



THE Southwestern

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

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STOCK IN TRADE

INTEREST GROWING
IN SKILLED TRADES

SCHOLARSHIPS

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Simply baking Christmas cookies? So last season. In this month's Co-op Kitchen, we're turning cookies into craft projects.

26 Current Events

Christmas markets, Christmas festivals, Christmas lights. Can you spot the theme in this month's calendar of events? That question, among others, is answered inside.

ON THE COVER

Payton Noyes Sisson, a junior at Litchfield High School, practices welding at Litchfield's new South Central Illinois Training and Innovation Center. The center offers students from nine school districts opportunities to cultivate their interest in the trades. Our story begins on page 14.



Back cover: Frankie Koniak, a junior at Litchfield High School, tightens a vice during an automotive lesson at Litchfield's SCI Regional Workforce Training and Innovation Center.

CO-OP REMINDERS

December 11 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 22 Offices close at noon for Christmas holiday.

December 25 Offices closed for Christmas holiday.

December 29 Offices close at noon for New Year's Eve.

January 1 Offices closed for New Year's holiday.

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For the latest news and notes, follow us on Facebook and Twitter. You'll find us at facebook.com/SWECI and twitter.com/sweci. Search for Southwestern Electric on YouTube and Instagram. 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 in your magazine. Your job is to find it. The actual illustration may be

larger or smaller than what you see here. We may change the color or reverse or alter the image we've hidden to make the contest more challenging.

This month we've hidden an illustration of Santa Claus and his reindeer, similar to the image you see at the bottom of the page. If you find the image, email us or send a postcard with your name, address, phone number, and the page number where you found the illustration. 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 December contest, we'll need your entries in our inbox or postmarked by Jan. 1, 2024.

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 February issue of The Southwestern.

OCTOBER WINNER

Congratulations to Nancy Davis of Altamont. As the winner of our October Hide & Seek contest drawing, Nancy will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. Thanks to everyone who participated in our October contest. You'll find Hide & Seek rules at right.

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 list and not one you care to be part of.
- December contest entries must be in our inbox or postmarked by January 1.
- We'll never hide the image on the front or back cover or on the page where we list the rules.



Capital Credits Q&A

The changing needs of an evolving membership prompted Southwestern Electric Cooperative's board of directors to update the co-op's decades-old approach to returning member capital. Director Ann Schwarm explained the policy changes at the co-op's annual meeting in September. If you missed the meeting or our October recap, here's what you need to know.

Q: What are capital credits?

A: Capital credits are your equity in the co-op. They represent your share in the ownership, maintenance, construction and success of Southwestern Electric Cooperative.

The cooperative's rates are designed to bring in enough money to pay operating costs and maintain an emergency reserve. When revenue exceeds expenses, that money is later returned to members as capital credits.

The capital credits assigned to you in a year are based on the cooperative's annual margins — the revenue that exceeded Southwestern's operating costs — and the capital you contributed by paying your electric bills. The more power you use, the more capital credits the co-op assigns to your account.

Q: How does Southwestern use the membership's equity, or investment, in the co-op?

A: Your equity in the co-op is used as operating capital for maintenance and improvements, such as new substations, poles and wire. Those improvements are expected to last 30 years. Southwestern retires, or returns, capital credits to members on a 30-year schedule. The cooperative traditionally has returned capital credits during general retirements and to estates upon the death of a member.

Q: How is your policy for returning member capital changing?

A: Beginning Jan. 1, 2024, you may apply for an adjusted early payout of capital credits if you're terminating your membership or if you're the executor of an estate with capital credits. In the past, Southwestern didn't offer the option of adjusted early payouts.

Q: What prompted the policy change?

A: Southwestern Electric's board of directors revisited the cooperative's capital credit policy to meet your needs — the needs of a changing membership. You're far more mobile than you were when our policy was originally drafted in 1939. We have members who relocate five times in 10 years, eventually moving off co-op lines. Each change of address is an opportunity to fall out of touch. That can make it difficult to return capital credits to people who've earned them. Recognizing that, Southwestern's board of directors decided to offer an adjusted early payout option to the co-op's capital credit retirement policy.

Q: Why are early payouts adjusted — why don't you pay out in full, as you do with a general retirement?

A: Early payouts recognize that you withdrew your capital credits before Southwestern could realize their full value. The co-op was not able to use those funds as capital for the full 30 years as planned. If you withdraw your capital credits before they fully mature — even if you are settling an estate — they will be adjusted to the net present value.

“Southwestern's board considered the update carefully, over months. We voted unanimously to update the policy in the spirit of fairness. Fairness to people who terminate their membership when they leave our lines and fairness to those of you who have built a life here — members who want to receive safe, reliable power, from a cooperative you invested in and own.”

—Director Ann Schwarm

Youth Tour 2024

June 18-23

WIN A TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Applications due Jan. 1, 2024.

WHAT IS YOUTH TOUR?

In spring of 2024, Southwestern Electric Cooperative will take local students to Springfield, Ill., to tour the Capitol and meet with legislators during Illinois Electric and Telephone Cooperatives Youth Day. Throughout the day, students will learn about leadership from legislators, state officers and co-op employees who've dedicated their lives to public service.

At the end of the day, two students will be selected to represent Southwestern Electric during the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth to Washington Tour, in June 2024.

Expenses for both trips are covered by the cooperative.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Any high school student in Southwestern Electric's service area is eligible to participate in Youth Tour.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF YOUTH TOUR?

In Springfield and Washington, legislators and officers discuss the rewards and responsibilities of public service, while representatives from AIEC, the statewide trade association representing Illinois electric cooperatives, explore the role of grassroots organizations in government. Careers in public service can be personally fulfilling, professionally rewarding and contribute to the common good. The spring Youth Tour and summer Youth to Washington experience bring these ideas to life.



HOW DO I APPLY?

Write an essay, no more than 275 words in length, that answers the question: What do you hope to gain from participating in the Youth Tour experience?

Submit your essay to Southwestern Electric Vice President of Member Services Susan File. Your essay can either be delivered in person at our Greenville office, mailed to Susan File, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 U.S. Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246 or emailed to susan.file@sweci.com.

Essays should be submitted no later than Jan. 1, 2024.

To learn more about Youth Tour, go to youthtour.coop or [Facebook.com/ILYouthTour](https://www.facebook.com/ILYouthTour).

Questions?

