

DECEMBER 2023

PENNY LINES

'Tis the Season

Co-op Members Make Spirits Bright with Christmas Giving

LANDSCAPING THE INSIDE OF YOUR HOUSE

THE MAGIC OF CHRISTMAS

MAYBE IT'S TIME TO BE A LITTLE LESS BUSY?

INSIDE!
SUBBING FOR SANTA



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DECEMBER



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Thanks to everyone who submitted photos for our 2023 "Rural Reflections" contest. Now it's time to start snapping away for 2024



ON THE COVER

Bryan Sheffar, a member of Indiana-based REA Energy Cooperative, has been performing as Santa since he was a teenager and is now known professionally as PA Santa Bryan.

PHOTO BY
HALEY ROSA
PHOTOGRAPHY

When Actions Speak Louder than Words



LEROY D. WALLS

WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON UPON us, it's an ideal time to reflect on the values that bind our rural electric cooperatives together. At the heart of the cooperative business model are seven principles, including one that's especially at the forefront as Christmas nears: concern for community. This principle is all about giving back and supporting the communities we serve, making the holidays an opportune moment to celebrate the cooperative difference.

Concern for community and the six other cooperative principles (see graphic below) guide all of our actions, which means Pennsylvania's rural electric cooperatives do much more than provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity. They support community well-being and local development and are committed to the common good. Therefore, when we talk about concern for community — or any of the other principles, for that matter — it's more than words; it's a guiding force that drives our decisions and actions every day.

Throughout the year, cooperative leaders and employees show their concern for community by engaging in community projects and championing local initiatives. Whether it's donating to holiday charities like those highlighted in this month's feature story, helping those struggling to pay their electric bills or providing scholarships to local students, electric cooperatives have a long-standing tradition of local support.

Cooperatives are especially committed to developing the leaders of tomorrow and investing in their growth. Each June, we send a contingent of high school students — the best of the best from our rural communities — on Youth Tour, a weeklong educational trip to Washington, D.C. This experience helps students see the bigger picture and their role in it. And it's made a difference; many former Youth Tour students have taken on leadership roles in their cooperatives, government and other service organizations.

Another way cooperatives show their concern for community is by empowering the local economy through job creation, infrastructure development and community partnerships. We also contribute to local public safety organizations, including volunteer fire companies and emergency medical services, and to libraries, too, because strong local services lead to stronger communities.

Our concern for community isn't limited by borders. Cooperatives actively collaborate with other cooperatives — whether they're in the next county or the next state. By sharing resources and expertise, cooperatives across the country have created a valuable network that has enhanced our resilience, ensuring we can weather any storm — be it a literal storm threatening power lines or the challenges life may throw at us.

So this holiday season, I encourage you to pause for a moment to appreciate the cooperative principles that underpin your electric service and our rural communities. These values ensure cooperatives remain forces for good, enhancing the lives of our members, their families and the communities we all call home.

Happy holidays! 🎁

The Seven Cooperative Principles

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Voluntary and Open Membership | 1 |
| Democratic Member Control | 2 |
| Member Economic Participation | 3 |
| Autonomy and Independence | 4 |
| Education, Training and Information | 5 |
| Cooperation Among Cooperatives | 6 |
| Concern for Community | 7 |

LEROY D. WALLS

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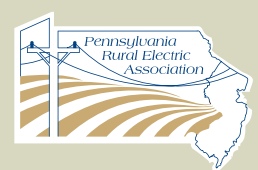
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Scientific Discovery Stuns Doctors

Biblical Bush Relieves Joint Discomfort in as Little as 5 Days

Legendary “special herb” gives new life to old joints without clobbering you. So safe you can take it every day without worry.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 54 million Americans are suffering from joint discomfort.

This epidemic rise in aching joints has led to a search for alternative treatments—as many sufferers want relief without the harmful side effects of conventional “solutions.”

Leading the way from nature’s pharmacy is the new “King of Oils” that pioneering Florida MD and anti-aging specialist Dr. Al Sears calls “the most significant breakthrough I’ve ever found for easing joint discomfort.”

Biblical scholars treasured this “holy oil.” Ancient healers valued it more than gold for its medicinal properties. Marco Polo prized it as he blazed the Silk Road. And Ayurvedic practitioners, to this day, rely on it for healing and detoxification.

Yet what really caught Dr. Sears’ attention is how modern medical findings now prove this “King of Oils” can powerfully...

Deactivate 400 Agony-Causing Genes

If you want genuine, long-lasting relief for joint discomfort, you must address inflammation. Too much inflammation will wreak havoc on joints, break down cartilage and cause unending discomfort. This is why so many natural joint relief solutions try to stop one of the main inflammatory genes called COX-2.

But the truth is, there are hundreds of agony-causing genes like COX-2, 5-LOX, iNOS, TNK, Interleukin 1,6,8 and many more—and stopping just one of them won’t give you all the relief you need.

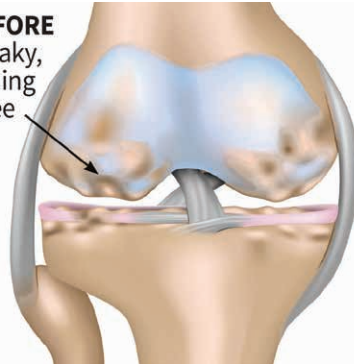
Doctors and scientists now confirm the “King of Oils”—Indian Frankincense—deactivates not one but 400 agony-causing genes. It does so by shutting down the inflammation command center called Nuclear Factor Kappa Beta.

NK-Kappa B is like a switch that can turn 400 inflammatory genes “on” or “off.” A study in *Journal of Food Lipids* reports that Indian Frankincense powerfully deactivates NF-Kappa B. This journal adds that Indian Frankincense is “so powerful it shuts down the pathway triggering aching joints.”

Relief That’s 10 Times Faster... and in Just 5 Days

Many joint sufferers prefer natural solutions but say they work too slowly. Take the best-seller glucosamine. Good as it is, the National Institutes of Health reports that glucosamine takes as long as eight weeks to work.

BEFORE
Creaky,
aching
knee



AFTER
Soothing,
ache-free
knee



*The active ingredient in **Mobilify** soothes aching joints in as little as 5 days*

Yet in a study published in the *International Journal of Medical Sciences*, 60 patients with stiff knees took 100 mg of Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for 30 days. Remarkably, Indian Frankincense “significantly improved joint function and relieved discomfort in as early as five days.” That’s relief that is 10 times faster than glucosamine.

78% Better Relief Than the Most Popular Joint Solution

In another study, people suffering from discomfort took a formula containing Indian Frankincense and another natural substance or a popular man-made joint solution every day for 12 weeks.

The results? Stunning! At the end of the study, 64% of those taking the Indian Frankincense formula saw their joint discomfort go from moderate or severe to mild or no discomfort. Only 28% of those taking the placebo got the relief they wanted. So Indian Frankincense delivered relief at a 78% better clip than the popular man-made formula.

In addition, in a randomized, double blind, placebo controlled study, patients suffering from knee discomfort took Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for eight weeks. Then the groups switched and got the opposite intervention. Every one of the patients taking Indian Frankincense got relief. That’s a 100% success rate—numbers unseen by typical solutions.

In addition, *BMJ* (formerly the *British Medical Journal*) reports that Indian Frankincense is safe for joint relief — so safe and natural you can take it every day.

Because of clinically proven results like this, Dr. Sears has made Indian Frankincense the centerpiece of a new natural joint relief formula called **Mobilify**.

Great Results for Knees, Hips, Shoulders and Joints

Joni D. says, “**Mobilify** really helps with soreness, stiffness and mild temporary pain. The day after taking it, I was completely back to normal—so fast.” Shirley M. adds, “Two weeks after taking **Mobilify**, I had no knee discomfort and could go up and down the staircase.” Larry M. says, “After a week and a half of taking **Mobilify**, the discomfort, stiffness and minor aches went away... it’s almost like being reborn.” And avid golfer Dennis H. says, “I can attest to **Mobilify** easing discomfort to enable me to pursue my golfing days. Definitely one pill that works for me out of the many I have tried.”

How to Get Mobilify

Right now, the only way to get this powerful, unique formula that clobbers creaking joints in as little as five days without clobbering you is with Dr. Sears’ breakthrough **Mobilify** formula. It is not available in stores.

To secure your bottle of this breakthrough natural joint discomfort reliever, buyers should call with Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-257-1039**. “The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers.”

Dr. Sears believes in this product so much, he offers a 100% money-back guarantee on ever order. “Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days, and I’ll send you your money back,” said Dr. Sears.

