

# *THE* Southwestern

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2026 • VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 2

## WPCA

HOW MARKET COSTS  
AFFECT YOUR BILL

POWER FOR  
PROGRESS

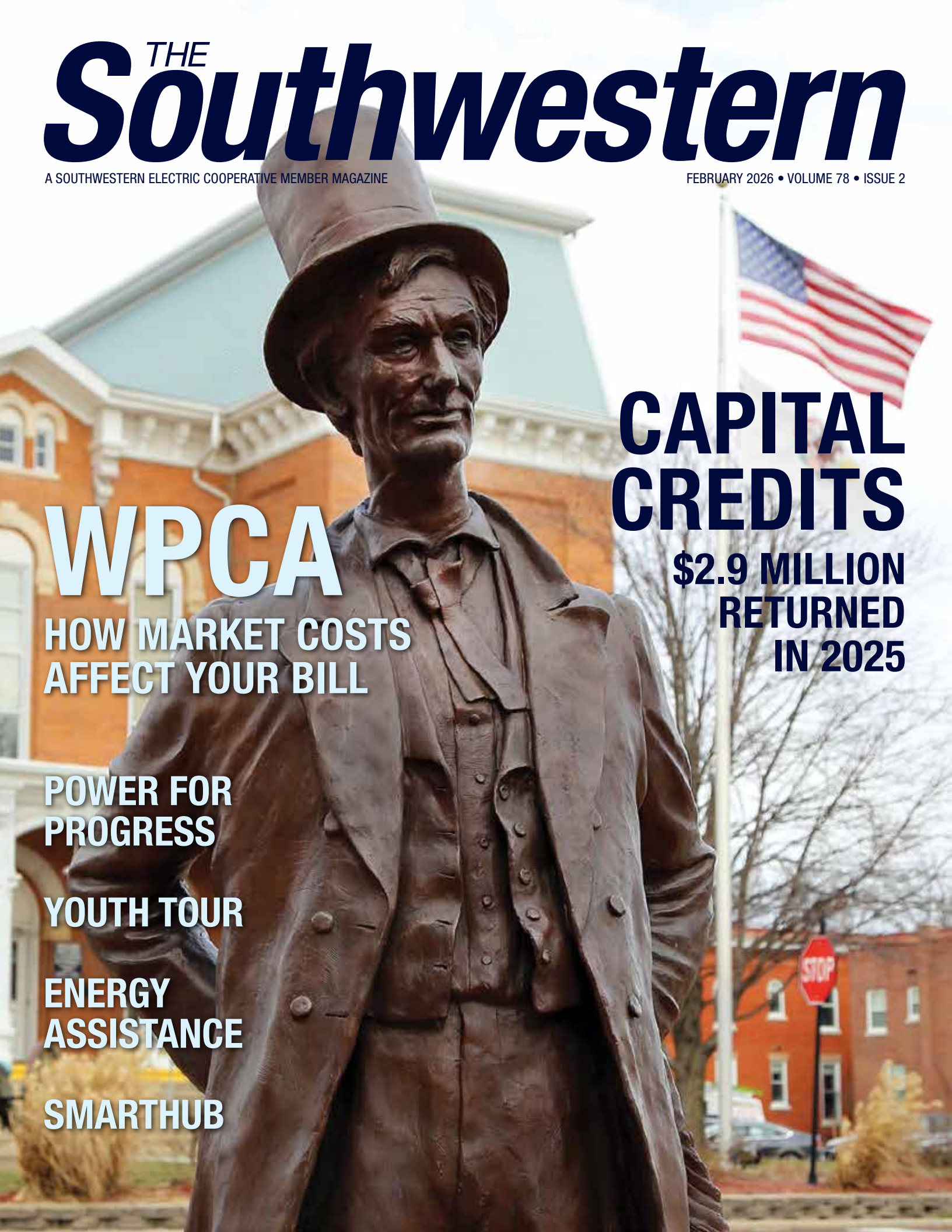
YOUTH TOUR

ENERGY  
ASSISTANCE

SMARTHUB

## CAPITAL CREDITS

\$2.9 MILLION  
RETURNED  
IN 2025





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## NEWS & NOTES

### ON THE COVER

A familiar figure stands watch on the courthouse square in Hillsboro. This month, we follow the trail of statues, markers and monuments that recall where Abraham Lincoln once stood. The journey begins on page 18.



### CO-OP REMINDERS

**February 17** Payment processing will be unavailable 8 - 11 p.m. while we perform maintenance.



### FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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



# Reader Contest

**W**e've hidden an image of a rose in your magazine. Your job is to find it. The actual image may be larger or smaller than what you see below. We may change

the color or reverse or alter the image we've hidden to make the contest more challenging. If you find the rose, email us or send a postcard with your name, address, phone number, and the page number where you found the image. Please email us at [thesouthwestern@sweci.com](mailto: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](mailto:thesouthwestern@sweci.com) inbox by the first day of the month following the month

of publication. For our February contest, we'll need your entries in our inbox or postmarked by March 1, 2026.

We'll choose one winner in a random drawing.

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



### DECEMBER WINNER

Congratulations to Linda Logsdon of Moro. As the winner of our December Hide & Seek contest drawing, Linda will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. Thank you to everyone who

participated in our December contest. This month's image appears at left. You'll find Hide & Seek rules below.

### RULES TO PLAY BY

- One entry per membership per month.
- A membership can only win once per calendar year.
- No phone calls, texts, social media posts, walk-in traffic, carrier pigeons, singing telegrams or other clever means of communication that may occur to you.
- Please respond *only* by emailing us at [thesouthwestern@sweci.com](mailto:thesouthwestern@sweci.com) or by sending a postcard to The

Southwestern Magazine, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.

- Entries submitted by other methods will be disqualified.
- Entries emailed to other Southwestern Electric email addresses will be disqualified, deleted, then disqualified again, just to be safe.
- Entries mailed to other departments or included with other correspondence will likely never find their way

to the editor. If they do, they'll be disqualified. Also, he'll add you to his list of people who can't follow instructions. It's a long (and growing) list and not one you care to be part of.

- February contest entries must be in our inbox or postmarked by March 1.
- We'll never hide the image on the front or back cover or on the page where we list the rules.

# LIHEAP Energy Assistance

The State of Illinois offers assistance to low-income families who struggle to pay their energy bills. Applications for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted. The current LIHEAP application period is Oct. 1, 2025 to Aug. 15, 2026, or until funding is exhausted.

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.

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

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

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

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

## Income Eligibility

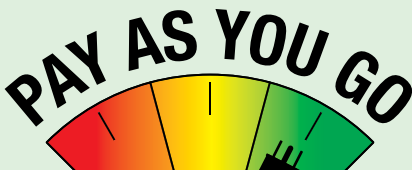
If your household's combined income for the 30 days prior to application (gross income, before taxes are deducted) is at or below the 60% state median income\* as shown in the chart (right), you may be eligible to receive assistance. If you rent, and your heat is included in the rent, you may be eligible for a LIHEAP benefit.

