

# THE *Southwestern*

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2025 • VOLUME 77 • ISSUE 1

## Power for Progress

APPLY FOR A \$1,200  
CO-OP SCHOLARSHIP  
TODAY!

HOME SERVICE  
PLANS OFFER  
PEACE OF MIND

GRAIN BIN  
PLANNING

ENERGY SAVING  
RESOLUTIONS

## SmartHub

NEW APP FOR ACCOUNT  
MANAGEMENT COMING  
IN MARCH

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We've hidden an image of a skier somewhere in this magazine. Don't take our word for it, though – ski, er, see it for yourself.

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SmartHub is an account management app that, among other capabilities, allows co-op members to pay their bills, view their usage, report outages and receive important account information on their computer or mobile device. On March 3, SmartHub is coming to you!

525 U.S. Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.  
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Want to make some resolutions you can keep? Check out these 12 easy home projects and resolve to make your home more energy efficient in the new year.

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Generators are great, helpful devices when used correctly, but danger lurks – for users and our linemen – if utilized the wrong way.

**20 Out & About**

This time of year, bald eagles flock to nearby riverbanks in pursuit of fish. We've got a list of places for you to flock in hopes of catching sight of them.

**22 Who-What-Where**

You clearly studied our November fire department photo but couldn't place it. Will you get the message with this month's item?

**24 Co-op Kitchen**

They're called sloppy joes, but we promise you can eat them however you like – neatly, sloppily, and with or without a Joe.

**26 Current Events**

Did we mention it's eagle-watching season?

**27 Final Frame**

Fire & light.

# Reader Contest

**W**e've hidden an image of a skier 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 skier, 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 January contest, we'll need your entries in our inbox or postmarked by February 1, 2025.

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 March issue of The Southwestern.

## NOVEMBER WINNER

Congratulations to Bob and Tracey Goestenkers of Pocahontas. As the winners of our November Hide & Seek contest drawing, Bob and Tracey will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. Thank

you to everyone who participated in our November 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.
- January contest entries must be in our inbox or postmarked by February 1.
- We'll never hide the image on the front or back cover or on the page where we list the rules.

## ON THE COVER

A sudden snowfall paints the trees and trails of Greenville's Patriot's Park in shades of winter. Snow or no, you'll find reasons aplenty to venture into the cold in our Out & About and Events sections (pages 20 and 26). Take a moment and a breath, reflect on the year that was, then bundle up and head out to begin the year that will be. Here's to your health, happiness and good adventuring.



## CO-OP REMINDERS

**January 13** 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.



## 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 and Instagram. You can listen to our podcast, WireSide Chat, on Apple Music, Spotify, Audible and anywhere podcasts are found.

# SOUTHWESTERN ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR 2025

*Co-op to Award \$16,800  
in Academic Assistance*

**S**ince 1995, Southwestern Electric Cooperative's Power For Progress Scholarship Program has provided more than \$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 12 \$1,200 Southwestern Electric Scholarships, one \$1,200 Alan G. Libbra Memorial Scholarship and one \$1,200 Richard Gusewelle Memorial Scholarship to students in 2025.

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](http://sweci.com) (the QR code at right will take you there). 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 2025 and students who graduated from high school in previous years.

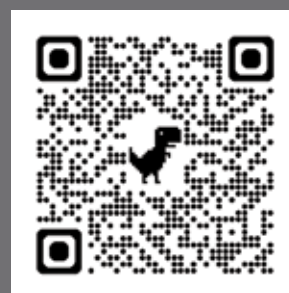
The completed application and supplemental materials — including a cover letter, academic transcripts and attendance records — must be delivered to Southwestern Electric's headquarters (525 U.S. Route 40 in Greenville), in a single envelope, by 4:30 p.m. on **Friday, March 14, 2025**.

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



## 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 2025.
- 3) The entire application must be completed in full, and received with the appropriate supplementary materials, in advance of the application deadline, March 14, 2025.



**Scan the QR code to download a scholarship application.**

# *In Celebration of Service*

Cooperation is defined as a group working together to achieve a common goal.

We'd like to begin the year by recognizing 35 Southwestern Electric employees who reached service milestones in 2024. Though their responsibilities vary, they share a single goal: providing you with the best possible service, day in and day out. You see the results of their work each time you turn on the lights, when power is restored after a storm, and when you're greeted with a kind word in our office or on the phone.

Together, the employees on these pages represent more than 380 years of service to our members.

Please join us in welcoming our new employees, thanking our retirees, and in celebrating the accomplishments of people committed to serving you.

## NEW EMPLOYEE



Devin Aukamp  
*Forestry  
Journeyman*



Logan Cayce  
*Staking Engineer*



Hannah Luketich  
*Member Services  
Representative*



Nathan Taylor  
*Chief Financial  
Officer*



Kris Brissenden  
*Staking Engineer*



Tucker Johnson  
*Forestry  
Journeyman*



Shelby Nosbisch  
*Dispatcher*



Glenn Williams  
*Vice President  
of Information  
Technology*



Jake Cain  
*Forestry  
Journeyman*



Lindsey Lampe  
*Member Services  
Representative*



James  
Rickermann  
*Journeyman  
Lineman*



Toni Wodtke  
*Member Services  
Representative*



Blake Carlson  
*Systems  
Administrator*

## 5 YEARS OF SERVICE



Brian Bast  
*Journeyman  
Lineman*



Tyler Kunz  
*Journeyman  
Lineman*



Chris Hamby  
*Warehouseman*



Tyler Meseke  
*Journeyman  
Lineman*



Eric Rodgers  
*First  
Class Mechanic*



Brooke Scott  
*Executive  
Assistant*



Keith Steiner  
*Warehouseman*

## 10 YEARS OF SERVICE

## 15 YEARS OF SERVICE



Scott Fitzgerald  
*Foreman  
Polyphase  
Meterman &  
Tester*



Brian Mills  
*Staking Engineer*



Bobby Williams  
*Chief Executive  
Officer*

## 20 YEARS OF SERVICE



Kyle Hails  
*Maintenance  
Foreman*



Joe Richardson  
*Vice President of  
Communications*



Mike Willman  
*Vice President  
of Operations*

## 30 YEARS OF SERVICE



Laura Gall  
*Purchasing Agent*



Rick Mersinger  
*Maintenance  
Foreman*



Carla Schneider  
*Cashier/  
Receptionist*

## RETIREES



Barb Frerker  
*Member Services  
Representative*



Kim Jackson  
*Dispatcher*



Tracy Kuttin-  
Ferguson  
*Purchasing  
Agent*



Russell Gilbert  
*Power Plant  
General Manager*



Andrew Jones  
*Vice President  
of Business  
Development/  
Marketing*



Deb Whicker  
*Member Services  
Representative*



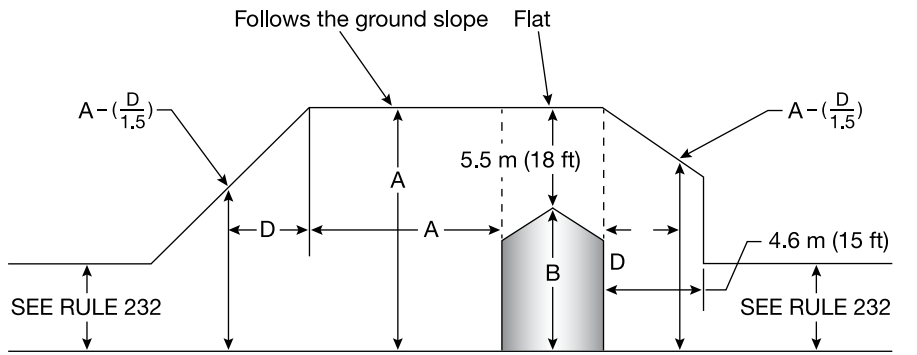
*Thank you for your service  
and dedication to the cooperative!*

# Building a grain bin? Call us first!

**PLANNING TODAY  
COULD SAVE LIVES  
TOMORROW**

**W**hile safety is usually a matter of being in tune with your environment at any given moment, there are instances when forethought on your part can prevent accidents for years to come. Grain bin construction is

