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Thanks to everyone who submitted photos for our 2022 "Rural Reflections" contest. Now it's time to start snapping away for 2023

HOLY MINIONS: Students from the Bedford County Technical Center put a creative spin on their nativity scene, which is among those that have been featured at the Holiday Nights of Lights at the county fairgrounds. *Photo courtesy of Bedford County Chamber of Commerce*



ON THE COVER

Bright lights inspire cheer during the holidays and draw communities around the Commonwealth together to build something special for their children.

Rural electric cooperatives, PREA 'rooted in progress'



LET ME BEGIN WITH A simple thank you to the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) for 80 years of service to Pennsylvania.

You — and the 14 rural electric cooperatives you represent — afforded rural citizens equal access to power, provided freedom to put their labor and skills into living versus just existing, improved the quality of life in rural communities, attracted business and commerce, and provided the light — literally — to see new possibilities for our communities and farms. Rural electric cooperatives made our “Commonwealth” a practical and economic reality. We are grateful to the men and women who have listened, learned, and led our rural electric cooperatives in making Pennsylvania a better place to live, work, and grow.

PREA was born at a time of momentous change in agriculture and rural communities. Farms, the businesses that served them, and the families who operated them needed electricity to survive and compete. Meeting consumer demand meant investing in a whole new way of living and doing business and in new infrastructure to make it possible. PREA's 80th anniversary comes as we're again facing momentous change requiring new investments and new infrastructure.

Just as electricity connected farms and rural communities to the larger world, broadband is now a necessity, not only for delivering services, but also for accessing vital services, like telemedicine, veterinary consultations and education, marketing goods, and servicing equipment. Broadband is the new electricity — with the same transformative powers.

Governor Tom Wolf in partnership with the General Assembly worked to improve broadband access by launching the \$35 million Pennsylvania Broadband Investment Incentive Program to expand rural broadband access in 2018. In 2021, the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority was created to guide the investment of \$100 million in federal dollars and \$10 million in new state funding to bring broadband equity to underserved communities.

For 80 years, PREA has been a valuable partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

PREA leaders serve on the department's Rural Development Council and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's board. Both groups connect policymakers with data and perspectives critical to rural communities' health and prosperity.

PennLines has been a vital channel for informing rural Pennsylvanians so they can use their voices to advocate to elected leaders and use their resources and their wallets to invest in ways that will help move us forward for the next 80 years.

Thank you, PREA, for 80 years of support and connection.

As 2023 approaches, we're planning a PA Farm Show with the theme “Rooted in Progress” to celebrate the deep roots that connect us and nourish our progress. PREA and its member cooperatives are part of the network of roots that bind us together, and they will be part of the network of partners that feed Pennsylvania's progress for the next 80 years.

Congratulations and thank you. 🍷

RUSSELL REDDING
PENNSYLVANIA AGRICULTURE SECRETARY

EDITOR

Peter A. Fitzgerald

MANAGING EDITOR

Jill M. Ercolino

SENIOR EDITOR

Michael T. Crawford

LAYOUT & DESIGN

W. Douglas Shirk

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Michelle M. Smith

CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS

**John Kasun, Anne M. Kirchner,
George Weigel, Abigail Zieger**

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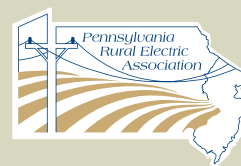
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THANK YOU, DEAR READERS

Recently, we were happy to learn that *Penn Lines* remains an extremely well read magazine. That's according to the results of a readership study conducted earlier this year. In fact, the study confirms that *Penn Lines* is one of the most highly read cooperative publications in the country.

The study was conducted by MRI Simmons, an international media research firm that compiles data for advertising and editorial interests. The study is done roughly every three years, and *Penn Lines* was among 18 similar publications that took part in this most recent one. A survey was sent out to 1,000 *Penn Lines* readers earlier this year, with results compiled over the summer.

We are very pleased with what the numbers tell us about our readers. First off, *Penn Lines* earned a 37% response rate in the survey – the highest among all publications.

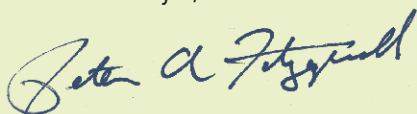
With respect to readership, *Penn Lines* has a "regular" readership rate (those who read three out of four issues) of 87%, putting us in the top five in the country. We have a "cover-to-cover" readership rate (those who read every issue) of 79%, making us the third most read publication in the survey. Those are some fantastic numbers in this age of distraction and social media.

We also learned that most readers get their cooperative information from *Penn Lines* (97%) over other sources like bill stuffers (27%) or websites and social media (11%). In fact, 95% of readers read their local cooperative pages sometimes to always, with nearly 70% reading them often to always. Readers also prefer to read the print version of the magazine (97%) instead of online (3%).

As far as what you like to read, the favorites include:

► Rural Reflections:	78%
► Feature stories:	76%
► Cooperative Kitchen:	64%
► Time Lines:	64%
► Keeping Current:	63%

Penn Lines readers are also very loyal, with 72% reading the magazine for 10 years or more and 50% reading it for 20 years or more. That loyalty shows, with a regular readership average of 89% since 1991. We are grateful to have those numbers – and to you for allowing us into your homes each month. Thank you, dear readers.



PETER FITZGERALD
EDITOR



IT'S OFFICIAL

White House Christmas tree grown at Pa. farm

An evergreen with roots in Schuylkill County will be featured as the official White House Christmas tree this year.

The 20-year-old Concolor fir, grown at Evergreen Acres Christmas Tree Farm near Auburn, is adorning the White House's Blue Room and will be seen by an estimated 100,000 visitors this month. The chosen tree, at 20 feet tall and 13 feet wide, was delivered to the White House the week before Thanksgiving.

Evergreen Acres, which is owned by the Shealer family, earned the honor after winning the 2022 PA Farm Show Christmas Tree Competition and going on to become the 2022 Grand Champion at the National Christmas Tree Association's National Tree and Wreath Contest. Since 1966, the winner of that national competition has presented a tree to the first lady.

It's not the first time a Shealer tree has been center stage at the White House over the holidays. In 2000, the family presented a Douglas fir to then-First Lady Hillary Clinton.

The fir is the 11th from Pennsylvania to be displayed at the White House.

FOR SALE

House hunters: \$475,000 will buy a piece of history

Penn Lines readers may remember

we gave a shout-out in November's log home feature to the Nothnagle Log Home in Greenwich, N.J., which is billed as "the oldest log cabin in the Western Hemisphere still standing in its original position."

