

MARCH 2024

PENNLINES

Digging for Dollar\$

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GEORGE WEIGEL

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ON THE COVER

Looking to save money on gardening this spring? Any container that holds soil and has drainage holes is fair game to become a plant pot – even a pair of brightly colored rain boots.

PHOTO BY
GEORGE WEIGEL

Women Increasingly Powering America's Electric Co-ops



SCOTT FLOOD

A GENERATION AGO, if a young woman expressed an interest in working in the energy industry, it's possible her friends, family and even prospective supervisors would have steered her away. Keeping the lights on was traditionally seen as men's work — aside from customer service or clerical roles, that is.

Yet today, women represent an increasing share of the electric cooperative workforce, and not just in traditional roles of the past.

As you look around Pennsylvania's electric cooperatives, you'll find women in every job imaginable, including top leadership roles.

According to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), which represents 900 electric co-ops nationwide, including those in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, nearly 90 are headed by female CEOs. Among them are Rachel Hauser, president & co-CEO of Mansfield-based Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, and Brenda Swartzlander, president & CEO of DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative.

International Women's Day is March 8, and it's a great occasion to celebrate the accomplishments of these women and the many others who are transforming electric co-ops and supporting their communities. It's hard to imagine a better career for today's young women who are interested in making their communities better places to live and work.

In fact, co-ops across America are actively working to build awareness among young women about the opportunities available to them. Some even host day camps for teens, where they get a behind-the-scenes look at what's involved with delivering electric power. Beyond the highly visible roles, such as linework, participants learn about how people in areas as diverse as IT, finance and environmental compliance are vital to co-op operations. Without that exposure, those future co-op leaders probably wouldn't know those jobs exist.

Students aren't the only target of such efforts. NRECA reports the entire industry is making it a priority to support career development for women. Mentorship programs and networking opportunities create platforms through which women can connect and share their experiences. The recently launched Women in Power Mentoring program for the electric co-op community provides mentorship and resources to support and guide women in their careers.

As nearly 20% of the nation's co-op workforce nears retirement age over the next five years and local cooperatives struggle with an ever-tighter job market, expanding the pool of potential workers is an effective solution. 📍

SCOTT FLOOD, BUSINESS WRITER
NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

EDITOR
Peter A. Fitzgerald

MANAGING EDITOR
Jill M. Ercolino

SENIOR EDITOR
Michael T. Crawford

LAYOUT & DESIGN
W. Douglas Shirk

ADVERTISING & PRODUCTION
COORDINATOR
Michelle M. Smith

CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS
**John Kasun, Anne M. Kirchner,
Yvonne Butts-Mitchell,
Steve Piatt**

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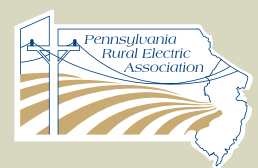
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CRAIG HARTING

COMMUNICATING KINDNESS

Later this month, cooperative communicators in Pennsylvania will gather for our spring meeting to catch up on industry issues and share updates. These are the folks who put together your *Penn Lines* magazine every month, and you couldn't have a more dedicated group of communication professionals. We'll be missing one person at this meeting – someone whose kindness and cooperative spirit made us all better.

This will be our first gathering since the passing of Craig Harting, one of our longtime cooperative leaders and a great supporter of cooperative communicators. Harting was the recently retired CEO of Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative, where he worked for more than three decades.

Harting passed away late last year following an illness at 66. Before his death, Harting received the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association's (PREA) 2023 "Miracle Mile" Eminent Service Award, the association's highest honor.

For years, Harting served as chairman of the PREA Awards Committee. One of his favorite duties was recognizing the work of cooperative communicators. Without fail, he would be part of the annual awards program that highlights the work that goes into producing *Penn Lines*. Over the years, his thoughtful leadership and support of cooperative communications helped improve the magazine – a magazine he loved contributing to with his columns for his local electric cooperative.

Australian musician and writer Nick Cave says that loss is a shared condition of our humanity, but kindness is the force that draws us together.

Harting's untimely passing hit our cooperative family hard. His loss left many remembering his kindness. Imbued with a true cooperative spirit, he was a mentor to many, always providing encouragement and support to others.

As cooperative communicators meet this month, we'll be sure to remember a friend who brought people together through the kindness he communicated. Rest in peace, Craig.

PETER A. FITZGERALD
EDITOR



APRIL ECLIPSE: When the solar eclipse occurs April 8, parts of Pennsylvania, including Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Warren counties, will be in the 115-milewide "totality zone." The eclipse is expected to last about 4 minutes.

IN THE DARK

State parks anticipating crowds for April's solar eclipse

Four state parks in Pennsylvania will be in the 115-milewide "totality zone" for the April 8 solar eclipse. That means the moon will block the sun for about 4 minutes during the mid-afternoon eclipse in those areas, which include Presque Isle, Erie Bluffs, and Pymatuning state parks in Crawford County, and Maurice K. Goddard State Park in Mercer County.

Other areas in Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Warren counties will also be in the totality zone, while much of the remainder of Pennsylvania will be in an area of partial eclipse.

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is recommending the following for those who plan to visit:

- ▶ Expect crowds at the four parks, which will close if they reach capacity.
- ▶ Make reservations now for overnight accommodations. Available spots are filling up.
- ▶ Plan to arrive early and stay

late because of the expected congestion.

- ▶ Have a second viewing location in mind in case your chosen park reaches capacity and needs to close.
- ▶ Park only in the designated areas.
- ▶ Keep in mind many parks and forests have little to no cellphone reception, and service in other areas may not work properly during the eclipse.
- ▶ Bring appropriate gear, including solar-safe glasses, and remember: Regular sunglasses, no matter how dark, are not safe for viewing the eclipse.

For more information about the April eclipse, visit dcnr.pa.gov.

WAY TO GO, WARREN!

Warren County home to Pa.'s Trail of the Year

The Trails at Jakes Rocks in Warren County have been named Pennsylvania's 2024 Trail of the Year, the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) says. The 35-mile natural surface trail system is

in the Allegheny National Forest.

A recent economic impact analysis found the trail system draws more than 25,000 users annually and generates an estimated \$9 million in annual tourism spending. The trails are used primarily for mountain biking, but other types of recreation, such as hiking, trail running and cross-country skiing, are also permitted.

“We at DCNR are hopeful that this honor helps connect even more people to the recreation opportunities around the trails in Warren County and in the Allegheny National Forest,” DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn said when making the announcement.

Located in northwestern Pennsylvania, Warren County is served by Warren Electric Cooperative and Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative.

BEAR OR BIGFOOT?

Study: What are people really seeing in the woods?

A study, published Jan. 13 in the

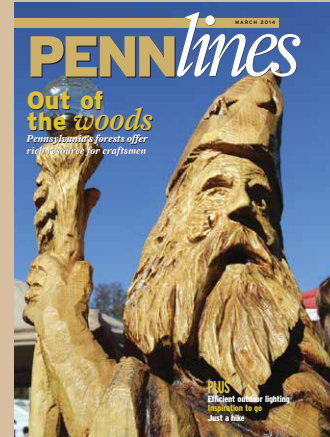
Journal of Zoology, has found that “Bigfoot” sightings in the United States and Canada often correlate with the size of the local black bear population.

Results show that for every 5,000 black bears, there’s an average of one Bigfoot, or Sasquatch, sighting. And if bear numbers go up, so do the number of Bigfoot sightings. The study also notes, however, that some states without a known population of black bears still have reports of Bigfoot sightings.

Bigfoot — a large, hairy mythical creature described as walking on two legs and often living in forested areas — has many traits in common with black bears, which can range from golden brown to reddish brown to black. Bears stand on their two hind legs and also frequent wooded areas.

Researchers looked at bear populations, reports of Bigfoot sightings, human populations and forested areas to determine the correlation. 📌

TIME LINES



MARCH 2014

Pennsylvania is renowned for its forests and its longstanding lumbering traditions, which *Penn Lines* celebrated a decade ago. In fact, many rural electric cooperative members have made their living off the land — and forests — from operating sawmills and making furniture to creating decorative carvings with chainsaws.

MARCH



HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PA!

Pennsylvania will be celebrating its 343rd birthday and founder William Penn on “Charter Day,” March 10. Among the family-friendly events: Bushy Run Battlefield in Jeanette, the Pa. Lumber Museum in Ulysses, and the Daniel Boone Homestead in Birdsboro will all be offering free admission and activities. Visit their websites to learn more.

SPRING FORWARD

Controversy aside, consider this your reminder that daylight saving time officially begins at 2 a.m. local time Sunday, March 10. Set your clocks ahead one hour and start savoring more daylight and — in a few weeks — the warmth of spring.



CELEBRATE ST. PATRICK

It’s March, and you know what that means: Time to celebrate St. Patrick. A quick Google search reveals the usual bar crawls, parades — and something completely different in Stroudsburg: the First Annual Poconos Sober St. Patrick’s Day on March 24. Learn more about the ticketed event at visitpa.com/event/poconos-sober-st-patricks-day.

A NEW EASTER FEAST

There’s something to be said about tradition, but this Easter — it’s March 31, by the way — try treating your family and friends to something new, like Pizza Rustica, an Italian Easter pie, or a creamy pasta loaded with spring vegetables. Start your search for inspiration at delish.com/holiday-recipes/easter/g81/easter-dinner-ideas.



DIGGING FO

How to Save Money in the Garden

GEORGE WEIGEL

Penn Lines Contributor

PLANT PRICES ARE UP SHARPLY the past two years.

