

# THE *Southwestern*

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2021 • VOLUME 73 • ISSUE 2

## HomeServe

REPAIR PLANS OFFER  
ASSURANCE, QUALITY  
AND CONVENIENCE

## Love Story

LEAPS OF LOVE  
LENDING SUPPORT TO  
FAMILIES AFFECTED  
BY CHILDHOOD  
CANCER

## 7 Simple Ways to Save

TRIM DOLLARS OFF YOUR  
ENERGY BILL WITHOUT  
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Stone-faced.

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



## LEAP FROG

Leaps of Love founder Traci Riechmann has no shortage of frogs in her Highland office, a reminder of the "leap of faith" she took in starting her organization's journey. Our story appears on page 10.

### Ask The CEO

Have a question for the CEO? Send it to Bobby Williams at [bobby.williams@sweci.com](mailto:bobby.williams@sweci.com), or write to him at Southwestern Electric Cooperative, Inc., 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL. Periodically, we'll print some of your questions with his replies in *The Southwestern*. Each member who submits a question will be entered in a drawing for a \$25 bill credit. We'll draw a name each time we run an "Ask The CEO" Q&A segment in the magazine.

## FROM THE CEO



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While our industry is always changing, the things that keep me awake at night remain remarkably consistent. I think about the safety of our crews, particularly when they're repairing downed lines during a late-night storm. I worry about some of the members I've met who live alone in remote areas. And I mull over regulatory language that may impact our members.

This time of year, I can sum up a constant concern with a single word: ice.

Ice-slickened streets set the stage for automobile accidents—and when those accidents involve utility poles, they can create life-threatening situations. In addition to endangering motorists, those collisions can damage poles and wires, resulting in widespread outages.

As freezing rain encapsulates overhead conductors and ice builds, the added weight causes lines to sag. Wind can make these ice-encapsulated lines move in a whip-crack motion, striking one another, causing blinks and outages.

Trees and limbs covered in ice may sag or snap. They can reach into the right of way, damage our system, and interrupt your service.

We can't prevent ice. But we can and do plan for it.

When we construct power lines, we use conductor and support structures strong enough to withstand a half inch of ice accumulation. Our lines are designed to accommodate that weight, ensuring there's enough clearance to keep wires off the ground and out of reach.

We have incorporated technology into our system that helps us identify outages and restore power quickly. We're testing ice-resistant lines. And as we retire old lines, we're replacing them with stronger wire more capable of withstanding storms.

Each year you see our clearance crews cutting trees and limbs along our rights of way. Line clearance work, which begins in spring and continues through fall, protects our lines from most of the trees and limbs that could interrupt your power.

Our priority is to keep your lights on and your heat running, safely, without interruption. If you are experiencing service interruptions, please call our office at (800) 637-8667. If you'd like to share your thoughts on our performance or any aspect of Southwestern Electric, please email me at [bobby.williams@sweci.com](mailto:bobby.williams@sweci.com). I look forward to hearing from you.

Bobby Williams, CEO

[bobby.williams@sweci.com](mailto:bobby.williams@sweci.com)





## What does it mean to be a co-op member?

Having trouble paying your bill?

Call us at (800) 637-8667 or email us at [billing@sweci.com](mailto:billing@sweci.com). We'll suggest resources that may be able to help.

You may qualify for energy assistance through LIHEAP. Find out more at [sweci.com/energy-assistance](http://sweci.com/energy-assistance).

## It means we're here for you.



**YOUR ACCOUNTABLE ENERGY PARTNER**

### Coronavirus Response

## Mitigation Measures Remain in Place

**N**early a year after implementing its remote work plan, Southwestern Electric Cooperative continues to keep coronavirus mitigation measures in place. “To protect the health and safety of our employees and members, we will extend Southwestern Electric’s current office and remote work arrangement through the end of February,” said CEO Bobby Williams. “Our management team continues to monitor information from state and local health departments and the CDC, and we are reevaluating our plans from month to month.”

The co-op’s COVID response plan calls for lobbies and drive-up windows to remain closed through February 28. “As always, our employees will answer calls and questions from our membership, and our line crews will respond to outages and make repairs quickly and safely,” Williams said. “We’re optimistic that infection and transmission numbers will trend down quickly as the vaccine becomes widely available. We look forward to the day we can invite members into our offices again. Until we can do that safely, we will keep our mitigation measures in place.”

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

For the latest information, go to [www.sweci.com](http://www.sweci.com).

## BOARD MEETING MINUTES

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

## CO-OP REMINDERS

**February 8** 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.

**February 12** Southwestern scholarship application deadline.

**April 2** Southwestern’s offices will be closed for Good Friday.

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

You embraced our 2020 rebate program with enthusiasm. We're back to offer more savings in 2021. Our rebate program will help you save money on the replacement or new installation of air source heat pumps, geothermal systems, electric water heaters and smart thermostats.

Members are eligible for one rebate per category per year. All rebates will be applied as a bill credit upon receiving the completed rebate application and proof of purchase. Rebate forms are available on our website at [sweci.com](http://sweci.com). You can email your completed application and proof of purchase to [julie.lowe@sweci.com](mailto:julie.lowe@sweci.com), or mail it to: Julie Lowe, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246. You're also welcome to leave your materials in the drop box 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).**

## HEATING AND COOLING

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

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

Requirements for air source heat pumps include:

- At least 16 SEER
- 9 HSPF

Requirements for ground source (geothermal) heat pumps include:

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

## WATER HEATERS

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

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

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

On-demand water heaters do not qualify for a rebate.

## SMART THERMOSTATS

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

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

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

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

- Energy Star certified
- Internet-enabled

# Energy Bill Payment Assistance Available to Low-Income Families

The State of Illinois offers assistance to low-income families who struggle to pay their energy bills. Applications for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted.