The Hotline will be taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow them to restock. Call **1-800-257-1039** to secure your limited supply of **Mobilify**. If you are not able to get through due to extremely high call volume, please try again! Call NOW to qualify for this limited time offer provided at a significant discount. To take advantage of this exclusive offer use Promo Code: **PLMB1223** when you call.

COMMUNITY AT HEART OF 'WONDERFUL LIFE'

"Merry Christmas, you wonderful old building and loan!" This, of course, is the excited cry of George Bailey as he runs through the fictional town of Bedford Falls in the holiday film classic, "It's a Wonderful Life." In the film, George, played by Indiana, Pennsylvania's own Jimmy Stewart, has just experienced an epiphany. He realizes that, despite his troubles, he's had a pretty good life. With the help of a guardian angel, George sees that his life is important – especially to those around him.



For decades, the film's timeless message about human connection has heartened generations of families, my own included, and has become a part of our holiday viewing tradition. During one particular viewing, my daughter asked, "What's a building and loan?"

I explained it was a type of bank that helped people buy homes. While banking regulations have changed these institutions, they once provided a path to home ownership for many Americans in the early 20th century.

In explaining it to her, I came to a realization of my own: building and loan institutions share many commonalities with rural electric co-ops. Both are cooperative institutions with roots in England. They formed as local businesses with a community focus, and they both sought to fill an unmet need.

Rural residents formed their own electric cooperatives because private power companies would not serve their areas. Based on a similar notion of mutual self-help, building and loan associations allowed members to hold shares in an institution, which provided borrowing opportunities otherwise not available to them. This investment in community to make lives better has become characteristic of cooperative organizations around the world.

The Bailey Bros. Building and Loan is at the heart of the film's story – a family business that supported its local community. Even as economic struggles hit the business, it continued to put people above its own financial concerns, with George Bailey willing to sacrifice his own dreams time and again for his community.

In return, it was the community that helped George in his moment of need – and reminded him that "no man is a failure who has friends." It was a return on his investment in community.

From our cooperative family to yours, Merry Christmas.

PETER A. FITZGERALD
EDITOR



PET NAMES: A recent study found that the most popular name for dogs across the country – and in Pennsylvania, too – is Bella.

NOT SPOT?
State's most popular pooch name follows nationwide trend

Pennsylvanians followed a nationwide trend when naming their dogs, according to a recent finding by *U.S. News and World Report*. Bella, the most popular name for dogs in the U.S., is also the most popular name for canines in Pennsylvania, where Luna came in second. Both Bella and Luna are the names of characters in the "Harry Potter" and "Twilight" books and films.

Rounding out the top five popular dog names in Pennsylvania are Daisy, Max and Lucy.

HO, HO, HO
Commonwealth among states with most Christmas cheer

Pennsylvania has once again made it into the Top 10 of states with the most Christmas cheer, according to a study by CenturyLink, an internet service provider based in Washington.

If you streamed any Christmas music, it's possible you helped Pennsylvania stay in fifth place for the second year in a row. Also for the

second consecutive year, New Hampshire ranked first, while Wisconsin came in second. Other states in the Top 10 are: Utah (3), West Virginia (4), Ohio (6), Kentucky (7), Indiana (8), New Jersey (9) and Delaware (10).

In addition to streaming holiday music, Christmas spirit was measured by internet searches and social media posts on Christmas topics, the number of Christmas tree farms per capita, and charitable giving in each state. Streaming holiday tunes accounted for 14% of the state's total Christmas spirit ranking.

NATURE NEWS
Grant will help turn land owned by cooperative into a community forest

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has awarded Pennsylvania's first Community Forest Program grant to a project involving Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), headquartered in Cambridge Springs, and the Foundation for Sustainable Forests (FSF).

The grant will help establish a community forest in Cambridge Township, Crawford County, on 98 acres of woodland purchased from the cooperative. Under FSF's ownership, the property

will remain on local tax rolls and be a carefully managed working forest, open to the public for hiking, bird-watching, hunting and other recreational activities.

Located in the French Creek drainage area, the forest — to be known as Northwestern REC Community Forest — will also help to protect the waterway's health and diverse species.

“We at Northwestern REC are excited to be a part of this opportunity,” says Amy Wellington, Northwestern REC director of communications. “The co-op takes pride in being a locally owned and operated electric distribution company. The communities we serve are the same communities we raise our families in. Several locals and many of our employees have enjoyed walking and hunting on the property for over 20 years.

“It will be wonderful to see this forest flourish with a carefully choreographed maintenance plan drawing even more visitors to the land.”

FOOTLOOSE NO MORE

Sticky bun lures piggy Kevin Bacon back home

With a little online encouragement from Kevin Bacon, the actor who's originally from Pennsylvania, Kevin Bacon, the pig, is finally home in Cumberland Township, Adams County, after 18 days on the lam.



EVENINGSUN.COM

The search for the elusive pig, which captured national attention, came to an end when he couldn't resist eating a sticky bun that was filled with pet-safe Benadryl.

The pig was spotted roaming the neighborhood multiple times but resisted capture until the sticky bun was offered. The pig's owners have reinforced his pen in the hope that the newly renovated shelter will hold its now-famous resident. 🐷

TIME LINES



DECEMBER 2013

A decade ago, *Penn Lines* was celebrating rural radio stations, a long-standing source of news and information in their communities. Among those featured were brothers John and Jay Cessna, owners of several stations in Bedford County. Earlier this year, the pair and their company, Cessna Communications, were inducted into the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce's Business Hall of Fame.



NPS.GOV



GET DAZZLED BY DWIGHT'S DECORATIONS

Decorations used by former President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his wife, Mamie, will once again adorn their historic home in Gettysburg this holiday season. Tours are available through Dec. 31 by reservation and shuttle bus only. Call 877-874-2478 to reserve tickets.

WATCH HISTORY UNFOLD

Set sail for Washington Crossing this month to watch a re-enactment of Gen. George Washington's historic crossing of the Delaware River. Two events are planned: a dress rehearsal on Dec. 10 and the annual re-enactment on Christmas Day. Get more details at washingtoncrossingpark.org.



EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG



OFFICIALCHEVCHASE.COM

OH, CLARK!

Need a little laughter this holiday season? Comedian and actor Chevy Chase will take the stage at the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts in Wilkes-Barre Dec. 17 for a special Q&A and screening of "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." Learn more at kirbycenter.org/events.

TRAIN-TASTIC!

Embark on a trip to the Western Pennsylvania Model Railroad Museum in Gibsonsia, which is hosting its 35th Holiday Train Display through Jan. 14, 2024. The event features two floors of displays, ranging from hands-on set-ups for kids to elaborate dioramas for everyone. Learn more at wpmrp.org.



FACEBOOK.COM

'TIS THE Season

Co-op Members Make Spirits Bright with Christmas Giving

KATHY HACKLEMAN

Penn Lines Contributor



CHRISTMAS CAN BE SUMMED UP in song titles. For some, it's a religious observance ("Away in a Manger"). For others, it's a time for family gatherings ("I'll be Home for Christmas"), gift giving ("Santa Claus is Coming to Town") or hope ("O Tannenbaum").

And then there are those who believe Christmas is a time to think about the less fortunate. For them, 'tis the season for giving, not receiving ("Little Drummer Boy").

High on the list of Christmas memories for many people is the traditional holiday meal. While it's true that meal can feature a variety of foods and recipes handed down by families for generations, for many, it includes turkey, ham, mashed potatoes with gravy, stuffing and plenty of desserts.

A FAMILY TRADITION: The Brown family of Sullivan County honors the memory of its matriarch, Naomi, on Christmas Day by serving a free meal to community members at a local church. The meal has been a family tradition for 19 years.

Full bellies, full hearts

That's the menu Sullivan County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) member Steve Brown and his siblings prepare and serve at the Forksville United Methodist Church on Christmas Day. Before she passed away, Brown's mother, Naomi, would cook the traditional holiday dinner for 50 to 60 family members.

After her death, some of her children decided they would honor her by continuing the tradition and opening it to the public. This is the 19th year for the community meal.

"We just figured it was time to do something to give back to the community," Brown says. "She would like to have seen that. She was a person that as long as you came to her house, you had a meal. We have carried that on."

The Brown siblings typically feed upward of 100 family members and neighbors these days. While that may seem like a tremendous amount of work, Brown says it sounds far worse than it really is.

"The biggest thing is buying groceries," he says. "The day

of the meal is not that bad. We start at 6 or 6:30 on Christmas morning and have dinner ready by 1 p.m. Everyone has their own job to do, and they just jump in and do it. We are usually all done and cleaned up by 3 or 3:30 p.m."

Brown's sister, Darlene Fenton, also a Sullivan County REC member, agrees: "We each take a section of the dinner," she says, "so it's not too much work for any one person."