So is the cost of insecticides, fertilizers, deer repellents, mulch, tools, and other accessories gardeners use to keep their green investments alive.

Even bagged dirt is no longer dirt-cheap.

But none of it seems to be discouraging Pennsylvanians from gardening.

“People are just gardening smarter,” says Mary Ann Ryan, the Penn State Master Gardener coordinator in Adams County. “For example, we’re seeing a lot more interest in starting plants from seed, which is cheaper than buying plants.”

“We sometimes hear complaints (about prices),” says Mary Jo Gibson, a Penn State Master Gardener in Columbia County who also manages the greenhouse at a local retailer, “but the younger gardeners, in particular, seem to be taking it in stride.”

Gibson thinks higher prices might be making more of an

impression on the “less young” because they remember when prices were much lower.

As Ryan puts it: “Long gone is the day of the \$10 perennial container.”

These days, a gallon-sized perennial can easily fetch \$20 or more. So, with interest in gardening growing — along with prices — how can those who love to play in the dirt enjoy their hobby without breaking the budget?

We did some digging, talked to a few experts and came up with an abundance of tips.

Saving on plant purchases

You could pay full price at prime planting time like the majority of gardening consumers, or you could pay half or less with some bargain-sniffing strategies.

Start by looking for markdowns on overstocked, out-of-bloom, or past-prime plants. These are often perfectly healthy... just not attractive enough to fetch top dollar.



OR DOLLAR\$

Four top savers: 1) perennials relegated to a bargain rack after they've finish blooming for the season; 2) annuals and vegetables that are still viable but unsold after the spring rush; 3) trees and shrubs that are misshapen but fixable with pruning and patience; and 4) tulips, daffodils, and other spring-blooming bulbs that are often 50% off when unsold, but still plantable until the end of October.

If you shop local, join your favorite garden center's loyalty program. These offer discounts, coupons, rewards and special sales to regular customers.

While you're at it, let local garden center managers know you're interested in plants they want to clear out. You might get a call before plants go on the clearance rack — and maybe even year-end freebies.

Often, lower prices can be had by buying directly from area greenhouse growers or smaller, outlying plant-sellers.

"I know more (gardeners) are driving to the country garden centers," landscape designer Erica Jo Shaffer, a member of Adams Electric Cooperative, says. "The prices on the outskirts of bigger towns are always better."

Bargains are sometimes possible through mail-order

and online vendors; however, expect the plants to be small and "bare root" — i.e., shipped with weight-saving packing material around the roots instead of soil. Coddle them in a pot for a year to maximize success.

Plant bargains also can be found from unconventional sources, including plant societies, Master Gardener plant sales, libraries, public gardens, farmer's markets, schools, and garden clubs — all of which often hold plant-sale fundraisers using divisions from members' yards, locally started seedlings, and discounted greenhouse transplants.

"Our garden club has an annual plant sale, and we sell out of perennials," says Sheila Croushore, president of the Somerset Garden Club, Somerset County, and a member of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative. She notes these plants — mostly divisions dug from members' own gardens — are small, but go for \$5 to \$7 each.

Lori Voll-Wallace, the Penn State Master Gardener area coordinator for 17 Northern Tier counties, says some groups also run "seed swaps" in which gardeners trade excess or saved seeds with one another at no cost.

You might also encounter plants at yard sales. These





sometimes can be bargain-priced, dig-your-own gold mines. “But sometimes it’s the invasive stuff people are trying to get rid of,” Shaffer warns. “Be sure you know what you are getting.”

Landscape companies are another overlooked resource. Landscapers routinely dig up healthy plants during renovations simply because they’ve outgrown the space or a new homeowner doesn’t like them. They may let you salvage their dig-outs before they go to a dump.

Ways to trim the plant budget

Wherever you buy plants, **opt for less-expensive smaller sizes.** “It’s much cheaper to buy small, be patient and watch the plants grow,” Croushore says.

Buying small especially saves on trees, which can double in price for just 2 or 3 feet of additional height. Research has found that smaller transplant sizes usually establish faster and catch up to their bigger brethren within a few years.

Another good strategy: Buy fewer plants up front and allow more space between them, Shaffer says. “Lots of people are putting in new plants way too close together, both in the landscape and in their containers,” she says. “Those extras add up fast.”

BARGAIN HUNTING: Landscape designer Erica Jo Shaffer, a member of Adams Electric Cooperative, says many gardeners hunt for bargains on the outskirts of town – in the country – where prices are often lower.

Starting new plants from seed also yields more plants to the dollar than transplants.

“We’ve been getting a lot more questions lately about seed-starting,” Ryan says. “I assume it’s a direct relation to prices because it’s definitely cheaper to start from seed than buy mature plants.”

During winter, vegetables and annual flowers are fairly easy to start from seed inside. Basic workshop lights with fluorescent tubes are sufficient for growing seedlings, which usually need only about six weeks of inside growth before being ready to plant outdoors.

Even less expensive is planting seeds directly in the ground outside, bypassing the need for lights, pots, potting mix and such.

A third plant budget-stretcher is mining your own plants for expansion. Most perennial flowers can be dug up and divided into fist-sized pieces after several years of growth, giving you free plants to use elsewhere.

Clumps of spring bulbs also can be dug up and divided after their foliage browns in spring, and some shrubs will yield newbies if their “suckers” (roots that send up

The fastest way to save on gardening products is to cut out things that you – and your plants – really don't need.

shoots) are dug up and transplanted. Virginia sweetspire, summersweet, hydrangea, diervilla, kerria, lilac, bayberry, sweetshrub, sweetbox and forsythia are good sucker-transplant candidates.

Check with friends and neighbors to see if they'd like to trade divisions, which can yield free, new varieties for your yard.

New shrubs, trees, roses, and evergreens can be created by snipping 4- to 6-inch pieces off the tips of "mother plants" and sticking them into moist potting mix. That induces roots to grow from the buried cut ends, giving you a new "baby" of the plant. This works for many annual flowers and tropicals, too.

If you're spending too much on annual flowers (the ones planted anew each spring), **save money by converting space to perennials** (plants that come back year after year). Limit those \$6 annuals to pots, hanging baskets and window boxes.

Perennials may cost more up front and don't bloom as long as annuals, but the payback is usually three years or less.

Some annuals, such as ageratum, celosia and cosmos, are good at "self-seeding," meaning they come up on their own each spring from seed dropped by last year's flowers.

This is a way to fill beds without any new expense and only limited work (i.e., removing seedlings you don't want or transplanting self-sprouted seedlings where you do want them).

Save on your potted-plant budget by scavenging the yard for perennial flowers that you can dig and divide to use in pots. The best are ones with colorful foliage that add interest beyond the few weeks they're in flower, such as coralbells, hosta, golden sedge, variegated liriopse and ferns.

Return the perennials to the ground in fall to overwinter and mine again next year.

Another money-saver is using "double-duty" plants. Most so-called "houseplants" (crotons, palms, snake plants, peace lilies, rubber plants, etc.) are tropical or subtropical species that do perfectly fine outside in northerly summers and inside over winter.

Consider using plants you've bought as houseplants in summer pots, dressed up with coordinated annuals. Conversely, instead of discarding tropicals bought for summer pots at the end of the season, convert them into houseplants over winter.

Ways to save on gardening products

The fastest way to save on gardening products is to **cut out things that you — and your plants — really don't need.**

Some possibilities: wound dressings for pruned trees (not necessary and sometimes counter-productive); leaf shine (a soft, damp cloth with diluted soap cleans dusty houseplant leaves); compost activator (a few shovelfuls of finished compost or soil adds decomposition microbes); anti-transpirant/anti-desiccant sprays (somewhat helpful in transplanting but research shows little-to-no-cold-weather protection); moisture-holding gels for potted plants (research shows little-to-no-water-saving benefit); landscape fabric (inhibits soil oxygen and traps moisture in poorly drained beds, plus weeds grow on top, if you mulch over it); and tree fertilizer spikes (trees usually get the nutrients they need from soil, decomposing mulch, and/or fertilizer on the surrounding lawn).

Next is reducing the amounts of products you use, such as fertilizer. Plants take up only the nutrients they need. Adding more than that doesn't make them grow bigger or better and wastes money, plus it's potentially polluting.

If plants are growing well, there's usually no need to add anything. If they're not, a soil test will tell if lack of nutrition is a culprit — along with exactly what nutrients are needed and in what amounts.

Extension offices and many garden centers offer inexpensive DIY soil-test kits to help you spend fertilizer dollars wisely.

Bug and disease sprays are another potential



COURTESY OF SHEILA CROUSHORE

PLANT SALES: Sheila Croushore, president of the Somerset Garden Club, Somerset County, and a member of Somerset Rural Electric Cooperative, says local garden clubs often host plant sales — another place where bargains can be found.

cost-saver. Some gardeners routinely use pesticides “just in case,” both wasting money and potentially killing beneficial insects that would’ve controlled pest bugs naturally (and at no charge).

Most bugs and diseases target only specific plants, and much of the damage is temporary or cosmetic anyway. Consider products only when particular plants are under threat from intolerable or potentially fatal damage — and when there are no better alternatives.

Sometimes, free or less expensive alternatives are available for garden products. For example, an index finger stuck a few inches into the soil can give an accurate read on soil moisture vs. investing in a soil-moisture meter.

PLANTING THE SEEDS: Even cheaper than buying greenhouse transplants on sale or starting your own seeds inside is direct-seeding. Once the frosts are done and the soil warms up, simply tamp seeds into loosened, moistened dirt. PHOTO BY GEORGE WEIGEL

“Long gone is the day of the \$10 perennial container.”