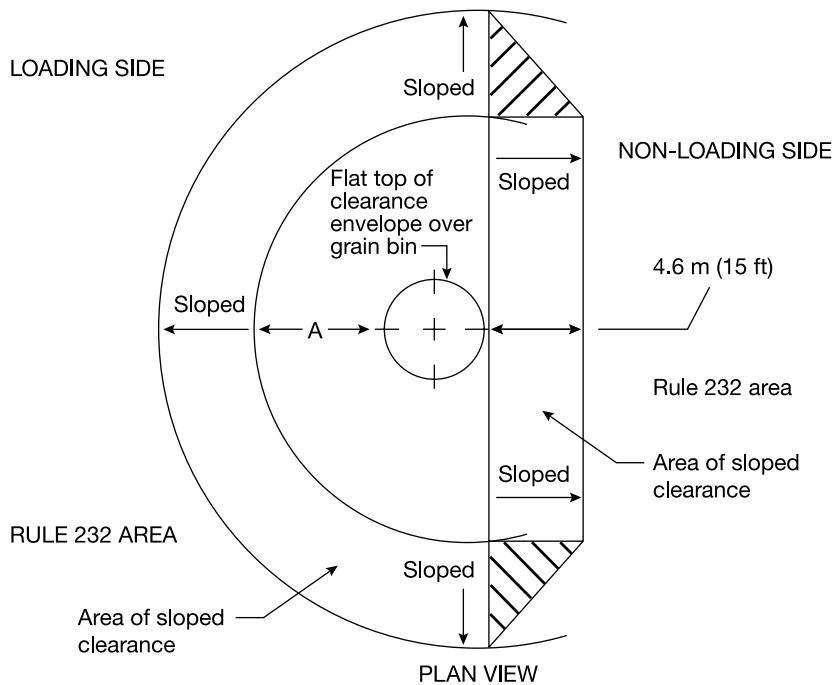
Left: Clearance envelope for grain bins filled by portable augers, conveyors, or elevators, as printed on page 128 of the 2023 edition of the National Electrical Safety Code. Appears courtesy of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.



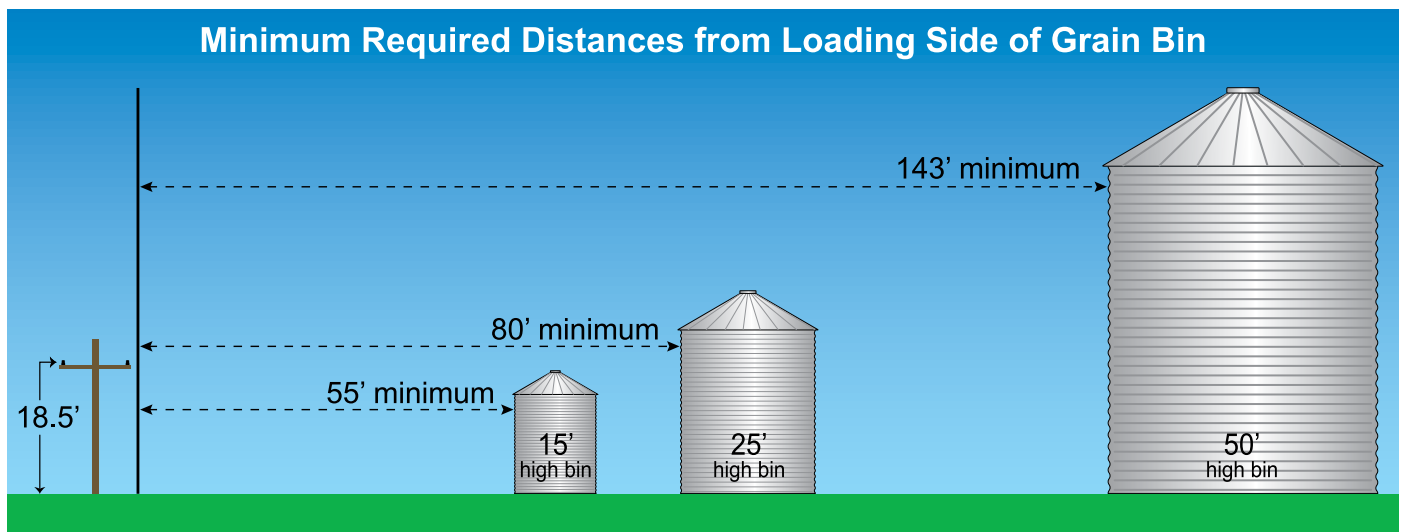
B = Height of highest filling or probing port on grain bin  
A = B + 5.5 m (18 ft)  
D = Variable horizontal dimension

### ELEVATION

In the area of sloped clearance, the vertical clearance is reduced by 300 mm (1 ft) for each additional 450 mm (1.5 ft) of horizontal distance from the grain bin.



**Figure 234-4(b) — Clearance envelope for grain bins filled by portable augers, conveyors, or elevators**





a perfect example. Just as you'd survey a new field before planting, you should also take a minute to survey your grain bin site.

First, look up. Are there power lines nearby? They don't have to be directly overhead to pose a problem. Plot the movement of your equipment around the field. How many times do you pass near or beneath power lines? Can you re-route traffic in ways that will keep you farther from them?

Perhaps you know precisely where the lines are and always use extreme caution when working near them. But what about the people who work with you? Are they just as diligent? Will a distraction or lapse in judgment place them in danger of electrocution?

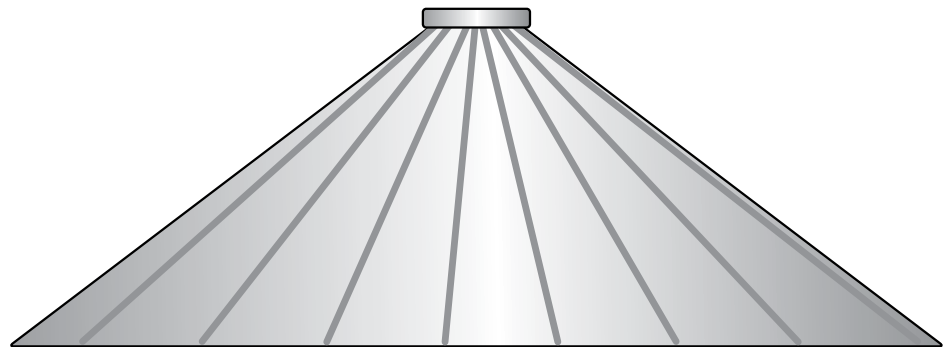
You can cut down on the danger significantly by building your bin far from power lines.

How far is far enough?

We've included diagrams and a table that illustrate requirements established by the National Electrical Safety Code (NESC). Keep these distances in mind when you search for a bin site, and then call Southwestern Electric Cooperative. We'll send a staking engineer to survey your site. It's the best way to make sure your bin will meet NESC guidelines.

While safety is certainly your first concern, there are also financial penalties for violating the NESC. If grain bins are constructed too close to power lines, Southwestern Electric is obligated to alter the path of the electrical system and bring the site into compliance. The member who violated the code by constructing the bin too close to a line is liable for the cost. In other words, if you build a bin too close to a power line, you'll have to pay the cost of relocating our facilities.

The easiest way to avoid such a problem is to call Southwestern Electric Cooperative before building. Our staking engineers will be happy to visit your site and help you plot a safe and efficient solution. For assistance, please call (800) 637-8667 and ask for the engineering department.



**Minimum Phase and Neutral Clearances from Grain Bin**  
Adapted from NESC Rule 234F

**Voltages 12.47/7.2 kV through 34.5/19.9 kV**

Height of Bin (ft)	Loading Side of Bin			No-Loading Side of Bin		
	Horizontal Distance from Bin (ft)	Minimum Conductor Height (ft)	Minimum Conductor Height (ft-in)	Horizontal Distance from Bin (ft)	Minimum Conductor Height (ft)	Minimum Conductor Height (ft-in)
15	0	33.0	33' 0"	0	33.0	33' 0"
	33	33.0	33' 0"	10	26.3	26' 4"
	40	28.3	28' 4"	15	18.5	18' 6"
	50	21.7	21' 8"			
	54.75	18.5	18' 6"			
20	0	38.0	38' 0"	0	38.0	38' 0"
	38	38.0	38' 0"	10	31.3	31' 4"
	50	30.0	30' 0"	15	18.5	18' 6"
	60	23.3	23' 4"			
	67.25	18.5	18' 6"			
25	0	43.0	43' 0"	0	43.0	43' 0"
	43	43.0	43' 0"	10	36.3	36' 4"
	50	38.3	38' 4"	15	18.5	18' 6"
	60	31.7	31' 8"			
	70	25.0	25' 0"			
30	0	48.0	48' 0"	0	48.0	48' 0"
	48	48.0	48' 0"	10	41.3	41' 4"
	60	40.0	40' 0"	15	18.5	18' 6"
	70	33.3	33' 4"			
	80	26.7	26' 8"			
35	0	53.0	53' 0"	0	53.0	53' 0"
	53	53.0	53' 0"	10	46.3	46' 4"
	60	48.3	48' 4"	15	18.5	18' 6"
	70	41.7	41' 8"			
	80	35.0	35' 0"			
	90	28.3	28' 4"			
	100	21.7	21' 8"			
	104.75	18.5	18' 6"			

NOTE: Vertical clearances, however, must be met using the worst-case sag conditions, as described in rule 234A of the NESC.