**Call Susan File at 800-637-8667 or
write to her at susan.file@sweci.com.**

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

Our rebate program will help you save money on the replacement or new installation of air source heat pumps, geothermal systems, electric water heaters and smart thermostats.

Members are eligible for one rebate per category per year. All rebates will be applied as a bill credit upon receiving the 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 drop off your materials at our Greenville office.

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



HEATING AND COOLING

High efficiency heat pumps can significantly increase the comfort of your home while lowering your energy bills. If you're thinking of upgrading to or installing a new air source or ground source heat pump, our \$300 rebate will help you offset some of the cost.

To qualify for the rebate, your heat pump must be the primary source of heat in your home. It may be installed in a newly constructed home, or replace electric resistance heat, propane or fuel oil heat. Installed backup heat must be electric, and the condenser and coil must be replaced and/or installed as a matched set.

Requirements for air source heat pumps include:

- At least 16 SEER
- 9 HSPF

Requirements for ground source (geothermal) heat pumps include:

- For closed systems—at least 17 SEER; COP 3.6
- For open systems – at least 21.1 SEER; COP 4.1

WATER HEATERS

Water heating accounts for about 18 percent of your home's energy use. Choosing an energy efficient water heater can help you reduce your monthly water heating bills.

To qualify for our \$250 water heater rebate, you can install an electric water heater as part of a newly constructed home, or replace an existing gas water heater with an electric model.

Your water heater must be at least 50 gallons and one rebate is allowed per home.

On-demand water heaters qualify for this rebate.

SMART THERMOSTATS

A smart thermostat learns your lifestyle and adjusts the temperature of your home automatically, helping you use less energy and save money.

With a smart thermostat, you can control your home's temperature settings, even when you're at work or on the road. Connected to your Wi-Fi, your smart thermostat allows you to monitor and change your home's temperature from your smart phone, tablet or PC.

You can install a smart thermostat as part of a newly constructed home, or replace an existing manual or programmable thermostat.

To qualify for our \$50 rebate, your smart thermostat must be:

- Energy Star certified
- Internet-enabled



SOUTHWESTERN ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR 2024

***Twelve
\$1,200***

**Southwestern
Electric Scholarships
and one \$1,200 Alan
G. Libbra Memorial
Scholarship will
be awarded
in 2024**



Co-op to Award \$14,400 in Academic Assistance



Since 1995, Southwestern Electric Cooperative's Power For Progress Scholarship Program has provided close to \$300,000 in academic assistance to students pursuing a college degree or vocational school certificate. The tradition continues this year with Southwestern's pledge to award \$14,400 in scholarship money to 12 students in spring 2024 for use in the fall 2024 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 2024 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 **Monday, March 11, 2024**.



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 2024.
- 3) The entire application must be completed in full, and received with the appropriate supplementary materials, in advance of the application deadline, March 11, 2024.

Since 1995, Southwestern Electric has provided close to \$300,000 in scholarship funding, assisting 439 students.

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

Libbra Scholarship Will Support Future Leaders

The family of Southwestern Electric director Alan Libbra has established the Alan G. Libbra Memorial Scholarship in his name. All Power for Progress applicants will be considered as candidates.

"Alan believed in leadership by example. He was a passionate advocate for pursuing the common good, and giving back to the people who helped you fulfill your potential," said Southwestern director Jared Stine, chair of the Scholarship Committee. "Students who aspire to provide community service through leadership will be particularly strong candidates for the scholarship Alan's family established in his name."

A lifelong member of Southwestern Electric, Alan Libbra served as president for 30 of his 36 years on the cooperative's board of directors. He worked throughout his life to serve the interests of farmers, rural communities and Southwestern Electric Cooperative members.

All Power for Progress eligibility requirements and criteria apply to the Alan G. Libbra Memorial Scholarship. For more information, contact Susan File at 800-637-8667 or susan.file@sweci.com.

RECOMMENDATIONS 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.

Southwestern Students Eligible to Apply for IEC Memorial Scholarship

Students of Southwestern Electric Cooperative members are eligible to apply for one of 16, \$2,000-scholarships offered through the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives Memorial Scholarship Fund. Developed by the board of directors of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), Southwestern's statewide trade association, the fund will award more than \$30,000 in academic scholarships next year to students of members served by Illinois electric cooperatives.

Ten scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors enrolling full-time at a two-year or a four-year college, university, or vocational or technical school. The student must be the child of an Illinois electric cooperative consumer-member receiving service from the cooperative.

Five scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors enrolling full-time at a two-year Illinois community college. The student must be the child of Illinois electric cooperative consumer-members, employees or directors.

Students may apply for a scholarship through the AIEC web site at <https://aiec.coop>. Applications are due Dec. 31, 2023.

In addition, AIEC will award one LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship to a student who plans to enroll in the lineworker's school offered by AIEC in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College, Springfield, Ill. To be eligible for the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship, a student must be related to an electric cooperative



PHOTOS COURTESY BROOKE SCOTT



Photos shot by Southwestern Electric Art Director Mike Barns (pictured) raised \$425 at auction for the Thomas H. Moore IEC Memorial Scholarship Fund.

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>. Applications are due Dec. 31, 2023. Please review the submission guidelines thoroughly before you apply.

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.

INFO YOU'LL WANT TO HAVE ON HAND

- Your name, address, phone number and email address.
- The name and contact information of your parent or guardian.
- The name of your electric cooperative.
- The name of your high school.
- Your high school grade point average based on or converted to a 100-point scale. For example, if your school uses a 4-point scale, multiply your G.P.A. by 25. If your school uses a 5-point scale, multiply your G.P.A. by 20.
- Your parent's or guardian's legal consent to apply.
- A *brief biographical statement*. Your statement should be about 250 words or less and include your educational goals, financial need and other pertinent information about yourself that you feel is important. Please do not reference your name, county or home location.
- A *500-word essay*. In your own words, write an essay of 500 words or less that answers this two-part question: In the next 20 years, what will electric cooperatives mean to your

employee or director in Illinois, the son or daughter of an electric cooperative member in Illinois, be currently enrolled in the Lincoln Land lineworker's school, or have served or be serving in the U.S. armed forces or National Guard. The applicant must have a high school diploma or a GED at the time the scholarship is awarded. The submission deadline for the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship is April 30, 2024. The scholarship will be awarded in July 2024.