Fenton's main area of responsibility is, as she describes it, "being the social butterfly." That includes greeting all attendees and making sure they are comfortable and interacting with other guests. She also delivers meals to guests who can't make it out to the dinner.

The dinner serves multiple purposes, she adds. It's an opportunity for her entire extended family to gather in one place to celebrate the holiday, and it spreads the Christmas spirit around the community.

The family does not solicit donations, but they will accept money — at least half of which is donated to a local



THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT: Forksville United Methodist Church in Sullivan County is the site of the Brown family's community Christmas meal. Family members start preparing the food around 6 on Christmas morning and serve it to more than 100 family members and neighbors at 1 that afternoon.

food pantry or church to help with their holiday outreach projects.

'It's a warm feeling'

While the community Christmas dinner is open to everyone, some prefer to cook their own holiday meals. That's where the Sullivan County Food Pantry steps in.

Barb Davis, another Sullivan County REC member, has been the food pantry coordinator since 1999. The organization provides bags of food to qualifying residents twice a month. The bags typically include canned goods, cereal, pasta, and a dessert, such as cookies.

Bags intended for use at Christmas include items to prepare a holiday meal, such as a ham, sweet potatoes and cake mixes. Donations usually increase around the holidays, and the extra funds allow the food pantry to buy more food, much of which comes at a greatly discounted price from the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank in Harrisburg. Other food, such as eggs, milk and meat, is purchased locally.

"We feed at least 200 families each holiday," Davis reports. "Last month, we fed 618 people."

Each year, food pantry volunteers also purchase coats and boots for elementary students, as well as toys for Christmas. They also collect gently used coats, boots and blankets for all ages.

Davis says some area residents are living in very poor

conditions with a very limited income, and they rely on the food pantry to help them survive. She recalls a woman who asked if she could take two blankets, instead of the usual one per household. She wanted to use one to block a hole in her trailer and one to cover up with.

"Life for many of our people is very difficult right now," Davis explains. "But even though they are having a real struggle in life, they are so thankful to pick up their food. People come in thanking us for what we do, appreciating the fact that they are getting food."

"It's a warm feeling to work here," she adds. "You are helping someone, and they are really appreciating it. We get to know the people; we ask about their families. Some people who live alone don't have anyone to talk to on a regular basis, but twice a month they are able to come and talk to us."

Community support

Sullivan County residents are very supportive of the food pantry, Davis says, and that support, at times, arrives from faraway places. (Most often, it comes from former residents who have moved or people who have families assisted by the food pantry.)

"We get a lot of donations from people in the area, but we also get donations from Oregon, Florida and even England," Davis says. "People want to support the pantry to thank us for what we have done for their parents or grandparents."

In addition, local Boy Scout troops and schools do food drives every year before the holidays to help the food pantry collect extra food.

"I can't say enough about how the community is supportive," she adds. "If I need something, an individual or an organization will come through and provide it. The local supermarket gives us the lowest price they can."

Of course, none of this would work without volunteers, and the food pantry has plenty of them, with 40 to 50 people showing up every distribution day.

"The volunteers are the most amazing



A HELPING HAND: Volunteers with the Sullivan County Food Pantry unload donations in preparation for the holiday season. Typically, the organization provides Christmas meal fixings to at least 200 area families.

people you will ever meet,” Davis says. “They are there every day we are open. They unload the trucks, bring the food in, set up bags and boxes, fill them with food, and take the food out to people in their cars. Every volunteer is so positive. Everyone is friendly to the people who come in to pick up food. It’s an uplifting feeling to be among these people.”

Still, all is not rosy in the world of food pantries. Davis reports that a monthly bill for food used to be around \$5,000. Now, it has tripled to nearly \$15,000 as the price of food has skyrocketed. (Those who want to volunteer at the food pantry or donate food should contact Davis at 570-924-4465 or bsdavis@epix.net.)

For the kids

While food is an essential part of getting into the Christmas spirit, anyone with a child knows a toy will put a big smile on their face.

That’s where John Kwieraga, owner of Pioneer Campground in Muncy Valley, has found his Christmas niche. For the past six years, the Sullivan County REC member has conducted a “Christmas in July” weekend at the campground. He also coordinates drop-off boxes throughout the county. When all the toys are collected, Kwieraga takes them to the U.S. Marine Corps in Williamsport, where the Toys for Tots distributions are handled.

“It has grown from year to year,” he says. “Local businesses call us and want to get involved by having a box at their business, too, so it’s worked out pretty well. If we have an outlet and the ability to do something like this, why not? It’s our opportunity to give back to the community. It’s for kids, and we will continue to do this every year.”

Wysox-based Claverack REC is another business that wants to make sure children have a good holiday.

Each year, employees hold a gift/money drive to benefit the Bradford County Children and Youth Program. Nicole Newton, the cooperative’s billing process supervisor, contacts the agency each fall to obtain a list of suggested items, which she distributes to employees. The group usually gathers more than 100 items, including coats, hats, gloves, pajamas, educational games and toys.

In addition to gifts and cash, Claverack REC employees also provide “boots on the ground.” Each year, about 20 employees volunteer to ring the bell for the Salvation Army’s annual holiday fundraiser.

According to Executive Assistant Annette Koder, the co-op’s employees demonstrate their concern for community — one of seven cooperative principles — by bundling up and braving the cold to do their part for the Salvation Army. Because bell-ringing volunteers can



CHRISTMAS CHEER FOR KIDS: John Kwieraga, owner of Pioneer Campground in Sullivan County, brightens Christmas for children by collecting donated toys during the Christmas in July weekend at the campground and coordinating Toys for Tots drop-off boxes throughout the area.



SALVATION ARMY SUPPORT: Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative helps the community in a number of ways during the holidays. Employees, for instance, cover Salvation Army bell-ringing shifts at the local grocery store. Shown above are: Karen Evangelisti, left, manager of communications & marketing, and Nicole Newton, billing process supervisor.

be hard to come by in small towns, the co-op provides enough employees to cover multiple shifts at the grocery store in Wysox.

A shoebox and a prayer

Knowing there are children everywhere who could use a lift as well as a gift each Christmas, community members in one western Pennsylvania region fill shoeboxes and send them off to children in need across the world through a Samaritan's Purse project, known as Operation Christmas Child.

In 2022, a five-county region made up of Blair, Cambria, Clearfield, Jefferson and Indiana counties, collected 33,322 shoeboxes. Across the U.S., the public donated 9.3 million gift-filled shoeboxes.

Shelly Rhoades, Operation Christmas Child coordinator for Clearfield and Jefferson counties, which are served by United Electric Cooperative and REA Energy Cooperative, reports the local group gathered nearly 13,000 shoeboxes in 2022.

Suggestions of what to include in a shoebox are available at samaritanspurse.org. The list is heavy on practical items — school supplies and hygiene items — but those who

donate are also asked to include one “wow” item, which is something a child would pick up and say “wow” when receiving.

Rhoades says the most common items can be a huge blessing, and often, the shoebox is the first gift a child has ever received. One, for instance, was given a flashlight, which the child used to safely flee to a bomb shelter, she says. Other recipients describe how the gift of a pencil has allowed them to attend school.

Box donors are encouraged to include a photo of themselves and their family along with a note to the recipient. Each box is also prayed over before it is sent out, and most are distributed overseas.

Rhoades became involved in the Operation Christmas Child project in California after retiring from the military. When she moved to Pennsylvania, she became a year-round volunteer and eventually moved into a leadership role. Her team includes 17 people. There are also numerous short-term volunteers who help gather the shoeboxes.

“The most important thing we put in the shoebox is prayer,” she says. “If you feel called to be a part of something bigger than yourself, check it out and see if it's a fit for you.”



A LITTLE SOMETHING EXTRA: Jane Davis, volunteer prayer team coordinator for Operation Christmas Child's West-Central Pa. Area Team, prays over locally donated shoeboxes before they are collected and distributed to children around the world.

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In & Around

Warren Electric Cooperative

It's the end of another year, and we want to take this opportunity to thank you, our dear readers, for opening *Penn Lines* month after month and joining us for journeys across the Commonwealth. For our last journey of the year, we revisit the northwest and explore the service territory of Youngsville-based Warren Electric Cooperative, which serves more than 8,600 homes, farms and businesses across more than 1,000 miles of line spanning five counties.

If wintry weather doesn't stand between you and the great outdoors, Allegheny National Forest has hundreds of miles of ATV, snowmobile, hiking, and horseback riding trails. If you return in warmer months, it is one of the few places in the country to see synchronized firefly dances.