## *Home Service Repair Plans Offer Assurance, Quality and Convenience*

**W**e've all experienced home mechanical and system failures. When breakdowns involve exterior home electrical lines, members sometimes call Southwestern to request repairs. Many members understandably assume all electrical lines outside their home are owned by the cooperative. But components that connect a member's home to the cooperative's distribution system — elements like the weather head, insulator, riser, meter base or loop, and service entrance conductor — are owned by the member.

That's why Southwestern partnered with HomeServe USA, an independent provider of home repair service solutions. HomeServe offers home service repair plans that protect a homeowner's budget from expenses that come with water, sewer, electrical and heating and cooling home emergencies. Their external electrical line plan will pay for repair or replacement of items that your homeowners insurance may not cover when the components fail due to normal wear and tear.

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

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

HomeServe lessens the financial burden of unexpected breakdowns by paying the bill on covered repairs up to the benefit amount, and eases the stress and inconvenience that comes with the event. You don't have to research repair bids or vet and hire a technician.

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

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

HomeServe returns a portion of the proceeds from plan sales to Southwestern Electric Cooperative. The funds support Southwestern Electric's energy efficiency programs and other energy-related initiatives. You can read more about HomeServe at [www.HomeServe.com](http://www.HomeServe.com) and view videos on HomeServe's YouTube channel.

### Get peace of mind against emergency home repair costs

Southwestern Electric Cooperative has partnered with HomeServe to offer members optional coverage to help protect against the costs of unexpected breakdowns. See why over **4.8 million customers** trust HomeServe.



Scan this code, call 1-833-334-1874 or visit [HomeServe.com/SWECI](http://HomeServe.com/SWECI) to learn more about HomeServe service repair plans.

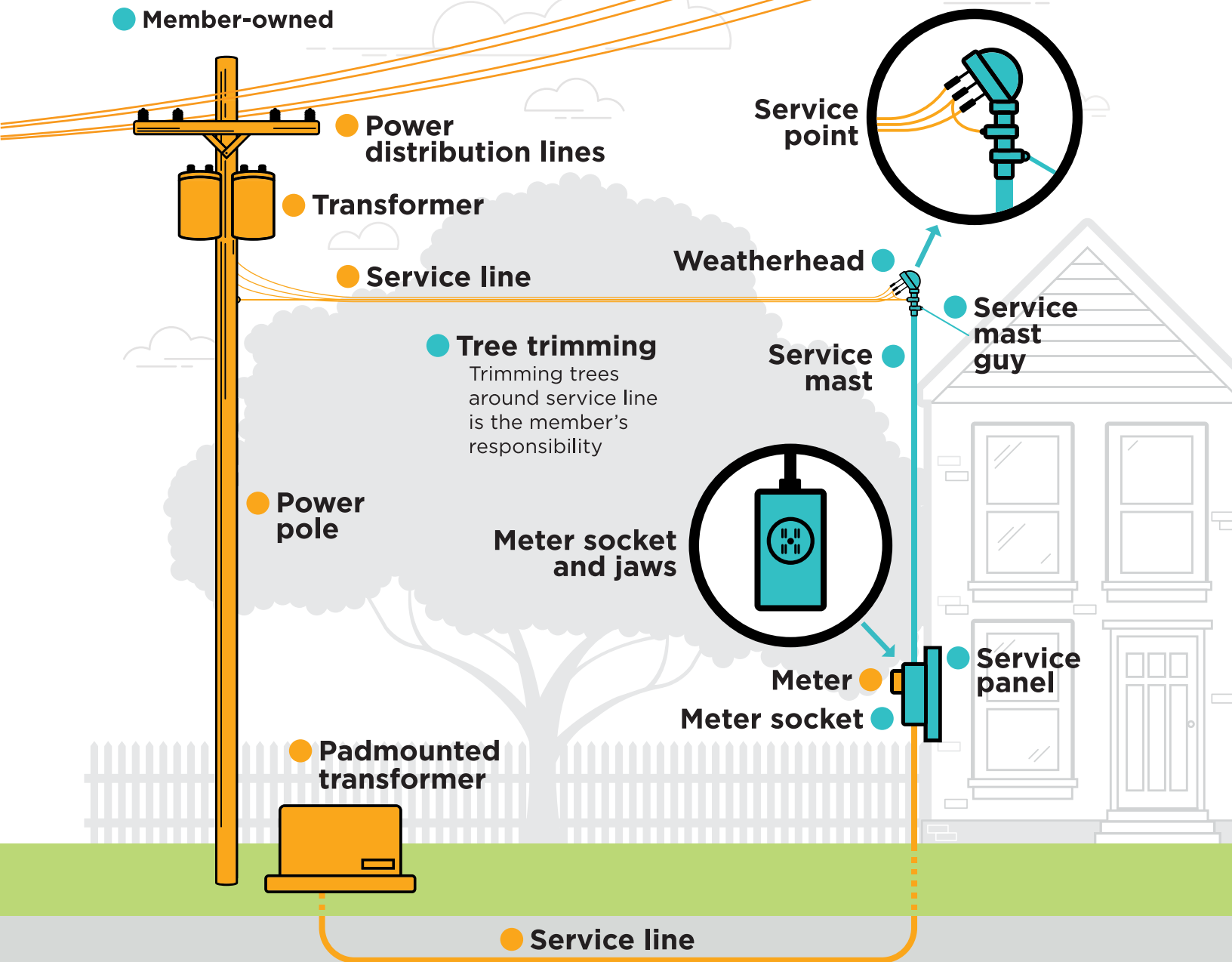


# Who Owns What?

## Electric Co-op Owned Equipment vs Member-Owned Equipment

This graphic depicts equipment owned by the co-op (in gold) and the member (in blue). If a storm damages any equipment owned by the co-op, we are responsible for repairs. If a storm damages any member-owned equipment, the member is responsible for repairs. Repairs to member-owned equipment should be performed by a licensed electrician.

- Co-op owned
- Member-owned



*Note: This graphic depicts overhead and underground service. Please be aware of which type of service you receive at your home or business.*

# SmartHub Offers Array of Account Management Tools & Messaging Options

smart



**A** new payment portal, easy-to-use app, real-time energy usage information, and multiple notification options are among the tools you'll see in March as Southwestern Electric Cooperative migrates from its legacy software provider to National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC), a St. Louis-based information technology company that develops and supports software and hardware solutions for electric co-ops across the country.

SmartHub, Southwestern's new account management system, will go live on Monday, March 3.

"SmartHub, NISC's web and mobile application, has been helping utility customers pay their bills and understand their usage for more than a decade," said Southwestern COO Vic Buehler, who coordinated Southwestern's migration to NISC. "SmartHub puts your electric use and payment details front and center for instant access," Buehler said. "The menu is simple and straightforward, so using the app is easy and convenient."

In February, Southwestern Electric will post videos highlighting SmartHub's features and how to log in to the new software. The videos will appear on the co-op's social media channels and website, [sweci.com](http://sweci.com).

"On March 3, our members will need to register in the SmartHub payment portal. The registration page will ask for your account number, last name or business name, and your email address. We're unable to move your payment

information into our new software system, so all members set up on auto pay will need to re-enroll regardless of payment method, which they can do using the SmartHub app. If you're paying your bill(s) with a credit or debit card, you'll need to re-register your card information in SmartHub after we go live on March 3," Buehler explained. "We'll post links to the new payment portal and mobile app on our website and social media channels when we go live, so SmartHub will be easy to find."

Members who access their accounts on mobile devices will need to download the SmartHub app from Google Play or the iTunes Store.

"We wanted to provide our members with more options for real-time communication, especially during outages," noted Buehler. "A lot of our members prefer to send and receive information by text. But we also have a lot of people who still prefer to get a phone call, or who appreciate push notifications when a message is time-sensitive." With SmartHub, all of those options are available, Buehler said. "Members with more than one account can choose different options for each account. It's a really useful tool."

Here's a preview of some of the tools and features you'll see in March.