To support the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives Memorial Scholarship Fund, AIEC hosted a fundraiser Aug. 3 at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Springfield, Ill. Illinois electric cooperatives and associated organizations were invited to submit items for both live and silent auctions. Co-op representatives bid on the items, with proceeds supporting the scholarship fund.

Brooke Scott, executive assistant, coordinated Southwestern Electric's participation in the auction. "Ann Schwarm and I met in late May to discuss several topics, including the auction," Scott said. Schwarm and Scott considered donating a number of items, ultimately settling on photographs taken by Southwestern Art Director Mike Barns. "Mike has a remarkable talent for capturing beautiful images," Scott said. "I've been wanting to add some of his work to our co-op's walls for quite some time, and already had two images in mind. I thought acrylic photo prints would be the ideal



Southwestern Electric Executive Assistant Brooke Scott reviews photographs shot by Art Director Mike Barns in preparation for the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives Memorial Scholarship Fund fundraiser auction, held in August.

medium to display his photos, as they enhance the vividness of the colors."

Barns offered a broad selection of images shot in service of Southwestern for consideration. "We selected 'Sunset Silhouette' from that group," Scott said. "I suggested his 'Bottled Garden' image. It's a favorite of mine and I thought the vibrant colors would turn out beautifully."

In addition to two images contributed by Southwestern Electric, Schwarm donated 'Famous Abe,' an acrylic print made from a photo Barns shot at the Vandalia Statehouse in Vandalia, Ill.

The photos ranged in size from 11 inches by 14 inches to 24 inches by 36 inches. "The photos looked fantastic on

acrylic and the sizing was perfect. They were a hot topic," Scott said, noting that several co-ops requested copies of the 'Sunset Silhouette' acrylic for their offices.

Together, the prints raised \$425 at auction.

In total, 40 co-ops, co-op representatives and co-op related organizations donated about 50 items for the auction. The auction and proceeds from a wine and spirits ring toss raised \$19,385 for the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives Memorial Scholarship Fund.

Scott plans to submit a new selection of photos for next year's auction.

community? How can electric cooperatives support/engage young adult members?

- *A character essay.* In your own words, write an essay of 500 words or less that recalls a time when you made a positive difference in someone else's life — someone who is not a family member. What did you do? How did it make them feel? How did it make you feel? What motivated you to do this?

OTHER INFO YOU'LL NEED TO PROVIDE

- *Work and volunteer experience.* List positions you've held, the dates, and whether they were volunteer or for pay. Please do not reference your name, county or home location. For example, you might write: Volunteer at National Honor Society events, June 2019, volunteer. You may list up to 15 positions you've held.
- *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 reference your name, county or home location. For example: High school soccer, 2019, 2020, team captain. You may list up to 15 activities.

You're encouraged to prepare your cooperative principles essay, brief character essay and biographical statement in advance, using a word processing program such as Microsoft Word, so that you may prepare and proofread your work before you sit down to complete your application. You may cut and paste your work into the application.

You'll find a complete list of rules and requirements on the AIEC website at <https://aiec.coop>. Deadline for receipt of completed applications is Dec. 31, 2023.

Questions? Call AIEC Member Services Manager Brooke Gross at (217) 529-5561 or email her at bgross@aiec.coop.

Purchase Power Day By Day With **Pay- As-You-Go** Option

Pay for the power you need as you need it — that's the idea behind Southwestern Electric Cooperative's Pay-As-You-Go program. "Most members are billed for power a month at a time. The power they've used during the last month is what they pay for," explained Susan File, vice president of member services for Southwestern Electric Cooperative. "With our Pay-As-You-Go program, you only pay for the power you need at the time, and you can add more money to the account whenever you want to."

File said the Pay-As-You-Go Program is perfect for families who want to control precisely how much of their budget they put toward electricity.

"Our main goal is to help our members use less power, and forego paying a deposit and reconnection fees," she pointed out. "Studies have shown that households typically experience a 12 percent drop in energy use after switching to this type of program."

Pay-As-You-Go allows the accountholder to purchase electricity at his or her convenience. Payments appear as credits on the member's account. The balance, which reflects energy used and payments made over the past 24-hours, is updated daily. There's no penalty for allowing funds to run out, but electric service becomes subject to disconnection when the account balance reaches \$0.00.

The cooperative doesn't mail a monthly bill to Pay-As-You-Go accounts. Rather, participating members monitor their account balance via the cooperative's online billing system, SWEC IL app or in-home display. In

addition to checking their account balance and payment history, the member will have access to an assortment of tools for tracking their energy consumption, including a breakdown of their kilowatt-hour usage and money spent on power each day.

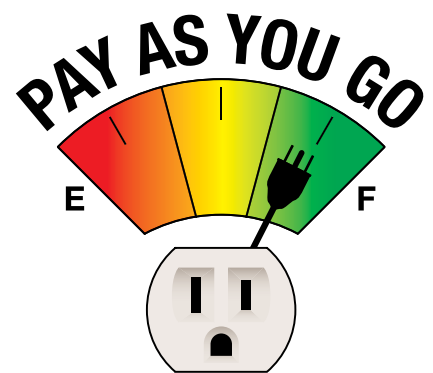
Southwestern also offers an in-home display unit (at no charge), particularly for members who don't have Internet access. The online billing system, app and in-home display allow the accountholder to view their present account balance and average daily usage.

"The member has to keep an eye on their remaining balance with this type of program, but we also have a couple of systems in place to let them know their account's status," said File. "The in-home display sounds an alarm when the account reaches a minimum dollar amount. We can also send the member a reminder message by telephone, text and e-mail if we have a valid phone number or e-mail address on file for their account."

Payments on a Pay-As-You-Go account can be made at the cooperative's Greenville office during regular business hours, at the Vandalia Farm Bureau, or deposited in the dropbox at Southwestern's St. Elmo and St. Jacob offices. Payments are also accepted 24/7 by phone, SWEC IL app and online at sweci.com. Most payments will post to the member's account within an hour. However, members should allow three day's processing time when payments are made at the St. Elmo or St. Jacob offices or Vandalia Farm Bureau.



- 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.

LIHEAP Energy Assistance

ELIGIBLE MEMBERS MAY APPLY DEC. 1

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. 2, 2023 to Aug. 15, 2024, or until funding is exhausted.

Applications in October were limited to priority groups.