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

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

## When you apply for assistance, please bring the following items:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Income Guidelines

If your household's combined income for the 30 days prior to application is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, as shown in the chart, you may be eligible to receive assistance. If you rent, and your heat and/or electric is included in the rent, your rent must be greater than 30% of your income in order to be eligible to receive assistance.

Family Size	30-Day Income
1	\$2,127
2	\$2,873
3	\$3,620
4	\$4,367
5	\$5,113
6	\$5,860
7	\$6,607
8	\$7,353

Additional \$736 per person monthly income above 8 people, or \$8,840 annual. (Note 30-day income rounded up.)

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



# FINAL REMINDER: SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE FEBRUARY 12



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

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

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

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

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

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

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

**Applications may be downloaded from Southwestern's website at [www.sweci.com](http://www.sweci.com) or picked up from the co-op's office at 525 US Route 40 in Greenville. For more information on the Power for Progress Scholarship Program, please contact Susan File at [susan.file@sweci.com](mailto:susan.file@sweci.com) or (800) 637-8667.**



## *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.

When those elements fail, you find yourself facing bills you hadn't budgeted for. If the issue is related to aging parts and normal wear and tear on the system, your homeowners insurance may not cover the cost of repairs. 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 sudden, often significant 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.

### **HOW HOMESERVE HELPS**

HomeServe is available to take emergency repair calls around the clock.



Photos courtesy Modern Fotographic by Dave Noonan

Technicians dispatched through HomeServe are local, licensed and insured. Their work is covered by a one-year HomeServe guarantee.

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

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

### **HELPING US HELP YOU**

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

You can read more about HomeServe at [www.HomeServe.com](http://www.HomeServe.com) and view nearly 100 informational videos on HomeServe's YouTube channel.

# Swipe & Type

Report your outage in seconds with the SWEC IL app



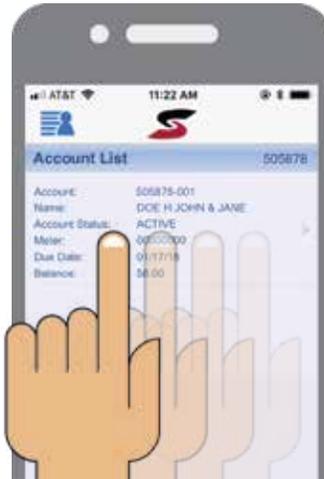
1

## Download the app

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

### Don't have a password?

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

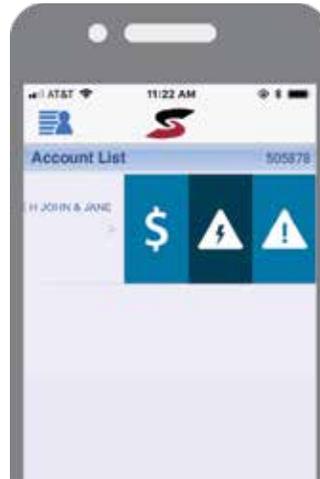


2

## Swipe

Swipe your account info

Swiping left across your account information will reveal three icons.

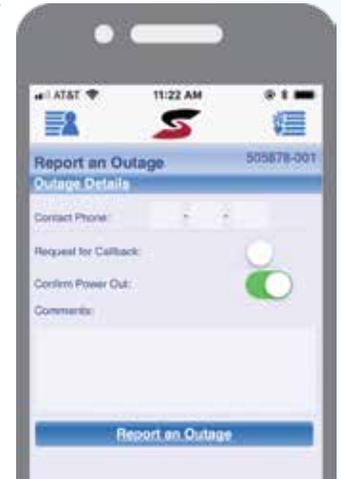


3

## Tap

Tap the center icon

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



4

## Type

Tap *Report an Outage*

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

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

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

## More Than One Account?

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

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

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

# Love Story

## Leaps of Love lends support to families affected by childhood cancer

Story by Nathan Grimm | Photos by Mike Barns



Traci Riechmann stands next to a box full of wrapped presents dropped off by the Highland FFA program. Donations from groups like the FFA and other local individuals and businesses provide all the support Leaps of Love receives throughout the year.

**A**t Leaps of Love, there is always something in motion. Tuesday morning in early January is no exception. The Highland FFA chapter held a toy donation drive for the Christmas holiday season, and boxes upon boxes of red- and green-wrapped gifts—red for International Harvester, green for John Deere—line the hallway of the office on Highland’s downtown square. Tiny helpers work to unwrap each present, 182 in all, and separate them into piles for boys and girls. From there, the toys will be distributed across the region to kids suffering the effects of childhood brain tumors.

Orchestrating it all, as always, is Traci Riechmann. The founder and leader of Leaps of Love, Riechmann has been in

perpetual motion since opening the charity’s doors in 2010. Since then, Leaps of Love has touched the lives of 468 families enduring, or who have endured, the effects of childhood brain tumors. Its reach stretches from Missouri’s western border to the middle of Indiana, covering all points in between.

Toys, like the ones being unwrapped by Riechmann’s grandchildren—it’s only fitting that a family-centered organization would also be a family affair—are a surefire way to bring smiles to children’s faces, but for Riechmann, Leaps of Love is about a holistic approach to helping families facing the disease.

“Everything I do is with the family as a whole,” Riechmann, 52, said. “It’s not just about the child in treatment. It affects the entire family.”



Siblings Kendall (left) and Wyatt Becker, ages 6 and 9, lent helping hands to their grandmother, Traci Riechmann, in unwrapping toys donated by the Highland FFA after their holiday donation drive. In total, the Highland High School club donated 182 toys to benefit Leaps of Love's mission.