Ryan advocates stretching expensive potting mix by mixing in your own compost or by “refreshing” last year’s mix with half new mix (assuming last year’s mix wasn’t bug- or disease-ridden).

Croushore says she cuts down on purchased-soil costs by making her own raised-bed soil out of DIY compost and newspaper on top of a cardboard layer (i.e., “lasagna gardening”). The only component she buys is a light layer of mulch, applied every other year.

Many municipalities now collect leaves in fall and offer the resulting free or low-cost compost to residents the following year, saving on bagged or bulk purchases. Ditto for tree companies, which often are willing to drop loads of chipped tree branches in home driveways, saving themselves hauling/dumping fees.

Even costly hardscaping materials, such as bricks, stone,

Continued on page 24

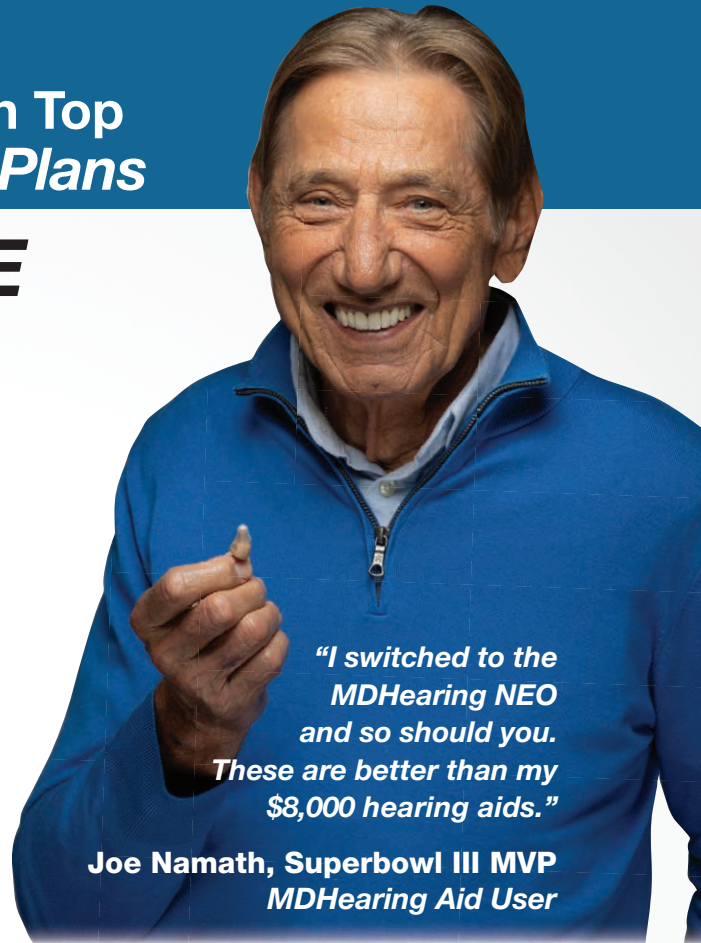


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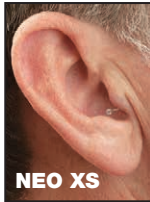
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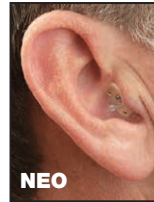
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Electrified Agricultural Equipment

JENNAH DENNEY

THE ELECTRIFICATION TREND has gained momentum in agriculture in recent years. This shift offers numerous advantages, including reduced carbon emissions, lower operating costs, improved energy efficiency and quieter operation.

Smaller electric equipment, such as irrigation systems and utility vehicles, are becoming increasingly popular. Many farmers are now using electric motors in place of older, inefficient diesel motors for irrigation.

Larger agricultural equipment can be difficult to replace with electric alternatives due to their weight. In response, manufacturers are developing tractors that are more compact, weigh less and feature battery-powered options. The compact, lighter design of these tractors allows for better maneuverability in smaller spaces, which improves efficiency and productivity in the field.

In addition to smaller equipment, electric drones are proving to be valuable. Farmers can monitor crops, perform precision spraying and even participate in crop pollination. Equipped with specialized sensors and cameras, these drones capture high-resolution imagery to help farmers make informed decisions about crop management.

Electrified equipment and farming operations

Here are some common types of farming operations that benefit from electrified equipment:

Crop farming: Electric equipment, such as tractors, sprayers, and

harvesters, are being used for tasks like plowing, planting, spraying, drying, and harvesting crops.

Livestock farming: Electric equipment can be used for feeding, milking and waste management.

Vineyards and orchards: Electric equipment can be used for precision pruning of grapevines, fruit trees and bushes.

Greenhouses and nursery operations: Electric equipment like tillers, seeders, and potting machines are often used for efficient soil preparation, seeding, and transplanting.

Organic farming: Electrified agricultural equipment is used here to focus on sustainability and environmentally friendly practices. Electric tools and equipment help minimize the use of fossil fuels and reduce emissions.

Benefits of electrified ag equipment

Electrified agricultural equipment offers several benefits beyond reducing carbon emissions.

Electric drive trains are radically simpler than modern tractors, mak-

ing maintenance cheaper and easier. Electricity flowing through batteries and electric motors is more efficient than having diesel delivered to farms, moved into tanks, and burned in diesel engines.

This efficiency also leads to reduced energy consumption and lower operating costs for farmers.

Considerations for farmers

When considering electrified equipment, farmers should evaluate their specific needs. They should also work with their rural electric cooperative to assess the farm's power supply capacity to ensure it can handle the additional load.

The electrification of agricultural equipment presents a promising future for farmers. By embracing electric vehicles, machinery, and drones, farmers can improve operational efficiency and benefit from cost savings in the long run. 🌱

JENNAH DENNEY writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

THE FUTURE OF ELECTRIFIED AG

Many farmers are making the transition from gas-powered equipment to electric models. Electric-powered farming equipment offers lower operating costs, improved efficiency and quieter operation. Here are a few ways the electrification trend is gaining momentum on the farm.

- 1** **Electric tractors** show promise for increased efficiency and reduced maintenance.
- 2** **Electric motors for irrigation** are more efficient than diesel motors and result in greater cost savings for farmers.
- 3** **Drones equipped with electric agricultural technology** make them a valuable tool for optimizing crop health, detecting pests and enhancing irrigation practices.

Labels in diagram: Battery pack, Electric pivot motor, Electric water pump, Precision monitoring.

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Local Lore

Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative

A First for Pennsylvania

Progress is rarely achieved by just one person. Instead, it happens through the cooperation of many ordinary people banding together for an extraordinary goal. These everyday folk don't often rise to the status of celebrity or become household names, but they do the quiet work of pushing the envelope of what society thinks is possible.

In honor of International Women's Day, March 8, here's the story about the first woman to become sheriff in Pennsylvania.

Born Mary Jane Morrow in 1873, the Herrick Township native graduated from Towanda's Susquehanna Collegiate Institute before marrying fellow teacher Frederick Renwick Mitten in 1896. The pair taught in the township for three years before moving to Towanda — three miles west of Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative's headquarters — where they raised four children.

In 1923, Fred was elected sheriff, at which point the Mittens began living in the Bradford County Jail. While not part of the staff, Mary helped



MARY'S MEMORY: Mary Morrow Mitten, Pennsylvania's first female sheriff, is remembered in a 1970 issue of the *Daily Review* in Towanda. Mitten later served as the Bradford County probation officer until she passed away in 1938 at the age of 64.

Fred with much of the day-to-day responsibilities of managing the jail, according to the Bradford County Historical Society.

Unfortunately, less than two years into his term, Fred passed away. The Mittens were so well-liked that hundreds of voters signed petitions imploring then-Gov. Gifford Pinchot — who, incidentally, was a fierce advocate for rural electrification — to appoint Mary to the office of sheriff.

Mary accepted the role of sheriff, making her the first woman in Pennsylvania to hold the office. During her

tenure, her office conducted more than 300 raids, many of which she led herself, to enforce Prohibition. She chose not to run for re-election, instead moving on to serve as the Bradford County probation officer for the remainder of her life, another rare office for women to hold at the time.

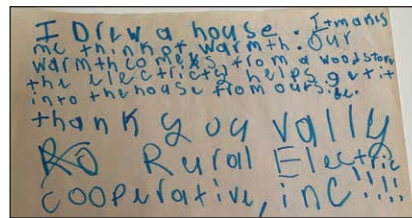
Though she lived before the formation of most rural electric cooperatives, Mary embodied the cooperative principle of "concern for community." She served as an officer of the Bradford County Federation of Women and as a worthy matron — the presiding officer — of the Order of the Eastern Star, a Masonic organization open to both men and women.

To learn more about Mary Morrow Mitten, visit the historical society's website, bradfordhistory.org.

Who are the local legends in your hometown? Let us know your stories at CommunityCorner@prea.com.



Main Office: Wysox, Pa.
Consumer-members served: 19,056
Website: claverack.com



Warming Our Hearts

"I drew a house. It makes me think of warmth. Our warmth comes from a woodstove. The electricity helps get it into the house from outside. Thank you, Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.!!!!"

*Trinity Covert, age 8,
 Valley Rural Electric Cooperative*

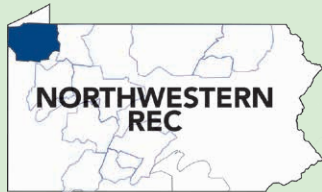
CALLING ALL KIDS, ages 5 to 17:
 Show off your artistic skills!