Priority groups include:

- Seniors (at least one household member is age 60 or older).
- Disabled (at least one household member receives disability benefits).
- Families with at least one child under 6 years old.

Beginning Nov. 1, 2023, members who had been disconnected or who were in imminent threat of disconnection could apply for benefits.

Beginning Dec. 1, 2023, all other eligible members may apply.

Agencies began scheduling LIHEAP application appointments for priority groups on Sept. 18.

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 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.

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 Guidelines

If your household's combined income for the 30 days prior to application (gross income for all household members, before taxes are deducted) is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level as shown in the chart at right, 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	\$2,430
2	\$3,287
3	\$4,143
4	\$5,000
5	\$5,857
6	\$6,713
7	\$7,570
8	\$7,775

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.

For more information on this program, visit [IllinoisLIHEAP.com](https://www.IllinoisLIHEAP.com) or call the toll-free hotline, (877) 411-WARM.

PUTTING STOCK IN TRADE

Today's youth are increasingly turning their attention to the skilled trades. It's easy to see why.

Words by Nathan Grimm | Photos by Mike Barns & Joe Richardson

Abbi Denton is in her element. It's a sunny October morning, and Vibrant Styles LLC, the Vandalia beauty shop she's owned and operated since 2021, is decorated for Halloween. Skeleton hands with beautifully painted nails sit atop manicure stations, and ghosts hang in the windows that face out onto West Gallatin Street. As she chats with a customer, Denton compliments her "creepy shirt," saying it's "beautiful — or, boo-tiful, rather."

"I love making people feel good," Denton remarks.

If it's clear she's now found her calling, it's equally hard to believe this hasn't always been her path. It was a winding road that led her to where she is today, one that saw her pursue a number of different occupations before finally deciding to attend Southern Illinois School of Cosmetology at the age of 29.

Now 34, Denton is fulfilled "making people feel more beautiful every day" through her salon — she does hair and eyelashes, and other vendors who

rent space at the shop offer things like permanent makeup, nail work and spray tanning — while also lamenting time wasted on other pursuits.

"Whenever I was younger, I avoided doing it because I didn't want to do something that I loved and make it a job and hate it," she recalls. "So, I pursued nursing and accounting and office work. I was OK with it but didn't love it. My grandma was like, 'Why don't you just do what you really love? If you love something, it's not going to be something you end up hating.' I wish I would have started from the get-go."

Denton's story is a familiar one.

For decades, options after high school — at least the ones presented to most high school students — were limited to attending college or finding a job immediately upon graduation. If one was interested in pursuing higher education, it was usually presented as a choice between a two-year college or four-year university.

Enrollment in postsecondary education peaked at 21.02 million students in 2010, according to the U.S. education research group Education Data Initiative. That 21.02 million represented, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 41 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old population in the United States. Since then, the overall college enrollment rate has decreased as the nation's youth has begun to question the usefulness of a two-year or four-year degree.

In its place, more high schoolers have



Abbi Denton, owner and operator of Vibrant Styles LLC, sits in her Vandalia shop as Reagan Roberts applies hairspray. Roberts is job shadowing at the salon while attending the OKAW Area Vocational Center on the Vandalia High School campus. Upon graduation, Roberts plans to follow in Denton's footsteps and attend cosmetology school in hopes of one day owning her own salon.

begun looking into the skilled trades. As interest has risen in Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities, so too has secondary education's embracing of the skilled trades as a viable career path after high school.

"It's more mainstream," says Abby Carlson, Career Services Coordinator with the Litchfield School District, of CTE. "Now, it's, 'What are you interested in? What is your passion? Perfect. How can you make money on it?' We are no longer, 'You have to go to college.' That is no longer the focus, at least for us here. We are more interested in, 'What do you want to do, and how can we set you up for success?'"

One way in which Litchfield and other local high schools are setting students up for success is the new SCI Regional Workforce Training and Innovation Center. The 48,000-square-foot facility, located in Litchfield's Industrial Park, includes a garage for automotive classes, 12 welding bays, Illinois Laborers' and Contractors Joint Apprenticeship & Training Program and an unfinished space that can be utilized for other programs in the future, among other amenities.

Continued on next page ►

"We are no longer, 'You have to go to college.' That is no longer the focus, at least for us here. We are more interested in, 'What do you want to do, and how can we set you up for success?'"

—Abby Carlson, Career Services Coordinator with the Litchfield School District



Above: Donny Daugherty, a junior at Lincolnwood High School in Raymond, Ill., uses an angle grinder to prepare metal for welding in Matt Belusko's metal fabrication class.



Left: Abby Carlson, Career Services Coordinator with the Litchfield School District, stands near a bank of welding bays in the new, 48,000-square-foot SCI Regional Workforce Training and Innovation Center.

Below: Lincolnwood High School juniors Brayden Morris, left, and Hogan Witt work on a truck in the SCI center's automotive classroom.



► *Continued from page 15*

The center was built with the help of an \$8.6 million grant from the state of Illinois' Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity — an indication that the state is also aware of the need for more CTE opportunities at the high school level. In dedicating the facility this past August, Illinois Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton said the SCI center “is a prime example of how we are investing in the partnerships that uplift Illinoisans with the tools to succeed.”

That’s not the only emphasis the state’s administration has placed on skilled trades, either. On May 27, 2022, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker signed House Bill 3296, requiring state school districts to offer College and Career Pathway Endorsements (CCPE) in at least one endorsement area — a defined career path, essentially — by July 1, 2025. Districts must offer an additional CCPE by 2029 and a third by 2031, per the law.

The center and mandates may be new, but the partnership between schools is not. Carlson said the SCI center just brought under one roof what nine local districts — Bunker Hill, Carlinville, Gillespie, Hillsboro, Litchfield, Mt. Olive, Nokomis, Panhandle and Staunton — had been doing for the past few years.

The program started in the 2020-21 school year with 61 students spread across nine areas of study. This year, more than 270 students from the participating districts are enrolled in one of the 17-plus courses being offered.

In those early years, the districts shared the responsibility of hosting the courses. Automotive and welding courses were taught at Litchfield High School; elsewhere, Nokomis hosted the education pathway. And even with the building of the SCI center, some courses are still taught at neighboring high schools for space reasons — Hillsboro High School hosts the building trades program, for example.

Like a cooperative, every participating school district brings something to the table, and any course, regardless of location, is free for students of those districts under the SCI umbrella.