**On March 3, you'll need to register in the SmartHub payment portal. The registration page will ask for your account number, last name or business name, and your email address.**

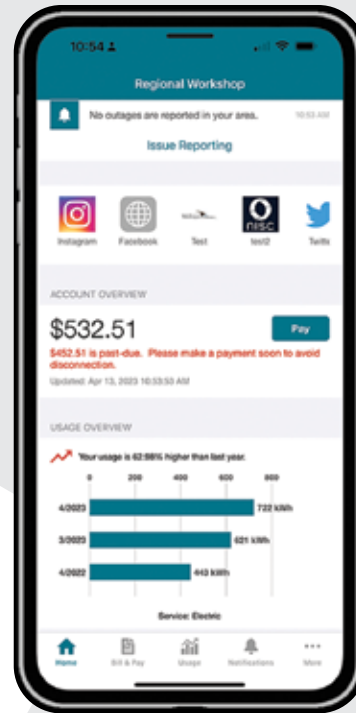
**All members set up on auto pay will need to re-enroll regardless of payment method, which they can do using the SmartHub app. If you're paying your bill(s) with a credit or debit card, you'll need to re-register your card information in SmartHub after we go live on March 3.**

**We'll post links to the SmartHub payment portal and app at [sweci.com](http://sweci.com) and on our social media channels when we go live.**

## ACCOUNT DASHBOARD

From the SmartHub account dashboard you'll see:

- Quick links that will lead to the features of SmartHub
- Usage Overview graphs to help you analyze and understand your energy usage trends
- The latest communications and alerts from us
- A Pay button to make quick payments right from the home screen



*Your member account number was assigned by Southwestern Electric when you joined the cooperative. You're getting a new app to manage your account, but your account number won't change.*

## BILLING HISTORY

From this screen, you can see the history of past bills for your account.

You can also view your bill or usage per bill by clicking on the View Bill or View Usage links.

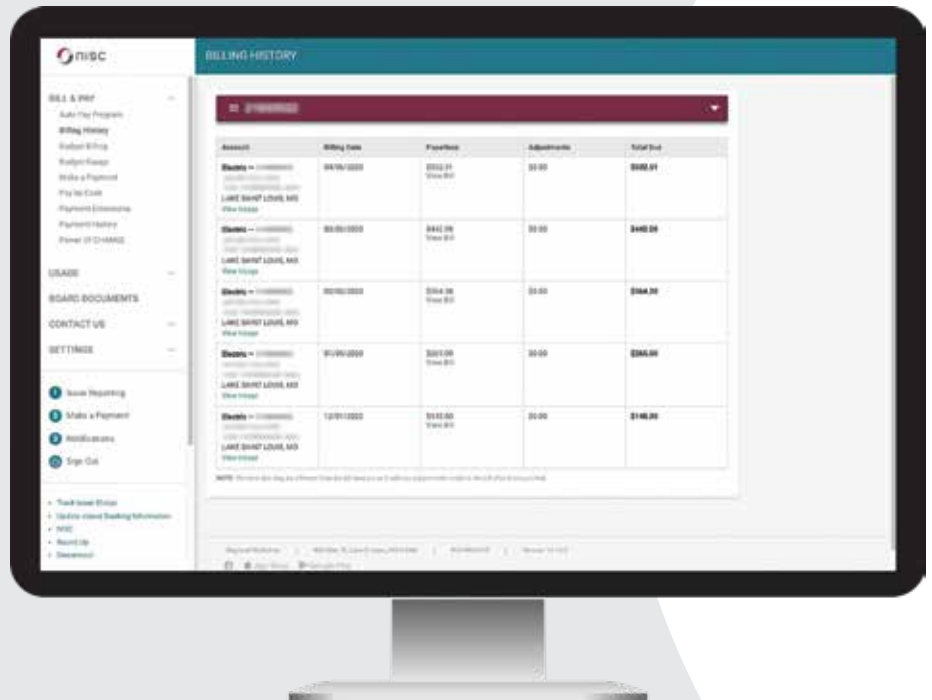
The Total Due column will reflect any adjustments made to your bill since it was printed.

## AUTO PAY PROGRAM

Enjoy the convenience of having your bill automatically paid each month from your bank account or credit card when you enroll in Auto Pay.

You no longer have to worry about due dates or late fees since payments are automatically deducted from your account each month.

For each account you have with us, you'll be able to add, edit, and remove any payment accounts you have setup to automatically make payments on your bill each month.



*Continued on next page ►*

► Continued from page 13

## LEVELIZED BILLING

Levelized billing eliminates significant seasonal changes you may sometimes see in your electric bills.

When you enroll in the program, Southwestern Electric determines your new monthly bill amount by averaging the last 12 months of electric usage on your account.

To enroll in levelized billing, you must have at least 12 months of usage history on your account, no more than one late notice over the last 12 months and a zero balance.

Levelized billing is only available for residential rate accounts. If Enroll Online isn't highlighted, your account isn't eligible for the program. If it's highlighted, you can sign up for levelized billing.

## BUDGET GAUGE PLANNING TOOL

Budget Gauge helps you set up a target monthly energy budget, and using your daily usage data, analyze where you are relative to your budget. Budget Gauge is a planning tool — it doesn't change your amount due.

## MAKE A PAYMENT

The Make A Payment screen provides a summary of all accounts you have registered including:

- Account numbers
- Billing addresses on record
- Due dates
- Auto Pay dates and amounts if you are enrolled
- A Pay Now button to quickly make payments on your balance due
- The first time you make a payment — either online or on the mobile app — you can securely store your payment information for easy future transaction

## USAGE COMPARISON

This tool lets you compare two monthly bills side-by-side to see “this year versus last year” or “this month versus last month.”

The comparison tool illustrates how weather and temperature affect your energy bills.

The comparison tool can also help you determine how changes in your lifestyle and energy usage habits or the addition of a new appliance is impacting your bill, and may suggest energy-saving measures that will offer the best return on your investment.

## AVERAGE USAGE

One of the most powerful features of SmartHub is the ability to see how much electricity you typically use during a specific period. This equips you to plan and may suggest opportunities to save on your bill.

## PAYMENT HISTORY

See at-a-glance all of the past payments that have been posted to your account.

## OPERATION ROUND UP

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

With SmartHub, you can easily enroll in ORU. After you've enrolled, Southwestern Electric will round up the amount due on your monthly electric bills to the nearest dollar. Your donations will be placed in the ORU account. ORU grants support community projects across the co-op's service territory.

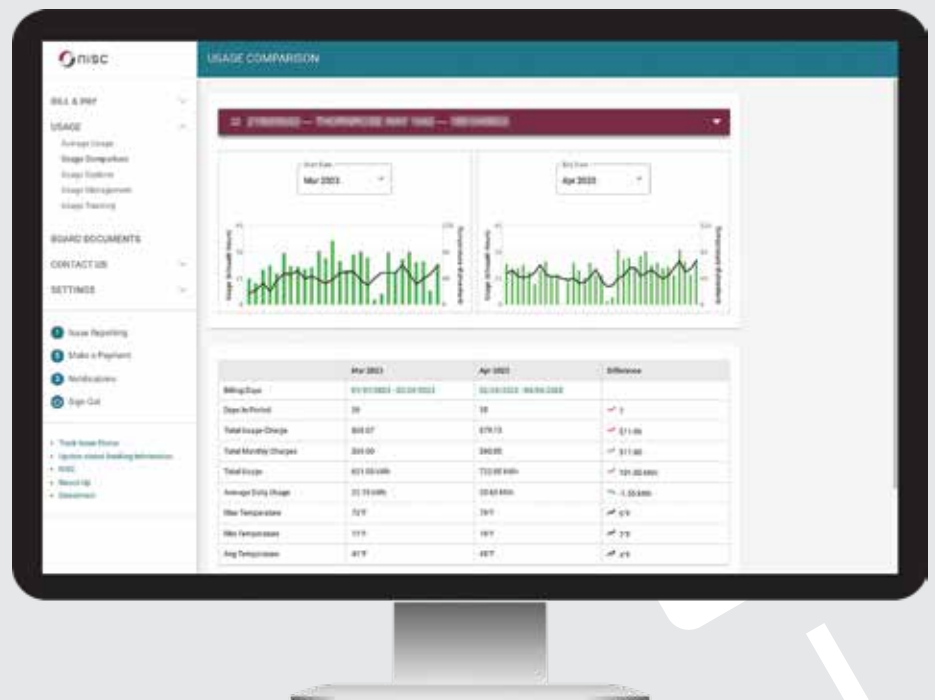
If you later decide you no longer wish to contribute, you can use SmartHub to unenroll from the program at any time.