*\*Program Year 2026 Income Guidelines are based on State Median Income and Federal Poverty Guidelines. The state reserves the right to adjust these levels based on the availability of federal appropriations.*

Family Size	30-Day Income
1 .....	\$3,332
2 .....	\$4,357
3 .....	\$5,382
4 .....	\$6,407
5 .....	\$7,432
6 .....	\$8,457
7 .....	\$8,649
8 .....	\$8,842

- 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](http://sweci.com) or call 800-637-8667 to speak to one of our member services representatives.





# HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR **MARK?**

**Deadline  
extended to  
Feb. 13**




**A WEEK OF BUILDING MEMORIES, SKILLS, LEADERSHIP  
AND FRIENDSHIPS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME!**

## **EXPERIENCE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME WITH YOUTH TOUR!**

- Explore Washington, D.C. through historic monuments, world-class museums, and visits with elected officials.
- Build leadership skills and discover how you can make your mark on the future.
- Connect with students from across the country and form friendships that last a lifetime, all sponsored by your local electric cooperative.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT APPLYING AT  
[SWECI.COM/YOUTH-TOUR](https://sweci.com/youth-tour)**

**YouTH**  
**TouR** **2026**  
  
**MAKE YOUR MARK**



# SmartHub is your one-stop account management portal

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

- **Billing & Payments** – No more waiting for your bill to arrive in the mail. Access your bill anytime, anywhere. Save time with easy payment options to avoid late fees and service interruptions.
- **Alerts & Notifications** – Stay informed on important account events via email or text messages. Receive the information you need to make informed decisions about your account.
- **Paperless Billing** – Save some time and a tree when you activate SmartHub paperless billing, an eco-friendly way to instantly access your bill.
- **Usage Monitoring** – Worrying about usage or surprising bill amounts can be stressful. When you know what devices are using the most energy, you can make money-saving decisions about your account.
- **Outage Reporting** – Need to report a power outage? Smarthub is the fastest and easiest way to let us know when your power goes out. When widespread storms knock out power to an entire region, phone lines can become overloaded. With Smarthub, you can avoid busy signals and report outages with a few simple taps on your mobile device.



For more information on SmartHub and how to get it, visit our website at <https://www.sweci.com/smarthub>.

## 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.

Backup heat must be electric for the heat pump rebate. 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](http://sweci.com). You can email your completed application and proof of purchase to [julie.lowe@sweci.com](mailto: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](mailto:julie.lowe@sweci.com).

# WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

*We'd like to help you find out.*

Since 1995, Southwestern Electric Cooperative's Power For Progress Scholarship Program has provided more than \$300,000 in academic assistance.

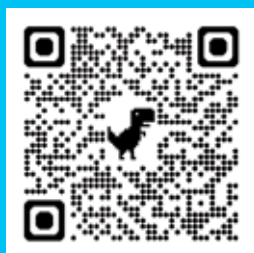
## WHAT'S AVAILABLE?

- 14 TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS of \$1,200 each will be awarded for the 2026 school year.
  - 12 Southwestern Electric Scholarships
  - 1 Alan G. Libbra Memorial Scholarship
  - 1 Richard Gusewelle Memorial Scholarship
- Use the funds for tuition at any accredited U.S. university, college, or technical school.

## ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

- You (or your parent/guardian) must be an active Southwestern Electric co-op member.
- You must be admitted as a full-time student for Fall 2026.
- High school seniors as well as those already attending college are eligible.
- SWEC directors, employees, and their immediate families are not eligible.

**DEADLINE: Friday, March 13, 2026**



## HAVE QUESTIONS?

Call Jennifer Gillan at 800-637-8667 or email her at [community@sweci.com](mailto:community@sweci.com).







**POWER FOR**  
*Progress*

**Southwestern**  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

**SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**



**Southwestern**  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

# Board Approves Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment

In December, Southwestern Electric's board of directors approved an increase to the Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment, raising it from \$0.01501 to \$0.02373 per kilowatt-hour (\$23.73 per 1,000 kWh). The change took effect Jan. 1 and appears on February bills.

At the Dec. 18 board meeting, CFO Nathan Taylor presented year-to-date transmission and capacity cost data which indicated an adjustment was necessary to recover rising costs in these areas.

Introduced in 2024, the WPCA allows Southwestern to recover fluctuating wholesale power costs without raising base rates. As regional market conditions change, the WPCA ensures the co-op recovers only what's necessary to deliver power to members.

## CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY IN COST RECOVERY

Four years ago, Southwestern revised its bill format to give members a transparent view of how energy costs are calculated. A line for the WPCA was included at that time, with the cost set at zero.

Since launching in January 2024 at \$0.00534 per kWh, Southwestern has adjusted the WPCA every six months to reflect changing market conditions. By July 2025, it reached \$0.01501 per kWh (\$15.01 per 1,000 kWh) as transmission and, most notably, capacity costs increased dramatically.

The December evaluation follows the cooperative's regular six-month review cycle.

*The WPCA allows Southwestern to recover fluctuating wholesale power costs without raising base rates.*

## WHY ADJUSTMENTS ARE NECESSARY

"Our contract with our wholesale power provider protects our members from extreme swings in market pricing, but it can't completely insulate us from higher capacity and transmission costs," noted CEO Bobby Williams.

"In our region, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) manages the power grid. Each season, MISO assesses the capacity, or potential demand, that utilities will place on the grid. When demand projections rise or when transmission costs increase, the price of power can climb significantly," Williams said.

In 2023, Southwestern Electric Cooperative paid \$10 per megawatt-day for capacity in the MISO summer auction. In 2024, capacity cost the co-op \$30 per megawatt-day. In 2025, MISO summer auction capacity costs soared to \$666.50 per megawatt-day — more than a 2,100% increase compared with 2024 and a more than 6,500% increase compared with 2023.

The WPCA allows Southwestern to respond to these changes without raising electric rates. When market prices rise, the WPCA appears as a charge. When they fall, it can appear as a credit.

## WHY THE WPCA WASN'T ZERO IN JANUARY

When Southwestern announced in September 2025 that the WPCA would reset to zero in 2026, the adjustment was tied to the cooperative's upcoming rate restructuring. "The reset was always intended to coincide with the transition to the new rate design," said Williams. "When we implement our new rates later this year, the WPCA will reset to zero."

Across the region, utilities are facing higher generation, transmission, and distribution costs — pressures that have led to rising rates among investor-owned utilities (IOUs). In August 2025, Southwestern Electric began hearing from IOU customers looking for alternatives after their bills spiked. "Those same market pressures are affecting all utilities, co-ops included," Williams said.

Some residential members will see a small increase in their bills due to the rate restructuring later this year, while many will see little or no change, Williams said. "We're evaluating the latest MISO and market data and finalizing our plans, so

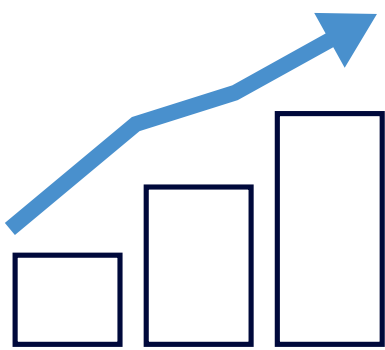
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# The Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment Explained

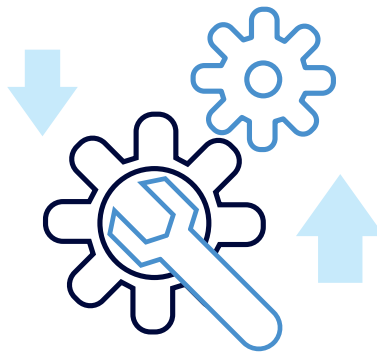
## The WPCA Provides Flexibility

The Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment (WPCA) allows Southwestern Electric to recover expenses associated with changes in the price of wholesale power. Those costs include energy, capacity and transmission fees.