Well, if log homes and owning a piece of history are your thing, you're in luck: The log building — constructed in 1638 long before New Jersey and Pennsylvania were even on the map — is up for sale, and this time around the asking price — \$475,000 — could be right.

The property, listed on the National Register of Historic Sites, was first put up for sale in 2015 for \$2.9 million. In subsequent listings, however, the price has dropped considerably. Located on 1.3 acres, the home was last listed for \$750,000 in 2021.

Finnish settlers built the cabin, which remains intact with most of its original logs.

BETTER THAN FLORIDA?

Lancaster, Harrisburg top list of best places to retire

Ah, retirement.

Who doesn't long for those days when bosses and time sheets are a distant memory? If you're nearing a certain age and looking for a place to spend your golden years, you may not have to travel far.

U.S. News and World Report has released the top 10 places in the U.S.

to retire, and Pennsylvania dominates the list, outranking even Florida as the state with the most desirable locations for retirees to kick back and relax.

Lancaster came in at No. 1 with Harrisburg taking the No. 2 spot. Other Pennsylvania cities in the top 10 were York (No. 5), Allentown (No. 9) and Reading (No. 10). Representing Florida were Pensacola (No. 3), Tampa (No. 4), Naples (No. 6) and Daytona Beach (No. 7). Michigan was the only other state with an entrant on the list; Ann Arbor came in at No. 8.

U.S. News reports Pennsylvania's affordable housing options, along with a reasonable cost of living and proximity to health care options, helped to land several cities on the list.

WEATHER ALERTS

511PA: A good thing for dealing with bad weather

With snow, sleet and freezing rain often in the forecast, it's the most weathery — and unpredictable —



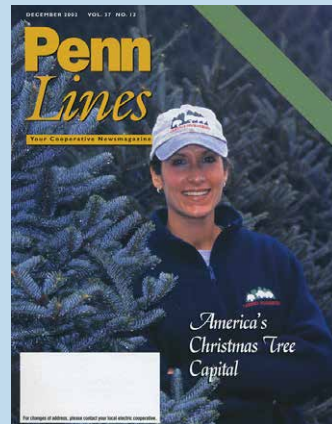
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TIME LINES



With the use of fresh-cut Christmas trees enjoying a resurgence in the early 2000s, *Penn Lines'* December 2002 issue focused on Indiana County, which at the time grew more holiday trees per capita than any other place on the globe. Today, while Christmas trees are still a big deal in the county, which is known as the Christmas Tree Capital, the number of farms has dwindled from more than 200 to around 26 in 2019, according to the Indiana County Christmas Tree Growers Association.

DECEMBER



LIGHT IT UP

If you love over-the-top holiday displays, this month's feature is packed with road-trip ideas. Another option: New Castle's Cascade of Lights, said to be among the best in Pa. (visitlawrencecounty.com).

UNDERGROUND SANTA

Take a trip to Valley REC territory to spend time with Santa in the Cave. This unique holiday event is hosted by Lincoln Caverns in Huntingdon (lincolncaverns.com).



HOLIDAY HELP

If you're struggling to provide food and gifts – or anything else – for your family this year, check out pa211.org. Operated by the United Way of Pennsylvania, the website will connect you with helpful resources close to home.

NEXT STOP: CHRISTMAS CITY

A trip to Bethlehem, Pa. – better known as Christmas City – is sure to get you in the holiday spirit. Special events, including a live Advent calendar, festive city strolls and a beloved tree tour, are planned throughout the month (historicbethlehem.org).



AN OFFBEAT NEW YEAR'S

What do bologna, a beaver, pickle and wrench have in common? They're all centerpieces of New Year's celebrations in Pennsylvania towns. Drop into uncoveringpa.com for more offbeat ways to ring in 2023.

Keeping Power Flowing Calls for Innovative Approaches

The Future Electric Utility Regulation Advisory Group compares electric service to a boxing match: “Reliability is when you can take a punch. Resilience is how fast you get up off the canvas after you’ve been hit hard.”

PAUL WESSLUND

A VARIETY OF FACTORS LIKE extreme weather and increased use of renewable energy are affecting the electric utility industry so much that there’s even a new way to talk about it: resilience.

The term describes the actionable steps electric utilities are taking to keep power flowing.

Just a few years ago, “reliability” was the term of choice. Reliability meant trimming trees near power lines and keeping squirrels from chewing up electrical equipment. Attention to those priorities worked. The average American’s electricity stayed on well over 99.9% of the time. That reliability record is still holding up, but it’s under pressure.

More powerful and frequent natural disasters and even the growing fleets of electric vehicles call for all electric utilities to learn new ways to do their job.

Most utilities agree grid resilience is the ability to withstand and recover from disruptive events and to predict and adapt to ensure consumers have the reliable power they need.

A less-formal definition from the Future Electric Utility Regulation Advisory Group compares electric service to a boxing match: “Reliability is when you can take a punch. Resilience is how fast you get up off the canvas after you’ve been hit hard.”

Utilities need to be ready to get back up off the canvas quickly. And that’s what they’re doing, from burying more power lines underground to developing plans that get the most essential services back online first.

Here are a few other ways electric utilities are building resilience:

Coordinated, local planning

Electric cooperatives, in particular, point out resilience means paying attention to regional and local differences. In other words, one size does

not fit all. Raising substations higher off the ground might make sense in flood-prone areas, while wrapping utility poles with fire-resistant coverings could be considered where wildfires are a threat.

Microgrids

One idea being tried is to create small areas, or microgrids, that can supply their own electricity in the case of a widespread outage.

Continued modernization

Electric utilities are investing in power lines that connect to new sources of renewable energy. They’re also investing in digital equipment and sensors that detect and resolve power outages and other problems more quickly.

Decentralized electricity

Rooftop solar arrays that allow homeowners to sell excess power back to the utility are another major change in the electric industry. The challenge for utilities is to integrate those power sources, which are variable and intermittent, into the smooth flow of electricity.

There are opportunities, as well. The growing number of electric vehicles plugged in overnight may be seen as a huge drain on the grid. However, those same batteries, when fully charged, could be a source of reserve power for the home during an outage.

There’s no doubt major changes to the way we generate and consume energy are happening. But utilities, including electric cooperatives, are answering the call with innovative solutions to serve their communities. That’s called resilience. 🌩️



LEVI GUZMAN, UNSPLASH

PLANNING AHEAD: Powerful storms and natural disasters are occurring more frequently. Today, electric utilities are planning well in advance for sudden and large-scale disruptions to maintain the power grid.