Other popular events this time of year are the Warren County



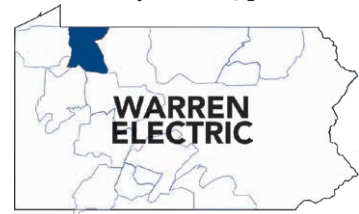
AMY SAVORITO

WINTERFEST: Two deer take a break from their stroll through the snow-covered woods of Warren County in this award-winning photo from the 2022 Winterfest at Chapman State Park.

Winterfest at Chapman State Park in Clarendon, holiday plays at the Struthers Library Theatre in Warren, visits from Santa at Sugar Grove Community Park, and the Old Fashioned Christmas in Youngsville — affectionately referred to as the “biggest little town on the map.”

There's always more to explore. Have you found any hidden gems or generally cool places

in your area? Tell us about it at [CommunityCorner@prea.com!](mailto:CommunityCorner@prea.com)



Main Office: Youngsville, Pa.
Consumer-members served: 8,684
Website: warrenec.coop

Attention: Young Artists

A NEW YEAR is right around the (community) corner, and we're switching things up in 2024 by trying to see things from a certain point of view: your children's (ages 5-17)!

Beginning each month in the new year, we'll feature a picture drawn by our young readers (or our readers' youngsters) about something you've read in *Penn Lines*. Paints, pencils, crayons – whatever medium the artist feels most appropriate – as long as it is a physical creation. You may send digital photos of the drawing to CommunityCorner@prea.com, but please: no digital artwork.

Please include the young artist's name, age and electric cooperative, plus a short (between 25 and 50 words) description of the art.

Co-op Q&A

DECEMBER'S RESPONSES

Many families have holiday traditions. Tell us about your favorite ones.

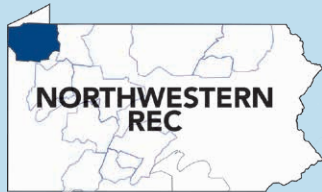


“When I think of Christmas, I think of presents to buy, decorating, food and cookies! I have made lots of cookies over 40-plus years. My daughters gave to all their teachers. We pulled a little red wagon around our neighborhood delivering cookies. Friends were given cookies, and at the family gathering, my nephews and nieces loved getting their own containers when they became adults. Even our workplaces were blessed with trays of varied cookies. For a few years ... I got a group of my co-workers together for two days each December to make cookies. Now my husband and I are in a different house. My daughters came here last year to make cookies. We don't need as many, so I have a hard time choosing which ones ... The only rule: No chocolate chip cookies. I am proud to say – and even my girls admit – those are for the rest of the year, not for the Christmas cookie tray.”

– KIM KINE, ADAMS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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Amy Wellington, *Editor*

Guest Column

Growing Up a Co-op Kid



LISA CHAUSSE

MY FATHER, LARRY PROPER, SERVED on the board of directors for 34 years. He once said, "Leese, if you ever have an opportunity to get involved with the co-op, it will be one of the best decisions you will ever make."

He was not wrong! These last six years have been a great learning experience for me as well as an opportunity to grow and serve alongside my fellow board members. This organization is truly as I remember it when growing up as a co-op kid.

I was very excited we were able to resume Youth Tour again this year. Several local students had the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., in June. This was a highlight of my junior year in high school, so I fully understand the impact Youth Tour can have on a young person.

Students from our 14 cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey joined students from across the United States in our nation's capital. They took in the beauty of the buildings and monuments; they sensed the gravity of sacrifice that Arlington represents; they realized the magnitude of honor there is in guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; and they embarked on a path of endless possibilities as they sat with their legislators. I get goosebumps when I think about how this whirlwind trip can spark a love for country and a fire in the young leaders of tomorrow to work hard and make a difference in their rural communities.

Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) has created a new program to give high school juniors the opportunity to learn about the cooperative business model and energy-related issues, gain leadership skills, and perform community service projects. The Youth Ambassador Program is a precursor to Youth Tour. Students are asked to attend several meetings — some in person, others on Zoom — before being chosen for Youth Tour. There is a Youth Ambassador competition at the end of the program, and the winner will be chosen as Northwestern REC's Youth Leadership Council candidate. This is an amazing opportunity for any student!

I am excited to announce the first 2024 Youth Ambassador Zoom meeting is scheduled Saturday, Jan. 13, at 11 a.m. Students, parents, and teachers are encouraged to participate to learn more about the Youth Ambassador and Youth Tour programs. Anyone interested in the meeting should contact Amy Wellington, Northwestern REC's Youth Tour coordinator, at awellington@northwesternrec.com or 800-352-0014 by Jan. 11. You can also visit youthtour.northwesternrec.com.

At Northwestern REC, we recognize the children of today are the members of tomorrow. In addition to sponsoring the Clearly Brighter Teachers Grant program, which was featured in *Penn Lines* last month, the cooperative also offers two scholarships through the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association Trust Fund. The William F. Matson Scholarship awards five or more scholarships of at least \$1,000 each, and the Jody Loudenslager Memorial Scholarship awards at least one scholarship of \$1,000 to past Youth Tour participants. Information about both scholarships can be found at northwesternrec.com.

In the words of my father, I encourage any of our high school juniors out there to take this opportunity and get involved with the co-op. It will be one of the best decisions you will ever make! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all. 🍷

Cooperatively yours,

LISA CHAUSSE
BOARD CHAIR

Helping Save the Osprey, One Pole at a Time

EMILY SONNTAG, COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING SPECIALIST

THREE GENERATIONS OF SNYDER MEN from Edinboro have been recognized by the National Eagle Scout Association while making a difference in their community.

Each generation is an avid enthusiast of osprey. It all began many years ago when John Snyder was young. John passed the love for the bird and for Scouting on to his son, Paul. Fast forward to today when Paul's son, Ethan, is the third generation of the Snyder family to "further the mission values and time-honored traditions of Scouting."

Ethan Douglas Snyder recognized the trouble osprey have encountered when nesting. The majestic birds tend to build their nests on utility poles with energized power lines — a situation that many times leads to their death. Ethan wanted to create a place where ospreys could be safe and flourish, and the idea for his Eagle Scout project was born.

Ethan says his grandfather inspired him to make a "monumental contribution" as he strived to aid the birds.

Ethan took the initiative and began the long process toward success, which included attending township



SAVE THE OSPREY: From left, Paul, Ethan and John Snyder stand in front of a pole donated by Cambridge Springs-based Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative for Ethan's Eagle Scout project. The project created a safe nesting site for osprey, which often nest on utility poles.

meetings for initial approval and funding for the project, speaking with an expert on structures and the best setup for the birds and their nests, and finally contacting





AN EAGLE AND AN OSPREY: Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative lineworkers join Ethan Snyder, third from right, in front of a safe nesting site for osprey, created as part of Snyder's Eagle Scout project. Shown, from left, are: Cole Jordan, Mitch Vallieres, Dylan Thomas, Ryan Marstellar, Snyder, Blaze Pietrowski and Joe Bernier.

Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) for assistance and possible donations.

These daunting tasks did not deter this future leader as he continued to advocate for ospreys. When Ethan contacted the co-op for help, we immediately got involved with the project at Edinboro's Peninsula Park.

One of the seven cooperative principles is "concern for the community." The cooperative does everything in its power to assist our members and communities. Northwestern REC's Line Superintendent Joe Bernier worked with Ethan and his family — as well as Norm Willow, a Washington Township supervisor; Jamie Hill, a biologist specializing in birds; and our lineworkers — to bring the Scout's vision to life. Northwestern REC donated a new 45-foot pole, time, wages and other equipment to set up the structure.

The overall structure Ethan and his team designed was based on one developed by the International Osprey Association with a few minor adjustments. It will be up to the osprey to finish the nesting process with various materials they gather in nature.

This project required a substantial amount of time, strategic planning and dedication. We applaud Ethan and everyone who played a part in its success. The structure is something that will be cherished for many years to come at Peninsula Park and in the Edinboro community. 🐾



COMMUNITY EVENT: Friends, family and community supporters gather to see the osprey structure at Peninsula Park. Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative crews raised the structure, designed by Eagle Scout candidate Ethan Snyder of Edinboro.

Preparation is Power: Weathering Winter Outages

ANYONE WHO HAS WEATHERED PROLONGED outages due to a winter storm will tell you it is more than an inconvenience. Outages during very cold weather create additional challenges and safety requirements. Preparation now is the key to ensure you're not left in the cold when the lights go out the next time.

Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) recommends assembling an emergency kit with essential items, such as:

- ▶ Flashlight, portable radio and extra batteries
- ▶ First-aid kit and essential medicines
- ▶ Non-perishable food
- ▶ Bottled water
- ▶ Basic tools and related materials
- ▶ Extra blankets and clothing to dress in layers
- ▶ Outerwear, including hats, gloves and scarves
- ▶ Rags or duct tape to seal air leaks

If you have a wood stove or fireplace, have plenty of extra wood on hand, and if you have a fuel-based heater, have extra fuel and the means to vent the fumes.

David Scheppelmann, Northwestern REC's safety and training coordinator, advises members to explore all the ways they can receive weather updates in their area.

"Options may include a weather radio, a mobile notification system you can enroll in, mobile app, etc.," he says. "Connect with us on social media. For specifics of emergency outage plans in your area, visit state and local websites."

Develop an emergency plan with your family so everyone knows what to do in the event of an outage. Keep your mobile devices fully charged and ready to use, especially when a storm is coming. You may want to get portable batteries and keep them charged for mobile phones/electronics.

To stay warm during an outage:

- ▶ Dress in several layers of warm clothing. Wear a hat to

avoid the loss of heat from your head. Close off rooms not in use. Secure curtains and blinds to reduce heat loss from windows.

- ▶ Never use an oven or charcoal grill to heat the home.
- ▶ Be alert to the signs of frostbite, which can include loss of feeling in the extremities, and hypothermia, such as shivering, memory loss, incoherence or drowsiness.
- ▶ Protect sensitive electronics by unplugging devices, such as televisions and computers. Install surge protectors, which will protect your electronics when the power comes back on. Once power is restored, you can plug these electronics in safely.
- ▶ Reduce the risk of spoiling food during an outage by lowering the temperature of your refrigerator as low as possible and avoid opening the refrigerator doors unless it becomes necessary. By doing so, you can keep your food cool for up to 24 hours.
- ▶ Use caution when going outside. Look out for downed power lines, which can be hidden by snow or ice. If you see a downed power pole or line, stay far away. Call Northwestern REC immediately at 800-352-0014 to report any damaged electrical equipment after a winter storm.

A portable generator can provide power in the event of an outage. Have an electric cord long enough so the generator is at least 20 feet from any door, window or vent to keep carbon monoxide out of the home. Read your instruction manual before use and operate your generator in well-ventilated areas.

Never use a portable generator in the home or garage, and never plug it into a wall outlet or connect it directly to the home's electrical system. Install battery-powered or battery back-up carbon monoxide detectors near floors on each level of the home. 🚫

DON'T MISS YOUR CHECK! UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO

Capital credits season will be upon us soon! This month, Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) will be retiring more than \$575,000 for portions of years 2003, 2013 and 2022. If you were a member during any of those years, you may receive a capital credits check. But did you know we spend many hours each January trying to track down members whose checks have been returned? By keeping your contact information up to date, you can take full advantage of the services Northwestern REC offers and never miss a check.

Also, did you know that with the press

of a button, you can easily report an outage? At Northwestern REC, we use the phone number you provide to link your service address to our outage management system. For example, if you call to report an outage, our automated system instantly recognizes your phone number and determines the service address. Once you give our system a response, your outage is reported. It's that simple! But remember: This only works if your current phone number is linked to your service address.

In addition, updating your contact information speeds up the power resto-

ration process. With correct information, our outage management system can predict the location and possible cause of an outage, making it easier for our crews to find and correct the problem.

You can also sign up for our outage alert service, which sends notifications about outages that may affect your service location. It is also possible for you to receive bill notifications, including when your bill is due. Call 800-352-0014 or visit NorthwesternREC.com and make sure your contact information is up to date.



Light up the holiday season *safely.*

Holiday lighting safety tips:

Before hanging holiday lights outside, look out for overhead power lines. Never throw light strands into trees near power lines.

Inspect all the lights you plan on using. Make sure the wires are in good condition—not cracked, brittle, or frayed. The sockets should not be damaged, and no light bulbs should be missing.

Check that all light strands are certified and rated for the conditions in which they'll be used.

Never string more than three strands of lights together unless the packaging says it is safe to do so. Overloaded cords or outlets could start a fire.

Never tack or nail through a strand of lights. Do not place cords under rugs or in high traffic areas.

Lighted and electrical outdoor decorations should be plugged into ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected outlets.

Turn holiday lights off before going to sleep or leaving the house. A timer can help you do this.

Get more safety tips at

 Safe
Electricity.org

Landscaping the Inside of Your House

GEORGE WEIGEL

THE POPULARITY OF HOUSEPLANTS

was on the upswing even before COVID-19 forced gardeners and non-gardeners alike into seclusion.

Stuck inside and looking for anything to make us feel better, lots of cocooners turned to potted plants for everything from a breath of nature to soft backdrops for virtual meetings.

“Plantfluencers” and other social media posters pointed to houseplants as a “cheap form of therapy,” while many millennials began to think of houseplants as pets and themselves as “plant parents.”

Almost anything offbeat remains particularly hot on the houseplant front, such as living-rock plants (lithops) that look more like stones than plants, all sorts of curious succulents, and the current coolness king, the monstera, a Swiss-cheese-like plant with white variegation.

For many, the interest has graduated beyond the old, single houseplant on the windowsill to landscaping the entire inside of the house or apartment.

The same but different

The mechanics of indoor plant-placing are surprisingly similar to outside landscaping.

It’s a matter of mixing and matching plant colors and forms, having an eye for good spots to place plants, and making good plant choices depending on the site (primarily the light that’s available).

The bonus is you don’t have to worry about deer or groundhogs eating the Rex begonias.

As with outside landscaping, a good place to start for any room is with the

bigger “anchor” plants. These are generally floor plants in larger pots that grow upright, such as potted palms, the evergreen-like Norfolk Island pine, dark-leaved or rosy-variegated rubber plants, and a favorite of late, the fiddle leaf fig with its over-sized, glossy, dark-green leaves.

Heftier specimens like these are especially good at softening corners, framing picture windows, flanking fireplaces and doorways, and serving as living exclamation points at the ends of sofas.

Save money by choosing specimens that can double as centerpieces outside in summer and then houseplants in winter.

With the anchor plants in place, the next step is creating indoor gardens or “potted-plant vignettes” by grouping several smaller plants around the dominant plant.

Pick plants that pair well texturally and/or colorwise and you get bonus points. For example, that needled Norfolk Island pine might look good paired with a broad-leaved bushy plant, say a peace lily or prayer plant, and a trailer or two, such as a golden pothos or a hoyo. On the other hand, a bushier upright, such as the fiddle leaf fig, would pair nicely with the fine foliage of a fern and/or a spiky dracaena or snake plant.

Use a pedestal or plant stand if you need extra height for any of the smaller plants.

Add some color

The general idea when pairing (inside or outside) is contrasting plant textures and forms while coordinating the colors.

One way to bring color into your interiorscaping, obviously, is to use a few plants that bloom inside. Popular examples are African violets, bromeliads, kalanchoe, cyclamen, anthurium and orchids — many of



MIX IT UP: Multiple houseplants in decorative pots have turned this room into an “interiorscape.”

which are very long blooming and easier to grow than most people think.

You could even stick a few cut flowers from the florist into pots to gain a color boost.

Plants can be changed out if/when they stop blooming. Garden centers always have something potted in bloom, from forced-into-bloom bulbs in winter to a slew of annuals from spring through fall to poinsettias and Christmas cactus to close out the year.

Another way to add color is by using plants with colorful foliage. Purple heart, purple passion plant and aeonium are good dark-leaf choices. Calathea, peperomia and aluminum plants offer variegated-leaf interest. And stromanthe Triostar, Rex begonias and snow bush mix beautiful rosy shades into white and green variegation.

Add a few finishing touches, such as interesting stones, found wood pieces, antique tools, or a basket or two, and you won’t have rooms anymore — you’ll have “interiorscapes.”

GEORGE WEIGEL is a retired horticulturist, author of two books about gardening in Pennsylvania, and garden columnist for *The Patriot-News*/PennLive.com in Harrisburg. His website is georgeweigel.net.

How Energy Efficiency Contributes to a Better Grid

By embracing energy conservation, we can all make small changes that have a big impact on the intricate system that powers our lives

MIRANDA BOUTELLE

“BEAT THE PEAK” HAS BECOME a unified message among Pennsylvania’s electric cooperatives as the demand for electricity grows.

Your electric cooperative must deliver around-the-clock electricity to power your life. To understand why it is so important for everyone to use less energy when there is high demand for electricity, known as peak times, let’s start with the complex system that delivers electricity to your home.

How the grid works

The U.S. has three main interconnected power grids: the Eastern Interconnection, the Western Interconnection and the Electric Reliability Council of Texas. Each interconnection has regional balancing authorities, which ensure electricity supply constantly matches electricity demand.