## GETTING PERSONAL

It was a personal encounter with cancer that sparked Riechmann's passion for giving back.

In 1997, Riechmann's 16-year-old sister was diagnosed with cancer. Their mother had previously passed away, making Riechmann her "guardian-slash-pretend mom," accompanying her sister to doctor's appointments and chemotherapy treatments and anywhere else she needed to be.

"We would do treatment every day," Riechmann recalls. "I would meet a lot of different people in the waiting room, and I found that it is something to have another kind of connection outside of just the hospital environment.

"You get so much stuff thrown at you, but...they don't get what happens at

home. They don't get the outside world. You get more experience of what other people are going through when they get home, what kind of experiences they're dealing with."

It encouraged Riechmann to get involved with local cancer support organization HIS KIDS. She began volunteering for the organization in 1999, helping with retreats and outreach.

Around a decade later, the Late Effects Clinic at Siteman Kids at St. Louis Children's Hospital—a program that monitors and treats the later-in-life side effects of pediatric cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation—opened, and clinic officials began seeking an organization to be an advocate for late effects education.

*Continued on next page >*

## A LEAP OF FAITH

Traci Riechmann doesn't mind being the "frog lady," as she puts it.

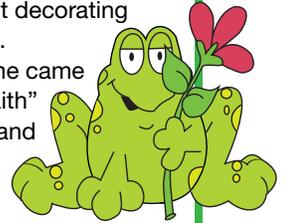
The motif is hard to miss. The organization's logo, a frog holding a flower, adorns the front door of the building at 1005 Broadway in Highland, and once inside there are numerous odes to the theme, including countless stuffed frogs, ceramic frogs, and a hand-painted frog portrait decorating Riechmann's office.

She said the name came from the "leap of faith" needed to jump in and devote her life to filling the void she saw at the time Leaps of Love was created.

"I worked at my husband's trucking company for 20 years, and then when my sister got diagnosed with cancer, that's when my eyes opened to a new way of me giving back in life," Riechmann said.

The name also acts as an acronym: FROG—Fully Rely On God. While Leaps of Love has no religious affiliations, Riechmann said her faith has played a role in, and has been positively impacted as a result of, the work her organization does.

"It's put my life in a whole different kind of perspective toward religion and God," she said.



***“There’s not one specific thing I can actually say that I do. I just become part of their family and help them with any of their needs or wants. What they’re struggling with is what I’m aiming to do.”***

– Traci Riechmann

➤ *Continued from page 11*

“It was a struggle that I was working on in my own mind of, ‘What can we do for these kids?’” she said. “When I got approached by the Late Effects Clinic, I’m like, ‘OK, so what can I do?’”

## **MAKING THE LEAP**

Her solution, as has become custom, was to do it herself.

Riechmann founded the organization in 2010 and went to work establishing contacts at St. Louis Children’s Hospital, SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital and Mercy Hospital St. Louis who could put her in touch with families of children with brain tumors and late effect issues. As the list of families grew, so, too, did the organization. Riechmann herself is one of roughly 50 to 75 volunteers who pass through the building’s doors in a normal, non-COVID year, and Leaps of Love’s six-person volunteer board is made up of medical staff and survivors of childhood cancer.

Support for Leaps of Love is entirely voluntary as well. Riechmann said toy drives, like the one recently completed

by the FFA, as well as fundraisers, collections and other forms of charity help keep the mission moving forward.

“It varies, but it’s really mostly Metro East local businesses and individuals,” she said.

The ways in which Leaps of Love benefits a family are numerous. When a new family establishes care at one of the hospitals, Riechmann reaches out, often gathering a basket of household essentials and knocking on front doors in hopes of making a connection and getting a sense of the family’s needs.

It’s that spirit that makes the organization unique, said Southwestern Electric Vice President of Human Resources Carrie Knebel. She and her husband, Brent, have volunteered for Leaps of Love over the years—with Brent once donning a wig to portray “Marshmallow” in the annual Ms. L.O.L. Pageant fundraiser in 2019. They hold a special fondness for the organization’s efforts.

“You always think about donating to help pay for medical expenses or research, but there’s not a lot of

*“You always think about donating to help pay for medical expenses or research, but there’s not a lot of organizations out there that actually support the family as a whole to make their lives easier. Not easy, but easier.”*

– Carrie Knebel



organizations out there that actually support the family as a whole to make their lives easier,” Knebel said. “Not easy, but easier.”

## A HELPING HAND

Like tiny hands pulling at wrapping paper, Riechmann takes little time to rest.

The organization now facilitates four different retreats for families affected by childhood cancer: a spring retreat focusing on families with children fighting brain tumors; a summer retreat catering to young adult childhood cancer survivors; a fall retreat for families experiencing late effects of childhood cancer; and a Good Grief Getaway bereavement retreat aimed at helping families with the grief process. That’s in addition to the Share Your Love program through which Leaps of Love adopts a different family every quarter, and the endless fundraising events that go on throughout the year.

“It is a full-time job,” she said.

A full-time job that does not appear ready to slow down any time soon, even though COVID-19 derailed some of her

2020 plans. As new variations of brain tumors are identified, a new mission has fallen under Riechmann’s umbrella as well—educating and advocating for genetic cancer testing.

And of course, she will continue to fill the needs of families as they arise, however unconventional. Uber rides. Repairing leaky roofs. Mowing the lawn. Riechmann coordinates it all, using her vast network of contacts built up over the years to facilitate whatever a family might need at that moment.

“There’s not one specific thing I can actually say that I do,” Riechmann said. “I just become part of their family and help them with any of their needs or wants. What they’re struggling with is what I’m aiming to do.”

A friend still recalls the time Riechmann got in touch to ask if she could borrow a trailer to help move a family that had been evicted. No job is too big, no detail too small for Riechmann.