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



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LIGHTING UP THE FUTURE

Holiday decorations inspire the hearts and minds of the next generation

MICHAEL T. CRAWFORD


There's a special magic in the air in December — and November, for that matter — that sparks a simple, contagious frivolity in people. And sometimes, it can be found on a 10-foot-tall pirate ship at a Christmas tree farm.

“Every year I add something big,” explains Stacey Mytrysak, owner of Mytrysak Tree Farm and Greenhouse. “My friend wanted to get rid of it. We actually had to take it apart and rebuild it. I saw the idea at another farm and thought, ‘That is such a neat idea,’ ... We’re always looking for stuff for kids to play on.”

While a pirate ship might not be quite

the classic image of a holiday light show, it embodies the sort of large-scale, over-the-top decorations that inspire the inner child to come out and smile in adults — and sparks joy and excitement in actual children. Mytrysak, a member of Indiana-based REA Energy Cooperative, says she adds new attractions as often as she can. For her, it’s an effort to make the task of buying a tree less like work and more like an experience.

“When I was a kid, we went and got the tree and that was it,” Mytrysak recalls. “We wanted to make it a fun experience for the kids and make it something they look forward to, and maybe



when they grow up and have kids, they'll look forward to bringing their kids, too."

Community lights

A bit to the southeast, a different holiday experience is being held in the spirit of supporting kids — but in a different way. Kellie Goodman Shaffer, president and CEO of the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce and member of Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), has been coordinating the Holiday Nights of Lights since 2019. The event draws thousands of visitors each year in support of the Bedford County Chamber Education Foundation (BCCEF), a workforce development and career exploration program for area students.

The BCCEF provides age-appropriate connections to careers for students K-12, such as "Touch a Truck," where elementary school children explore trucks and learn about jobs that pair with specific ones.

There's also Bedford REC's electric education station.

"They'll talk to kids about being the best of the best to be a lineman," Shaffer says. "They're so proud of their work, and the kids get so excited. When the guys are done and they're like, who wants to be a lineman, every kid raises their hand."

When the Holiday Nights of Lights first launched, the chamber started advertising in late October, hoping to recruit 25 to 30 organizations to put up decorations at the Bedford County Fairgrounds. Instead, more than 70 businesses, church groups and families signed up. Participation is simple: Sign up for a space and invest what you want. Some set up free-standing decorations,

others decorate specific structures along the mile-plus drive through the holiday light displays.

"It's a great example of the cooperative nature of our business community and how ... we can create [something] for the community that is very special," Shaffer says, noting the annual showcase gives people pride in where they live and in being part of something bigger than themselves.

The event became even more popular during the pandemic since the drive-thru holiday display naturally allowed for social distancing, Shaffer explains. There were just shy of 100 participating decorators in 2020 and more than 100 in 2021. As of late October, Shaffer says, nearly 130 different organizations had signed up to decorate at the 2022 display, which will be open from 6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 2-4, 9-11, 16-18, 21-23 and 26, weather permitting, at the fairgrounds.

Last year, nearly 3,000 vehicles came through. At \$10 per vehicle, the collaborative display raised almost \$30,000 for the BCCEF.

"I love that it's a home-grown thing," says Pastor Brian Swain of Real Life Church and a chamber board member. "In a community, it's about the people who you know, and that's what makes it personal."

Swain, whose church is adjacent to the fairgrounds, speaks proudly of his congregation's contribution to the drive-thru — their nativity display, constructed from restored wood from the 1950s, is the largest there.

"There's a degree of friendly competition — everyone wants to have the coolest display," Shaffer says with a laugh. "Every display is a reflection of

"There's a degree of friendly competition — everyone wants to have the coolest display."

the entity that built it. And it's all a representation of having a good idea, gathering volunteers to help and showing up to do the work."

Bright ideas

Churches aren't the only organizations setting up nativity scenes. Scott Myers, instructor for the agriscience and biotechnology programs at the Bedford County Technical Center, and his students brought a modern flair to the classic nativity scene, replacing the key players with Minions — yes, those yellow, gibbering, over-all-wearing workers from the "Despicable Me" and "Minions" films.

Myers says his role is that of a facilitator, challenging students to take ideas a step further and offering guidance when students find themselves puzzled with a particular aspect of a project. The project is ungraded. Instead, he says, it's simply an opportunity for students to show their creativity, build the best thing they can build and have fun while doing it.

"I have been fortunate and blessed to have some very creative students who have taken very small ideas and built upon those ideas and made them into some pretty significant displays," Myers says. "They are coming to a technical center, so we try to make it as hands-on as we can to give them skills they can use in their adult lives.

"Not only are they gaining some minor construction skills from building these items, they're gaining a sense of community," he adds. "It's not always about 'what am I going to get' but 'what can I give.'"

In the northeastern part of the state, giving something to the community is what drives the Christmas Village at the Sullivan County Fairgrounds in Forksville.

"I think it's a great idea," says Kayla Lambert, a member of Sullivan County REC. "It's nice to have a little marketplace for our local friends to earn a little more Christmas cash before the holidays, all while supporting small businesses and getting some last-minute Christmas shopping done. It gets the community involved and spreads a little joy around the holidays, especially since we're in the middle of nowhere — we have to drive pretty far to see Christmas shows, so it's nice to have something right in our backyard."

COURTESY OF KAYLA LAMBERT



SMILE BRIGHT: Lila Lambert, daughter of Sullivan County REC member Kayla Lambert, smiles as bright as the Christmas lights behind her during the 2021 Sullivan County Christmas Village at the county fairgrounds in Forksville.

Passion project

The Christmas Village is the pet project of Kim Phillips, office secretary at Sullivan County REC, and her passion for the holidays rubs off on people. Lambert was a vendor at the first Christmas Village, where she sold ornaments. This year, she's helping to decorate the fairgrounds with a goal of bringing the big city to the small town with a scaled-down Rockefeller Center Christmas tree and ice skating rink.

"Kim is kind of infectious with her Christmas spirit, and it just makes everyone's hearts happy," Lambert says. "This is her labor of love. She's pretty humble and doesn't give herself enough credit for as much hard work as she puts into it."

The Sullivan County Fairgrounds hosted Phillips' first Christmas Village in 2019, after she and a friend finally pulled the trigger on the idea both had been brainstorming for years. Running from the last Sunday in November to the first Saturday in December, the Christmas Village turns on the lights from 6 to 8:30 p.m. as a drive-thru light show during the week. On

"Kim is kind of infectious with her Christmas spirit, and it just makes everyone's hearts happy."

the weekend, visitors can walk through the fairgrounds and meet local vendors selling everything from baked goods to handmade jewelry. At any point, guests can make donations to benefit the Sullivan County Agricultural Society, which owns the fairgrounds.