The interconnections are powered by electric generation from various sources, including hydropower, nuclear, coal, gas, wind, solar and more. The energy produced by these sources connects to the grid and travels long distances along transmission lines.

Your electric cooperative is known as a distribution utility. It operates the infrastructure that connects the transmission lines to the distribution lines

that bring electricity to your home.

Throughout the day, demand for power supply fluctuates. If supply and demand fall out of balance, local or widespread blackouts can occur. To maintain reliable power, especially during peak times, there must be enough power supply to equal demand.

Due to supply and demand, the cost to buy power is higher during peak times, which vary across the country. Typically, though, they are in the morning as we start our day and in the evening when we return home.

Demand is increasing

The demand for power increases every year. The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects residential consumption of purchased electricity will increase between about 14% and 22% from 2022 to 2050. Industrial, transportation and commercial consumption are also projected to increase.

As generation, transmission and distribution utilities work to increase production and maintain and protect our grid, it’s important for all of us to take steps to use less energy every day. In turn, it will help you save on your monthly electric bill.

To beat the peak, think about how

you can use less energy in the morning and evening. Start with the area that uses the most energy by adjusting your thermostat during peak hours, either up or down a few degrees depending on the season. A smart thermostat can do this for you automatically.

Are there certain appliances or devices you can wait to run until after peak hours? For example, start the dishwasher or dryer before you go to bed. Smart power strips also ensure your devices are not pulling power when they are turned off. These devices work well for TVs and gaming devices. And if you have appliances that are 10-plus years old, consider replacing them.

By embracing energy conservation, we can all make small changes that have a big impact on our community and the intricate system that powers our lives. To learn more about your local peak times and how you can use less energy, contact your electric cooperative. 📞

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 more than 900 local electric cooperatives.



MARK GILLILAND, PIONEER UTILITY RESOURCES

PROCRASTINATE: How can you use less energy during peak times? Consider delaying when you’d usually run large appliances, such as your washer and dryer, to off-peak hours.

SUBBING FOR *Santa*



Meet the Men Behind the Beards Who Spread Christmas Cheer

MICHAEL T. CRAWFORD

HE'S MAKING A LIST (AND CHECKING IT TWICE) — there's a lot of work to do to make Santa look nice.

Meet Mike Leonard: By day, he is the head cavern interpreter at Lincoln Caverns, which receives electricity from Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative. But by afternoon (specifically 1-4 p.m. during the second weekend in December), he's Father Christmas for the Lincoln Caverns Santa in the Cave event.

"Just like at the mall, kids come and sit on Santa's lap," Leonard says. "We'll have a couple little helper elves who give them a bag of candy when the kids are done. We'll decorate the room with Santa's chair, a tree and some lights.

"It exposes people who maybe normally wouldn't come see a cave," he adds. "While they're in there, they notice all the really pretty cave formations and they see something they normally wouldn't see."

Leonard, who goes for the "traditional Santa" look (more on that later), has donned the cap and beard since 2013 to support local charities via Santa in the Cave. Visitors are asked to make \$5 donations but are free to give more or less. Last year, donations supported the Huntingdon Forum of Churches' Fuel Fund, and they will again this year.

Leonard enjoys the happiness his role brings to families, sparing them long lines in malls and giving hope to children who bring him their wish lists.

"Little kids get so into it," he says. "People will say really nice things when they leave, whether it's how nice we are to do this or how it's going to charity. It's rewarding to see kids have fun and parents not have to wait an hour."

'The best feeling in the world'

But it's not just children who enjoy jolly old St. Nick. To the men who don the red suits, Santa represents unconditional love.

"Charles W. Howard, one of the most famous Santas

JOLLY OLD ST. NICK: Bryan Sheffar, a member of Indiana-based REA Energy Cooperative, stands beside a more modern sleigh for a photo shoot as his alter ego, PA Santa Bryan. Sheffar, a member of both the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas and the Fraternal Order of Real Bearded Santas, performs as Santa year-round across western Pennsylvania.

(PHOTO CREDIT: HALEY ROSA PHOTOGRAPHY)



LEIGH DEFORREST

HIGH-FIVE: Mike Leonard, head cavern interpreter at Lincoln Caverns in Huntingdon, performs a magical high-five as Santa Claus at the site's annual Santa in the Cave event. Money raised during the event is donated to the Huntingdon Forum of Churches' Fuel Fund.

ever, had a really great quote: 'He errs who thinks Santa enters through the chimney; Santa enters through the heart,' explains Bryan Sheffar, a member of Indiana-based REA Energy Cooperative. "Santa loves everybody. He's not political.

"The whole 'naughty-nice' thing, I tend to shy away from because — let's face it — we all have times when we're not at 100% and we just try to be our best. As you age, you learn that giving is better. There's nothing at Christmas time that I want, but to give things out to other people — to help other people — that is the best feeling in the world."

Sheffar, 50, has been playing the role of Santa since his teens, when he would try to draw attention to his father's store during the holidays. Sheffar would continue dressing up over the years for his nephews as they grew up, and the holiday tradition slowly evolved into a more profes-

sional production. Eight years ago, Sheffar took his role to the next level, serving as a professional Santa under the moniker of PA Santa Bryan (not to be confused with Santa Bryan of Denver, Colo.).

“Years ago, I used a fake, cheap suit and fake beard and hair,” says Sheffar, who has served as Santa for downtown Indiana’s Light Up Night. “Then I grew out my own, and that was a world changer.”

As a member of both the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas and the Fraternal Order of Real Bearded Santas, Sheffar says spreading Christmas cheer is serious business. By October, he had already booked nearly 100 events for the holidays on top of having a full-time job. He also performs year-round for family gatherings, Christmas-in-July- events and more, has his own suits, and bleaches his beard every fall.

“I can be walking around in blue jeans and a T-shirt and kids will come up to me and talk to me like I’m Santa,” Sheffar says. “The kids don’t care. I never say, ‘I’m the real Santa’ — it’s up to the individual to *believe*, but I will let them pull my beard.”

While rosy cheeks and a bushy beard usually sell children on Santa easily enough, Sheffar says he has a handful

of options for more discerning eyes.

“Everybody does things a little different, everyone has their own little twist and vision of what Santa is,” Sheffar says. “Some go for the traditional Father Christmas look with the long robes, some go for the Coca Cola Santa. There are different suits out there with the buttons down the front called a Coca Cola suit. When you get the fur down the front, that’s the traditional Santa suit. I have a chef’s hat that has ‘Chef Santa’ embroidered on it and we play with flour and make and decorate cookies.”

Regardless of the variant Sheffar embodies for any given appearance, he knows Santa holds a sacred place in children’s hearts — even the “inner child” of an adult.

“Everybody loves Santa — it doesn’t matter if you’re a child or an adult,” Sheffar says. “I’ve visited a lot of medical facilities and aging centers and even people with dementia — they may not know their own children, but they know Santa; they remember Santa.”

“To me, it’s about bringing joy, because life is tough,” he adds. “If you can give that few moments of light to somebody — they light up and remember happy memories, good times — that’s what it’s all about: making people happy and spreading the love and joy.” 🎅

HALEY ROSA PHOTOGRAPHY



ALL IS BRIGHT: Bryan Sheffar gives a big hug to children as PA Santa Bryan. Sheffar, 50, bleaches his beard white every fall to look the part of Father Christmas.

Select the Most Efficient and Quiet Dishwasher

JAMES DULLEY

DEAR JIM: My dishwasher is 13 years old, and recently I've started comparing new dishwasher features. Which features are the most efficient, and is hand-washing a good alternative?

— Beth R.

DEAR BETH: Using an automatic dishwasher is typically more efficient than the way most people hand wash dishes. However, if you take your time and are miserly with the water use, hand washing can be more efficient. I've tested this in my own home using a spray kitchen faucet with touch control that allows me to minimize water use when rinsing the washed dishes.

That said, your old dishwasher probably needs to be replaced because it has already survived longer than the typical dishwasher. No matter which new dishwasher you select, you can be certain it will use less electricity and hot water than your old one. In fact, the vast majority of dishwashers made today exceed the Energy Star®-efficiency standards. Over the life of the new dishwasher, the energy and water savings, when compared to your old one, can payback its initial cost.

Another key advantage of newer dishwashers is they are much quieter. This is accomplished by better motor/pump design and higher levels of insulation, both for better efficiency and for noise reduction. Layers of insulation are placed around the pump assembly and the walls of the cabinet and door. I just installed a new stainless steel dishwasher in my own home; it is significantly quieter, and the cycles are shorter, too.