Each month, we'll feature the artwork of our young readers (or our readers' youngsters), inspired by something they've read in *Penn Lines*. Paints, pencils, crayons, clay, sand – any physical medium is OK! You may send digital photos of the creation to CommunityCorner@prea.com, but please: no digital artwork.

Be sure to include the artist's name, age and electric cooperative, plus a 25- to 50-word description of the art.

Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

NORTHWESTERN REC

P.O. Box 207
22534 State Highway 86
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www.northwesternrec.com

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Amy Wellington, *Editor*

Light at the End of the Tunnel for Centerville and Oil Creek



RYAN MELLER

MORE THAN ONCE, YOU HAVE heard us say Penelec, or First Energy, is the power supplier for our 17 substations. This means we use Penelec's transmission lines to get our power from Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. to our substations. We do not purchase power from Penelec or First Energy.

That is a true, yet simplified, statement. There are 15 power supply delivery points on our system that feed 15 of our 17 substations. The two remaining substations in Edinboro and the Centerville are fed by other co-op substations. This setup made the most economical sense several decades ago when the system was designed.

In recent years, the co-op added tie-lines where possible, enabling backfeeding between most of our substations. Backfeeding is essential to Northwestern REC's system reliability. This hasn't been the case for our members in the Centerville and Oil Creek areas. The Centerville substation is fed by our Oil Creek substation near Titusville. As things currently are, there is no way to backfeed either substation during a power supply outage. When Oil Creek experiences a power supply interruption, all of Centerville is out of power as well.

There hasn't been an easy solution to this issue — or one that isn't a multi-million-dollar project — but we finally see light at the end of the tunnel.

We are excited to share that Phase 1, the engineering phase, is already underway to construct a new power supply delivery point in the Centerville area. Working with our power supplier, the plan is for this new delivery point to serve the Centerville substation and act as an alternative source for the Oil Creek substation. This is exciting news for our members in eastern Crawford County, but we ask for your patience for just a bit longer; it will take several years to complete this construction.

In the coming months and years, you will see our crews working to construct a new transmission line from our Centerville substation to the new delivery point. We ask the members in this area to work with our staking engineers to help us secure the right-of-way closer to the road, so they are more accessible to line crews in the future.

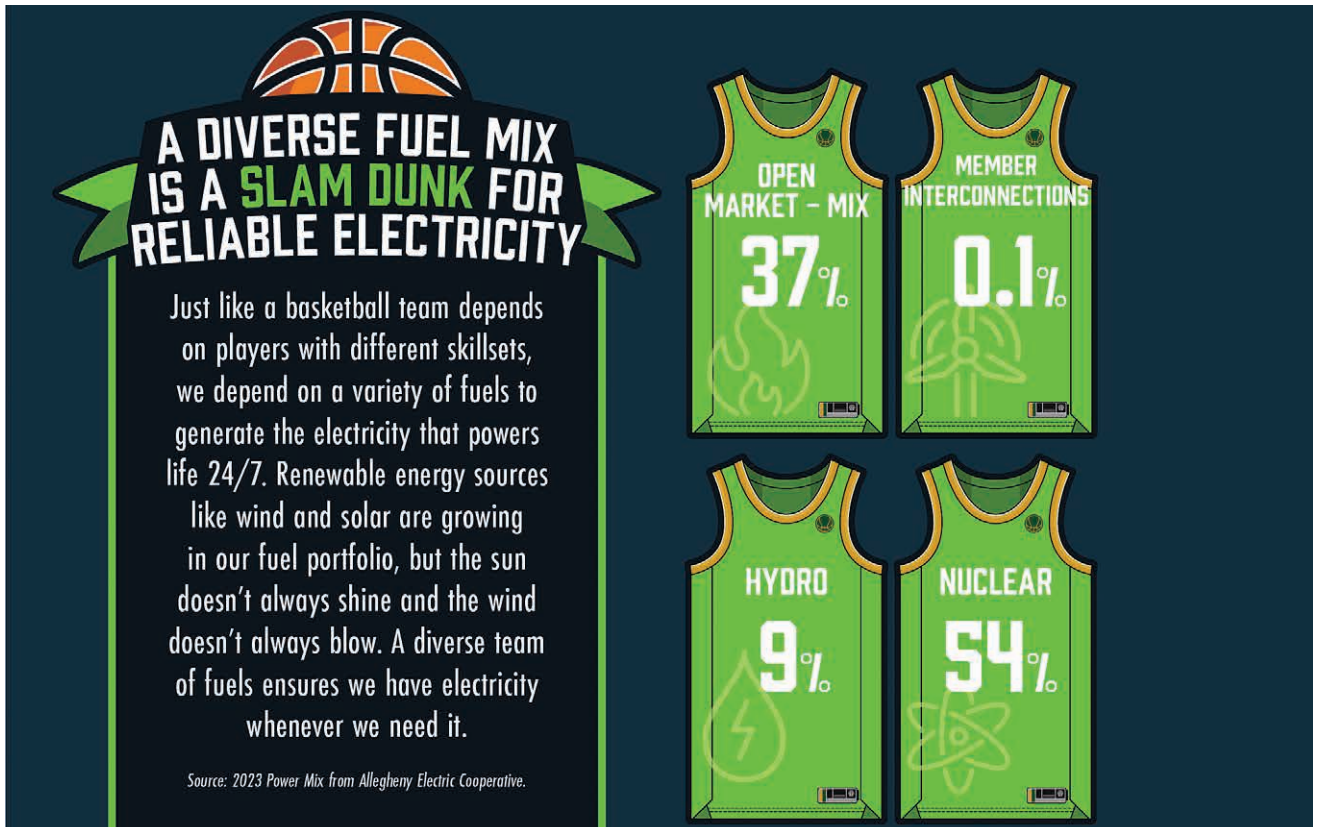
When this project is complete, we will be able to backfeed both substations from either direction. Power supply concerns will no longer be an issue for our 1,200 members in the Centerville and Oil Creek areas.

Funding this project has been carefully planned. We hope to receive grant money intended to improve grid reliability but are prepared financially for this project. We do not foresee any impact from this construction on our future rates.

With that, I invite all of you to attend one of our four member meetings in April (see page 16C), where we will discuss this project and other topics in more detail. Hope to see you there! 🍷

Cooperatively yours,

RYAN MELLER
PRESIDENT & CEO



A Balanced Team for Reliability

AMY WELLINGTON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE WINNINGEST BASKETBALL TEAMS in history are consistent and have players with varying abilities. Some are better at shooting three-pointers, and some excel at defense. Having a balanced mix of skills makes the team a powerhouse on the court. The way to ensure energy reliability is a bit like that, too.

The power team first requires a foundation of consistent sources that can be put in the game any time they're needed. Having enough "always-available" fuel, like natural gas and coal, ensures consistent power generation.

Just like a team needs different players for different situations, our power grid requires multiple sources to keep the grid running. Relying solely on one player to win every game is not an effective strategy — what happens if they get injured? Similarly, using a single fuel source for electricity generation poses a significant risk to energy reliability. Natural disasters, geopolitical tensions and unforeseen disruptions can severely impact the supply chain of a particular fuel. A diverse mix of energy sources acts as a safeguard, ensuring the grid remains operational even in the face of unexpected challenges.

A diverse energy mix also enhances grid flexibility by accommodating the intermittent nature of renewable energy sources like solar and wind. Think of solar power like a team's inconsistent three-point shooter. It's awesome when the sun is shining bright, but what if it's nighttime or

cloudy? That's where the other players, like hydro, nuclear, natural gas and coal, can step up and keep the team scoring.

Diverse fuel sources contribute to the stability and reliability of the electric grid. The different sources have varying characteristics, including generation patterns, responsiveness and storage capabilities. This diversity allows for a more balanced and resilient energy system that can adapt to fluctuating demand and unforeseen circumstances. Having a mix of these energy sources is like having a team with different skills to handle various situations and scenarios.

A diverse set of energy sources is essential, but that's not the only thing we need to have for reliable electricity — or a winning team. Basketball teams are always trying new plays or training rookies to create a versatile lineup. Similarly, electric cooperatives are constantly innovating to maintain reliability for tomorrow. But creating new ways to make our power sources more efficient and reliable takes time, money and advances in technology that aren't necessarily ready yet.

As we continue to work on the innovations of tomorrow, the key to keeping our electricity reliable right now is ensuring a diverse "team" of fuels. Each one brings something special to the table, and together, they make sure we have the power we need, whenever we need it. 🏀

2024 MEMBER & NOMINATING MEETINGS

APRIL

15

Member Resource Meeting

Edinboro McKean VFW Post 740

6 - 7:30PM

APRIL

16

District 3 Nominating Meeting

Elgin/Beaver Dam VFD

6 - 7:30PM

APRIL

25

District 10 Nominating Meeting

Cooperstown VFD

6 - 7:30PM

APRIL

30

District 5 Nominating Meeting

Northwestern REC

6 - 7:30PM

All meetings begin at 6 p.m. with dinner. Presentations to follow. Email reservation (include name, date of event and how many) to info@northwesternrec.com or call 800-352-0014.

Nominations for Team Northwestern REC

MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING with their co-op have the right to seek election to the board of directors. While serving on a board is certainly not for everyone, it is healthy for any co-op to have an engaged team of members interested in serving as leaders.

At Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), we are governed by a board of 10 directors, elected by the membership, that provides strategic direction and guidance to ensure we continue to serve your interests.