"I think it's a nice way to bring the community together and help out local vendors," says Phillips, president of the Sullivan County Agricultural Society. "I have vendors who are coming back again this year. They do very well — some of them do the best they've done all year — because everyone's shopping for Christmas."

Phillips, also a Sullivan County REC member, starts planning the Christmas Village in January and begins checking for participant interest in September. While the pandemic made Phillips pass on an encore in 2020, the village returned to the fairgrounds in 2021. Last year, almost all of the decorations put up at the fairgrounds were her own. This year, she has attracted assistance with a little friendly competition through the Sullivan County Great Light Fight.

For \$20, community members can decorate as much of the fairgrounds as they want. Half the money goes toward covering the

cost of electricity, while the other half goes toward a cash prize for the best decorations.

"I'm anxious to see it myself," Phillips says. "If you haven't come out before, you need to come out and experience it. You don't have to spend any money to drive through and look at the lights. And then on Saturday, come and support the local vendors and get Christmas shopping done."

"It's just about having fun and enjoying family," she adds. "You'll see people on Saturday at the village you haven't seen in a couple years or a couple months and you'll get a couple minutes to stand and talk."

Lambert says the Christmas Village is in a central location, making it easy for local families to visit after school and still make it home in time for dinner and bedtime.

"We have kids who like to enjoy different activities, and for most of us we would have to drive 45 minutes to an hour to go look at Christmas lights," explains Lambert. "The kids get so, so excited — my oldest daughter, Lila, was in preschool last year, and I just can't describe the joy in her face. I think her eyes light up more than the Christmas lights."

"It makes my heart full," she says. "That's what it's all about — the kids." 🎄

Don't get burned

'Tis the season to be jolly, but according to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, home fires and electrical accidents typically increase during winter months. Keep these holiday lighting tips in mind to stay jolly (and safe) this holiday season.

1. Carefully inspect all electrical decorations before use. Cracked or damaged sockets and loose or exposed wires can cause serious shock or start a fire.
2. Consider purchasing LED lights, which use less energy and run cooler than traditional incandescent lights.
3. Never mount or support light strings in a way that might damage the cord's insulation.
4. Make sure cords are not pinched in doors, windows or under heavy furniture, which could damage the cord's insulation.
5. Always unplug electrical decorations before replacing bulbs or fuses.
6. While it may be tempting to be "that house" and light up the night, turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep.
7. All of the above apply doubly when around the Christmas tree, real or otherwise. For freshly cut trees, trim the stump by at least 2 inches and allow it to absorb water for 24 hours before bringing it inside.
8. Keep the tree watered, refilling the water reservoir and checking the trunk and branches for moisture every day. Look for shedding or dry needles that could mean the tree is drying out, increasing overall fire risk.
9. Make sure your tree is at least 3 feet away from any heat source, like an air duct, fireplace or space heater.

SILENT NIGHT: A nativity scene — assembled by Real Life Church and constructed from restored wood pieces from the 1950s — greets visitors at the 2021 Holiday Nights of Lights at the Bedford County Fairgrounds.





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New feature highlights people and places that make cooperatives special

AS YOU FLIP THROUGH THE pages of this month's *Penn Lines*, you'll notice a number of changes, including a refreshed design and a handful of new columnists. One addition that we're most excited about is this: the **Community Corner**, which will debut in the January 2023 issue.

Each month, at the top of the page, we'll introduce you to one of Pennsylvania's rural electric cooperatives. Scattered around the state, no two are the same. We'll be highlighting the things that make each cooperative special, including fun and interesting things to do and see in the region.

At the bottom of the page is a little something we're calling the "Co-op Q&A." This space is dedicated especially to you, our readers. We'll be posing a different question each



month and asking you to submit answers along with a selfie — so be sure to give us a big smile! 📸

FEBRUARY 2023 CO-OP Q&A: Answer by Monday, Dec. 19, 2022

What's the sweetest thing someone has ever done for you?

EMAIL YOUR ANSWER, along with a selfie, to
CommunityCorner@prea.com.

Please include your full name, the name of your cooperative and a daytime telephone number and put **"February 2023 Q&A"** in the subject line.

Holiday Safety Tip

Discard any decorations that are frayed, damaged or worn out.



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Amy Wellington, Editor

Small change can change lives



THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS FINALLY here. Some call it the most wonderful season of all. That's because we associate it with family traditions and gathering with friends and loved ones. It's a time of giving and spreading joy.

This "giving back" reminds me of the many good things we have right here in our community and why it's so important to spread the good as far as we can, especially to the most vulnerable in our area. I'm also reminded of how wonderful our

community is and the big impact we can have when we work together.

When you are a member of Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), you help us spread the good throughout the year. Through our Operation Round Up program, your donations help local families and individuals in need by providing financial assistance with their energy bills. Members can enroll in the voluntary program by calling the office during regular business hours or using the SmartHub app. When you "round up" your monthly bill from Northwestern REC and donate to this fund, you're making a big difference in someone's life. You are helping to meet an immediate, critical need, but just as important, you are telling this person the community cares.

Over the years, our community-focused programs, food donations and other giving projects have built community gardens, supported local schools and young people, fed hungry families, and enabled families in need to keep the lights on and so much more.

Northwestern REC also participates in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth Tour, where we take our community's brightest young people to Washington, D.C., for a weeklong immersion to experience democracy in action. Ultimately, the larger community benefits from these programs because of you and your neighbors.

You've likely heard us say the cooperative principle, "concern for community," is part of Northwestern's DNA. It defines who we are as an organization. When we first brought electricity to this area in 1937, the quality of life improved. But other things also needed to be addressed and through the years, your co-op has been at the forefront of bringing improvements to the quality of life here. It's why we created Operation Round Up.

To date, with your help, we've given hundreds of thousands of dollars back to local families and individuals through this program. Across the country, more than 350 other electric co-ops have an Operation Round Up program, too. Together, we've raised millions for our collective communities. This shows that small donations from electric co-ops like ours, over time, can make a big impact.

As a local cooperative, we have a stake in this community. It's why we support local organizations like the United Way. We hope you think of Northwestern REC not only as your energy provider, but also as a catalyst for good in our community.

I hope all our members have a joyous holiday season. May it be merry and bright! 🎄

Cooperatively yours,

RYAN MELLER
PRESIDENT & CEO

Need Help? Don't Know Where to Turn?