Because dishwashers need heated water, this adds to their operating costs. If the new dishwasher design consumes less water, then less energy

will be needed to heat it. A portion of this energy is used by the primary water heater, and the rest by an internal heater in the dishwasher. In many areas of the country, the water consumption is as significant an environmental issue as energy consumption. Therefore, always compare the overall water consumption specifications for an average load cycle among the models.

Energy efficiency is important, but the most important feature is how well the machine cleans dishes. If it does not clean well, people tend to run it on the heavy cycle when normal will do, or they hand rinse the dishes first. Rinsing can use more than 10 extra gallons of water, and some people even use hot water for this. With a good dishwasher, just hand scraping the dirty dishes should be adequate.

The best dishwashers use a two-pump design in the bottom of the tank. One small pump is used for spraying the dishes, and another small one is used to drain the unit. Many models still use a single reversing pump, which sprays in one rotation and drains in the other. Two smaller pumps require a smaller water reservoir, but the efficiency difference between one- and two-pump models has narrowed considerably.

Top-of-the-line dishwashers offer many cycle settings to fine tune the cleaning needs of a specific load. This is a nice feature, but some of this is also for marketing purposes. If you are on a limited budget, most families can get by with three basic cycles: light, medium and heavy (pots/pans).

Newer electronic controls offer greater convenience and efficiency. Hidden digital, electronic controls



THE DISH ON DISHWASHERS: In the market for a new dishwasher? No matter which one you choose, it will use less electricity and hot water than your old one. In fact, the vast majority of dishwashers made today exceed the Energy Star®-efficiency standards.

look good when the door is closed, but you can't watch the progress of the cycle or see how much time is remaining. Partially hidden controls are another option. The dishwasher I selected has exposed controls, which I find easier to see and use.

Automatic dirt sensors measure the turbidity (cloudiness) of the water to determine when the dishes are clean and how long to run the cycles. There are several technologies to accomplish this, and they function pretty well. A filter option strains the water inside the dishwasher to remove food particles. Self-cleaning models use a grinder, but these may increase the noise level. 🗣️

HAVE A QUESTION FOR JIM? Send inquiries to James Dulley, Penn Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit dulley.com.

The Magic of Christmas

ANNE M. KIRCHNER

NO MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE, Christmas caroling brings cheer and warms the heart. My first caroling venture was with my best friend's family when I was 10 years old. I felt simple joy while walking around the neighborhood sharing the gift of song. Beautiful harmonies emerged from our intergenerational group. The moonlit sky filled with magical sounds as our voices floated through the crisp winter air.

The meal afterward also brought comfort. We cuddled under blankets in front of a crackling fire. We sipped warm cider from holiday mugs. We ate a bowl of hearty soup. And a platter of holiday cookies beckoned for all to indulge. What magical memories do you have as the holiday season unfolds? 🎄

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



WARM HOLIDAY PUNCH

- 4 cups apple juice
- 2 cups orange juice
- 1 cup pineapple juice
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 whole anise star
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon whole allspice

Combine the three juices in a large saucepan. Put the spices in a cheesecloth bag, tie the top and add the bag to the juice mixture. Bring the punch to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes. Remove the spice bag. Serve the warm punch in a holiday mug. *Makes 6 to 8 servings.*



HAMBURGER LENTIL STEW

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 4 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 1 small green pepper, diced
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 2 cups dry lentils, rinsed
- 4 cups tomato juice
- 4 cups water

Warm a heavy soup pot over medium high heat. Add the ground beef to the pot. As the beef begins to brown, use a wooden spoon to break the meat into chunks. Cook the hamburger until no pink color remains. Pour off the grease. Add the onion and garlic; cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the carrots and green pepper; cook for an additional 2 to 3 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients to the soup pot and cover with a lid. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook for 30 to 45 minutes. *Makes 8 to 10 servings.*



GINGERBREAD SUGAR COOKIES

- 2 cups flour
- ¼ cup whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1½ teaspoons ginger
- 1½ teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- ¾ cup butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- ⅓ cup molasses

Combine the flour, whole wheat flour, baking soda, cornstarch, salt, ginger, cinnamon and cloves; set aside. In a mixing bowl, cream together the butter, brown sugar and 1/2 cup granulated sugar. Add the egg to the butter mixture and beat until well combined. Add the vanilla and molasses. Slowly add the flour mixture to the butter mixture and beat until a thick dough forms. Cover the bowl tightly and refrigerate the dough for 1 to 2 hours. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Use a cookie scoop to measure out dough balls. Roll the balls in the remaining 1/2 cup granulated sugar and place on a cookie sheet 2 inches apart. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Cool the cookies for several minutes on the cookie sheet before transferring to a cooling rack. *Makes 3 dozen cookies.*

Maybe it's Time to be a Little Less Busy?

ABIGAIL ZIEGER

I WAS OUT WITH MY kids, enjoying an evening sports practice and cheering them on wildly from the sidelines. All was well with the world until I glanced down at my phone and saw the day of the week: Monday. My stomach knotted. I was supposed to be at choir rehearsal — right at that very moment. I had double-booked myself without realizing it!

It wasn't the first time, and I can guarantee it won't be the last. What is the reason for this absent-mindedness? Let's be honest: I've always been a little flighty. However, I'm willing to bet our busy schedule has something to do with it, too.

As a mom from rural Pennsylvania with four kids who are involved in different activities, my head is often spinning with all the different places to be and forms to fill out. Add in my part-time work schedule teaching at four different locations, and it's no wonder that things slip through the cracks.

Unfortunately, I usually don't recognize I'm over-committed until I start forgetting things.

I'm likely not the only parent who struggles with an overly busy life. Rising costs demand that today's parents work more to keep up with the bills. School events, fundraisers, field trips and homework are nonstop. Sports, arts, and other extracurricular activities for our children are plentiful, and the pressure is on to make sure our kids have every opportunity to succeed.

Ideally, I would love to streamline everything. What would life be like without the daily dropoffs and pickups, shuttling from place to place, and calendar coordination? It's a fantasy I would love to indulge in. However, my reality is not a slow, simple life, so I keep trying to do better to keep on top of things.

I've worked to adopt tools that other busy parents swear by. I use a calendar as my "external brain," adding appointments and commitments to my phone as I make them. We post lists of daily tasks on the fridge that remind us what

we need to do each morning and evening to help us get out the door on time. I keep hoping these tools will help me to be less forgetful and more organized.

Despite my best efforts, I still feel that I am living in a state of near-constant chaos. Sometimes, we think if we only tried harder or worked smarter, then we could cope with our overly busy lives. Yet, the fact is you can only fit in so much overcommitment before hitting a wall.

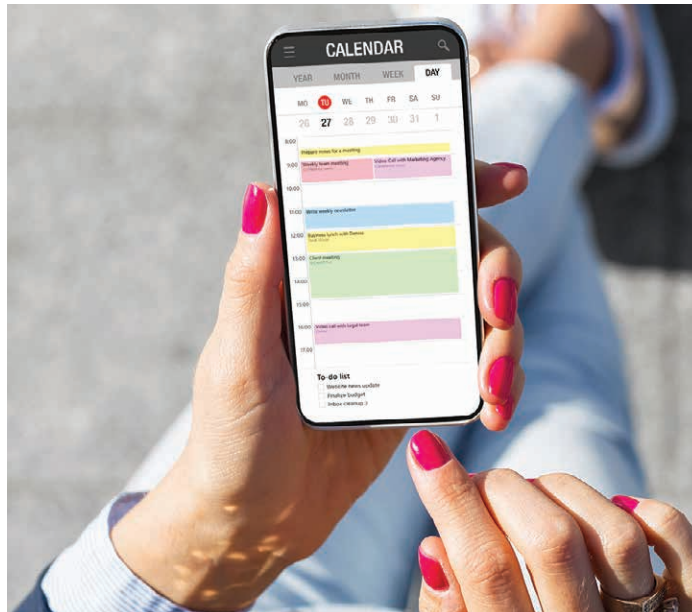
At times, when cutting back feels impossible, I take a step back and take a good, hard look at my priorities. Does my child really love that after-school class, or do we drag them there every week because we feel like they should go? Are

we involved in an activity because of how it enriches our family's life, or are we simply attempting "to keep up with the Joneses?" Do we have to say yes to every event we are invited to? Do I need to volunteer for each organization I'm involved with? Often, there are opportunities to streamline our schedules that we may not recognize at first.

I've been working on slowing down my reflexive, overly optimistic tendency to say yes to unnecessary commitments.

I'm trying to teach my kids that it's OK to say no to an extracurricular activity or weeknight event in favor of rest. I'm working to carve out decompression time for all of us — because both the parents and the kids need it.