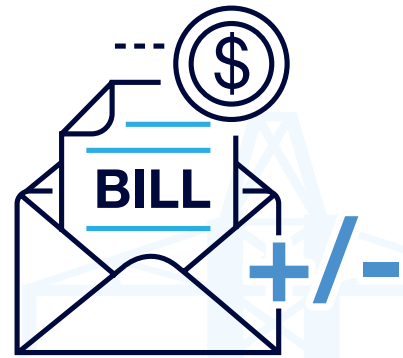
### Energy, Capacity & Transmission Costs Are Increasing

The co-op is paying more for wholesale power than it was just a few years ago. Capacity costs are much higher than they once were. Transmission fees — expenses incurred in moving energy from power plants across the grid and onto the co-op's distribution system — have also increased significantly. These expenses are addressed by the Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment.



### The WPCA Helps Southwestern Avoid Rate Increases

The WPCA allows Southwestern to recover expenses incurred in a rapidly changing power market, without continually changing electric rates. The WPCA will rise and fall to meet fluctuating market prices.



### The WPCA Is A Pass-Through Cost

Southwestern only collects what's necessary to recover variable costs associated with providing wholesale power. If energy, capacity or transmission costs drop substantially, the Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment will appear as a credit on your bill.



***YOUR ACCOUNTABLE ENERGY PARTNER***

# Board Returns \$2.9 Million to Southwestern Electric Members

Last year, your directors approved returning \$2.9 million in 1997 capital credits to longtime cooperative members. In December, we mailed 8,563 checks and credited 157 bills.

New to capital credits? Read our Q&A to learn how membership pays.

***Q. What are capital credits?***

A. Unlike investor-owned utilities driven by profits, Southwestern Electric Cooperative is owned by the people we serve. From the moment you join, you aren't just a customer — you're a member-owner.

Capital credits represent your personal equity in the cooperative's infrastructure and future. When Southwestern's annual revenue exceeds our operating costs, those reserves, called "margins," aren't sent to distant shareholders. They're allocated back to you.

Our business model is simple, elegant, effective and fair. Your investment powers your co-op, and your co-op's success is returned to you. It's a system built on trust, accountability and shared ownership.

That's the Cooperative Difference.

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

A. Our rates are designed to keep the lights on and the cooperative strong. Your equity helps us fund infrastructure construction and maintenance — improvements in poles and wires — that bring safe, reliable power to your home. When we end the year with a surplus, that money belongs to you. We honor your ownership by returning that value through capital credits.

The more power you use, the more equity you earn in the cooperative you own. While your credits are busy at work today, building the poles, wires and substations that serve your home, we return that investment to you as the equipment ages. By following a 30-year cycle, we ensure the grid is reliable for your family today, and that it remains reliable for the members who'll join us tomorrow.

***Q. Why did I receive a check instead of a bill credit last year?***

A. In December, Southwestern returned your 1997 capital credits. To give you more flexibility in how you use your capital credits, the board transitioned to a check-based system for larger amounts. Whether you chose to boost your savings, cover household expenses, or pay down your bill, the choice was yours.

- For amounts of \$20 or more: You received a check in the mail, giving you the freedom to use your refund however you saw fit.
- For amounts under \$20: We applied the funds directly to your statement as a convenient bill credit.
- For former members: As always, those with inactive accounts received their refunds by check.



***Q. What if I had an outstanding bill?***

A. If you had an outstanding balance on your account, we used your refund to help bring your account current. If there was a surplus remaining, we sent it your way, either as a check for amounts over \$20, or a credit on your next bill for amounts under \$20.

***Q. Why 1997 Credits?***

A. Capital credits reflect the long-term nature of our business. The equity you provided in 1997 has spent the last few decades working for you — building the substations, poles and lines that power our co-op community. Now that those investments have matured and our cooperative remains financially strong, we've returned that capital to the members who helped build the system. Your refund is a promise kept — a return on the investment you made in your cooperative back in 1997.

***Q. I wasn't a member in 1997. Will I get a check?***

A. Last year's general retirement was for members who provided capital to operate the co-op in 1997. If you joined us after that, you're currently building your own equity! Every time you pay your bill, you're earning capital credits that will be returned to you in future retirements. It's one of the long-term rewards of being a member-owner.

***Q. How did your policy for returning member capital change in 2024?***

A. As of Jan. 1, 2024, Southwestern began offering members more control over their capital credits. If you're terminating your membership or settling an estate, you can apply for an adjusted early payout. While Southwestern previously only returned credits on a set schedule, this new option provides immediate access to member equity.

***Q. What prompted the policy change?***

A. Our community is more mobile than it was when our original policies were drafted in 1939. We recognize that many members now relocate more frequently, often moving off our lines. To ensure you receive the equity you've earned — and to prevent us from losing touch as you move — the Board of Directors updated our policy to include an adjusted early payout option. This change ensures your capital stays with you, regardless of where life takes you.

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

A. When capital credits are returned early, they're adjusted to their "net present value." Because these funds were intended to support Southwestern's infrastructure for 30 years, withdrawing them ahead of schedule means the co-op needs to replace that capital sooner than planned. The adjustment ensures that members who choose an early payout receive a fair value today without placing an additional financial burden on the members who remain on our lines.

***Q. Do you publish a list of unclaimed capital credits?***

A. Absolutely. We want to ensure these funds reach their rightful owners. You can search our latest list of unclaimed capital credits at [sweci.com/capital-credits](https://sweci.com/capital-credits). If you find your name or have questions, please call us at 800-637-8667.

## Moving? Keep in touch!

When you relocate, please update your contact information. By keeping your record current, you're making sure you receive your capital credits.

# Smart Savings

by Energy Manager Julie Lowe

## SMART DEVICES CAN IMPROVE COMFORT WHILE LOWERING YOUR ENERGY BILL

There are many appliances and devices on the market today designed to help you save energy — and saving energy means saving money. Here are a few of our favorites.

### SMART THERMOSTAT

Smart thermostats perform many of the same functions as regular programmable thermostats, as they allow you to control the temperature in your home throughout the day using a schedule. But they also offer additional features, such as sensors and Wi-Fi connectivity, that allow you to adjust your home's environment remotely using your mobile or internet-connected device. This capability makes operation more convenient, offering more control of heating and cooling, and therefore more control of energy savings.

Some smart thermostats, such as the Nest Thermostat, can “learn” when the house is likely to be occupied and when it is likely to be empty, by using the location services on your mobile phone. This allows automatic pre-heating or pre-cooling, so the temperature is comfortable when you arrive. If your schedule or lifestyle change, the smart thermostat will gradually adjust to accommodate your new routine, maintaining energy savings and comfort.