DIAL 2-1-1
or visit **PA211NW.org**

FIND HELP. GET CONNECTED.

2-1-1 connects you to information about:
Aging Services • Child & Youth Services
Counseling • Education/Training • Food/Shelter/Clothing
Health Services • Parenting • Support Groups
Substance Abuse • and much more!



PA 2-1-1 NORTHWEST IS PART of the national 2-1-1 Call Center's initiative to offer area residents an easy-to-remember telephone number and chat, text, and a web resource to help them find health and human services for every-day needs and in crisis situations.

PA 2-1-1 Northwest is brought to you through a partnership of local United Way organizations, county government and human service providers in the region, along with PA 2-1-1 and United Way of Pennsylvania.

United Way of Erie convenes the PA 2-1-1 Northwest Advisory Council, a coalition of local lead agencies that provides oversight of the organization. 2-1-1 staff work closely with

government and agencies to make local program information available through the helpline.

Every day, highly trained 2-1-1 call specialists provide referrals to:

Basic human needs resources: food banks, shelters, and rent and utility payment assistance

Physical and mental health resources: crisis intervention services, support groups and counseling

Employment support: financial assistance, job training and education programs

Support for older adults and those with disabilities: home-delivered meals, transportation and health care

Youth and childcare programs: after-school programs, summer camps, mentoring, and protection services

Regional disaster preparation

Those who contact 2-1-1 will have free, confidential access to thousands of programs and services to improve the quality of their lives. Help is available by calling 2-1-1. TTY and language services are available in more than 170 languages and dialects. 2-1-1 can also be reached by texting your zip code to 898-211 or chatting with an online 2-1-1 specialist at pa211nw.org, which also has resources available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. 📞

Gift certificates available for any holiday



The gift of electricity is welcomed by anyone with an electric bill. Best of all, you don't have to agonize over colors or sizes. You also won't have to stand in line to make an exchange — or even wrap it.

An electricity gift certificate makes your gift-giving easy. But as with all

presents, it truly is the thought that counts.

If you would like to give a gift of electricity to a fellow cooperative member this year, just fill out the coupon below and return it with payment enclosed to Northwestern REC. We'll either send you the certificate,

or if you wish to remain anonymous, we'll send the acknowledgement to the recipient.

If you have any questions, please call consumer services at 800-352-0014. Our address is: Northwestern REC, P.O. Box 207, Cambridge Springs, PA 16403.

To: _____
Phone: _____
Address: _____
City, State, ZIP: _____
I would like to purchase a \$ _____ gift of electricity to be credited to the account of the person(s) above.
From: _____

☐ I wish to remain anonymous

Please remember to enclose payment. Thank you.

Generator safety : Our lives are on the line

FROM THE SAFETY COMMITTEE OF NORTHWESTERN RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

THE SAFETY OF YOU, OUR members, and our employees is a top priority at Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), especially during dangerous times. When storms impact our area, we rush to your aid as soon as weather conditions allow our lineworkers to travel and make repairs safely.

Our line crews take necessary precautions before they work on downed power lines. First, they verify a circuit has been de-energized and that proper switches are opened and tagged to isolate the circuit from the system. We place ground chains on the circuit — on both sides of workers — to make sure the line cannot be energized while work is being done.

But even after these measures, our workers' lives remain in your hands.

Northwestern REC is proud of our outstanding safety record, but sometimes, no matter how many steps we take to keep everyone safe, the very people we are there to help unknowingly put our lives — and their own — in danger.

Portable generators, widely used when power lines are down, can prove fatal to lineworkers and your neighbors when used improperly.

Of course, no one would ever purposely cause the death of a lineworker. Nevertheless, a generator connected to a home's wiring or plugged into a regular household outlet can cause backfeeding along power lines and electrocute anyone who comes in contact with them — even if the line seems de-energized.

And Northwestern employees are not the only ones in danger when a portable generator is used improperly. Generator owners themselves may be at risk of electrocution, burns, property damage or carbon monoxide poisoning if they do not follow the necessary safety rules.

Portable generators can be very helpful during outages. But we urge you to follow these safety guidelines when using one:

- ▶ Never connect a generator directly to your home's wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use. This can cause backfeeding along power lines.
- ▶ Always plug appliances directly into generators. Connecting the generator to your home's wiring must be done by a qualified, licensed electrician, who will install a transfer

switch to prevent backfeeding.

- ▶ Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords and make sure the cords are free of cuts or tears and the plug has three prongs. Overloaded cords can cause fires or damage equipment.
- ▶ Ensure your generator is properly grounded.
- ▶ Never overload a generator. A portable generator should only be used when necessary to power essential equipment or appliances.
- ▶ Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- ▶ Keep the generator dry and operate it on a dry surface under an open structure.
- ▶ Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
- ▶ Never refuel a generator while it is operating.
- ▶ Adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for safe operation.

We encourage you to protect the well-being of your family during outages and safeguard those who come to your aid during emergencies. When we work together for safety and the good of our communities, we all benefit. 🤝



WHAT IS YOUTH TOUR?

Each year, Northwestern REC sponsors eight to 10 local high school students on an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. We do this because education is important — education about cooperatives and education about America. The students of today are cooperative members of tomorrow.

More than 1,800 students from cooperatives across the United States take part in the Youth Tour experience. Students travel to D.C., where they visit with their elected officials and watch history come alive as they explore the museums, memorials, and monuments with students from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Not to mention, they will make lifelong friendships as well.

In addition to this fun-filled week in D.C., Youth Tour participants have two unique college scholarship opportunities available to them only — one through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and one through the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association.

For more information about the Rural Electric Youth Tour or to apply for this opportunity, visit NorthwesternREC.coop. All applications are accepted online and must be submitted by **Jan. 15, 2023**.

Youth Tour will be June 18 - 23, 2023.

Questions can also be referred to Amy Wellington at 800-352-0014 or awellington@northwesternrec.com.

Keeping pets and energy bills comfortable

AMY WELLINGTON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, but I consider my feathered and furry companions part of the family. We have nine chickens, two dogs and one too many cats, but I can't imagine life without them. I know others feel this way, too. That's why during the winter months, we make sure our whole family, including our menagerie of animals, is cozy — without taking a big “bite” out of our budget.

This month, I'd like to share a few simple ways you can make your home more comfortable this winter, which can ultimately help you save on energy bills.