After all, an object in motion stays in motion. “That’s what I pride myself on,” she said. “I’ll do anything to help.” 

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Concern for community is one of the foundational guiding principles for Southwestern Electric Cooperative.

It’s one the co-op has taken to heart. Operation Round Up, a charitable program governed, funded and supported by members of the cooperative, and Power for Progress, Southwestern’s scholarship program, are longtime cooperative outreach efforts. But in 2019 the co-op began a new community outreach tradition: collecting donations around the Christmas holiday in hopes of making the season a bit brighter for some of its Southwestern Illinois neighbors.

That first year the cooperative benefited Military Moms of Bond County, and in 2020, Leaps of Love was selected to be the beneficiary of the donation drive. Southwestern employees came together to give food, household supplies and children’s activities to the Highland organization to support its mission of serving childhood brain tumor patients and their families.

“We’re hoping to do something every year just to help give back, because we’re very fortunate here,” Southwestern Electric Vice President of Human Resources Carrie Knebel said.

## DONATING TO LEAPS OF LOVE

Leaps of Love is a 501(c)(3) organization. Financial contributions are tax deductible and may be made at [leapsoflove.org/give#Donatetoday](https://leapsoflove.org/give#Donatetoday). Those interested in volunteering, donating or learning more about the organization can get on the Leaps of Love mailing list by visiting [leapsoflove.org](https://leapsoflove.org), following the Facebook page at [facebook.com/LeapsOfLove](https://facebook.com/LeapsOfLove) or calling (618) 410-7212.

Southwestern Electric Vice President of Human Resources Carrie Knebel (left) and Leaps of Love founder Traci Riechmann load donated items into Riechmann’s vehicle. The Highland-based organization was chosen as the beneficiary of Southwestern Electric’s holiday donation drive in 2020.



## MEMBERS IN FOCUS

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

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

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

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

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

### Submission Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ken Suhre of Alhambra sent this spectacular shot of an autumn sky, taken near Mt. Olive from his tractor cab while he waited to catch corn from a combine.





Bill Malec made this photo of a foggy October dawn north of O'Fallon, where he resides, while putting in his morning miles on an early a.m. run.



Dave Highlander made this early morning image of bees' wings (corn chaff) on the rise at his grain bins in Edwardsville. The backlit bins and impressive plume cut a striking image against a flawless December sky.



Denise Medford made this image in February 2019, capturing the first instance of a bluebird frequenting her bird feeders in Glen Carbon.



Joan Baker of Meadowbrook froze poetry in motion at Horseshoe Lake in summer 2018. "It's an egret coming in for a landing. There were hundreds of egrets at the lake, and I took hundreds of pictures," she said. "It was hard to pick just one to send you." Well worth the effort, Joan. Excellent choice.

# SEVEN SIMPLE WAYS TO SAVE

by Julie Lowe, Energy Manager

As temperatures drop, our energy bills climb. Small changes in your daily routine can make a big impact on your energy usage, while keeping your home comfortable.

Keep winter's chill out and comfort in without breaking your budget by following these energy-saving tips.

## ONE LET THE SUNSHINE IN

Take advantage of the sun—naturally heat your home by opening the curtains of south-facing windows during the day to allow the sunlight to heat your home. Close them at night to help keep the heat inside.

## TWO USE SPACE HEATERS SELECTIVELY

If you choose to use a space heater, be aware that even the energy-efficient models can use a lot of power. For this reason—and safety reasons—only use a space heater in a room you are occupying and turn it off when you leave the room.

## THREE ONLY HEAT THE ROOMS YOU ARE USING

To be more energy efficient, close and seal off vents to rooms that you never use. Be sure to avoid heating areas of your home that are not insulated.

## FOUR INVEST IN A SMART THERMOSTAT

This easy home upgrade can help you save money by allowing you to lower the temperature in your home while you are away, and increase the temperature when you are due home. Southwestern Electric offers a \$50 rebate bill credit for the purchase of a smart thermostat! For more information, see page 5.

## FIVE ONLY USE EXHAUST FANS WHEN NECESSARY

Kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans vent warm air (which rises) out of your home. Use your exhaust fans sparingly in the winter months.

## SIX WEATHERPROOF YOUR WINDOWS

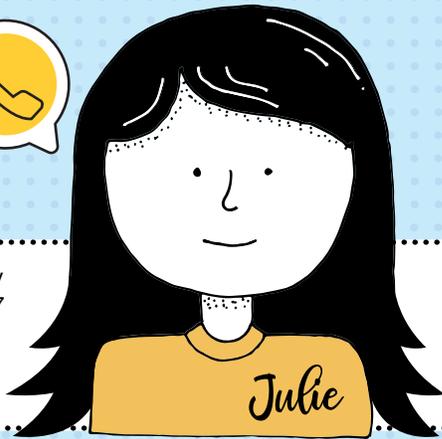
During the winter, up to 30% of your home's heat can escape through your windows. Consider upgrading your windows, or for a budget-friendly alternative, caulk around window frames and cover windows with plastic film.

## SEVEN SERVICE YOUR SYSTEM

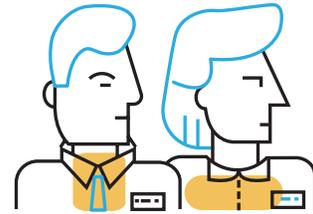
Keep your furnace and vents properly maintained and replace your filters every two to three months.



# Steps to Solar Commissioning



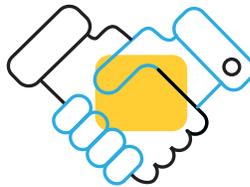
Contact Julie Lowe, energy manager, at (800) 637-8667 or [julie.lowe@sweci.com](mailto:julie.lowe@sweci.com) for our information and commissioning packet.