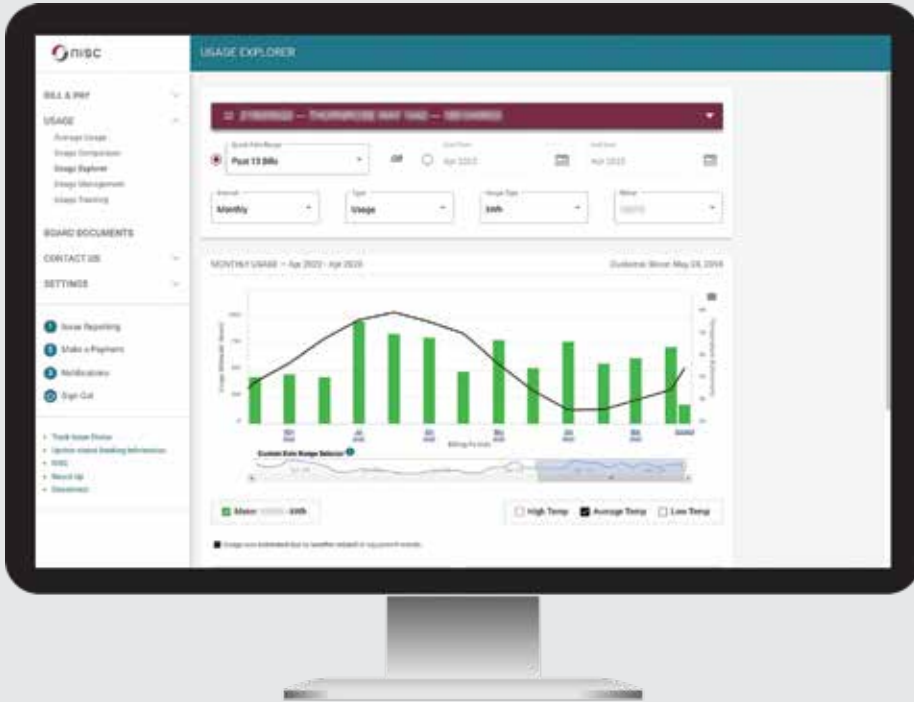
## POWER OUTAGE REPORTING

You can report outages quickly and easily using SmartHub.

## DOWNLOAD YOUR DATA

The Usage Management screen will provide tools to help identify how you use your services and evaluate ways to save usage and money.





## USAGE EXPLORER

The Usage Explorer will give you a detailed look at your past and current usage, all in one place. You'll be able to view your power use alongside weather trends by month, day or hour.

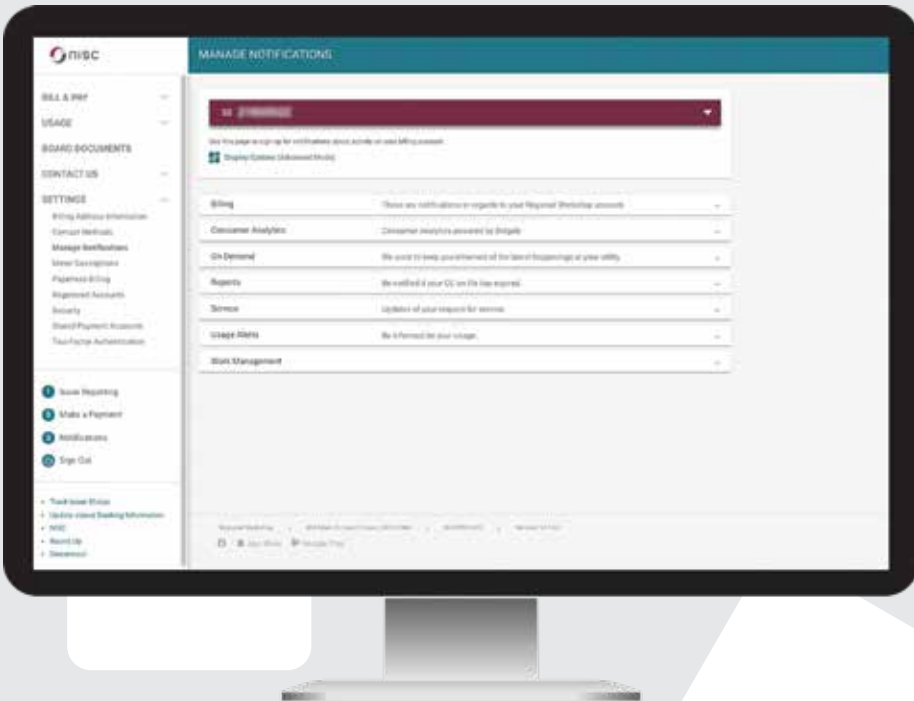
You'll be able to set filters for graphs to highlight data from specific dates and meters, and see monthly costs graphed against temperature data.

## SAVE ENERGY & MONEY

Usage Management provides tools to help you identify how you use energy and evaluate ways to save money.

You can use SmartHub's HomeEnergyCalculator™ to see your energy usage based on home inputs, weather and billing information.

SmartHub will offer tailored energy recommendations to pinpoint savings opportunities.



## MANAGE NOTIFICATIONS

Use this page to sign up for notifications about activity on your billing account. You'll use the contacts that were set up on the Manage Contacts screen.

You'll have the option to modify account notifications in the following categories:

- Billing
- Consumer Analytics
- On Demand
- Reports
- Service
- Usage Alerts
- Work Management

*Learn more about SmartHub in our February and March magazines, on our social media channels and at [sweci.com](http://sweci.com).*

# ENERGY SAVING RESOLUTIONS

## Small Investments Add Up To Year-Round Savings

by Energy Manager Julie Lowe

When you're pressed for time and living on a tight budget, making home improvements may not seem worth the effort. But small investments made with energy efficiency in mind can keep cash in your pocket year-round. And you don't have to spend the time or money all at once. Commit to making a single energy-efficiency investment each month, and watch your savings grow. Here are 12 projects to take you through the year.

### JANUARY

Lowering your thermostat just a few degrees during winter can save as much as \$85 per year on your energy bill. Programmable and smart thermostats make it easy to save by offering pre-programmed settings to regulate your home's temperature throughout the year, or allowing you to control settings remotely. Southwestern Electric is now offering a \$50 rebate on the purchase of a smart thermostat. See [www.sweci.com](http://www.sweci.com) for details!



### FEBRUARY

Sunlight can help your heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system do its work in winter. During cold months, open your curtains and blinds during the day to harness the sun, so it can help you heat your home. (In summer, use light-colored window treatments to shut out the sun, keeping your home cooler.)



### MARCH

Make sure your refrigerator is on your spring cleaning to-do list. Throw out expired items, clean the refrigerator inside and out and check the temperature gauge. For maximum operating efficiency, your refrigerator's temperature should be set between 37 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit.





## APRIL

A little caulk goes a long way toward energy savings. Caulking cracks and openings to the outside can save you more than \$200 a year.



## MAY

If you're buying a dehumidifier to keep your home comfortable, look for the ENERGY STAR label. ENERGY STAR certified dehumidifiers have more efficient refrigeration coils, compressors, and fans than conventional models, which means they remove the same amount of moisture, but use nearly 30 percent less energy. Look for a model that has the feature to shut off when the environment reaches the chosen humidity level, or has a timer you can set to control how frequently the unit runs. The annual energy saved by an ENERGY STAR certified dehumidifier could run your ENERGY STAR certified refrigerator for four months.

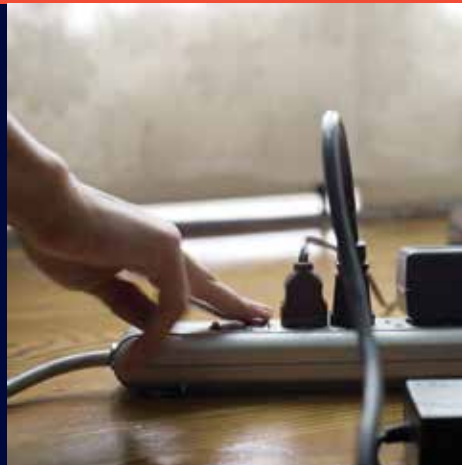


## JUNE

Hire a contractor to check your heating and cooling system. Commit to an annual HVAC system check-up from a qualified technician. A good contractor will make sure your home's heating and cooling system is operating safely and efficiently. The up-front expense can save you money over time, and it's an investment in the health of your home and family.