At the onset of the cold-weather season, we replace the HVAC filter for better air quality and to help the unit operate more efficiently. You can also keep your home cozier by caulking and weatherstripping windows and doors. If your home is particularly drafty, like mine, you can tape or affix heavy, clear plastic to the inside of your window frames to create an additional barrier against the cold. Ensure the plastic is tightly sealed to the frame to help reduce infiltration.

We know winter can be “ruff,” so we set our thermostat no higher than 68 degrees, a “purr-fect” temperature for people and pets. This is especially important for smaller, short-hair and senior dogs — not just for warmth, but for their general health. Puppies, kittens and older pets with arthritis



or other ailments may also have a harder time controlling their body heat and need the additional warmth when it's chilly.

Pets that sleep close to the floor can be subject to cold drafts that enter your home through windows and exterior doors. If your pet's bed is near a window or door that feels drafty, tightly roll up a towel and place it near the bottom of the door or window to eliminate the draft. Cutting down on cold drafts helps everyone feel more comfortable during colder months.

If possible, elevate your pet's bed so it's not placed directly on a cold floor. An old chair or sofa cushion works well. If you don't use a dog bed, take some old blankets and create a donut shape on the cushion so the dog can snuggle and “nest” within the blanket.

You can do the same for cats, but on a smaller scale. Of course, my cats all choose to sleep on the bed with me. Blankets enable pets to nestle into them, even when they aren't tired, and provide a comfortable place for dogs and cats to curl up.

During the day, open your blinds and curtains to allow sunlight to warm your home. Close window coverings at night for an added layer of insulation.

At Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative, we want to help you save energy and money. Check out our website, NorthwesternREC.com, for additional energy-saving tips.

We can't control the weather, but we can provide advice to help you save energy and keep your family and furry friends more comfortable during the winter season. ❄️



MERRY CHRISTMAS
& Happy New Year

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow cable-knit sweater, a red scarf, and a red beanie, is smiling and reaching up to hang a string of warm white lights. The background is a blurred night scene with more lights and a snow-covered tree.

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**

Appliances That Use the Most Energy

TOLU OMOTOSO

HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED YOUR energy bill and thought, “I wonder which appliances in my home are using the most energy?” Don’t worry — you’re not alone. A few years ago, after being away for a somewhat lengthy trip, I arrived home to a typical energy bill. I was surprised because I expected a lower bill after being away. This led me to an enlightening journey in search for answers.

My first set of answers came from browsing the Energy Information Administration’s (EIA) website, specifically the Residential Energy Consumption Survey. According to EIA, a typical U.S. home spends more than \$2,000 annually on energy bills, and on average, more than half of

household energy consumption is for just two energy end uses: space heating and air conditioning. Seeing this, I understood the importance of adjusting my thermostat while I’m away because it truly makes a difference on our monthly bills.

I also learned water heaters tend to be the third largest energy user at 13%, followed by lighting, which usually accounts for about 12.5% of the average energy bill.

Once I understood the factors driving my energy consumption, I was able to control them and save money by using helpful devices, like smart thermostats, water heater controllers and smart power strips.

Several factors affect the amount of energy a household uses, including geographic location and climate, the number of people in the home, the type of home, and its physical characteristics. The efficiency of energy-consuming devices and the amount of time they are used also impact home energy consumption.

To save energy and reduce your monthly bill, the following tips can help:

1. Use Energy Star®-rated appliances and devices.
2. Replace old, inefficient equipment. For example, if your air conditioner, furnace or water heater is more than 10 years old, it is likely using a lot more energy than necessary. A newer model will save you money in the long run and help you avoid an inconvenient breakdown.
3. Use appliances with efficiency in mind. Only wash full loads of clothes or dishes, and when possible, cook with smaller, countertop appliances instead of the oven.
4. Set your thermostat accordingly to scale back heating or cooling when you are asleep or away. When you’re in the home and active, the U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting it to 78 degrees in the summer and 68 degrees in the winter. Aim for settings as close to those as possible to save energy.
5. Use energy-efficient LED bulbs. They use 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs and last 25 times longer.
6. Plug electronics into a smart power strip, which allows you to designate “always on” for devices that need to maintain network connection, while cutting power from devices like speakers and TVs when they are not in use.

In addition to the steps noted above, consider using real-time energy monitors to help identify faulty appliances or other problems, like a broken water heater that runs unnoticed for extended periods of time, leading to high energy bills.

With a little extra attention to how you use energy in your home, you’ll be well on your way to a path of energy savings — and lower energy bills. 🌱

TOLU OMOTOSO is the director of energy solutions at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.



OUT WITH THE OLD: If your major appliances are more than 10 years old, they’re likely operating inefficiently. Consider purchasing newer, more efficient models to save more energy over the long run.

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On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. To pay tribute to the beloved American President, Congress authorized the abrupt ending of the Franklin Half Dollar series, replacing it with the Kennedy Half Dollar. Following its release in January 1964, just two months after the tragic assassination, this Kennedy Half Dollar became the year's most sought-after American coin!

The president's wife, Jackie Kennedy, was given the choice of denomination and chose the Half Dollar because she did not want to see George Washington removed from the quarter. Interest in this first-year issue coins was very high, and people lined the streets outside the Treasury Building to obtain the coin.

The Only Kennedy Half Dollar Struck in 90% Silver

This 1964 Kennedy Half Dollar is a first and only—first year of issue and the only

Kennedy Half Dollar struck for circulation in 90% silver. The U.S. Mint reduced the silver content to 40% the next year in 1965—where it stayed until 1971 when the Mint again changed the content to copper-nickel.

Very Limited. Act Fast!

It's surprising that any of these coins still exist because when the price of silver skyrocketed in the 1980's, and again in 2011, people melted countless numbers of these coins for the precious metal, leaving only a fraction of the original mintages, and making them more difficult to find.

You're guaranteed to receive a first-year, 90% silver, 1964 Kennedy Half Dollar. Depending on your budget, you have your choice of three—Good, Brilliant Uncirculated, and

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Proof Quality Collector Condition (see above for condition explanation). But hurry—if you want one of these history-soaked coins, you should immediately call the toll-free number below because the limited supply will not last.

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Learning a Lesson from a Tantrum

ABIGAIL ZIEGER

I REMEMBER ONE OF MY son's earliest holiday gatherings. Our family came together for a hearty meal and a small gift exchange. My 2-year-old edged closer to the stack of presents underneath the tree, his excitement barely containable.

I watched my son's bright eyes when it was his turn to open gifts. He squealed and ripped open the colorful packages, clapping and dancing on his little tiptoes. My husband and I grinned at each other, but it wasn't long until his eagerness turned sour and our smiles fell.