I am on a quiet mission to resist the pressure to add more, be more and do more. I will likely never achieve the idyllic, simple life I dream of. However, with a little practice and intention, maybe this mom can be just a little less busy in a very busy world. 🍵



ABIGAIL ZIEGER is a music teacher and singer by trade, but also enjoys capturing life experiences through writing. When not singing, teaching or typing, she can be found working in her kitchen, helping her kids with school or consuming copious amounts of coffee. A member of Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, Abigail lives with her husband and four children in northeast Pennsylvania.

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|---------------|-------------|
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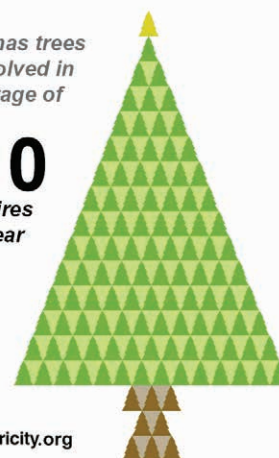
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It's Christmas Already?

JOHN KASUN

IT'S DECEMBER! HOW DID THAT happen? It seems like a month ago I was putting the patio furniture out for the summer. Some people already have their Christmas cards signed and addressed with stamps attached, ready to be mailed. Chances are they also have a pile of wrapped Christmas gifts close at hand as well.

Unfortunately, that is not true at my house. It is not that I am not a Christmas person, but I don't try to cross that snow-covered bridge before I get to it. I have Christmas spirit, but mine is just slower to arrive.

My personal Christmas spirit kicks in about Dec. 23 and hangs around until about Jan. 15. My wife is on a completely different schedule.

Her Christmas spirit starts the day after Thanksgiving and wraps up about Jan. 10. Just about the time mine kicks in, my wife has the house completely decorated, cards mailed and gifts wrapped. When I am in full Christmas spirit in early January, she is tearing things down and putting them away. Normally, when I have just found my Santa hat, all that is left are some shreds of wrapping paper behind the couch and a broken ornament under a chair.

My wife claims that if it wasn't for her there would be no Christmas at our house. That is not true; however, I must admit that Christmas might be a little late under my direction. During the pre-Christmas rush of shopping, decorating, cleaning, cooking, cleaning, baking and cleaning, I am like a guest Uber driver. I am constantly driving to get the things we need and then driving back to get the things we forgot we needed.

In between trips, I get boxes out of the attic and put boxes back into the attic. My most difficult assignment is being readily available while keeping out of sight. I never enter the kitchen except to help clean up. This is especially true during baking sessions when anyone leaving the kitchen is subject to a full body search. Fresh baked goods are strictly for guests and gifts. I do, however, have full access to the Christmas cookies we placed in the freezer last year and only discovered after Thanksgiving this year

when we put away the leftover turkey.

One of my favorite parts of Christmas is the memories that pop into my head unexpectedly when the house is quiet, often late in the evening.

My parents struggled to make a good home for my brother and me, but we never realized how hard things were at times. Still, they made every holiday special, especially Christmas. There was always a decorated tree in the living room — a real one Dad cut down on our property. We adorned it with strings of those old, very large lights in various colors along with some old glass ornaments that had been handed down through the family. I remember Mom

had crocheted large snowflakes to hang on the tree. She soaked them in sugar water so they would retain their pointed shape. They were a true work of art, and several still hang on the tree we put up in our home each year. I clearly remember the strands of aluminum icicles that were very carefully hung — one at a time — on every branch until the tree looked like it was covered with fresh, glistening snow. In my eyes, it was the most beautiful tree in the world.

There were always presents under the tree, and while most were clothes, shoes or warm boots, there always was a toy or two. Mom spent a lot of time in the kitchen making mountains of treats for the holiday. Outside, the air was often so cold it seemed as if you could reach out and break off a piece. The stream that ran in front of our house sparkled like it was full of diamonds, and the snow-covered hill behind our home was covered with sled tracks. It was a simple time, it was a magical time, and it was a very, very happy time.

From the Kasun household, we wish all of our *Penn Lines* neighbors a blessed and merry Christmas. May you remember your own sweetest Christmas memories and share them with your loved ones. 📺



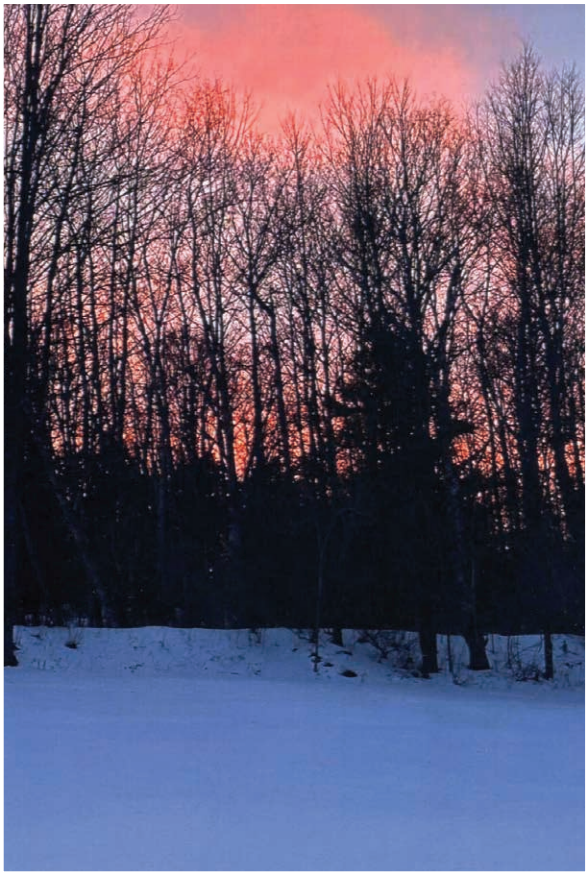
JOHN KASUN, a lifelong Pennsylvanian with more than 30 years of writing experience, looks for the humor in everyday life and then tells a story from that perspective. He is a member of Huntingdon-based Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.



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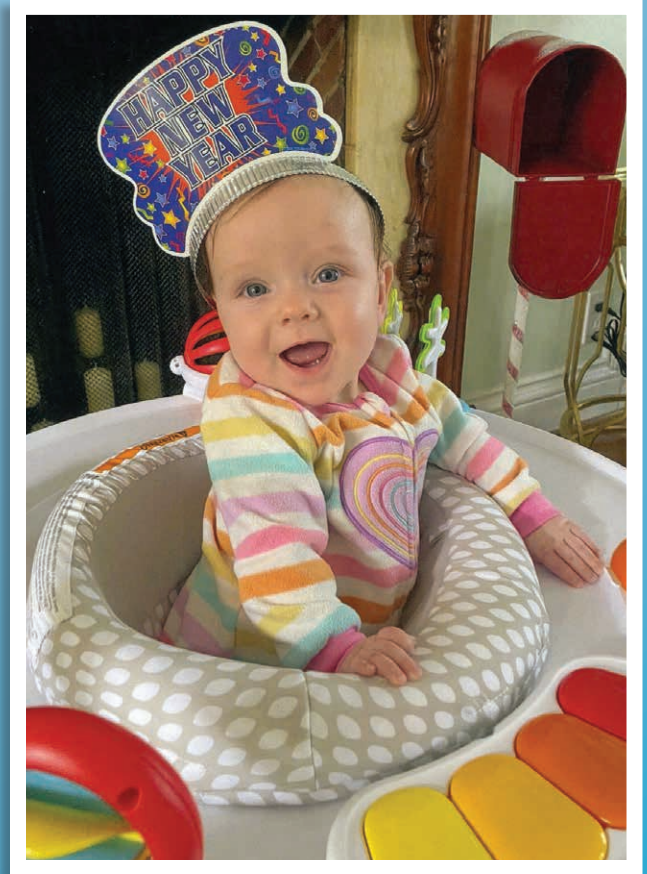
See You Next Year!

WE WANT TO GIVE ONE last “thank you” to all of the amateur photographers who submitted photos for our 2023 “Rural Reflections” contest. The photos we receive bring smiles to our faces, and even though we can’t publish all of them, we’re grateful for the joy they bring. ’Tis the season after all, right?

Winning photos for this year’s contest, chosen by an independent panel of judges, will be printed in the January and February issues of *Penn Lines*.

You can now begin submitting your photos for the 2024 contest. (See the submission information below.) If your photo wins top honors, you could receive a \$75 prize in one of our five contest categories: artistic, landscape, human subject, animal and editor’s choice. 📷

PEGGY MIESKO • REA ENERGY



AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS may send photos (no digital files, please) to *Penn Lines* Photos, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266. On the back of each, 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 at the end of the contest year if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is included.

ADDRESS CHANGES:

For change of address, please contact your local electric cooperative. For cooperative contact information, please visit www.prea.com/member-cooperatives



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