## JULY

Leaving home for summer vacation? Unplug electronic devices like computers (including peripheral devices like the monitor and printer), TV and cable boxes, game consoles and microwave ovens. Electronics with digital displays and standby power features consume energy even when they're not in the "on" mode.



## AUGUST

Change your home's air filters regularly—at least every three months. Dirty filters restrict air flow and reduce the efficiency of your heating and cooling system, forcing it to work harder year-round. This wastes energy and can reduce the life of expensive HVAC equipment.



## OCTOBER

Get ready for winter by insulating your attic. Adding nine or more inches of insulation could save you more than \$150 a year.



## SEPTEMBER

Seal leaking ducts in your basement. You'll help your HVAC system direct conditioned air where you need it, and keep more of your money where you want it — in your wallet.

## NOVEMBER

While you're decorating for the holidays, swap out your home's traditional light bulbs for energy-efficient LEDs.



## DECEMBER

Put a new ENERGY STAR appliance at the top of your Christmas wish list. Upgrading appliances like washing machines to ENERGY STAR-rated models can save up to \$140 per year.



For more energy efficiency tips, call Julie Lowe, energy manager, at (800) 637-8667.

# Generator Safety

**S**outhwestern Electric Cooperative is urging members who use generators to exercise caution. “When used correctly, generators are a sound, short-term solution to a power outage. But if the proper precautions aren’t taken, generators can be deadly to the people using them and to linemen working to restore power,” said Joe Richardson, editor of The Southwestern.

“Read your owner’s manual and follow the manufacturer’s instructions,” Richardson said. “It should cover general safety guidelines as well as procedures that apply specifically to your model.”

Richardson cautioned members against connecting a generator directly to their home’s wiring. “That can backfeed power into our distribution lines. Our transformers will step-up that energy, increasing it by thousands of volts. And that’s more than enough to injure or kill a lineman who’s working on that system, even if he’s a

long way from your home.”

Never plug a generator into a household outlet, said Richardson. “That can also backfeed power into the distribution system, energize power lines and injure family members, neighbors or linemen.”

Generators also produce carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless and deadly gas. Never use your generator indoors or in an attached garage, Richardson said.

“Run it outdoors in a well-ventilated, dry area, far away from air intakes to your home.”

Homeowners should plug individual appliances into portable generators using heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords with a wire gauge suitable for the appliance load.

“All the standard cord precautions apply. Don’t use extension cords with

exposed wires or worn insulation. Make sure the cords don’t present a tripping hazard, and don’t run them under rugs where heat could build up and start a fire. Be selective with what you plug into your generator,” said Richardson. Overloaded cords can cause fires and damage appliances.

“You also need to make sure your generator is properly grounded,” he said. “Generators get very hot while they’re running. They can deliver a nasty burn. Remind kids to stay clear of them.”



PHOTO COURTESY HONDA

## TRANSFER SWITCH AND GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS

- Transfer switches make life easier during a power outage while keeping linemen safe as they restore power. Without a transfer switch, power from a generator can backfeed into utility lines and electrocute linemen.
- Your transfer switch should be wired to meet standards outlined in the National Electric Code (NEC) and all local codes.
- Talk to your electrician to make sure you have the proper sized wire to accommodate your generator and the needs of your home.
- Never use a generator indoors.
- Inspect wire from your generator to the power inlet for tears in the insulation.
- Make sure the voltage your generator produces won’t damage your electronics.
- Never plug a portable generator into an outlet in your home. It can backfeed energy into power lines and compromise the safety of your family, neighbors, and service crews.

## TRANSFER SWITCHES

The only safe way to connect a generator to your home's existing wiring is to hire a licensed electrical contractor to install a double-throw transfer switch. The switch isolates your household, forming a break between the power coming from your generator and Southwestern's distribution system.

"Transfer switches make life easier during a power outage while keeping our linemen safe as they restore service," said Southwestern Electric Cooperative Engineering Supervisor Dylan Casey. "Without a transfer switch, power from a generator can backfeed into utility lines and electrocute line workers."

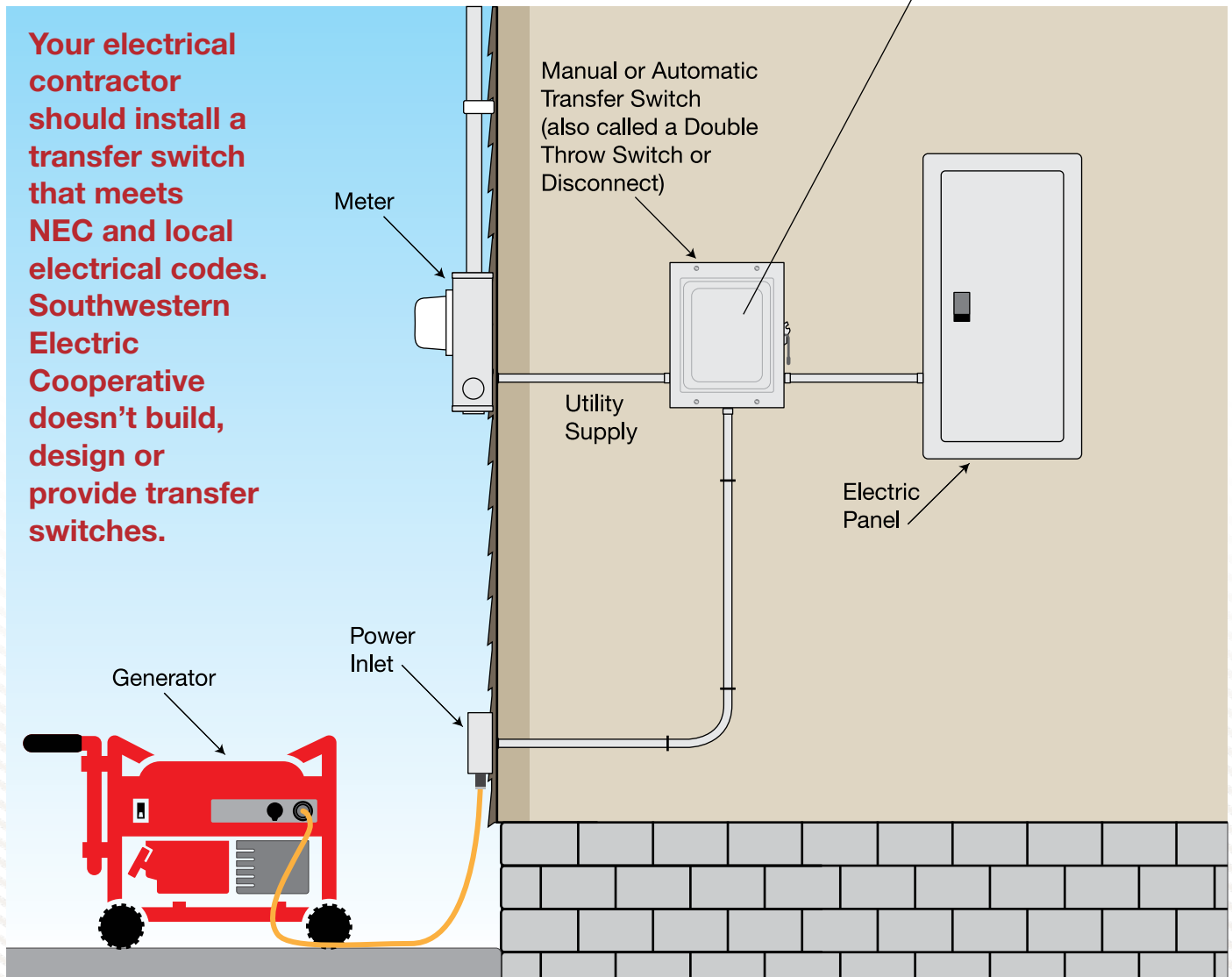
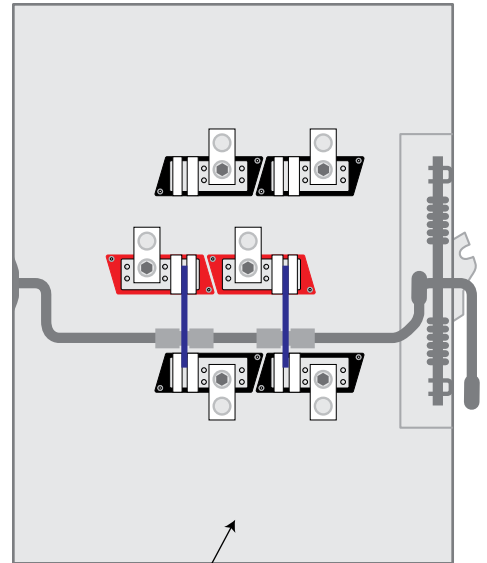
Casey said transfer switches may be manual or automatic. "With a manual transfer switch, during a power outage, you have to manually switch power from the utility to your backup source." By

contrast, automatic transfer switches detect an outage and activate without assistance from the homeowner.