My busy little guy scampered from box to box, zealously tearing open successive gifts without even stopping to look at what was inside. "Stop and look! Say thank you!" we chided, but it was like trying to restrain a busy squirrel gathering nuts.

Before we knew it, the gifts were all unwrapped. My son looked left to right, picking up pieces of wrapping paper to make sure there were no more presents underneath.

He suddenly burst out, "Where is the next present? I want MORE!"

And with the dreaded blood-curdling wail that young children are particularly adept at producing, he launched into a full-blown fit, complete with fist-pounding and tears.

We sheepishly shuffled our child into another room to attempt de-escalation and sighed: How had the idyllic season of giving turned into an obsession with getting?

Giving. It seems that small word has shifted from its original meaning. At one point, it may have represented selflessness, generosity, self-sacrifice and service. But during the holidays, it has turned into a harsh taskmaster to which we are bound.

We plan errands around what to buy for whom, rushing from place to place. We attempt to budget our spending, but often end up depleting our bank accounts. In fact, it seems we are so focused on gift-getting, we forget what giving really means.

It's no wonder our children struggle with the idea of

giving, too. After all, they are bombarded with the same advertisements we are. They see their friends getting new toys, just like we watch our neighbors bring home a nice new car. They also experience the flurry of gift exchanges at home and school. Of course, they want and expect their own share of presents — and sometimes aren't content with what's been given.

How can we teach our children to be generous and selfless in a world that's always telling us to get more, more, more? After our toddler's unpleasant display, we were determined to try.

We started small. The next year, we gave our son a modest budget to pick out gifts for family members to help him think of others. When the kids got a little older, we encouraged them to find ways to help others in our community in a tangible way, so they raised money to provide canned goods to our local soup kitchen. Nearly a

decade after the toddler meltdown, that same boy who was screaming for more presents is a preteen who initiated a neighborhood clean-up project.

Are we perfect? Certainly not. Our children still get occasionally grumpy over unpurchased toys or forget to be grateful for their blessings. We adults have to practice, too — after all, the spirit of giving is not a one-time lesson to be learned.

Together, we're exploring the idea that giving means more than just buying presents for other people. It means learning contentment and gratitude so that we can be generous. It means helping without expecting anything in return. It may not always be easy, but it's worth it. And it's something we all can work on, any time of the year. 🎁

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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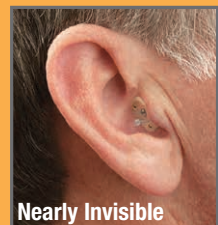
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The Landscape in Winter

By planning ahead, the view outside your window this season doesn't have to be so dreary

GEORGE WEIGEL

SO WE'RE LOOKING AT THREE more months until winter weather lets us get back outside to romp in the gardens and enjoy the scents and sights of whatever the deer don't eat.

In the meantime, we're reduced mainly to what we see out the windows.

That's a view few people consider when they plan a landscape ... or randomly plant whatever caught their eye at the garden center, as the case may be.

A few winter-interest plants placed outside the kitchen window or a favorite living room window can be uplifting during those blustery stretches.

Consider two fiery winter shrubs that are at their best in winter: the red-twig dogwood and the winterberry holly.

The dogwood, with its bright-red stems, and the holly, with its red or gold berries, are a stunning pair, especially when backdropped by evergreens and glowing in a bed of new-fallen snow.

The red-twig/winterberry combo is just one possibility for a nice window view in winter.

A surprising number of plants have showy features long after the bling of summer flowers and fall foliage has run its course.

Evergreens are the most obvious, including needled ones (pine, spruce, fir, yew, hemlock, arborvitae, etc.) and "broad-leaved" ones (boxwoods, hollies, rhododendrons, azaleas, cherry laurel, etc.)

Even in plain green, any evergreen at least offers a sign of life when so much else has died to the ground. But you can up your winter-window game considerably by picking evergreens



A ROOM WITH A VIEW: A few winter-interest plants and a structure or two can give you a decent view out the window over winter.

with colorful foliage or eye-catching forms, such as blue-tinted junipers, golden Hinoki false cypresses, nandinas that turn bright red in winter, and weepers, such as weeping Alaska cedar, weeping Norway spruce, and weeping blue atlas cedar.

An alternative is to create your own curious shape — spiral, pom-pom, animal, etc. — by pruning/shearing evergreens into topiary forms.

A more subtle winter interest is possible by adding a few trees and shrubs that have peeling or flaking bark.

Kousa dogwoods and stewartia trees, for example, have bark that flakes with age to create a look somewhat like a Dalmatian.

River birch and paperbark maple are two trees with cinnamon-colored bark that peels away, and oakleaf hydrangea and ninebark are native shrubs with interesting peeling bark, too.

Milk some interest out of the shoulder seasons of winter by picking a few shrubs that hold their fall fruits

and foliage into early winter and then add a few shrubs, perennials, and bulbs that are quick to get started as winter fades.

Besides winterberry hollies, some late and long fruiterers include bayberry, beautyberry, junipers, and chokeberries. Some late-to-turn, long-to-hold fall foliage shrubs include fothergilla, Ogon spirea, and Virginia sweetspire.

Now that our winters

aren't always snow-covered wire-to-wire anymore, we can better appreciate a class of plants known as evergreen perennials. These are plants that come back to flower year after year, but instead of dying back to the ground — *a la* coneflowers, black-eyed susans, and daylilies — they keep their leaves all winter.

Hellebores, coralbells, liriopse, lamium, sweet flag, and some ferns and sedges are examples of perennials that pair nicely with evergreen trees and shrubs in a winter landscape.

Add a few non-plant landscape features, such as a bench under a tree, an arbor, or a piece of freeze-hardy garden art, and you'll have plenty to look at in that potentially barren December-February period.

Santa will thank you for the nice view, too. 📷

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.

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85044

Seasonal Inspiration

ANNE M. KIRCHNER



'TIS THE SEASON FOR OFFICE parties, gatherings of friends and family celebrations. Each year, I like to try a new recipe. I prefer bite-sized treats that are quick to make and easy to serve.

I enjoy traditional options, but it's the creative recipes that bring welcome surprises to the holiday season.