While democracy itself is an imperfect system, it remains the best way to ensure the most voices are heard. Democracy cannot, and should not, be taken for granted.

The electric co-op's mission to provide safe, reliable and affordable power has been achieved. Now, as the utility industry enters an era of change, when people have more choices for the way they receive electricity, it is critically important we hear the diverse voices of our many members. Through active engagement and participation of the membership, the co-op can ensure it is heading in a direction members will support.

In addition to ensuring the co-op serves the best interests of its members, the board of directors is committed to

helping maintain the vibrancy of our communities. Being a co-op board member requires a commitment of time and effort and the attitude of a servant-leader, meaning: Board members should be committed to making a real contribution to the membership and community.

This year, Districts 3, 5 and 10 have seats up for election.

If you are interested in running for your district or would like to nominate another member, here are a few qualifications you must meet (this is not a complete list):

- ▶ Your primary residential home (within that district) must have received Northwestern REC electric service for at least one year prior.
- ▶ You must be a member in good standing with no outstanding balances for at least one year.
- ▶ You cannot be an employee of any cooperative or association within the past three years.
- ▶ You cannot be a close relative of an employee or current director.
- ▶ You cannot be convicted of a felony within the past five years.
- ▶ You cannot be a candidate or incumbent for elected public office at the county, state or federal level.

For a complete list of qualifications, please review the director position description and director qualifications at northwesternrec.com/content/running-board before submitting your nomination.

Any member, regardless of their district, can nominate another member for any of the districts up for election. The nominee must live in the district where he or she is being nominated.

Nominating meetings have been planned and are shown above. Invitations will also be emailed and mailed to members.

Once all nominees are certified by the Member Panel for Director Elections, voting will begin in June with online, electronic and mail-in ballots. Election results will be announced during the 88th Annual Meeting scheduled Sat., Aug. 3, at the New Beginnings Church of God on Leslie Road in Meadville.

One of the greatest resources of northwest Pennsylvania is our people. If you are interested in running for a seat on Northwestern REC's Board of Directors, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact Amy Wellington, director of communications, at 800-352-0014 or awellington@northwesternrec.com.

Clearing the Path to Reliability

AMY WELLINGTON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

TREES ARE MAJESTIC, BEAUTIFUL and good for the soul. But we also know our members depend on us to deliver reliable power to their homes and businesses. That's why Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) strives to balance maintaining the beautiful surroundings we all cherish with ensuring reliable electricity. You might not realize it, but there are several benefits to regular tree trimming.

Reliability

Keeping power lines clear of overgrown vegetation improves service reliability. After all, we've seen the whims of Mother Nature during severe weather events with fallen tree limbs taking down power lines and utility poles. While many factors can impact power disruptions, about half of all outages can be attributed to overgrown vegetation. This is why you sometimes see Northwestern REC crews or contractors trimming trees near power lines. Our trimming crews have been trained and certified based on the latest industry standards.

In fact, all U.S. electric utilities are required to trim trees that grow too close to power lines. Scheduled trimming throughout the year keeps lines clear from overgrown or dead limbs likely to fall, enabling us to better prepare for severe weather events.

Plus, we all know it's more efficient to undertake preventive maintenance than it is to make repairs after the fact. Drone inspections of power lines and vegetation allow the cooperative to reduce labor and equipment costs while improving reliability. Through the use of small drones, we can accurately monitor the health and growth of trees and identify potential problems.

3 Ways to Help Limit Tree Trimming

Did you know electric utilities are required to trim trees and other types of vegetation that grow too close to overhead power lines? We know you love your trees, and we will do everything we can to avoid trimming them. Here's how you can help:

- 1. Plant trees in the right place.** Trees that will be <40 ft. should be planted at least 25 ft. away from power lines (>40ft. should be at least 50 ft. away).
- 2. Don't block pad-mounted transformers.** Plant shrubs at least 10 ft. away from transformer doors and 4 ft. from transformer sides.
- 3. Report dangerous branches.** If you spot a tree or branch that is dangerously close to power lines, please let us know.

**Trimming improves safety for all.
Let's work together to enjoy the beauty of trees and reliable electricity.**

Safety

Working near power lines can be dangerous, and we care about the safety of our members and lineworkers. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members' yards, they can pose a grave danger to families. If children can reach those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor, such as a tree.

Any tree or branch that falls across a power line creates a potentially dangerous situation. A proactive approach decreases the odds of fallen trees during severe weather, which improves safety and reliability.

Affordability

Northwestern REC always strives to keep costs down for our members. If trees and other vegetation are left unchecked, they can become overgrown and more expensive to maintain. A strategic vegetation management program helps to reduce costs for everyone.

When it comes to vegetation management, you can help, too. When planting new trees, make sure they're planted a safe distance from overhead power lines. Medium-height trees (those up to 40 feet tall) should be planted at least 25 feet from power lines. Trees taller than 40 feet should be planted at least 50 feet from power lines. We encourage you to practice safe planting near pad-mounted transformers, too. Plant shrubs at least 10 feet from the transformer door and 4 feet from the sides. If your neighborhood has underground lines, remember to call 811 before you begin any project that requires digging.

If you spot an overgrown tree or branch that's dangerously close to overhead lines, please let us know by calling 800-352-0014.

We have deep roots in our community, and we love our beautiful surroundings. It takes a balanced approach, and our vegetation management program is a crucial tool in ensuring service reliability. 🌳

When it comes to severe weather... hope for the best, **but prepare for the worst.**



You can begin your preparation by assembling an emergency preparedness kit, which includes items to help keep your family safe and comfortable during a power outage. Your kit should include items such as water, non-perishable food, flashlight, batteries, blankets, and a first aid kit.

- ___ Drinking water & food
- ___ Blankets, pillows, & clothing
- ___ Basic first-aid supplies
- ___ Medications
- ___ Basic toiletries
- ___ Flashlights
- ___ Battery-operated radio
- ___ Extra supply of batteries
- ___ Cell phone with chargers
- ___ Cash and credit cards
- ___ Basic tools (duct tape, wrench, etc.)
- ___ Important documents & numbers
- ___ Toys, books, & games
- ___ Baby supplies
- ___ Pet supplies

The Memory of Trees

MITCHELL KYD

IT'S ONLY MARCH, but I'm desperate to see a pop of American redbud blossoms pinking-up my woods after this long and frigid winter. Those tiny dots of color peek out, explode, then fade in a few short weeks, but for me, they announce that all my sleeping trees are waking up and will soon be green again.

My view from every window looks out to towering oaks, wild cherry, shagbark hickory, tulip poplars and beech. Sadly, I lost my beautiful hemlocks to that thieving invader, the woolly adelgid.

My dad and I planted the hemlocks together when I was a kid. He taught me young trees need "an extra drink" during their first dry summer, and I brought it to them in my red beach bucket. I remember lugging my small contribution to their base, sloshing as I went, but he always made me feel my help was important. It's

painful to say goodbye to the monuments of memories like that, but my tree surgeon understood. He surprised me with a bench from the felled bones of my hemlocks.

Dad and I spent a lot of time together in the woods to experience *shrinrin-yoku*, a Japanese concept and now trendy activity known as "forest bathing." No. That's a lie. We simply recognized those hours as taking a walk in the woods. We didn't know a formal term would emerge to describe it, and we didn't need one.

When your earliest memories are connected to trees like that, world news sinks in beyond an eight-second sound bite. During the devastating wildfires in Maui last year, the deep charring of the banyan tree in the heart of Lahaina left residents with another layer of grief. Only a month later, in northern England, the Brits and world travelers alike were outraged at the deliberate destruction of the centuries-old Sycamore Gap tree along the ancient Hadrian's Wall. My travels never took me to the site of either of those wise elders, but I felt the importance of their loss.

I never learned to graft trees as my dad did, and I haven't planted nearly enough, but I have filled my bookshelves

with great reading and photo essays honoring them. There's more to appreciate than the bounty, clean air, wild-life habitat, and economic contribution trees give us. I've discovered stories about the miracles they perform consistently, quietly and without our intervention. For instance, oak trees must throttle their acorn production to divert energy to other parts of their systems. When a bumper crop of seeds is produced, it is part of a survival plan that provides more than enough acorns for the critters that eat

them, ensuring there are enough seeds left to grow new trees.

Scientific research chronicles how trees communicate, often activating alarm systems for their species. One South African study documented that when a drought forced kudu antelope to ravage acacia leaves with overbrowsing, the trees fought for survival by increasing

production of deadly tannins to poison the kudu. Acacia leaves also sent a distress signal to neighboring trees by releasing ethylene gas into the air, alerting them to increase their tannins as well.

There is no denying that everything is connected. Famed naturalist John Muir put it this way: "The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness ... When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it is attached to the rest of the world."

You've probably already heard some version of the Chinese proverb: "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now." If you've been thinking it might be now for you, the official tree-planting day — Arbor Day — is only one calendar page away on April 26.

Visit arborday.org for tree recommendations and planting tips. Find a planting partner and make your tree day an event. In 20 years, the two of you could be relaxing in some beautiful shade, sharing a memory of trees. 🌳



YVONNE BUTTS-MITCHELL celebrates the joys and poignant moments of rural living under the pen name Mitchell Kyd. Her stories from the Path Valley Hotel were hatched by encounters with contractors, critters and creepy crawlies while rehabbing the family cabin after its 17-year stint as a giant closet.

Fish Oil Failure Shines Grim Light on America's Memory Crisis

America's Top Memory M.D. Reveals Why Fish Oil Doesn't Protect You from Senior Moments – and the #1 Alternative

More than 16 million Americans suffer from age-associated cognitive impairment, and according to nationwide research, these numbers are only rising.