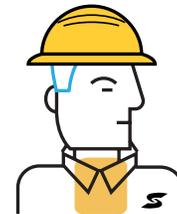
Contact your installer and insurance agent. Ask your installer for a one-line diagram. Request a certificate of insurance from your agent. They're welcome to send those documents to Julie Lowe at Southwestern Electric. Or if you'd like to review them, they can send them to you, and you can pass them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



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



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



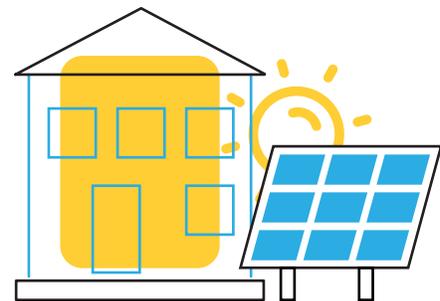
Our commissioning team will visit your site. An engineer will inspect your system to verify it meets our safety specifications. A team member will review a memorandum of understanding with you. You'll sign this document for our files. Note: If you won't be present for commissioning, please schedule a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



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



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



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

# 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. After a snowstorm swept across the Midwest in 2015, 18 people died in upstate Illinois. 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.

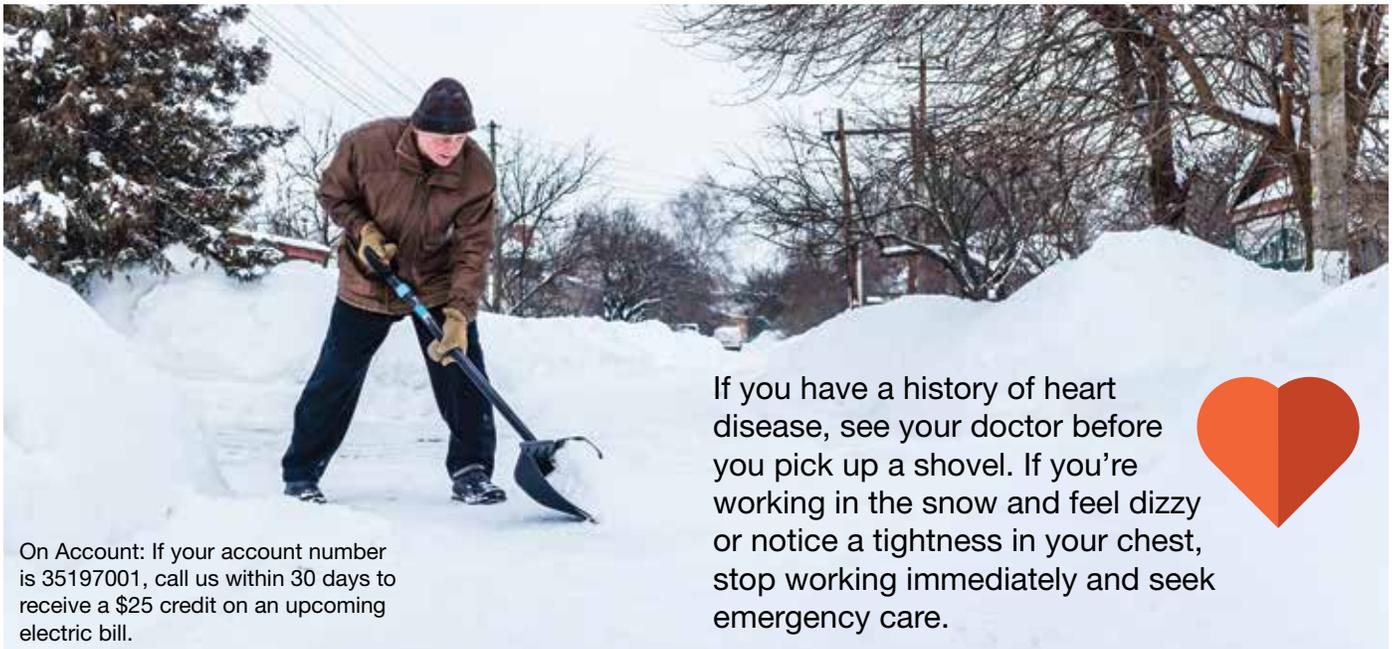
**That's a Stretch.** Just as you'd warm up before lifting weights or running, you need to stretch before you shovel. It can stave off strains and other injuries.

**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.



**On Account:** If your account number is 35197001, call us within 30 days to receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill.

## 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 close to you. 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.

# In Sink

Reflect & reset  
with a walk  
through Stemler  
Cave Woods

**A** new year is a chance to reset and reassess, to look inward and set goals for how we would like to grow and change in the coming year.

Finding time for such introspection in the busy rush of the day to day is often difficult, which makes Stemler Cave Woods Nature Preserve a welcome getaway. The old growth forest remnant set in the sinkhole plain between Millstadt and Columbia, Illinois, features 120 acres of oak-hickory forest and another 75 acres of restored prairie. The preserve is the largest dedicated Illinois nature preserve in St. Clair County.

The 1.9-mile Homer F. Stemler Memorial Walking Trail cuts a loop through the heart of the preserve and offers the kind of quiet solace perfect for cold, gray winter days. The trail, which on this early January day was in good condition despite the prior day's ice storm, is primarily used for hiking, running and other outdoor activities, but the lightly trafficked path also features 12 interpretive points for visitors hoping to learn more about the sinkhole ponds, prairie grass and other attributes that make the preserve one of the area's hidden gems.

Let your mind, and your feet, wander as you enjoy this serene St. Clair County setting.