While sweet treats satisfy most guests, consider a savory approach. Focus on basic ingredients and make-ahead options. What can you do with meatballs, avocados and bleu cheese? This month's recipes offer some ideas. When you keep recipes and kitchen prep simple, you will have more time to spend with family and friends. Cheers! 🍷

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

CURRIED MEATBALLS

- 1 cup honey
- 1 cup Dijon mustard
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup water
- 2½ tablespoons curry
- 2 pounds frozen meatballs

Combine the honey, mustard, lemon juice, water and curry in a saucepan. Simmer over medium-low heat until hot. Place the frozen meatballs in a crock-pot. Pour the sauce over the meatballs and toss gently. Cover the meatballs with a lid and cook on low for 2 to 3 hours. *Makes 20 appetizer servings.*

AVOCADO YOGURT DIP

- ¾ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup red onion, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons cilantro, chopped
- 1 tablespoon jalapeno, finely diced
- 2 teaspoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 ripe avocados, seeded and chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced

Place all ingredients in a food processor or blender. Process until smooth. Serve the creamy dip with pita chips, celery, carrots, green pepper, red bell pepper and/or cucumbers. The dip can be prepared up to eight hours in advance. Keep refrigerated in an airtight container. *Makes 15 to 20 appetizer servings.*

NUTTY BLEU CHEESE ROLLS

- ⅔ cup walnuts, finely chopped
- ⅓ cup bleu cheese crumbles
- 1 tablespoon parsley, finely chopped
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 pie crust
- 1 tablespoon milk
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese

Stir together the walnuts, bleu cheese, parsley and pepper. Roll out the pie crust on a lightly floured surface. Cut the dough into 16 wedges. Spread the walnut filling over the crust. Starting at the wide end, loosely roll up each wedge like a crescent roll. Place the rolls on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Brush the rolls lightly with milk and sprinkle with parmesan cheese. Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes; serve warm. *Makes 16 appetizer servings.*



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NATIONAL STATS

2021 Sales Volume – **\$1.4 Billion**

2021 Annual Transactions – **4,900**

Total Offices – **100**

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February 2023
March 2023
April 2023

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December 15
January 13
February 15

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- ☐ Cooperative members should please submit the mailing label from *Penn Lines* as proof of membership.
- ☐ Non-members should submit name, address, phone number, and email address, if applicable.
- ☐ Month(s) in which the ad is to run.
- ☐ Ad copy as it is to appear in the publication.
- ☐ Heading ad should appear under, or name of special heading (additional fee). See below for FREE heading options.

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Ho-Ho Humbug

JOHN KASUN

MY WIFE IS DEFINITELY A Christmas person, but I am slightly on the Scrooge side. I enjoy Christmas, but I just don't seem to enjoy it as early as most people. My Christmas spirit normally kicks in later in the afternoon of Dec. 24, but in my defense, it does stick around for several days afterward. When most people are busy taking down decorations and returning unwanted gifts, I like to kick back, build a fire, load up a plate with leftovers and light the tree.

If I had to rank my wife's Christmas spirit, she would get 10 elves, the highest score possible. I, on the other hand, might eke out a score of one "Sleepy," as in one of The Seven Dwarfs. All in all, it works out every year, but it does make for some interesting times during most of December.

I knew it was going to be a tough holiday season last year when on the way home from Thanksgiving dinner at our niece's house, my wife announced we would need to get out the Christmas decorations the next day. I hadn't even had an opportunity to lie down on the couch and relax, and she was already planning for me to climb into the cold attic. There, I would wrestle boxes of what I believe contain approximately 10,000 Christmas ornaments, various wreaths and garlands, three Christmas trees of different sizes, enough lights to create my own personal Milky Way, and a partridge in a pear tree.

Well, a couple of weeks after Thanksgiving, the house was finally decorated — I hoped. I say this because since the day my wife started to decorate, a steady stream of "new decorations" started magically appearing. On the plus side, however, a new "Master Remote Christmas Lighting Control Center X3000" was among all the goodies. I was not sure if X3000 stood for the model number or the cost. In any event, it allowed me to control the indoor and outdoor lights from one central location. No more running inside and out to turn on or off, plug in or unplug a series of lights. Now, I could remain inside while controlling everything.

This system worked quite well, and I must admit the house looked beautiful with one interesting exception: the wreath from hell on the fireplace. Remember: I don't make this stuff up.

My wife had made a beautiful green wreath with a huge red bow for over the fireplace. She found strings of battery-operated lights mounted on very fine copper wire, and each string came with its own programmable, built-in controller. The controller had 12 different modes, from steady, twinkle, and flashing to wave, sequence, and seven others I can't even remember. In addition, the controller had a timer, so when programmed, it came on automatically, performed the chosen lighting mode and turned itself off at a predetermined time. The truly remarkable thing was the controller was about the size of a deck of cards. It came with printed directions too small for the average adult to read and tiny buttons built for the hands of a 2-year-old. Meanwhile, the wreath was

so large, it needed four strings of lights, meaning we needed to program and coordinate four different controllers.

My wife painstakingly wove the string of lights into the wreath, tucking all the wires and controllers out of sight within the branches. After hanging it above the fireplace, we waited with breathless anticipation for the initial lighting that first evening.

As we watched the sun set through our family-room window, the wreath lit up with a string of twinkling lights.

My wife started to say, "I didn't want twinkling, I wanted ...," but before she could utter another word, the second strand of lights began to flash on and off, followed by the third strand, in which the lights looked like they were chasing each other around the wreath. Finally, the fourth strand kicked in with a wave lighting effect. The wreath was pulsating and looked like something out of an Indiana Jones movie right before the volcano erupts.

"John ... you have to HELP me," my wife exclaimed.

Safely from my hiding place behind the couch I whispered, "I am not getting near that thing; it could eat us alive!"

Merry Christmas from our house to yours! 🎅



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 Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.

Season's Greetings

OUR 2022 "RURAL REFLECTIONS" photo contest has ended, and the winning photos in the categories of most artistic, best landscape, best human subject, best animal and editor's choice will be printed in next month's issue of *Penn Lines*. Winners will receive a \$75 prize, and runners-up will receive a \$25 prize. 📷

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NOW IT'S TIME to begin submitting your photos for the 2023 "Rural Reflections" contest. To be eligible, send photos (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 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

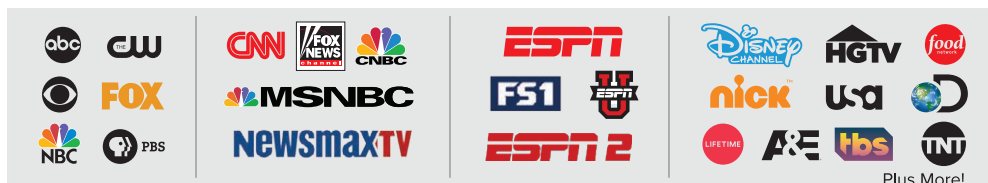


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