Thankfully, anti-aging specialist and best-selling author Dr. Al Sears says there's an easy way to banish senior moments and brain fog for good.

It's a safe, natural compound called DHA – one of the building blocks of your brain. It helps children grow their brains significantly bigger during development. And in adults, it protects brain cells from dying as they get older.

For years, most people thought fish oil was the best available source of DHA...

But industrial fish farming practices have depleted the nutritional content of nearly every fish oil you can buy.

Today, roughly 20 million Americans are wasting their money on fish oils that hardly do anything at all.

And since they think they are addressing the problem, fish oil's failure has led to America's memory crisis continuing to grow practically unchecked.

Fortunately, Dr. Sears says, "there's still hope for seniors. Getting more DHA can make a life-changing difference for your mental clarity, focus, and memory."

Dr. Sears, a highly-acclaimed, board-certified doctor— who has published more than 500 studies and written four bestselling books — says we should be able to get enough DHA in our diets... but we don't anymore.

"For thousands of years, fish were a great natural source of DHA. But due to industrial fish farming practices, the fish we eat and the fish oils you see at the store are no longer as nutrient-dense as they once were," he explains.

DHA is backed by hundreds of studies for supporting razor-sharp focus, extraordinary mental clarity, and a lightning quick memory... especially in seniors.

So, if you're struggling with focus, mental clarity, or memory as you get older...

Dr. Sears recommends a different approach.

THE SECRET TO A LASTING MEMORY

Research has shown our paleo ancestors were able to grow bigger and smarter brains by eating foods rich in one ingredient — DHA.

"Our hippocampus thrives off DHA, and grows because of it," explains Dr. Sears. "Without DHA, our brains would shrink, and our memories would quickly fade."

A groundbreaking study from the University of Alberta confirmed this. Animals given a diet rich in DHA saw a 29% boost in their hippocampus — the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory. As a result, these animals became smarter.

Another study on more than 1,500 seniors found that those whose brains were deficient in DHA had significantly smaller brains — a characteristic of accelerated aging and a weakened memory.

PEOPLE'S BRAINS ARE SHRINKING AND THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW IT

Dr. Sears uncovered that sometime during the 1990s, fish farmers stopped giving their animals a natural, DHA-rich diet and began feeding them a diet that was 70% vegetarian.

"It became expensive for farmers to feed fish what they'd eat in the wild," explains Dr. Sears. "But in order to produce DHA, fish need to eat a natural, marine diet, like the one they'd eat in the wild."

"Since fish farmers are depriving these animals of their natural diet, DHA is almost nonexistent in the oils they produce."

"And since more than 80% of fish oil comes from farms, it's no wonder the country is experiencing a memory crisis. Most people's brains are shrinking and they don't even know it."

So, what can people do to improve their memory and brain



Why the 'brain fuel' ingredient in fish oil is slowly drying up.

function most effectively.

Dr. Sears says, "Find a quality DHA supplement that doesn't come from a farmed source. That will protect your brain cells and the functions they serve well into old age."

Dr. Sears and his team worked tirelessly for over two years developing a unique brain-boosting formula called **Omega Rejuvenol**.

It's made from the most powerful source of DHA in the ocean, squid and krill — two species that cannot be farmed.

According to Dr. Sears, these are the purest and most potent sources of DHA in the world, because they haven't been tampered with. "**Omega Rejuvenol** is sourced from the most sustainable fishery in Antarctica. You won't find this oil in any stores."

MORE IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

Already, the formula has sold more than 850,000 bottles. And for a good reason, too. Satisfied customers can't stop raving about the memory-boosting benefits of quality-sourced DHA oil.

"The first time I took it, I was amazed. The brain fog I struggled with for years was gone within 24 hours. The next day, I woke up with the energy and mental clarity of a new man," says Owen R.

"I remember what it was like before I started taking **Omega Rejuvenol**... the lack of focus... the dull moods... the slippery memory... but now my mind is as clear as it's ever been," says Estelle H.

"My mood and focus are at an all-time high. I've always had trouble concentrating, and now I think I know why," raves Bernice J. "The difference that **Omega Rejuvenol** makes couldn't be more noticeable."

And 70-year-old Mark K. says, "My focus and memory are back to age-30 levels."

These are just a handful of the thousands of reviews Dr. Sears receives regularly thanks to his breakthrough memory formula, **Omega Rejuvenol**.

WHERE TO FIND OMEGA REJUVENOL

To secure bottles of this brain-booster, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-236-3304**. "It takes time to manufacture these bottles," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers who need it most."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about this product he is offering a 100% money-back guarantee on every order. "Send back any used or unused bottles within 90 days and I'll rush you a refund," says Dr. Sears.

The Hotline is taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow for inventory restocking.

Call **1-800-236-3304** to secure your limited supply of **Omega Rejuvenol**. Readers of this publication immediately qualify for a steep discount, but supplies are limited. To take advantage of this great offer use Promo Code **PLOM324** when you call.

Life with our Labs

STEVE PIATT

IT'S PROBABLY NOT ACCURATE — laughable, really — to call our two Labrador retrievers “kennelmates,” given how little time they actually spend out back in that fenced enclosure.

Years ago, research debunked the myth that “hunting dogs” — and our supercharged yellows are just that — needed to live outside in a kennel. Finnleigh and Riley are just fine with that change in thought, spending their days in various spots in the house, sometimes even on their personal beds, instead of ours.

The switch flicks on, however, when shotguns, blaze-orange vests and hats, and brush-buster pants appear, sending both into a whining, dancing frenzy as Paula and I prepare for a day afield, where Pennsylvania's stocked pheasants, hopefully, await.

Our shooting percentages are, thankfully, high enough to keep the dogs happy. Over the years, however, we're absolutely convinced some of our Labs shot a brief glare our way when we missed an easy, going-away shot on a cackling cockbird.

This season, however, the whining has taken on different meanings. Riley, our 3-year-old fireball from a breeder in southeastern Kansas, has performed admirably in a solo role, joyously snorting her way through heavy cover and sending birds airborne.

Finn, meanwhile, has remained at home, whining pitifully as we load the truck and pull away. She has been relegated to life on a short leash, literally, as she recovers from the canine version of surgery for a torn ACL.

Our dogs are superb companions and a huge part of our lives. But they are also athletes. And when Finn, now 8 years old, came up lame early this fall, we received the bad news at



THE LOST SEASON: Finn, the Piatts' 8-year-old Lab, has been on a short leash this hunting season, recovering from surgery for a torn ACL. It's a temporary setback, though. With her recovery nearly complete, Finn will soon be back to her pheasant-flushing ways.

the worst possible time, right before hunting season.

It's a slow recovery process, and a season lost. Our checkbook, too, is slowly recovering. Without breaking down the dollars and cents of it all — including post-surgery rehab visits — let's just say we didn't remodel the bathroom this year. And Paula and I have whined a bit, too.

Looking back over the years of Lab ownership (Finn and Riley are our sixth and seventh), we've been pretty fortunate — a few porcupine encounters, a nick and cut here and there, a torn toenail now and then, a few sprains that slowed them for brief periods. Nothing this serious. Or costly.

But there was no other decision to make. Finn needed to be Finn again, and surgery would allow her to return to her pheasant-flushing, dock-diving ways. It's what you sign on for when you get a hunting dog — including, ultimately, the incredibly painful loss that comes as they age at a faster pace than we do. You don't get to hunt into the sunset together. Invariably, they depart first, leaving behind great memories and tears that still occasionally flow even years later when we think of Magic, Brooks, Ben, Maddie, and Hailey.

But along the way it's an incredibly one-sided deal in which we are the clear winners. A couple bowls of kibble daily, a snack now and then, pats on the head and belly rubs for a lifetime of unqualified love and devotion. You don't get that anywhere else.

Although Finn's surgery is in the rear-view mirror and her recovery, technically, complete, Paula and I are still hesitant to turn her loose, knowing there's now a 50% chance she could blow out the other leg. We will have to deal with that mental hang-up and at some point allow her to be her energetic self.

We could, in fact, treat Finn and Riley to a late-season visit to a pheasant-hunting preserve, something we often do after we exhaust the supply of state-stocked birds. But we remain ultra-cautious and have scrapped that plan.

It was a season lost for Finn, but our consolation prize was watching Riley emerge as a fine hunting dog of her own.

Maybe we'll remodel the bathroom next year. 🐾

STEVE PIATT is a veteran newspaper editor and outdoor writer who along with his wife, Paula, has hunted and fished across North America. He is most at home on the water and in the fields of the Keystone State. He lives in Bradford County.