“Since Litchfield provides the welding teacher, we don’t have to pay tuition for our kids to go to Nokomis to take a class, or our kids to go to Panhandle — they have a great agriculture course there,” Carlson explains. “It opens up all these different pathways for our students.”

Like Denton, Robbie Shipman didn’t immediately land at his final destination.

Now the business manager of Hiller Sheet Metal in Hillsboro, Shipman, 44, worked at the heating and cooling company part time in high school but tried his hand at a few different things after graduation.

“I was a paramedic, a firefighter and a part-time police officer,” Shipman recounts. “I worked a lot of different jobs. At one point, I had four jobs.”

Around the turn of the century, he decided to commit to HVAC. The state

“They’re working with their hands and learning through their hands instead of through a book. And we do something different every day.”

—Robbie Shipman, Business Manager, Hiller Sheet Metal

of Illinois specifies that HVAC technicians need only a high school diploma or GED; still, many employers prefer their technicians to have some formal schooling from a career training program as well.

Much of the trade is learned simply by doing, though, a perk of the job for Shipman.

“It’s a fun career,” he says. “It has its challenges, just like any other job, but I think for the people who like to work with their hands, it’s a great job. They’re working with their hands and learning through their hands instead of through a book. And we do something different every day.”

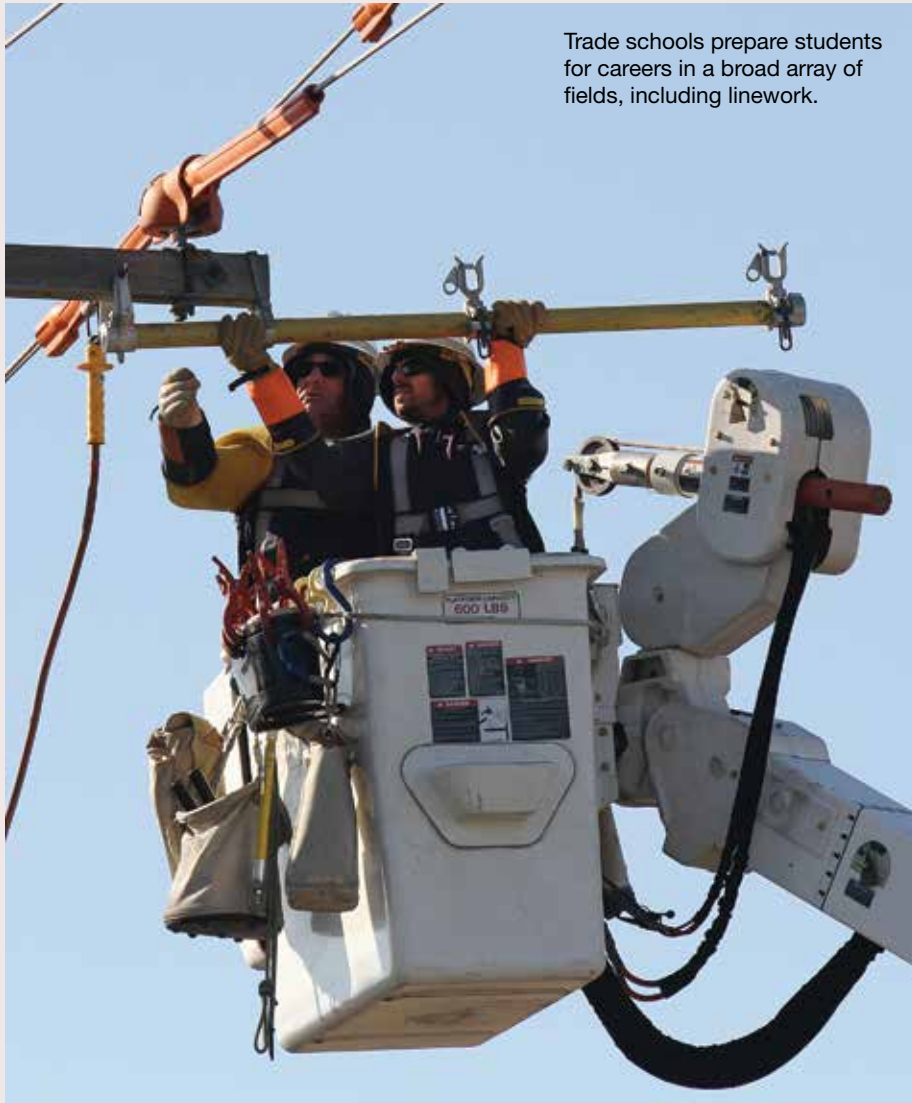
The satisfaction of the work, the way of life and — if he’s being honest



COLD, HARD(-EARNED) CASH

Trade schools emphasize hands-on learning and prepare students for long and rewarding careers. Here are a few skilled trades and their annual mean wage for Illinois workers, according to a May 2022 report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Electrical power line installers and repairers	\$100,330
Electrical and electronics repairers, powerhouse, substation and relay	\$98,610
Power distributors and dispatchers	\$93,340
Structural iron and steel workers.....	\$92,000
Plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters	\$87,980
Electricians	\$84,790
Brickmasons and blockmasons	\$82,910
Sheet metal workers.....	\$79,250



Trade schools prepare students for careers in a broad array of fields, including linework.

“Skilled trades have always been a foundation of the electric cooperative model. It’s encouraging to see government, the education system and the youth of today increasingly embrace the trades as a viable career path after high school. If you’re interested in a challenging, rewarding career making a difference in the lives of your friends and neighbors, I would highly recommend you make an investment in your future and apply for our scholarship program.”

—Bobby Williams, CEO, Southwestern Electric Cooperative

— the pay are among the reasons Mike Willman encourages people to become linemen.


Willman, Southwestern Electric Cooperative’s vice president of operations, began his career more than 35 years ago as a lineman apprentice. After stops at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 309, Union Electric and J.F. Electric, he joined Southwestern Electric in 2004 and worked his way up.

“There is a need for skilled tradesmen,” says Willman, who oversees a team of 27 journeymen linemen, foremen and other operations employees. “You can make a good living, you can have good benefits, you can raise your family. I would suggest that over a four-year degree.”

At Southwestern Electric, it’s not just talk, either. The cooperative’s Power

for Progress Scholarship Program has provided close to \$300,000 in financial assistance to a total of 439 students since the program’s inception in 1995, and at the co-op’s annual meeting in September, then-Board President Ann Schwarm encouraged students interested in pursuing a trade — lineman or otherwise — to apply for a scholarship.