Most of these smart thermostats also come with energy reports. The reports are free and easy to read, and depending on the model, can include an hour-by-hour breakdown of your home's thermostat data, inside temperature versus outside temperature by readings, humidity levels, etc.

While smart thermostats may be a wise investment for some homes, they won't work with all HVAC systems. For most smart thermostats to work, a strong Wi-Fi signal is necessary.

### SMART POWER STRIP

Traditional power strips are an affordable way to expand the number of electrical outlets in your home. The downside is that the convenience of the strip can encourage you to leave electronics plugged in all the time — and many devices continue to draw energy even when you aren't using them! DVD players, computers and TVs are all examples of products that may use significant energy in standby mode. This “phantom power” drain costs money and wastes energy.

Smart power strips work to reduce your energy usage by shutting down power to products that go into standby mode. For example, when a TV plugged into a basic smart power strip goes into standby mode, its power consumption drops. The circuitry within the strip detects the change and cuts the power to that outlet while maintaining power to other outlets on the strip.

Some smart power strips let you group items together, turning all of them on or off at the same time. Such a strip would be useful for devices that you can only use when the TV is on, like a DVD player or a gaming system.

Smart power strips come with a range of options, from basic to more high-tech

— including surge protection and motion detection.

### SMART PLUG

Smart plugs are an easy and affordable way to turn ordinary appliances, lighting and other electronics into devices you can control from your smart phone.

Installation is simple. You plug the smart plug into a wall outlet or power strip. Then you plug the device of your choice into the smart plug. It's that easy. You won't gain or lose an outlet — you're making an existing outlet smart by connecting it to your home Wi-Fi network.



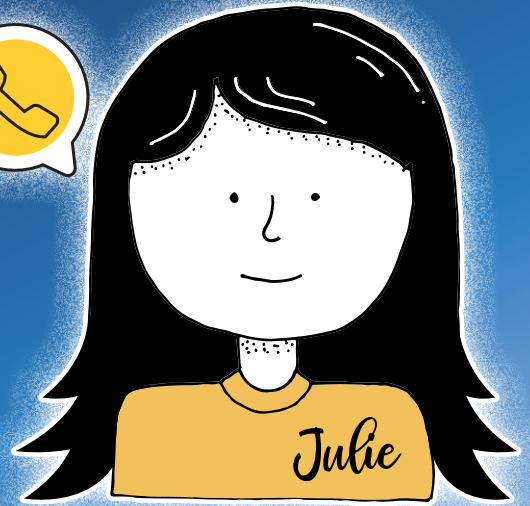
You'll need to install an app on your phone that's compatible with the smart plug of your choosing. From the app you will be able to control the power to the plug and schedule on and off times. Additionally, some apps support energy monitoring.

Installation is the same for all smart plugs; the variation comes with the smartphone and app you will be using. There are many models available. Compare cost and features to determine which will best fit your needs.

*For more energy-saving tips, contact Julie Lowe, energy manager, at 800-637-8667 or [julie.lowe@sweci.com](mailto:julie.lowe@sweci.com).*



# Steps to Solar Commissioning



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

**2** Contact your installer and insurance agent. Ask your installer to send a one-line diagram and certificate of insurance. Speak with your insurance agent to confirm you have appropriate coverage. 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.

**3** 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.

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

**5** 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.

**6** 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 (SRECs).

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

# GET THE DRIFT

**D**eath by snow shovel. Sound unlikely? Unfortunately, it's a real issue, with senior citizens and people who lead a sedentary lifestyle being at higher risk. Nationwide, each year, snow shoveling results in thousands of injuries and up to a hundred deaths.

It's hard to imagine a few shovel-loads of snow taxing your heart or testing your back, but those scoops add up. Clearing your sidewalk of wet, heavy snow may have you moving 20-pound scoops. Assume 15 scoops each minute for 15 minutes, and you've moved more than two tons of snow. That's a vigorous weight workout combined with steady aerobics. If you're unaccustomed to exercise, that's asking a lot of your body — and your body may say no.

If you're fit enough to shovel, these common-sense reminders will help you make it through snow season injury-free.

**The Right Tools Rule.** Before the snow hits, buy a shovel that suits you. Look for a scoop and handle that are a good match for someone your height and strength.

## Watch the Weather.

When there's a heavy snow forecast, stay ahead of the storm. Clear the snow every few inches instead of waiting for it to stop before you venture outside.

**Wear Layers.** Instead of a single heavy coat, wear layers of loose, moisture-wicking clothing. As you heat up, you can shed layers to regulate your temperature.



## Watch Your Extremities.

Frozen fingers and toes make for miserable work. Waterproof boots with good traction and insulated gloves



that shield your skin from the wind are good choices. For a few dollars you can buy several pairs of knit gloves, wear them inside mittens, and change them when your hands get wet.

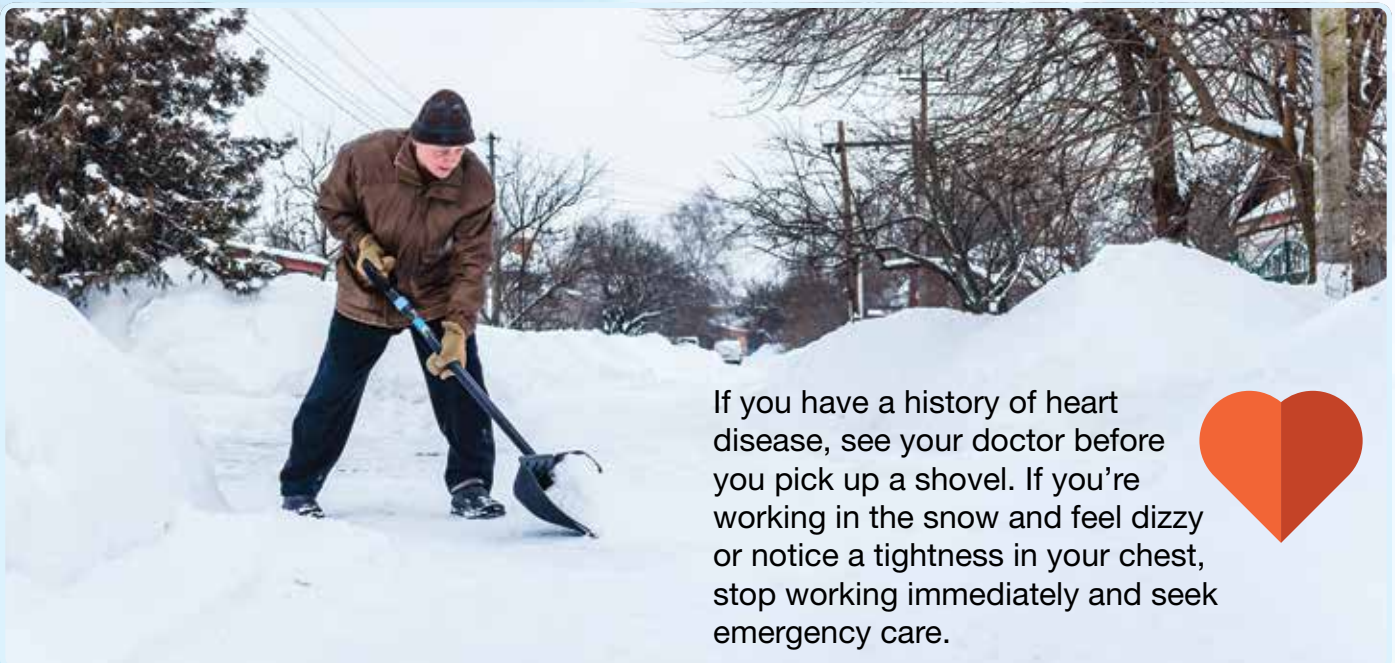
**That's a Stretch.** Just as you'd warm up before lifting weights or running, you need to stretch before you shovel. It can stave off strains and other injuries.

