiday Inn Express Troy, near I-70 Exit 18. Whether you're spending the weekend or just passing through, our EV charging stations and Troy's restaurants, hotels and parks will help you recharge before you hit the road.

Call for a code

To recharge your EV at no cost, call or email Julie Lowe, EV program coordinator, during office hours at (800) 637-8667 or julie.lowe@sweci.com. She'll provide you with a passcode. You can enter the code at our charging stations to recharge your EV for free.

Relax and recharge in Troy

Have friends or family who own EVs? For a limited time, we're extending the *recharge free of charge* offer to EV owners lodging in Troy. Remind your visitors to ask for a charging code when they check in to their hotel.

Questions? To request a code or learn more about our EV program, contact Julie Lowe, program coordinator, at (800) 637-8667 or julie.lowe@sweci.com.



Antique insulators perch atop a weathered utility pole in Madison County.

THE FINAL FRAME