“It’s our hope that Power for Progress — a scholarship program funded by electric cooperative members — encourages interest in careers involving linework,” she said, “and that some of today’s scholarship applicants become tomorrow’s Southwestern Electric lineworkers.”

Southwestern Electric is now accepting applications for the 2024 Power for Progress Scholarship Program. For more information or to apply, visit <https://sweci.com/scholarships>. 

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 2024. 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.

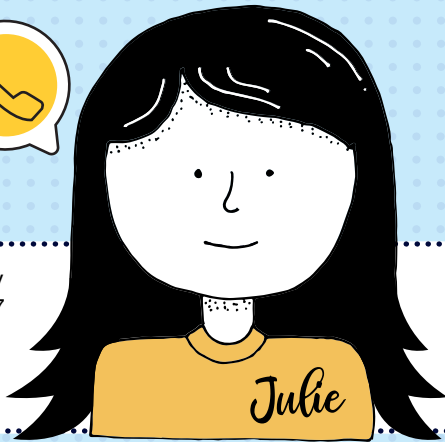
7. LED NIGHTLIGHTS

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.

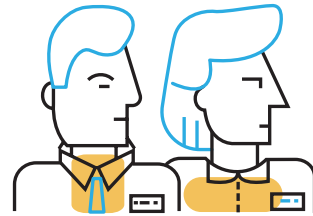
8. LED HOLIDAY LIGHTS

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.



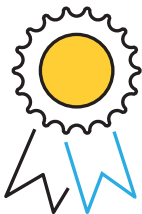
After your one-line diagram is approved by Southwestern Electric, you'll receive a \$500 invoice to cover the installation of your new dual register electric meter, a system inspection, and your array's interconnection to the grid. If your installer will be paying this invoice on your behalf, we'll send the invoice directly to them.



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



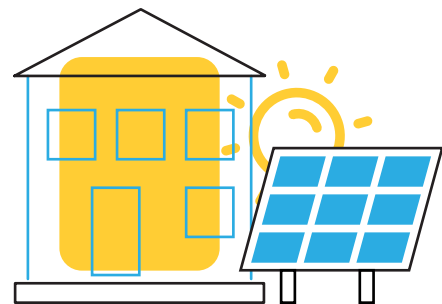
Our commissioning team will visit your site. We will inspect your system to verify it meets our safety specifications. A team member will review a memorandum of understanding with you. You'll sign this document for our files. Note: If you won't be present for commissioning, please schedule a meeting 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 and your installer a certificate of completion. Your installer will submit this document for you, so you can receive your solar renewable energy credits, or certificates (SRECs).



Each year, you'll submit documentation to confirm you've renewed your insurance. You may add us as a certificate holder on your policy so the renewal will be sent to us automatically each year.



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

HEATING HAZARDS

Supplemental warming products require proper attention

Using electric space heaters, blankets or heating pads to fight winter's chill? While they may provide comfort, they also introduce safety hazards into your home.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, space heaters are responsible for 32 percent of home heating fires and involved in 79 percent of home heating fire deaths.

As is the case with any electric-powered appliance, keep the space heater, blanket, or heating pad away from water and never touch the item while wet.

Only purchase products approved by an independent testing facility, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), and follow the manufacturer's instructions for operation and care of the product.

Prior to use, inspect cords and connections for cracks or frayed edges, and send the item off for repair if necessary. Discontinue use and unplug the unit immediately if you see or smell smoke. Here are additional safety tips to keep in mind:

ELECTRIC SPACE HEATERS

- When purchasing a new space heater, look for models with guards to protect the heating elements, and sensors that automatically shut off the unit if it tips or if an object gets too close.
- Position the space heater on hard, stable, level surfaces. Don't place it on carpets, furniture or countertops. Avoid high-traffic areas where people might knock over the heater or trip over the cord.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from combustible materials, such as bedding, curtains, clothing and rugs. Space heaters also have parts that can spark, so avoid using them in areas where you store flammable liquids like kerosene and gasoline.
- Plug your space heater directly into a wall outlet. Avoid using extension cords.
- Never operate a space heater if you suspect it may be damaged.
- Don't allow children or pets to come near the space heater when it's in use.
- Never leave a space heater unattended. Make sure to turn off and unplug the heater before you leave the room or go to sleep.

ELECTRIC BLANKETS & HEATING PADS

- Always place the electric blanket on top of you, not below you, and keep it flat at all times: Sitting or lying on top of the blanket may damage the internal coils, exposing the heating element to combustible material.
- Avoid covering the electric blanket or heating pad with another blanket, comforter or quilt, unless the safety instructions included in the packaging specifically state that it's safe to do so.
- Discard the electric blanket or heating pad if you notice dark or charred spots on its surface. Discoloration may indicate that the unit's heating elements are burning internally.
- Turn the electric blanket or heating pad off prior to leaving the room or when not in use.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully when attempting to clean the electric blanket or heating pad. Many models may only be washed by hand.

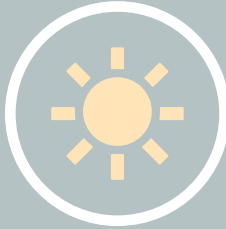


Only purchase products approved by an independent testing facility, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), and follow the manufacturer's instructions for operation and care of the product.

Space Heater Safety Tips

Space heaters are a great way to warm specific rooms in your home without having to crank up the thermostat, but using a space heater doesn't come without risk! Use the tips below to keep your home safe.

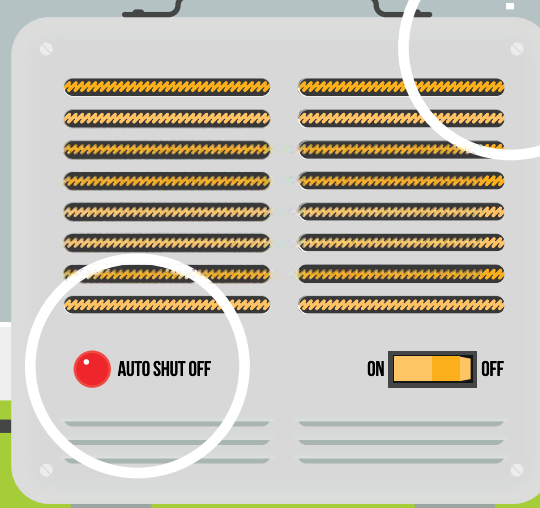
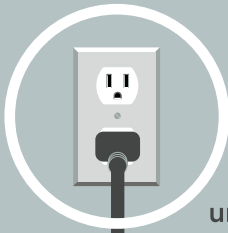
DO: Plug your space heater directly into the wall outlet.