"Inspect the wire going from the generator to the power inlet box for tears in the insulation," Casey said. "And be aware of the voltage you're generating to ensure you don't damage your electronics."

Your transfer switch should be wired to meet standards outlined in the National Electric Code (NEC) and all local codes, Casey added. "Talk to your electrician to make sure you have the proper sized wire to accommodate your generator and the needs of your home."

These guidelines are in place to protect the safety of our linemen and our members, said Casey. "We rely on our members' participation to help us take care of everyone involved."



# EAGLE EYES

## SPOT OUR NATIONAL SYMBOL ALONG THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI

**B**reak out your binoculars, long lenses and spotting scopes — eagle-watching season has landed in Southwestern Illinois. Each year, about 2,500 bald eagles winter in the Middle Mississippi River Valley, following the open water of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers in search of a meal.

From late December through early March, Illinois hosts the second largest wintering population of bald eagles in the contiguous forty-eight. With a little time and effort, you can watch these majestic birds in their natural habitat.

We've listed some of Southwestern Illinois' prime eagle-viewing locations along the Mississippi River, so bundle up, head out, and if you land a spectacular eagle photo, email it to [joe.richardson@sweci.com](mailto:joe.richardson@sweci.com). We'd love to include it in our Members in Focus section.

**Alton:** On Jan. 4, drop by Alton's Eagle Ice Festival to view a majestic American bald eagle up close at FLOCK Food Truck Park. The event features a free eagle meet and greet, where you'll have a chance to get your picture taken with this amazing animal. The festival at FLOCK will include food trucks, live music and ice carvers, eagle-watching shuttle tours (departing from the Alton Visitor's Center), Eagle Fest Beer from Old Bakery Beer Company, fire pits, face painting for kids. The event runs from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Flock Food Truck Park is located at 210 Ridge Street Alton, Ill., 62002. For more information call Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau at (618) 465-6676.

**Grafton Riverfront:** Like Alton, guided eagle tours and meet-and-greet events are scheduled to take place in the river town northwest of Alton. Its situation along the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers makes it perfect for eagle spotting along the riverfront. Visit [enjoygraffton.com](http://enjoygraffton.com) or call (618) 465-6676 for more information.

**Melvin Price Locks & Dam:** One of the key spots along the Alton area eagle-watching tour is the Melvin Price Locks & Dam. The locks and dam provide the dual service of making safe travel possible for commercial river traffic while also serving as a popular spot to view bald eagles south of Alton's Clark Bridge. For information regarding hours of operation and tours of the locks and dam, call the National Great Rivers Museum at (618) 462-6979.



**Old Chain of Rocks Bridge:** What's better than viewing eagles' nests from the riverfront? Viewing eagles' nests from the river! The Old Chain of Rocks Bridge, the eastern end of which is on Chouteau Island near Granite City, was once a motor route connecting Madison County with St. Louis but now serves as a pedestrian bridge. In the winter, it also provides a direct view to the riverbanks where eagles like to nest. Bring your binoculars or telescopes for up-close looks at the distinguished birds.

**Pere Marquette State Park:** The largest state park in Illinois, Pere Marquette has eagle-watching tours throughout the months of January and February for visitors to enjoy. A site interpreter presents informative programs about bald eagles, followed by a short video presentation and an observational drive to view the wintering birds. Interested guests are encouraged to dress warmly, have a full tank of gas, bring binoculars, wear waterproof boots and bring snacks and drinks. For details and dates, see our Current Events listing.

**Pere Marquette Lodge:** On the grounds of the state park, Pere Marquette Lodge plays host to the annual Bald Eagle Festival every January. This year's event is on Jan. 12 and includes unique vendor booths, live music and entertainment by the World Bird Sanctuary with their Masters of the Sky shows. Festival entry is free; however, tickets to the Masters of the Sky show are \$10 per person. For more information, call (618) 786-2331.



See our *Current Events* on page 26 for more area eagle happenings.



**Audubon Center at Riverlands:** The Audubon Center at Riverlands is located in the 3,700-acre Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary on the banks of the Mississippi River. Bald eagles can be seen feeding and perching in the trees throughout the sanctuary. An observation deck and several long-range binoculars can be found near the visitors' center. The Audubon Center at Riverlands is at 301 Riverlands Way, West Alton, Mo. Visit [riverlands.audubon.org](http://riverlands.audubon.org) or call (636) 899-0090.

## WHO • WHAT • WHERE

Each year we present at least one puzzle that stumps even our most accomplished sleuths. So it was with our November 2024 photo. We challenged you to identify the location of a building bearing the nameplate Fire Dep't. No.1. The vintage two-story is located in Shumway, in Effingham County.

While no one correctly identified the location of Fire Dep't. No.1, several hundred of you *did* note the acorns pinned to the wall, which were the object of our November Hide & Seek contest. This month's Hide & Seek contest, along with the name of our November drawing winner, appears on page 4.

For this month's puzzle, we're challenging you to identify an antique. Recognize the item at right? Have a story associated with one of these? We'd love to hear from you.

We deeply appreciate the cards, letters and email we receive from you each month. Your voices and the stories you share make Who~What~Where one of the liveliest, most engaging segments of the magazine.

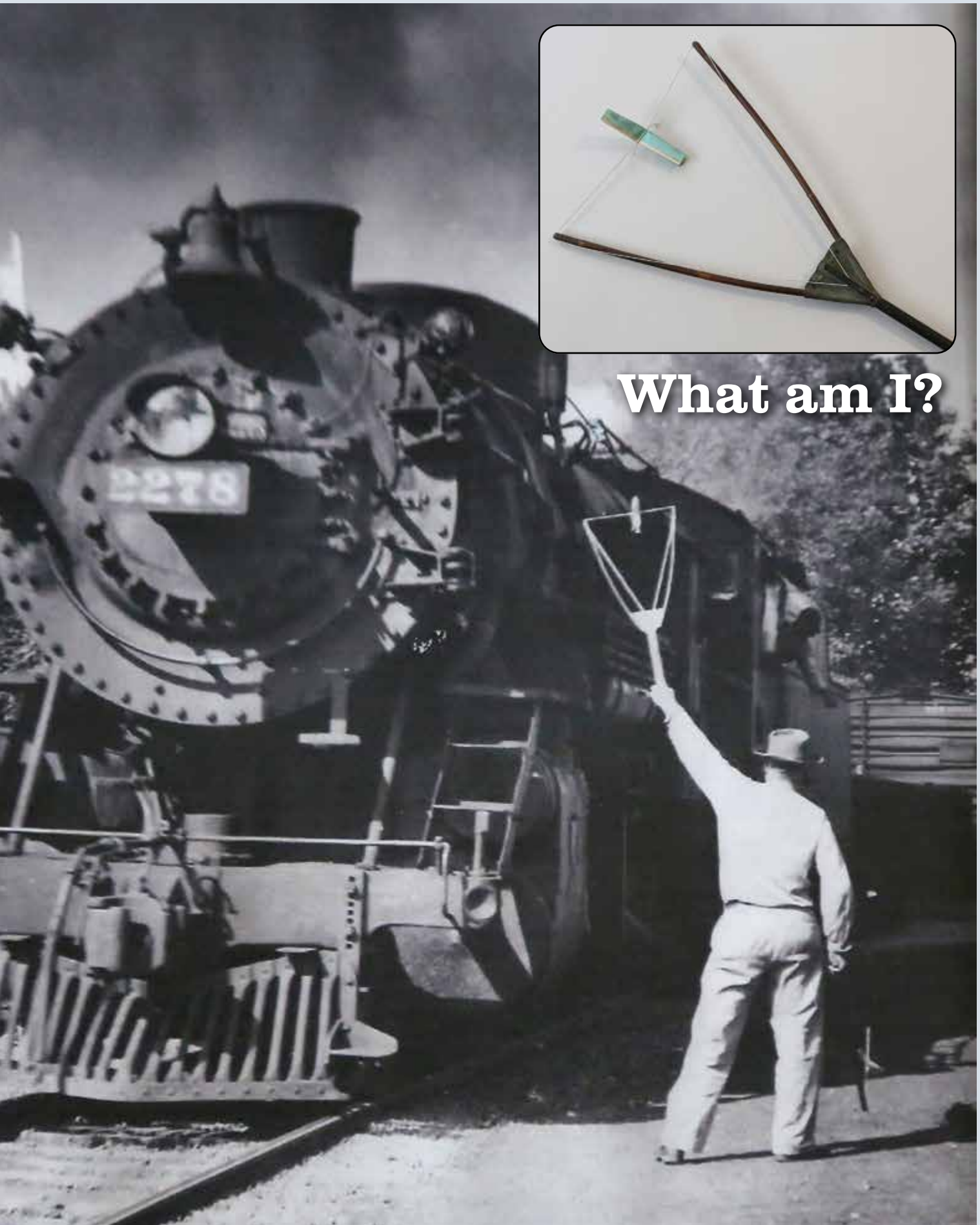
Thanks to all of you who shared your antiques and attic finds with us in recent years. The best mystery items you identify on these pages are almost always contributed by co-op members.