## Getting There

Take Interstate 70 west to Illinois Route 255 south. Take Exit 6 toward Columbia, to Highway 158 east, to Triple Lakes Road north, to Stemler Road west, then a half mile to the nature preserve's parking lot. The nature preserve is open daily from dawn to dusk for passive recreation. Pets are not permitted, so leave your four-legged friends at home, and visitors are required to stay on the trail.

The Homer F. Stemler Memorial Walking Trail cuts a loop through the heart of the preserve, with 12 interpretive points addressing the sinkhole ponds, prairie grass and other features of interest. Note: Visit during dry weather. The footing is treacherous after it rains or during a thaw.

**WHO • WHAT • WHERE**

**Y**ou dug in on this month's challenge! So we'll keep our comments brief and let you do the talking. Thanks to everyone who identified the historical figure in our January issue. We hope to hear from you again this month. Recognize the mural? It appears downtown in one of our co-op communities.

As always, we appreciate your email, cards and letters. Thanks for writing—and thank you for reading *The Southwestern*.

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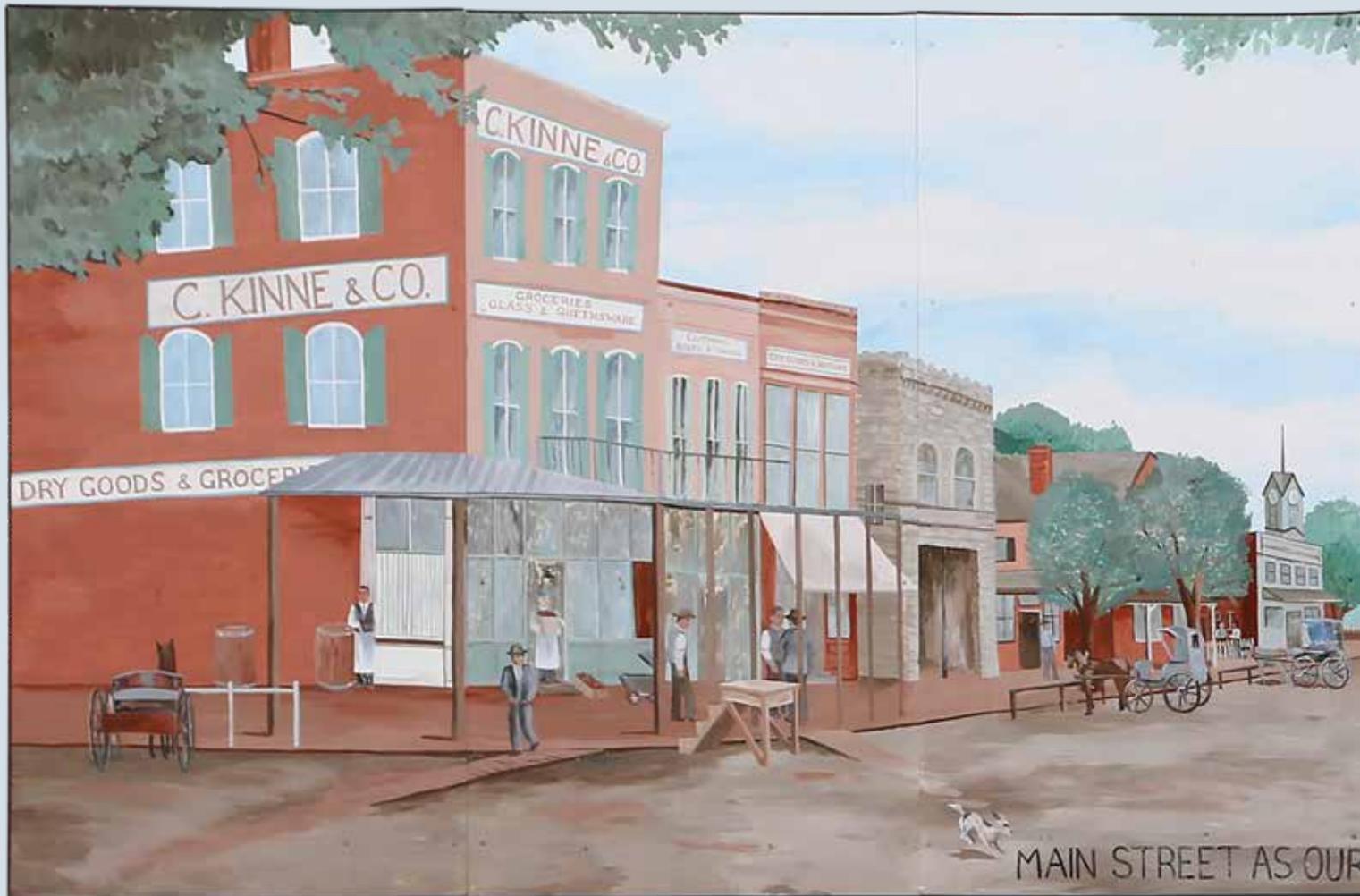
The photo in your Who-What-Where from January 2021 is a bronze relief of Edward Coles that is set on a monument in Edwardsville. The monument was a state funded project that was completed in 1928 to honor the former governor and abolitionist. It sits at the edge of Valley View Cemetery in Edwardsville, which is on the corner of Highway 157 and Lewis Road. The City of Edwardsville, as well as a group of private citizens, maintain the garden around it. It's a lovely spot to visit and contemplate.