DO: Keep your space heater in low-moisture rooms.

DO: Keep your space heater at a safe distance (at least 3 feet) from kids, pets and flammable items.

DO: Buy a unit with an automatic shutoff in case the unit tips over, or you forget to shut it off.



DO: Always follow the directions and take a broken space heater to a qualified appliance service center.



DON'T: Leave your space heater unattended. Always unplug it before you leave the house or go to bed.



DON'T: Use an extension cord to plug in your space heater. It can cause the heater to over-heat, and can be a tripping hazard.

DON'T: Place your space heater near curtains, clothing, furniture or bedding.



DON'T: Try to repair a broken space heater yourself.



DON'T: Put your space heater in your bathroom. The moisture can damage the unit, which could cause it to malfunction.



WHO • WHAT • WHERE

It's Worden for the win. Our September challenge brought a trio of replies from Southwestern members living near the one-room schoolhouse that served as our mystery location. We'll share more about the school in a future issue of the Southwestern. Special thanks to Southwestern director Bill Jennings for shooting and sharing photos of the school, and calling the location to our attention.

On to our next challenge: Can you identify the item on the opposite page? We look forward to seeing your solutions for this month's puzzle. We'll share your responses in February. Meanwhile, here's what you had to say about our September puzzle.

Many were the plant sales, bake sales and yard sales we had for the Butler School restoration!

The school originally was about a half mile north on Dustman Road, then spent many years as a corn crib, storage shed, etc., after being auctioned off when Butler School #2 was built on Renken Road, almost in Staunton.

The original one-room schoolhouse site was almost where the fenced in area is on Dustman Road, near Wiesemans.

When enough funds for beginning rehab were gathered, the school was moved to the Hensley farm on Renken Road.

After more yard, plant and bake sales, a new roof was put

on. Locust beams from our farm south of Prairietown made the roof safe enough to climb on.

There it sat until a few years ago when Marilyn Hensley's daughter, Mary, moved it to the front of their property on Dustman Road, where this picture was taken, less than a mile south of Renken.

School children have visited and Mary's family has put a rock drive around the school and added the outhouse!

—Helen Flatau, Worden

Editor's Note: Butler School now stands on property owned by Eugene and Donna Hampton of Worden.

The photo is Butler School, (one room school house) located in Madison County, on Dustman Road south of Renken Road, between Staunton and Prairietown.

—Ron Williams, Staunton

Original Butler School. Omphgent township rural Worden, Ill. Erected in the mid-1830s on ground donated by the Butler family. After many years of sitting on the Wieseman farm it was moved and restored. The school now sits on Dustman Road in rural Worden a half a mile from its original location.

—Julie Matesa, Staunton & Pat Wieseman, Worden

This is the picture of the old Butler School that is now located on Dustman Road, outside of Worden, Ill. We stopped by there one time and read the sign, but my memory not being what it used to be, I do not remember the history of this little old school. But it's always nice to see a piece of history saved.

—Diane Ridens, Worden

Pictured on page 21 of "The Southwestern" is Butler School located on Kenny Wieseman's farm outside of Worden on Dustman Road. It's a great reminder of how things were and how far we have come!

—Terry Johnson, Worden

The schoolhouse is located on Dustman Rd just south of Renken Rd. It has been restored and maintained.

—Paula Lievers, Worden



PHOTO COURTESY BILL JENNINGS

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
AM I?

Christmas Cookie Crafts



PAINTED SUGAR COOKIES

Cookie Directions

1. Mix your favorite sugar cookie dough or ready-to-bake sugar cookie dough.
2. Roll dough out until $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick.
3. Use Christmas themed cookie cutters to cut cookies from dough.
4. Bake according to instructions and cool on wire rack.

Paint Glaze Ingredients

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon corn syrup
- 2 tablespoons water
- food coloring

Paint Glaze Directions

1. Stir together powdered sugar, corn syrup, and water.
2. Divide mixture into several bowls (depending on how many colors you want).
3. Add and mix in food coloring as desired to each bowl.

Painting Directions

1. Use paint brushes to paint glaze on to cookies (let each layer dry before adding to your design).
2. Be sure to stir glazes often to keep them from drying.
3. While glaze is still wet you can also sprinkle with decorating sugars.
4. Allow glaze to dry completely.
5. Store in air-tight container with wax paper or parchment between layers.



PEANUT BUTTER SANTA COOKIES

Ingredients

- 2 (6 ounce) packages of white baking chocolate, chopped
- 1 (1 pound) package of Nutter Butter cookies
- colored decorating sugar (red)
- 32 vanilla chips
- 64 miniature semisweet chocolate chips
- 32 red-hot candies

Directions

1. Melt white chocolate in a saucepan over low heat, stirring now and then.
2. Dip one end of the cookie into the melted chocolate, then place on wire rack.
3. For Santa's hat, sprinkle red sugar on the top part of the chocolate. Press a vanilla chip on the hat to serve as the pom-pom. Let the cookie cool.
4. After the chocolate sets, dip the other end of the cookie into the melted chocolate to make Santa's beard. Leave the cookie's center uncovered. Place the cookie on a wire rack to cool.
5. Use semisweet chips for the eyes and a red-hot for the nose. You can attach them with a dab of melted chocolate.
6. Place your finished cookie on wax paper until the chocolate sets.

Prepared &
photographed
by Mike Barns

CURRENT EVENTS

26 | The Southwestern December 2023

December 8 STATEHOUSE GALA, Vandalia. Enjoy an elegant evening at the oldest standing capitol in Illinois. Features Christmas decor, candlelight, live music, hors d'oeuvres and beverages. 6 - 8:30 p.m. Vandalia Statehouse, 315 West Gallatin Street. For tickets, email vandaliahistoricalcalsociety@yahoo.com.

December 9 HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS, O'Fallon. Holiday vendor market with delicious local food and unique gifts. The OTHS Madrigals will amaze everyone with their singing talents, the caboose will have story time for the kids and keep your eyes peeled for Santa. 2 - 6 p.m. Downtown District and Vine Street Market, 116 East 1st Street. Visit ofallondowntowndistrict.com.