**Push It.** If you can push the snow aside rather than lift and throw, you'll use less energy, tire less quickly, and reduce stress on your body.

**Hydrate.** You wouldn't work outside in summer without water. It's just as important to hydrate in the dry winter air. You're working out. Act accordingly.



**Posture Pointers.** If you do lift, pay attention to technique. Squat with your



If you have a history of heart disease, see your doctor before you pick up a shovel. If you're working in the snow and feel dizzy or notice a tightness in your chest, stop working immediately and seek emergency care.





## Z-BEST SHOVEL FOR YOU

Snow shovels with the distinctive z-shaped shaft are designed to lessen the strain on your lower back. They reduce the bending you'll do while scooping snow. Another shovel design with comfort in mind features a large wheel attached to the handle. The wheel takes the weight of a loaded scoop and serves as a fulcrum for lifting. Both designs are more expensive than traditional models, but if their features keep you out of an emergency room or urgent care office, they're worth the investment.

legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs. Don't bend at the waist. Holding a shovel with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Shovel deep snow in layers. Take an inch or two at a time. Move your feet rather than twisting.

**Watch the Road.** By default, shoveling a walk or drive puts you next to the road. Keep an eye on approaching traffic. That oncoming car may swerve off the snow-slickened pavement, or a snowplow may jet ice and debris your way.



**Keep A Phone Handy.** You may not feel compelled to Instagram your exemplary snow shoveling, but keep your phone tucked in an inside pocket. You'll keep your battery warm and, should you need help, it's only a call away.



## Throwing Snow

**S**now blowers and throwers eliminate the physical strain of manual snow removal — but they come with their own unique dangers. Each winter, people lose fingers and toes to accidents involving snow clearing machinery. Many operators are diligent about staying clear of the auger, only to be injured by an impeller.

The auger, which resembles a large drill bit, is responsible for pulling in snow and feeding it to the impeller. The impeller, a metal plate sporting blades, throws snow away from the machine. Wet snow, ice and debris can clog the discharge chute and stall the impeller. By removing the clog, you enable the impeller to spin, cutting and twisting anything in its way.

Even with the machine off, the impeller can spin. Torque can drive the blade for another rotation — which is more than enough to damage fingers. Turn off a gas powered snow blower or unplug the cord of an electric model and use a clearing tool, stick or broom handle to free ice and debris from the auger or discharge chute. You want to keep your hands and feet clear of the machine — even when it's off.

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Make sure you've read the operator's manual and you're familiar with the controls.
- Before it snows, take a few minutes to assess your work area. Remove sticks, mats, and other items that may stall the snowblower, become projectiles, or trip you.
- Plan a path that won't shoot snow toward pedestrians, traffic, and items that could be damaged by projectiles.
- Find eye and ear protection, store it with your snowblower, and be conscientious about using it.
- Don't wear jewelry, long scarves or other loose clothing that could become entangled in the moving parts of a snow thrower.
- For an electric model, use a properly rated outdoor extension cord with ground fault circuit protection. Plot a pattern that keeps the cord clear of the auger.

### CLEARING AN OBSTRUCTION

- If the snow blower jams, turn it off.
- Disengage the clutch.
- Wait 10 seconds after shutting off the motor or engine. That should provide enough time for the impeller to stop rotating.
- Always use a clearing tool, stick or broom handle to clear impacted snow.
- Keep all shields in place. Don't remove any safety devices on the machine.
- Keep hands and feet away from moving parts. Never put your hand down the chute or around the blades, even after you've turned off the machine. The auger and impeller may spin even with the engine or motor switched off.



# LINCOLN LAND

Nearly 200 years on, the places that shaped Abraham Lincoln's political career are just minutes away

Story by Joe Richardson | Photos by Mike Barns

While Springfield anchors the story of Abraham Lincoln's life, his early legacy was built in courthouses and town squares across our region. From his days as a circuit-riding lawyer to his debates as a senatorial candidate, the counties that make up Southwestern Electric's service area helped shape the political career of the man who would preserve the Union.

As our nation turns its eyes to the marble memorials of Washington and the historic sites of Springfield this month, we have the privilege of following Lincoln's footsteps through our own backyard.

## POLITICAL ROOTS, FAYETTE COUNTY

Begin your journey into Lincoln's political past in Vandalia. Serving as the state capital before Springfield, the Vandalia State House in Fayette County is the oldest surviving capitol building in Illinois. During his time in the Illinois legislature, Abraham Lincoln honed his political skills and began articulating his positions on slavery. Today, visitors can explore the restored State House chambers and see a life mask of Lincoln on display at the nearby Evans Public Library.

## THE TRAVELING LAWYER

Before the presidency, Lincoln traveled extensively as a lawyer on the Eighth Judicial Circuit. In Shelby County, bronze statues next to the Shelbyville courthouse commemorate the Lincoln-Thornton Debate of 1856, a moment reflecting Lincoln's evolving stance against slavery.

In Montgomery County, the "Among Friends" statue in Hillsboro depicts Lincoln in his law-and-politics days, recalling the visits he made across central Illinois beyond the official

stops of his judicial circuit. Local lore recalls an 1858 speech delivered from a wagon under a circus tent during a storm, a story that stands as a testament to Lincoln's rhetorical skill and dedication to his audience.

## THE FINAL DEBATE

The year 1858 was defined by Lincoln's senatorial campaign against Stephen A. Douglas. Madison County hosts one of the most significant sites of the era: Lincoln-Douglas Square in Alton. This location saw the seventh and final debate, now memorialized with bronze statues of the two rivals.

## ALLIES AND AUDIENCES

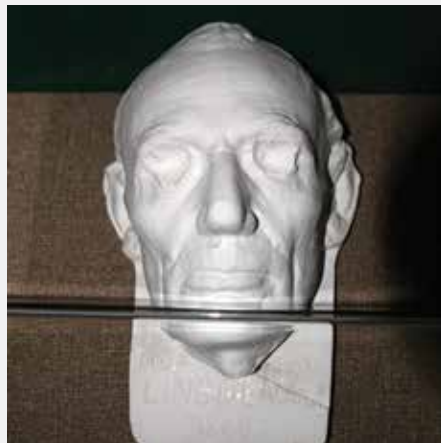
Lincoln's influence extended beyond the counties where he practiced law, connecting him to key allies and communities across the region.