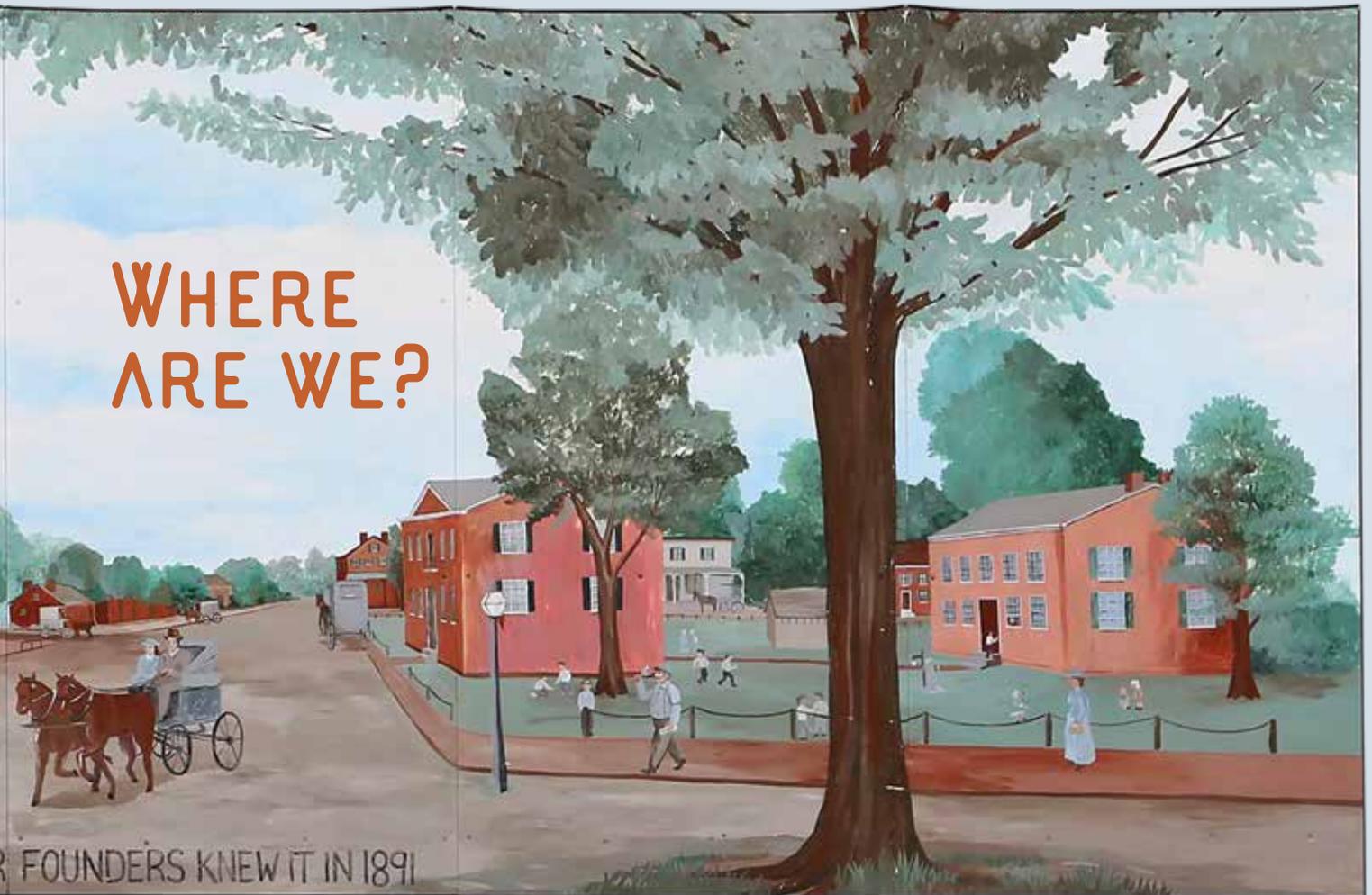
Coles was originally from Virginia and was encouraged by his friend and mentor, James Madison (who was married to his cousin, Dolly), to travel to the Northwestern Territory and seek out political office.

He was also committed to an anti-slavery agenda for most of his life, manumitting the enslaved people he inherited from his father when he immigrated to the newly formed State of Illinois in 1819.

While his political aspirations did not take root in Illinois (He was the second Governor of Illinois 1822-1826, but did not hold any other office in Illinois prior or after, save being appointed by President Madison to the Register of Lands office in Edwardsville 1819-1822), he was a major force during his tenure in preventing a constitutional convention from being held. The pro-convention advocates were also pro-slavery, and hoped to change the state's anti-slavery constitutional language. The issue made it all the way to a voter referendum in 1824. Coles was very active in campaigning for a no vote to hold the convention.

*Continued on page 26 >*





# BISQUE, BACON & BEAN



This month's recipes are courtesy of 4-H House Alumni Association's *Nurture the Future @ 805 4-H House Anniversary Cookbook* (shrimp celery bisque), Bond County *Habitat for Humanity Cookbook* (creamy spinach & bacon soup), and Edwardsville Garden Club's *Favorite Recipes* (ham & great Northern beans).

## CREAMY SPINACH & BACON SOUP

### Ingredients

- 12 slices bacon cut into small pieces
- 3 cups mushrooms sliced
- ½ cup onion chopped
- 1 teaspoon garlic minced
- 2 cups water
- 3 tablespoons chicken base
- 1 (10 ounce) package frozen spinach thawed and squeezed well
- 8 ounces cream cheese cubed
- 2 cups whipping cream
- 6 cups milk
- ⅓ cup Parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup artichoke hearts drained and chopped
- ½ cup water
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

### Directions

1. In a large pot combine bacon, mushrooms, onion, and garlic.
2. Cover pot and place on medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until bacon is cooked and vegetables are tender.
3. Add the 2 cups of water, chicken base, spinach, cream cheese, whipping cream, milk, Parmesan cheese, and artichoke hearts.
4. Cook and stir frequently to prevent scorching.
5. Mix ½ cup water and cornstarch in separate bowl.
6. When mixture becomes very hot add the cornstarch mixture, stirring constantly until creamy.