December 9 JOYOUS JOLIES AND JINGLES, Godfrey. Celebrate the season with the Alton Symphony Orchestra. Hear Sleigh Ride, White Christmas, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, and a performance from our Deborah Fox Guild winner. Adult \$10; 18 years of age and younger \$5. 7 p.m. Lewis & Clark Community College, Hatheway Cultural Center, 5800 Godfrey Road. Visit alton-symphonyorchestra.org.

December 9 OLD BELLEVILLE HISTORICAL LUMINARY WALK, Belleville. Stroll luminary-lined Abend and Garfield Streets while touring historic homes. Carolers, food truck pod, and Christmas photo opportunities are available. Koerner House, Garfield Saloon and Emma Kunz House will be open to the public. 5 - 9 p.m. Admission is free. Old Belleville Historic District, 200 Abend Street. Call (618) 799-1088.

December 9 & 10 ARRIVAL WEEKEND, Hartford. On December 12, 1803, the Lewis & Clark Expedition arrived at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and fixed on a place to build Camp River Dubois. Arrival Weekend features exhibitors of vintage

tools, firearms, rocks and minerals, 18th Century medicine, military re-enactors and artillery. See how the Corps of Discovery lived during their winter encampment. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Lewis & Clark State Historic Site, One Lewis & Clark Trail. Call (618) 251-5811 or visit campdubois.com.

December 9 & 10 THE BEST OF THE BEST CHRISTMAS CONCERT, Alton. Featuring Abigail Stahlschmidt (International Artist & Violinist) with Eric Strothers (with selections from Manheim Steamrollers Siberian Holiday) and a company of beautiful voices and instruments. Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m. Admission is \$25. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, visit altonlittletheater.org.

December 10 HOLIDAY POPS CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR, Belleville. Ring in the holidays with orchestra favorites, sing-alongs and the Philharmonic Society of Belleville. 1 - 2:30 p.m. Adult \$15; children under 12 years of age \$5. Lincoln Theater, 103 East Main Street. Visit bellevillephilharmonic.org.

December 16 & 17 WINTER ILLUMINATION WALK, West Alton. Meet live raptors from the TreeHouse Wildlife Center, explore illuminated trails on a night hike and marvel at lights complementing the River Ark sculpture. End the evening with s'mores by the fireside. 5 - 7 p.m. Adult \$15; child \$5. Audubon Center at Riverlands, 301 Riverlands Way. To register, visit riverlands.audubon.org.

December 16 & 17 WINTER MARKET, Collinsville. Shop 30,000 square feet of one of kind gifts. Event features handmade crafts, boutique items, kids crafts, bounce house, face painting, and family fun. 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission is free. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit gatewaycenter.com.

December 17 WINTER SOLSTICE SUNRISE OBSERVANCE, Collinsville. Meet at the

Woodhenge Reconstruction, west of Monks Mound, by 7 a.m. for a discussion regarding the discovery, function, and significance of this pre-Columbian calendar. The Woodhenge reconstruction is about 1/4 mile west on Collinsville Road, from the Cahokia Mounds Interpretive Center. Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, 30 Ramey Street. Call (618) 346-5160 or visit cahokiamounds.org.

December 21 MAIN STREET MINGLE, Belleville. Enjoy extended shopping hours, happy hour specials, fresh eats, live music and free trolley rides. 4 - 8 p.m. Downtown at East A Street and Main Street. Visit bellevillemainstreet.net.

January 5-7 LET'S GO FISHING SHOW, Collinsville. There will be a wide variety of fishing gear, live demonstrations, kids activities, boats, exhibits and seminars. Friday noon - 8 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. - 7 p.m.; Sunday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Adults \$7; children 6-15 years of age \$3.50; children 5 years of age and younger are free. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit gatewaycenter.com.

January 6 EAGLE ICE FESTIVAL, Alton. Get a bite to eat, see a live eagle from the World Bird Sanctuary, take an eagle-watching tour, and enjoy fun winter activities for all ages. The celebration will take place at FLOCK Food Truck Park, 210 Ridge Street and the National Great Rivers Museum, 2 Lock and Dam Way. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Event is free. Visit riversandroutesc.com.

January 6, 13, 20, 27; February 3, 10, 17, 24 EAGLE SHUTTLE TOURS, Alton. Enjoy a 45-minute guided tour of some of the best American bald eagle watching spots around the Alton area. Sites may include Clifton Terrace, Audubon Center, Maple Island and National Great Rivers Museum. Tickets are non-refundable unless the tour is cancelled due to weather. Shuttles are limited to 20 passengers and are not ADA

accessible. Tickets must be purchased in advance. Tours at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Admission is \$15. Alton Visitor's Center, 200 Piasa Street. For tickets, visit riversandroutesc.com.

January 6, 13, 20, 27; February 3, 10, 17, 24 EAGLE SHUTTLE TOURS, Grafton. Enjoy a two and a half-hour guided tour of some of the best American bald eagle watching spots around Grafton. Sites may include Brussels Ferry, Calhoun Point and Pere Marquette State Park. Tickets are non-refundable unless the tour is cancelled. Shuttles are limited to 20 passengers and are not ADA accessible. Tickets must be purchased in advance. 9 a.m. Admission is \$30. Grafton Skytour parking lot, 3 West Clinton. For more information visit riversandroutesc.com.

January 6 & 20 EAGLE MEET AND GREET, Alton. The World Bird Sanctuary will be bring a bald eagle for up-close viewing. Be sure to bring your camera. After this personal encounter you can pick up an official All Around Alton Eagle Watcher's Guide and set off along the Great River Road to see eagles in their natural habitat. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Admission is free. January 6 at FLOCK Food Truck Park, 210 Ridge Street and January 20 at Alton Visitor Center, 200 Piasa Street. Visit riversandroutesc.com.

January 11-13, 18-21, 26-28 ALTON LITTLE THEATER: THE ACTOR'S STUDIO SERIES, Alton. Three new plays done in rotation by the Alton Little Theater Company. Two Rooms by Lee Blessing January 11 - 13. Red Jasper by Michael Madden January 18 - 21. The Elephant's Graveyard by George Brant January 26 - 28. 7:30 p.m. All three shows for \$25 or \$10 for single show. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, call (618) 462-3205 or visit alton-littletheater.org.