In Alton, the Lyman Trumbull House on Henry Street — part of the Lincoln & Civil War Legacy Trail — was home to U.S. Senator Lyman Trumbull, a close ally who co-authored the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery.

In Belleville, a marker and historic site honor Gustave Koerner, a German immigrant who served as Illinois lieutenant governor, rallied German-American support for Lincoln, and later served as U.S. Minister to Spain during the Civil War. He also stood as a pallbearer at Lincoln's funeral.

In Bond County, a plaque west of the Greenville courthouse square commemorates his 1858 campaign visit.

In Macoupin County, Lincoln history is set in stone. The Lincoln Boulder in Carlinville marks the place where Lincoln spoke on August 31, 1858.





## If you're looking for Lincoln this month, here's our at-a-glance guide to places you'll find him

### Bond County (Greenville)

- **Lincoln Historic Plaque**, 411 S. 5th Street. A plaque west of the courthouse square commemorates Lincoln's 1858 campaign visit and speech. Please view from the public right of way.

### Fayette County (Vandalia)

- **Vandalia State House State Historic Site**, 315 W. Gallatin Street. Illinois' oldest surviving capitol building. Lincoln served in the Illinois House of Representatives here until the state capital moved to Springfield, honing his political skills and beginning to articulate his positions on slavery.
- **The Lincoln Collection (Evans Public Library)**, 825 W. Randolph Street. Features a life mask of Lincoln, as well as historical documents and images.
- **Lincoln Park & Wayside Exhibits** Several "Looking for Lincoln" storyboards are located around the State House and downtown Vandalia.

### Macoupin County (Carlinville)

- **The Lincoln Boulder**, 100 block of East First South Street (United Methodist Church yard). This multi-ton boulder marks the spot where Lincoln gave a speech on August 31, 1858.

### Madison County (Alton & Edwardsville)

- **Lincoln-Douglas Square**, 100 Market Street, Alton. Site of the seventh and final debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas on October 15, 1858. Today it features bronze statues of both men overlooking a brick courtyard.
- **Lyman Trumbull House**, 1105 Henry Street, Alton. National Historic

Landmark and site on the Lincoln Legacy Trail. Trumbull, a key Republican ally, championed the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and later chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee.

- **Madison County Courthouse**, 155 N. Main Street, Edwardsville. A plaque mounted beside the Main Street entrance commemorates Lincoln's speech here on September 11, 1858.

### Montgomery County (Hillsboro)

- **Lincoln Plaza & Statue**, 200 Courthouse Square. The "Among Friends" statue depicts Lincoln in his law-and-politics days, recalling visits he made across central Illinois beyond the stops of his judicial circuit.



### Shelby County (Shelbyville)

- **Shelby County Courthouse**, 301 E. Main Street. Features a historical painting by Robert Root depicting the Lincoln-Thornton Debate of 1856.
- **Lincoln-Thornton Statues** Bronzes outside the courthouse show Abraham Lincoln and Anthony Thornton debating slavery, commemorating Shelbyville's 1856 showdown and Lincoln's early Republican years.

### St. Clair County (Belleville)

- **Gustave Koerner House**, 200 Abend Street. Koerner, a German immigrant, was a close political ally of Lincoln, served as Illinois lieutenant governor, and later as U.S. Minister to Spain. He also stood as a pallbearer at Lincoln's funeral.





## WHO • WHAT • WHERE



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,  
NYWT&S Collection LC-DIG-pmsca-05791

**O**ur January puzzle challenged readers to identify a figure whose influence reaches far beyond the frame of any photo she appears in — and there are many.

Katherine Dunham was a groundbreaking dancer, anthropologist and civil rights activist. She reshaped American dance by blending Caribbean and African traditions with modern technique, and she used her platform to confront segregation long before it was safe to do so.

Thank you to everyone who sent a solution to the puzzle. And congratulations to puzzle solver extraordinaire Bill Malec of O'Fallon. Bill's tenacity took him down a trail that led to Dunham. We've printed his response on the opposite page.

But before you read Bill's solution, we'd like you to consider our February challenge. Below, you'll find a sturdy, working artifact that helped us see the mid-20th century more clearly.

If this device could speak, it might say:

I'm technology that never needs a plug or a battery. I'm powered by the energy I was made to measure.

My heart is made of selenium.



# WHAT A

**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](mailto: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*.



I have a swinging needle and an analog scale, but I won't tell you how fast you're going — only how well you may see the world around you.

I don't deal in inches, pounds, or degrees. My field is foot-candles.

I'm a piece of mid-century Americana, manufactured by General Electric from the 1930s through the 1960s.

My cousins go by names like the DW-40, DW-58, and the Type 214.

Can you identify the item? We look forward to seeing your solutions. Meanwhile, here's Bill Malec's answer to our January puzzle.



She was called the “matriarch and queen mother of black dance.” Anna Kisselgoff, a dance critic for The New York Times, called her “a major pioneer in Black theatrical dance ... ahead of her time.”

The January 2026 “Who am I?” is Katherine Mary Dunham, who was an American dancer, choreographer, anthropologist, and social activist. She was born in Glen Ellyn, Illinois in 1909 and graduated from Joliet Junior College and later the University of Chicago with a degree in anthropology.

The dance company she established and led toured for 25 years performing across the United States and 57 countries.

In 1964, Dunham settled in East St. Louis, and took up the post of artist-in-residence at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. In 1967, Dunham opened the Performing Arts Training Center in East St. Louis in an effort to use the arts to combat poverty and urban unrest.

On May 21, 2006, Dunham died in her sleep from natural causes in New York City at age 96.

Today, the Katherine Dunham Centers for the Arts and Humanities manages the Katherine Dunham Dynamic Museum and Children's Workshop, located at 1005 Pennsylvania Avenue in East St. Louis.

—Bill Malec, O'Fallon



AM I?

CO-OP KITCHEN

# Bowls of Comfort

Crock Pot Broccoli Soup prepared  
& photographed by Mike Barns,  
[mike.barns@sweci.com](mailto:mike.barns@sweci.com)





## CROCK POT BROCCOLI SOUP

### Ingredients

- 4 cups water
- 4 chicken bouillon cubes
- ½ cup onion chopped
- 2 cups potatoes diced
- 1 bag frozen chopped broccoli
- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1 pound Velveeta cheese cubed

### Directions

1. Mix together water, bouillon cubes, onion, potatoes and broccoli in crock pot.
2. Cook on high until broccoli is thawed.
3. Stir in cream of chicken soup and Velveeta cheese.
4. Cook on low for 2 hours.

## MEXICAN CHICKEN CORN CHOWDER

### Ingredients

- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast chopped
- ¼ cup onion chopped
- 2 garlic cloves chopped
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 chicken bouillon cubes
- 1 cup hot water
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- 2 cups half and half
- 2 cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 1 can cream style corn
- 1 (4 ounce) can chopped green chiles undrained
- ½ teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1 medium sized tomato chopped
- fresh cilantro to garnish (optional)
- corn chips (optional)

### Directions

1. In large stock pot or Dutch oven cook chicken, onion and garlic in butter until chicken is no longer pink.
2. Dissolve bouillon cubes in hot water and pour into pot.
3. Stir in cumin and bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Add half and half, cheese, corn, chiles and hot pepper sauce.
6. Cook and stir over low heat until cheese is melted.
7. Stir in tomato and serve garnished with cilantro and crushed corn chips.