While these pages don't deliver vital information like other parts of the publication, they remind us we're linked by culture and community. They showcase a shared narrative written by generations of people who've come together to work, play and contribute to the common good. That story is still being written today — by you. It's richer and more alive for your contributions. We look forward to sharing more of your stories in the coming year.



**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*.





What am I?

# SLOPPY JOES

## *With a Twist*

### SLOPPY JOE CASSEROLE

#### Ingredients

- 8 ounces shell or elbow macaroni
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 package sloppy Joe seasoning mix
- 1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
- 1 (8 ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 cup water
- 1 (16 ounce) container cottage cheese
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

#### Directions

1. Cook and drain pasta according to package directions.
2. Brown ground beef and drain off excess fat.
3. Stir in sloppy Joe seasoning mix, tomato paste, tomato sauce and water.
4. In a greased 2½ quart baking dish layer half the pasta, half the cottage cheese and half of the meat sauce.
5. Repeat step 4, top with cheese and bake at 350° for 40 minutes.

### SLOPPY JOES

#### Ingredients

- 1½ pounds ground beef
- 2 medium onions chopped
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- 1 clove garlic minced
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 can chicken gumbo soup
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard

#### Directions

1. Brown ground beef with onions and drain off excess fat.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients.
3. Simmer over low heat for 1½ hours.
4. Serve on a bun or sliced roll.

### FIREHOUSE SLOPPY JOES

#### Ingredients

- 3 pounds ground beef
- 1¼ cups onion chopped
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 2½ tablespoons mustard
- 2½ cups ketchup
- ¼ cup flour
- ¼ cup brown sugar

#### Directions

1. Brown ground beef with onions and drain off excess fat.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients.
3. Simmer for 20 minutes.
4. Serve on a bun or sliced roll.

### CROCK-POT SLOPPY JOES

#### Ingredients

- 1½ pounds ground beef
- 1 cup celery chopped
- 1 large onion chopped
- 1 (24 ounce) bottle ketchup
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- ½ cup green pepper chopped

#### Directions

1. Brown ground beef, drain off excess fat and place in crock-pot.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients.
3. Cook on low 3 - 4 hours.
4. Serve on a bun or sliced roll.





Firehouse Sloppy Joes

Prepared & photographed  
by Mike Barns  
mike.barns@sweci.com

## CURRENT EVENTS

**January 4** 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, National Great Rivers Museum, 2 Lock and Dam Way and the Audubon Center at Riverlands, 301 Riverlands Way, West Alton, MO. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Event is free. Visit [riversandroutess.com](http://riversandroutess.com).

**January 4, 11, 18, 25; February 1, 8, 15, 22** 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 15 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 [riversandroutess.com](http://riversandroutess.com).

**January 11, 25** 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 [riversandroutess.com](http://riversandroutess.com).

**January 12** BALD EAGLE FESTIVAL AND LIVE BIRD SHOW, Grafton. Meet our nation's ma-

gestic symbol. Festival will have unique vendors, restaurant favorites, drink specials, free face painting, live bird shows, and more. Our Masters of the Sky Bird Show, presented by The World Bird Sanctuary, will introduce guests to owls, falcons and eagles. Shows at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Admission fees apply. 11 - 3 p.m. Pere Marquette Lodge & Conference Center, 13653 Lodge Blvd. Call (618) 786-2331, ext. 338 or visit [pmlodge.net](http://pmlodge.net).

**January 14; February 11** ROAMING NATURALISTS, Godfrey. A monthly hike designed for adults (all ages welcome) that want to learn more about the natural world. Topics will range from birds to plants to insects and beyond. While each hike will have a topic of focus, we will allow the interest of the group and the surprises that nature throws at us to determine what we learn about. Meet the guide at the trail head parking lot. Hikes will range from 1-2 miles (rarely 3 miles) on easy to moderate terrain. Hikes occur rain or shine. In the event of icy conditions, or excessive snow, the hike may be canceled. The Nature Institute closes for the weather when Alton Public Schools close. Admission is free, but donations are appreciated. Registration isn't required but preferred. The Nature Institute, 2213 South Levis Lane. Visit [thenatureinstitute.org](http://thenatureinstitute.org).

**January 18** KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS PANCAKE AND SAUSAGE BREAKFAST, Greenville. Bulk sausage will be available for sale. 7 a.m. - noon. Adults \$10; children 5 - 12 years of age \$5; children under 5 are

free. St. Lawrence Catholic Church Hall, 512 South Prairie Street. Call (618) 292-4519.

**January 18** WINTERFEST HAMFEST, Collinsville. The Midwest's largest Hamfest offers more than 30,000 square feet of convention space with 180 vendors, 240 tables and 1,000 attendees. 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. For tickets, visit [winterfest.slsrcc.org](http://winterfest.slsrcc.org).

**January 18; February 15; March 15; April 19** WINTER MARKET, Edwardsville. Join us in the Market expansion lot for fresh fall vegetables, tasty baked goods, local meat, and unique artisan sauces, jams, jellies, and art. 10 a.m. - noon. Downtown Edwardsville, North Second Street. Visit [goshenmarket.org](http://goshenmarket.org).

**January 23** GATEWAY WEDDING SHOW, Collinsville. Meet vendors who can personalize and plan every aspect of a wedding. 5 - 8:30 p.m. Admission is free. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit [gatewaycenter.com](http://gatewaycenter.com).

**January 23-26, 30 & 31; February 1 & 2** GODSPELL, Lebanon. A theatrical performance by the Looking Glass Playhouse. All performances begin at 7:30 p.m., except for Sunday shows, which begin at 2 p.m. Looking Glass Playhouse, 301 West Saint Louis Street. For tickets, visit [lookingglassplayhouse.com](http://lookingglassplayhouse.com).

**January 24-26, 30 & 31; February 1 & 2** ALTON LITTLE THEATER: THE EXES, Alton. A theatrical presentation by the Alton Little Theater Company.

Thursday - Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, call (618) 462-3205 or visit [altonlittletheater.org](http://altonlittletheater.org).

**January 25** SAUSAGE SUPPER, Alhambra. Drive-Thru from 1 - 7 p.m. All meals will be in carry-out containers. There will be separate parking for those that wish to eat on site. Seating will be available in the upper parish hall. All meals are \$15. Salem United Church of Christ, 1117 West North Street. Visit [salemuccalh.org](http://salemuccalh.org).

**January 30 & 31; February 4, 7, 11, 21, 24, 26, 28; March 7** 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 1 & 2** HOME SHOW, Effingham. Check out the latest products in the home building and remodeling industry. Explore current trends in home building and construction and meet professionals who are ready to help you remodel or build your dream home. Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Sunday 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Thelma Keller Convention Center, 1202 North Keller Drive. Visit [effinghamhba.com](http://effinghamhba.com).

### 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 [joe.richardson@sweci.com](mailto:joe.richardson@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.

A photograph capturing a winter sunset over a snow-covered road. Two parallel steel tracks run down the center of the road, leading the eye towards the horizon. The sun is a bright, glowing orb just above the horizon, casting a long, golden light across the sky and reflecting off the snow. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds. Bare trees line both sides of the road, their dark silhouettes contrasting against the bright light. The overall mood is serene and quiet.

Winter sun sets  
fire to steel west  
of Altamont.

**THE FINAL FRAME**