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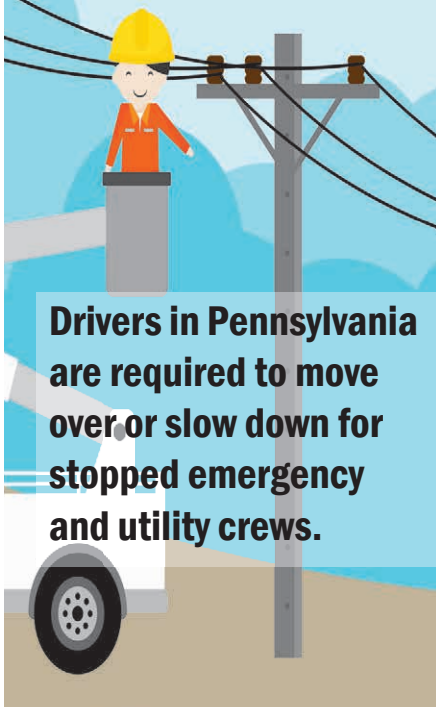


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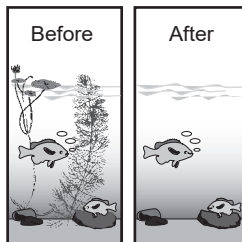


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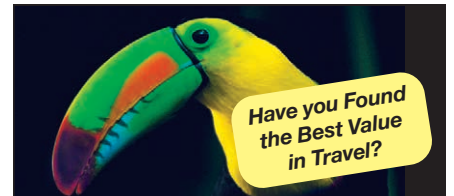
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Spring Cleaning Tips to Maximize Efficiency

MIRANDA BOUTELLE

DEAR MIRANDA: What are some energy-saving tasks I can add to my spring cleaning list?

A: Spring is a great time to refresh, clean and enhance energy efficiency at home. By adopting simple, yet effective energy-saving strategies during our spring-cleaning routines, we can create an efficient living environment that may also lower our utility bills and extend the life of heavily used appliances.

Be sure to include these spring cleaning tips to add some energy savings to the job.

Even though it's out of sight, don't leave it out of mind: **Check the filter in your HVAC system.** Your furnace worked hard during the winter. Ensuring your system has a clean filter is a low-cost and easy way to protect your equipment and maximize efficiency. Over time, dirty furnace filters can also shorten the system's life.

While the filter is easy to replace yourself, you should **have your air conditioning serviced and professionally cleaned.** Both the indoor and outdoor units should be cleaned. Dirty refrigerant coils reduce efficiency. This also applies to heat pumps and ductless heat pumps, also known as mini-split systems. The technician can check refrigerant levels and refill or repair if necessary.

HVAC contractors get busy responding to calls for repairs during the summer heat. Scheduling cleaning services for your air conditioning in the spring — before the heat of the summer — can ensure the work gets done before the rush and even save you money. Some HVAC contractors offer special discounts for cleaning services in the milder months, which

helps fill their schedules and keeps their technicians working.

Window AC units can get dirty, too. They can be cleaned with the proper tools, cleaning agents and know-how. Always unplug before cleaning and wait until completely dry to plug the unit back in again. Take the time to clean it properly in the spring before you need it in the summer.

Cleaning light fixtures and fixture covers can brighten your space by removing dust and grime collected during the winter. While you are at it, be sure to replace any incandescent or compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs with energy-saving LEDs. Although they tend to cost a little more, LEDs last longer and use less energy.

Good-quality LED lightbulbs can last 30,000 to 50,000 hours, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. A typical incandescent lamp lasts about 1,000 hours, and a comparable CFL lasts 8,000 to 10,000 hours. Therefore, if you have an LED light on for 10 hours per day, it can last 13 years compared to only about three months for an incandescent bulb and about two-and-a-half years for a CFL.

Don't forget the oven. A clean oven heats more evenly and quickly, providing better results and lower energy use. A clean oven window allows you to see the food and how it's cooking without opening the oven door, which wastes energy.

If cleaning windows is on the list, check the seals and sash locks to ensure they close tightly. Check for any areas that need caulking or sealing to reduce drafts. Sealing around windows contributes to year-round comfort in your home. Clean win-

MARK GILLILAND, PIONEER UTILITY RESOURCES



FILTER FIX: Replacing your furnace filter is a low-cost and easy way to protect your equipment and maximize efficiency.

dows also allow more light into the home, reducing the need to turn on lamps and overhead fixtures.

Spring is the ideal time to declutter, deep clean, and implement practices that not only tidy our homes but also reduce energy consumption, contributing positively to our homes' energy efficiency and saving money on energy use. 🌱

MIRANDA BOUTELLE is the chief operating officer at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company. She has more than 20 years of experience helping people save energy at home, and she writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



USING A GENERATOR?

8 DANGEROUS MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE



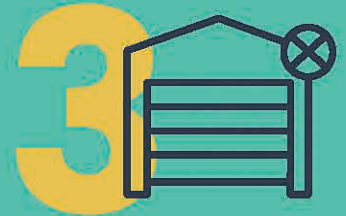
1 IN ENCLOSED SPACES

Always use it in a well-ventilated area.



2 NEAR WINDOWS OR DOORS

Place it at least 20 feet away from windows and doors.



3 IN A GARAGE

Even if the door is up, never use a generator in a garage.



4 IN THE ELEMENTS

Run it on a dry surface under a canopy-like structure (but not in a carport).



5 PLUGGED INTO A WALL OUTLET

This can be deadly to you, family members, neighbors or utility workers.



6 WITH THE WRONG EXTENSION CORD

Use a properly rated cord to plug appliances into a generator.



7 WITHOUT CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) TESTERS

CO detectors should be on every level of your home (test them monthly).



8 IN DISREPAIR

Make sure your generator is well-maintained and in good working order.



Safe Electricity.org[®]

20 HOUSEHOLD ITEMS THAT CAN BE REPURPOSED IN THE GARDEN

Gardening can give a second life to all sorts of household junk, er, “resources.” Here are 20 re-tooling possibilities:

- 1.) **Old shoes, baskets, backpacks, pocketbooks, etc.** Just about any worn-out item that'll hold soil can morph into a plant container. Just be sure it has drainage holes.
- 2.) **Vinyl blinds, plastic detergent bottles.** Cut in strips with a point at one end and use as plant labels. Use a china marker or wax pencil for writing.
- 3.) **Old nylons.** Cut them into strips to make soft ties for tomato plants, for staking new trees, or for securing any tall, floppy vine or plant to a support.
- 4.) **Old shirts.** Besides transforming into rags, these can be cut into strips and used as soft plant ties.
- 5.) **Dishes, glassware, vases, ceramics.** Old, one-off, and even cracked dishes and such can be crafted into garden ornaments.
- 6.) **Kitchen scraps.** Banana and vegetable peels, eggshells, coffee grounds, salad remnants, and other organic food waste make ideal “fuel” for the compost pile along with yard waste, such as leaves, spent plants, and grass clippings.
- 7.) **Newspaper, junk mail, office paper.** All can be shredded and added to the compost pile. Somerset Garden Club President Sheila Croushore makes her own seedling pots by wrapping newspaper around PotMaker molds sold in many seed catalogs. An empty vegetable can also can serve as a free mold.
- 8.) **Old carpet.** Cut it into strips and lay on the ground as a weed-preventing mulch between rows in the vegetable garden.
- 9.) **Empty milk jugs.** Wash and reuse as plant protectors over young veggie-garden plants on cold nights. Or use the cut-off bottoms as seed-starting containers.
- 10.) **Plastic soda bottles.** Cut a vertical slit and wrap the bottles around young trees, shrubs, and vines to protect them against hungry rodents.
- 11.) **Margarine tubs, yogurt cups, egg cartons.** Poke holes in the bottom and use as seed-starting containers.
- 12.) **Foam meat trays.** These make excellent water-catching trays for homemade seed-starting containers or for growing seedlings in cell packs that you've cleaned and recycled from previous plant purchases.
- 13.) **Plastic wrap.** After food-bowl duty, save a few sheets to drape over seed-starting trays. It traps moisture like a mini-greenhouse.
- 14.) **Window cleaner spray bottles.** Rinse them well and use to mist seed trays or tip cuttings. Or use them for spraying animal repellents.
- 15.) **Mayo jars.** Cleaned well, these make ideal storage containers for saved seeds in the refrigerator.
- 16.) **Aluminum foil, cardboard tubes from toilet-paper and paper-towel rolls.** Wrap around the base of squash family plants to keep squash-vine borers from laying eggs at the base of plants.
- 17.) **Used sandpaper.** Staple strips of it to the tops of raised-bed boards or other wooden-bed edging to repel slugs, which detest crawling over scratchy surfaces.
- 18.) **Old mailbox.** Relocate it to the garden, where it can become a repository for markers, labels, string, and all of those other little things you forget to bring from the garage.
- 19.) **Old broomstick, leftover PVC pipe.** Make your own watering wand for reaching hanging baskets and window boxes by using metal hose clamps to secure your garden hose to them.
- 20.) **Dehumidifier water.** Save on the water bill by using water from dehumidifiers on houseplants or outdoor potted plants.

Continued from page 12

patio furniture, garden ornaments, and fencing, are sometimes available for free or heavily discounted from neighbors advertising them on local social-media channels.

Lots of household-waste items are also fair game for repurposing in the garden, including storage tubs that morph into flower containers, cut-off soda bottles that serve as plant protectors, and butter tubs that become seedling pots. (**Note:** See the sidebar at left for 20 household rejects that can serve new life in the garden.)

Money-saving gardening practices

Changing how you garden is one last avenue for limiting expenses. Consider the following:

1) **Collect and save your own seed.** The mature flowers from many plants yield seed that can be saved and planted next year. Hybrid varieties usually don't work well, but heirloom or “open-pollinated” varieties can supply years' worth of new plants from a one-time seed purchase.

2) **Make the most of retail seed.** Most seed bought in packs is good for two or more years, especially if you store it in a cool, dry place (the refrigerator is perfect).

3) **Make your own compost.** Start a pile or two where you can recycle your property's leaves, grass clippings, spent plants and kitchen scraps into highly nutritious (and free) compost. If you do buy bagged compost (or soil or mulch), look for discounted broken bags.