## CREAMY CHEESY CHICKEN TORTELLINI SOUP

### Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 onion diced
- 2 carrots shredded
- 3 ribs celery shredded
- 6 cups water
- 1 (12 ounce) package frozen cheese tortellini
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups whipping cream
- 1 cup Cheese Whiz
- 4 cups chicken breast cooked and diced

### Directions

1. Melt butter or margarine in large pot.
2. Add onion, carrots and celery and saute until tender.
3. Pour in water and bring to a boil.
4. Add tortellini and cook 12 - 15 minutes or until tender stirring occasionally.
5. Reduce heat and stir in milk, whipping cream, Cheese Whiz and chicken.
6. Stir constantly over low heat until heated through and cheese is melted.

## QUICK VEGETABLE SOUP

### Ingredients

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- ½ cup onion chopped
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 (28 ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 quart water
- 1 (15 ounce) can mixed vegetables
- 4 beef bouillon cubes
- 1 cup medium egg noodles uncooked
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar

### Directions

1. In large stock pot brown ground beef with onion and drain.
2. Add oregano and pepper and combine with beef.
3. Stir in remaining ingredients.
4. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until noodles are tender.



## CURRENT EVENTS

**February 2-4, 18-20, 25-27; March 6 BALD EAGLE DAYS**, Grafton. Learn to distinguish between immature and mature bald eagles and why they winter in our area. Programs begin at the park's visitor center at 8:30 a.m. (reservations required). There will be a video presentation and program followed by a drive to view bald eagles. Dress warmly, have a full tank of gas and bring binoculars. Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center, 13653 Lodge Blvd. For reservations, call 618-786-3323 ext. 1.

**February 6-8, 13-15 BOEING BOEING**, Breese. A theatrical presentation by Clinton County Showcase. A witty and touching comedy about friendship, living life to the fullest, and



**February 8 SUPERB OWL SUNDAY**, East Alton. This Sunday is all about owls, come down to learn and meet some of these superb birds. Enjoy ticketed owl meet and greets with the Treehouse Wildlife Center, an education table, and crafts. View wild eagles and swans in our heated building through high powered spotting scopes. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Owl meet-and-greets at 11 a.m., noon and 1 p.m. Tickets required for meet-and-greets are \$5. Audubon Center at Riverlands, 301 Riverlands Way. For tickets, visit [riverlands.audubon.org](http://riverlands.audubon.org).

finding joy in the unexpected. When the ladies of a long-standing bridge club lose one of their own, the remaining three "borrow" her ashes from the funeral home for one last night of fun. All performances begin at 8 p.m. except for the last Sunday showing, which is at 2 p.m. General admission \$15. Historic Avon Theatre, 535 North 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. For reservations, call 618-526-2866 or visit [clintoncountyshowcase.com](http://clintoncountyshowcase.com).

**February 7 EAGLE MEET AND GREET**, Grafton. The World Bird Sanctuary will bring a bald eagle for up-close viewing. Take a photo with one of the handsome birds and learn interesting facts about eagles and their conservation. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Admission is free. Grafton Visitor Center, 950 East Main Street. Visit [riversandroutesc.com](http://riversandroutesc.com).

**February 7, 14 EAGLE SHUTTLE TOURS**, Alton. Enjoy a 90-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 nonrefundable unless the tour is canceled due to weather. Shuttles are limited to 15 passengers and are not ADA accessible. Tickets must be purchased in advance. 10 a.m. - noon. Admission is \$22.50. Tour begins and ends at Alton Visitor's Center, 200 Piassa Street. For tickets, visit [riversandroutesc.com/things-to-do/buy-tickets](http://riversandroutesc.com/things-to-do/buy-tickets).

**February 8 PICKER'S EXPO**, Greenville. All indoor event featuring booths and tables of signs (tractors, equipment, beer, etc.) antiques, artifacts, collectibles, toys, literature, tools, fishing and hunting items, camping and hiking equipment, boating supplies, bikes, artwork and more. Sorry, no guns. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. \$5 Cash per vehicle. On-site lunch options and beverages will be available. American Farm Heritage Museum, 1395 Museum Avenue. Visit [americanfarmheritagemuseum.org](http://americanfarmheritagemuseum.org).

**February 12 METRO THEATRE CO. PRESENTS: LIFE DOESN'T FRIGHTEN ME**, Lebanon. Inspired by Dr. Maya Angelou's powerful poem Life Doesn't Frighten Me, this original play by multi-disciplinary hip-hop artist Paige Hernandez brings to life the everyday fears we all face—and the courage within us to rise above them. Told through spoken word, hip-hop, and dance, the story celebrates every child's unique strength and reminds us all that we are indeed fearless royalty. 10 a.m. Ticket fees vary. The Hett Center for the Arts, 400 North Alton Street. For tickets, visit [thehett.com](http://thehett.com).

**February 21 & 22 GATEWAY HOME SHOW**, Collinsville. The show features a wide variety of home improvement professionals in a fun, interactive environment. Visitors can meet, compare, and connect with expert exhibitors, leaving inspired and confident to start planning. Friday 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Register online for a free entry

pass; \$10 at the door. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. [gatewayhomeshow.com](http://gatewayhomeshow.com).

**February 22 CHRISTINE BREWER'S MUSICAL JOURNEY**, Lebanon. Christine Brewer's appearances in opera, concert, and recital are marked by her own unique timbre, at once warm and brilliant combined with a vibrant personality and emotional honesty reminiscent of the great sopranos of the past. Her discography includes over 25 recordings. Event will also feature acclaimed pianist Alla Voskoboinikova. 3 p.m. Ticket fees vary. The Hett Center for the Arts, 400 North Alton Street. For tickets, visit [thehett.com](http://thehett.com).

**February 28 ALTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA VARIATIONS ON AMERICANA**, Godfrey. A lively tribute to American music featuring Bernstein's "Candide Overture," Ives' "Variations on America," Copland's timeless "Appalachian Spring" and more. This concert will feature our Marie Stillwell Concerto Competition winner Tyler He, and AYS seniors. 3 p.m. Adult \$10; child \$5. Alton Symphony Orchestra, Lewis & Clark Community College, Hatheway Cultural Center, 5800 Godfrey Road. For tickets, visit [alton-symphonyorchestra.org](http://alton-symphonyorchestra.org).

**February 28 AQUILA THEATRE: HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**, Lebanon. Step out onto the fog-shrouded moors of England with this spine-tingling mystery that can only be solved by the legendary Sherlock Holmes and

### Call to Confirm

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

### Submissions

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

trusted companion, Dr. Watson. 7:30 p.m. Ticket fees vary. The Hett Center for the Arts, 400 North Alton Street. For tickets, visit [thehett.com](http://thehett.com).