## SHRIMP CELERY BISQUE

### Ingredients

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup celery chopped
- 1 cup potato diced
- ¼ cup onion chopped
- ½ teaspoon salt
- dash pepper
- 2 cups milk
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 (4½ ounce) can shrimp, drained and coarsely chopped or 1 cup cooked shrimp peeled, deveined, and coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- snipped parsley to garnish

### Directions

1. In large saucepan combine water, celery, potato, onion, salt, and pepper.
2. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer covered for 15 minutes or until the potatoes are tender, stirring occasionally.
3. Combine milk and flour until smooth.
4. Stir milk and flour mixture, shrimp, and butter into potato mixture.
5. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly.
6. Garnish with parsley before serving. *Flavor is better if served the next day.*

## HAM & GREAT NORTHERN BEANS

### Ingredients

- 1 pound dry great Northern beans
- ½ pound cooked ham diced
- 1 small onion diced
- 4 carrots chopped
- 3 celery stalks chopped
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon white pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic minced
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon dried parsley
- salt and pepper to taste
- water

### Directions

1. Rinse the beans, removing any broken, shriveled, or discolored beans.
2. Place beans in large pot, add 8 cups of cold water, and let stand overnight or at least 8 hours. Drain and rinse.
3. Return beans to pot, add remaining ingredients, and enough water to cover.
4. Bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer 1½ - 2 hours, until beans are tender. Add more water if necessary during cooking.

Shrimp Celery Bisque

➤ *Continued from page 22*

While this was a minor win for abolitionists, such as Coles, ultimately slavery still existed in the state through the practice of indentured servitude and the anti-Black legal codes that were at play in the judicial system until after the Civil War, and many would argue beyond it. A great book on Coles (where I got most of this information) is called, “Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth Century America,” by Suzanne Cooper Guasco.

Thank you, as always for this feature in your magazine. It’s terrific.

—*Emily Klingensmith, Edwardsville*

In the January 2021 issue of *The Southwestern* magazine, the challenge picture is of the monument dedicated to Edward Coles, who was the second governor of Illinois (1822-1826). The monument is in Edwardsville, Ill., near the SIU campus.

This monument was erected to honor Edward Coles staunch stance for the abolition of slavery. He supported legislation that kept slavery out of the Constitution of Illinois making Illinois a free state.

His father was a slave owner in Virginia, and I imagine that as a young man, Edward came to realize that it was morally wrong for one man to own another and he made sure that this would not happen in Illinois under his watch.

Edward Coles established the underlying groundwork that laid the firm foundation for Illinois to be a free state. Thirty-seven years later this foundation pitted Illinois Union soldiers against the Confederates who supported slavery.

The groundwork that Edward Coles laid out early in the first quarter of the 1800s provided the pathway/foundation that led to Illinois’ support of the Union Army during the Civil War. Many battles were fought and many lives lost because the Illinois Civil War soldiers in the Union Army believed in the moral code that all men are born equal, should be treated equally. These morals and ethics were the backbone of the horrendous effort in battle reinforced by the civil rights code that no man or woman can be owned by another.

—*Linda Mauck, Maryville*

The gentleman shown in the January 2021 issue of the *Southwestern* is Illinois’ second governor, Edward Coles. He was appointed Register of Lands in March of 1818 and arrived in Edwardsville in May of 1819, where he opened an office and purchased a farm.

He did not marry until the age of 46, and died at the age of 81. The Coles State Memorial is located at Valley View Cemetery, Edwardsville. The picture in *The Southwestern* was taken at the Memorial.

—*Mac McCormick, Holiday Shores*

The January “Who am I?” challenge is Edward Coles, who served as the second governor of Illinois, Dec. 5, 1822 – Dec. 6, 1826. He died at age 81 on July 7, 1868 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and is buried at Woodlands Cemetery there.

In 1928 a monument commemorating his contributions to Illinois was unveiled at Valley View Cemetery in Edwardsville, Ill. The bronze image of Coles that is pictured is part of that memorial. The front face inscription reads:

Commemorating the career of Edward Coles who by steadfastness and courage in 1823 and 1824 kept slavery out of the Constitution of Illinois. A grateful state marks this spot in the community where his noble work was done.

Coles County, Illinois, founded in 1831, was named in his honor.

—*Bill Malec, O’Fallon*

Edward Coles is featured this month. He was the second governor of the new state called Illinois. He was born in 1786 and died at 81 in 1868. He was from an old Virginia family, and as a young man was a neighbor and associate of Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe.

He was an anti-slavery advocate, and after inheriting a plantation that came with slaves in 1819, he set free 19 slaves and acquired land for them in Illinois, his home at that time. He led political campaigns that prevented legalization of slavery in the new state of Illinois. He was vocal and strong of conviction, as he advised both Jefferson and Madison to free their slaves.

He attended William and Mary College and was strongly influenced by the ideals taught by instructor Reverend James Madison in Virginia—Bishop of the Diocese of Virginia and president of the college. Rev. Madison considered slavery morally indefensible.

Coles kept his anti-slavery advocacy secret fearing his father would gift property in his will in lieu of slaves; keeping his strong opinions to himself, he insured that he would inherit his father’s slaves. Just months after his father’s death, Coles revealed his emancipation plans to his family—to great resistance.

Due to the 1807 collapse of the real estate market during the depression, Coles found it impossible to sell his 782-acre plantation. When he was able to do so, he sold the property and moved his slaves to Illinois where they received their emancipation. He waited until they were safely in the free state of Illinois to let his then-slaves know they were now free men, women and children.

—*Anne Cicero, St. Jacob*

**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*.



Nature paints  
a face on a  
boulder at  
Wildcat Hollow  
in Effingham  
County.

**THE FINAL FRAME**



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