4) **Don't yank the annual flowers after they die back at fall frost.** Some types are cold-hardy enough to survive at least some winters and grow anew next spring. Possible returnees include dianthus, snapdragon, pansy, dusty miller and salvia.

5) **Watch for annuals that pop up on their own.** Flowering annuals might sprout in spring from your own self-seeders as well as seeds brought in by birds, bugs and the wind. If you recognize these as flowers and not weeds, you've just been gifted free flowers.

6) **Save on mulch by covering bare ground with low, spreading groundcover plants.** Examples are creeping sedum, creeping thyme, leadwort and liriopse. You'll pay more at planting time, but as the plants spread, they'll hold down weeds without having to buy mulch anymore.

Sure, in this new era of gardening, you may have to show some restraint, but think of the alternative.

“Higher prices are affecting gardeners the same way higher food prices are affecting how we eat,” Shaffer says. “It feels more ‘budgety,’ like we can't quite run amuck with our spring fever the way we used to. But gardeners ‘must’ garden, so I don't know any of my friends or clients who have stopped. Instead, they've adjusted.” 🌱

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

The Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) Scholarship Trust Fund offers a range of educational scholarships and is accepting applications for the 2024-25 college year.

ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS:

The Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association Scholarship Trust Fund in Memory of William F. Matson is offering scholarships to high school seniors whose parents/guardians are members or employees of Pennsylvania and New Jersey electric cooperatives. Scan this QR code for more information about the scholarship and the application.



ATTENTION FORMER YOUTH TOUR STUDENTS:

The Jody Loudenslager Scholarship is available to any college-bound or current college student who was selected to participate in the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association Youth Tour program. Scan this QR code for more information about the scholarship and the application.

REQUIREMENTS & DATES TO REMEMBER:

Applicants are required to furnish necessary aptitude test scores, transcripts (high school or unofficial college, if applicable) and financial aid information. All applications and required documentation must be emailed to Steph Okuniewski (email address below) no later than **May 3, 2024**. Finalists will be sent a follow-up questionnaire that must be returned by **June 3, 2024**. Scholarship recipients, notified in July 2024, will be featured in the October 2024 *Penn Lines* issue.



QUESTIONS:

Steph Okuniewski, *Member Engagement Specialist*
Stephanie_Okuniewski@prea.com
717.982.1455

Add a Little Spice

ANNE M. KIRCHNER

RECENTLY, I BEGAN MAKING CURRY DISHES, and I learned a few things along the way. Did you know curry powders were introduced by the British? They're like barbecue rubs. Each variation offers a different punch of flavor. Curry combinations are used to make sauces, soups, salads and entrees.

Traditionally, there are three types of curry combinations: yellow, red and green. Yellow curry powder gets its color from turmeric. Paprika is often used to achieve the color of red curry powder. And if you want to spice things up, use green curry powder. The extra heat and color are introduced by green chili peppers. 🌶️

ANNE M. KIRCHNER focuses her writing on human connections, travel and culinary arts, researching food origins, exploring cooking techniques, and creating new recipes.

PHOTOS BY ANNE M. KIRCHNER



SHEET PAN CURRY CAULIFLOWER

- 1 head cauliflower
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon coriander
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- ½ cup pine nuts, toasted
- ½ cup parsley, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Break the cauliflower into florets and place on the baking sheet; set aside. In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, lemon juice, kosher salt, cumin, coriander, turmeric, chili powder and brown sugar. Pour the spice mixture over the cauliflower and toss until well coated. Bake the cauliflower for 25 to 30 minutes. Garnish the roasted cauliflower with toasted pine nuts and chopped parsley. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*



CURRIED SPLIT PEA SOUP

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 tablespoon yellow curry powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 (16-ounce) package dried split peas
- 6 cups vegetable stock
- 1 (13.5-ounce) can coconut milk
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Heat the olive oil in a stock pot over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, carrots and celery. Sauté 3 to 5 minutes or until vegetables are softened. Add the curry powder and cumin. Transfer the seasoned vegetables to a crockpot. Add the dried split peas and vegetable stock. Cover the crockpot and cook on high for 6 to 7 hours or until the split peas are soft. Stir in the coconut milk and lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper, if needed. Keep warm until serving. *Makes 8 to 10 servings.*



CURRIED BUTTER CHICKPEAS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon yellow curry powder
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can chickpeas
- 1 (13.5-ounce) can coconut milk
- ¼ cup almond butter
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce

Heat olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the red onion and garlic; sauté for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the curry powder, cumin, diced tomatoes, chickpeas (drained and rinsed), coconut milk and almond butter. Stir to blend all ingredients. Add the cider vinegar, maple syrup and soy sauce and cook for 5 to 10 minutes. If desired, serve over basmati or jasmine rice and garnish with chopped cilantro. *Makes 4 to 6 servings.*

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TRACTOR PARTS - REPAIR/RESTORATION

ARTHURS TRACTORS. Specializing in vintage Ford tractors, 30 years experience, online parts catalog/ prices, Indiana, PA 15701. Contact us at 877-254-FORD(3673) or www.arthurstractors.com.

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NEW SMYRNA BEACH, Florida, oceanfront condo rental. Two-bedroom, two-bath, deck overlooking beach and pool. \$895/week or \$3,200/month. No pets. Not available Jan. - Mar. Call 814-635-4332 or 814-979-8058.

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WARNING

A warning means that a **severe thunderstorm or tornado has been spotted or seen on radar.**

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Can You Give a Microwave CPR?

JOHN KASUN

YOU DON'T EXPECT IT AND YOU certainly don't plan on it, but all at once out of the blue it happens. You suffer a loss that puts a hole in your heart and changes your life. Thankfully, it wasn't a person or a family pet. No, in my case, it wasn't even a living thing, but I did not realize how important it was until it was gone.

The day started innocently enough as I turned on the news, poured a glass of orange juice and put a Jimmy Dean breakfast sandwich into the microwave. I closed the door and pressed the start button. I had done this many times before; it was like crossing the street — you look both ways, but you do not expect to actually get hit by a car. In an instant, though, I realized

something was wrong. The microwave platter groaned to a stop as the light faded out. I checked and reset the electrical breaker and slowly pushed the start button a second time: a flicker of light, a slight groan, and silence.

It was over in a split second. I am sure it didn't suffer, but it seemed obvious the microwave was ... dead. It had been a good microwave and served us well, but its time apparently had come to an end.

My wife suggested we call a repairman, but when it comes to microwaves, it costs between \$100 and \$150 for someone to come to your home and tell you it will cost more to fix the microwave than it does to buy a new one. This microwave, however, was a microwave convection oven combo, built into a remodeled kitchen that cost slightly more than a new car.

The choice seemed simple: Go out and buy a new model just like the dead one. That seemed like a good idea until I found out they no longer make the model we had very happily lived with until that dark morning.

I wear big boy pants, so I accepted that I would have to buy a different model but with a very specific requirement: It had to fit the hole in my cabinet where the old microwave used to live. Easy, right?

Wrong! It seems that appliance designers are similar to water-board interrogators: They love to make people miserable a little at a time. Designers, it seems, periodically change the dimensions of appliances just enough so they don't quite fit where the old ones did.

I am now checking every appliance on the market from every manufacturer, looking for one slightly smaller or slightly bigger, a different color, or with a smaller handle or no handle. The fact that the cabinets were custom built around the old microwave and a special-order tile backsplash, which now has to have one row removed, makes me think this is not going to be easy or cheap.

My wife, who was quickly scanning the latest kitchen design magazines, has already suggested updating the entire kitchen, which means a new everything.

I considered putting the old microwave back in the hole in the wall and forgetting the whole problem. It's amazing, though, how many times I walk over to the now-vacant space with a bowl of soup or a cup of hot chocolate, only to stand there brokenhearted.

It seems as if the only solution is to redo the kitchen. If that happens, I

intend to buy two of every appliance I install. While that may sound expensive, it gives me one more chance to avoid ripping my entire kitchen apart. Logically, of course, I will also need to buy a lifetime supply of Jimmy Dean breakfast sandwiches in case they stop making them, too. That means I will need to get a bigger freezer ... and does that mean I will need to buy a second freezer as a backup?

I wonder if I should have simply tried harder to save my original microwave, but I can see the headline in the local paper now: "Man electrocuted giving microwave CPR." 🐶

JOHN KASUN, a lifelong Pennsylvanian with more than 30 years of writing experience, looks for the humor in everyday life and then tells a story from that perspective. He is a member of Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.



Finding Warmth

MARCH CAN BE A TRICKY MONTH to navigate. One day it will tease warmth and sunshine only to dump snow and sleet the next. But even knee deep in snow, we can still find moments to warm our hearts, if we're inclined to look.

If you find a moment of warmth, capture it on camera and send it our way for this year's Rural Reflections contest. At year's end, winners in each of our five contest categories — animal subject, artistic, human subject, landscape, and editor's choice — will capture a \$75 prize, and runners-up will receive a \$25 prize. (See entry guidelines below.) 📷



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AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS are encouraged to send photos for the 2024 "Rural Reflections" contest (no digital files) to: *Penn Lines Photos*, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266. On the back of each photo, include your name, address, phone number and the name of the electric cooperative that serves your home, business or seasonal residence.

Remember: Our publication deadlines require us to work in advance, so send your seasonal photos in early. Photos that do not reflect any specific season may be sent at any time. Photos will be returned one year after receipt if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is included.

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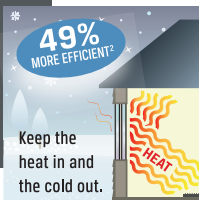
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