**February 28 POLAR PLUNGE**, Carlyle. The Polar Plunge, presented by Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run, is a unique opportunity to support Special Olympics athletes by taking a flying leap – a leap into the frigid waters of Carlyle Lake. Participants must raise \$100 in donations from friends, family and co-workers in exchange for jumping into the icy waters. Anyone can plunge – young and old. Wear anything but a wet suit, shoes are required and costumes encouraged. Registration opens at 9 a.m.; pre-plunge party 10 a.m.; costume parade 11:30 a.m.; plunge at noon. Carlyle Lake's Main Beach, 795 Lake Road. For more, information, visit [carlylelake.com/polar-plunge-at-carlyle-lake/](http://carlylelake.com/polar-plunge-at-carlyle-lake/).

**March 6-8, 12-15 ALTON LITTLE THEATER: FOUR OLD BROADS**, Alton. Laugh out loud with this hilarious comedy about four sassy senior citizens planning the ultimate girls' trip while uncovering a few wild secrets along the way. Admission is \$25. March 6, 7, 12 and 13 shows at 7:30 p.m.; March

8, 14 and 15 shows at 2 p.m. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, call 618-462-3205 or visit [alton-littletheater.org](http://alton-littletheater.org).

**March 7 FROGWATCH TRAINING**, Godfrey. Do you want to help scientists learn about frogs and toads? Learn how to become a Frogwatch Community Scientists and monitor the frogs and toad in your local ponds. Jessica Mohlman with Frogwatch will lead a training and give you the knowledge and tools needed to be a participant in this long running survey. Registration required. 5 - 7 p.m. The Nature Institute, 2213 South Levis Lane. To register, visit [thenatureinstitute.org](http://thenatureinstitute.org).

**March 15 SAUSAGE & KRAUT DINNER**, Troy. The menu includes grilled pork sausage, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, sauerkraut and dessert. Drive-thru only. 11:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. All dinners are \$15. Friedens United Church of Christ, 207 East Center Street. Call 618-667-6535.

**March 21 WILDFLOWER WALK**, Godfrey. Spring is here which means it is time to look for some wildflowers. Our earliest wildflowers are the ones that bloom in the forest before the trees get their leaves. They

don't last long so join us for a hike to identify some common spring ephemeral wildflowers. 10 - 11:30 a.m. Registration required. Members are free; nonmembers \$5. The Nature Institute, 2213 South Levis Lane. To register, visit [thenatureinstitute.org](http://thenatureinstitute.org).

**March 21 & 22 SPRING AWAKENING CONCERT**, Highland. Heartland Community Chorus will perform in collaboration with the Highland Youth Orchestra. Saturday 7 - 8:30 p.m.; Sunday 3 - 4:30 p.m. General admission is \$15. St. Paul's Catholic Church, 1411 Main Street. For tickets, visit [heartlandcommunitychorus.org](http://heartlandcommunitychorus.org).

**March 25, April 1, 8, 15, 22 ADULT CLAY HANDBUILDING CLASS**, Highland, IL. Join seasoned art teacher, Courtney Sellers, as she leads you through the process of hand building clay using slab construction. You will work with her to make 2 - 3 projects that will be fired upon completion of class. All materials, tools and supplies will be provided. Cost is \$100. Come join us on Wednesdays from 6 - 8 p.m. Class size is limited. Ages 14+. Highland Middle School, 2813 IL-160. Email [burnskathy11@gmail.com](mailto:burnskathy11@gmail.com) for questions or

visit [highlandartscouncil.org](http://highlandartscouncil.org) for easy sign-up.

**March 27-29 ILLINOIS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY SHOW**, Collinsville. The show will display authentic Native American artifacts dating from the pre-1900s. No contemporary Native American material will be at the show. Presenters/exhibitors must have authorization before event. Friday 3 - 7 p.m.; Saturday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Sunday 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Admission is \$5. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit [illinoisstatearchaeological-society.com](http://illinoisstatearchaeological-society.com).

**March 28 & 29 AMERICAN INDIAN & ETHNOGRAPHIC SHOW**, Collinsville. See native art, tools, and cultural items and learn about the different cultures and tribes of the Native American people. Items featured at this show will include beadwork, Native American artifacts, fossils, pottery, antique guns and knives, native rugs and blankets, paintings, modern art, turquoise jewelry, Civil War items, old west artifacts, and artifacts from around the world. Saturday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Sunday 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Admission is free. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit [gatewaycenter.com](http://gatewaycenter.com).



**Voices for  
Cooperative  
Power**

***United for Stronger Communities***

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



[aieccoop/vcp](http://aieccoop/vcp)

► *Continued from page 10*

I can't share specific numbers at this point," Williams said. "We'll publish the new rates well before they take effect and provide our members with tools to help them calculate their new bills."

He added that with the Time of Use rates and demand charges Southwestern is introducing, members will have greater control over when and how they use energy — and what they ultimately pay.

Both the rate restructuring and the WPCA are designed to keep rates fair, accurate, and directly tied to the cost of providing power, Williams explained. "As a not-for-profit utility, our objective is to offer power at the lowest sustainable cost," he said. "These changes help us accomplish that mission."

## HOW THE WPCA SERVES MEMBERS

The WPCA is a pass-through cost. Southwestern collects only what's required to cover power expenses. Every six months, the cooperative's officers and board of directors review market data to ensure the adjustment reflects the true cost of supplying power to members.

This process protects members from volatility, maintains financial stability, and positions the cooperative to offer safe, reliable, affordable energy.

## WAYS TO PAY & WAYS TO SAVE

Southwestern Electric offers several programs to help you manage your electric bill.

### Levelized Billing

Levelized Billing flattens the peaks and valleys of seasonal usage, making it easier to budget. Your payment is calculated on a rolling 12-month average and will vary by only a few dollars from month to month. To qualify, your account must have been active for at least 12 months with a zero balance at enrollment and no more than one late payment in the past year.

### Pay As You Go

Pay As You Go lets you closely monitor daily usage and customize your payment schedule. No credit history or security deposit is required, and there are no fees for late payment, delinquency, or reconnection. Minimum payment: \$20 per transaction, applied directly to your usage.

### LIHEAP

LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) helps eligible households pay for winter energy service. Learn more at [IllinoisLIHEAP.com](http://IllinoisLIHEAP.com) or call 877-411-WARM.

For more information about payment programs, visit [sweci.com/payment-programs](http://sweci.com/payment-programs) or call 800-637-8667.

## ENERGY-SAVING TECHNOLOGY

Southwestern offers rebates on energy-efficient technology to help you save money.

### Heat Pumps (\$300 Rebate)

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, 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.

### Water Heaters (\$250 Rebate)


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. One rebate is allowed per home. On-demand water heaters qualify for this rebate.

### Smart Thermostats (\$50 Rebate)

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 and internet-enabled.

For more information about rebates, call 800-637-8667 and ask for Energy Manager Julie Lowe, or email [julie.lowe@sweci.com](mailto:julie.lowe@sweci.com).

Each month, we offer energy-saving strategies in the Energy & Efficiency pages of The Southwestern. You can review past issues at [sweci.com](http://sweci.com). 







Snowfall  
and silence  
blanket the  
slopes beyond  
Patriots Park in  
Greenville.

**THE FINAL FRAME**



