

# living with energy IN IOWA

MAY 2021

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Unified efforts power rural  
economic development

New ideas for home  
improvement projects

Asparagus and  
rhubarb recipes

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### ON THE COVER



Congratulations to Marty Hulsebos, an Access Energy Cooperative member, for supplying the cover image for this month's issue of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine! ⚡

# State programs provide financial assistance with mortgage, rent and utility bills due to COVID-19

BY REGI GOODALE

Many households and businesses have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Iowa's electric cooperatives are committed to the communities we serve, and we want to share some new state resources with our readers.

In late March, Gov. Kim Reynolds announced two new programs to assist eligible Iowans who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and need financial assistance: The Iowa Homeowner Foreclosure Prevention Program and the Iowa Rent and Utility Assistance Program. Both programs are administered by the Iowa Finance Authority.

## Iowa Rent and Utility Assistance Program

Funded by the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, this program will provide rent and/or utility assistance for up to 12 months. Eligible renters can receive financial assistance with past due rent, electricity, gas, propane, fuel oil, water, sewer and/or trash removal bills incurred no earlier than March 13, 2020.

Utility payments through the program will be made directly to utility providers and applied to the applicants' accounts. If you need assistance with electric bill documentation for your application, please contact your local electric cooperative.

Eligible households must be current renters earning no more than 80% of their county's area median income. One or more individuals in the household must have either qualified for unemployment benefits or have experienced a documented financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. And the household can demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability,

which may include a past due utility or rent notice or eviction notice.

Full eligibility details are available at [www.IowaHousingRecovery.com](http://www.IowaHousingRecovery.com). The website includes an eligibility precheck and answers to frequently asked questions. You can also call Iowa's Utility Recovery Hotline at 515-348-8976 or 877-463-3269 for more information about this program.



## Iowa Homeowner Foreclosure Prevention Program

This program reopened in late March to provide mortgage payment assistance for income-eligible homeowners impacted by COVID-19 who are at risk of foreclosure.

Eligible homeowners can receive mortgage assistance for up to four months (including up to two months in arrears), beginning with an April 1, 2020 mortgage payment.

There is a maximum assistance per household of \$3,600.

This short-term program will be available until funds are exhausted or a new federal program is launched. Program funding is provided through federal CARES Act funds. Complete eligibility details are available at [www.IowaHousingRecovery.com](http://www.IowaHousingRecovery.com) or by calling the Housing Recovery Line at 855-300-5885 or 515-348-8813.

At [www.IowaMortgageHelp.com](http://www.IowaMortgageHelp.com), you can also learn more about Iowa mortgage help, which offers free, confidential mortgage counseling to Iowa homeowners at risk of foreclosure.

If you are at imminent risk of foreclosure and need legal assistance, Iowa Legal Aid may be able to assist you at no cost. Call 800-532-1275 or visit [www.IowaLegalAid.com](http://www.IowaLegalAid.com). ⚡

Regi Goodale is the director of regulatory affairs for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

# Win 10 shade trees

Shade trees can help lower summer energy bills. To help you get started, we're giving 10 lucky electric co-op members 10 free shade trees up to a foot tall. The winners also will receive a one-year membership to the Arbor Day Foundation, which includes a subscription to the organization's bimonthly newsletter, a copy of *The Tree Book* and discounts on future tree and shrub purchases. ⚡



## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com) no later than May 31, 2021. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the Home Technology Package from the March issue was Larry Heitmeier from Access Energy Cooperative.



# Do your part to keep Iowa's roads and co-op lineworkers safe

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



Have you ever had to stop your vehicle on the side of a busy highway to check on a flat tire or a trailer cover? Or maybe you've been

pulled over by a police officer and worried about his or her safety on the shoulder of the road while hoping you can get away with just a warning!

If so, you are well aware that most drivers won't bother to move over or even slow down as they pass you. Iowa's move over or slow down law requires motorists to move over or slow down when approaching ANY stationary vehicle with flashing lights activated, including passenger vehicles with hazard lights. Those who disobey the law could receive a hefty fine or potentially lose their driver's license.

This law is particularly important to Iowa's electric cooperatives because it helps keep our lineworkers and maintenance workers safe, as they often need to perform difficult and dangerous work with electric



equipment on the shoulder of the road. And even though our employees set out caution signs and orange cones, wear high visibility gear and turn on their vehicles' emergency lights, other motorists often fail to give them the room they need to do their job safely.

When you're behind the wheel, keep

your eyes on the road and make room for utility workers and others who are stopped on the shoulder. Their jobs are dangerous enough already.

For more information, visit [www.MoveOverIowa.com](http://www.MoveOverIowa.com).

Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month



A dirty filter causes your air conditioner to work harder than necessary. Remember to change your air filter every month (or every two months) to prevent dust buildup, which can lead to even bigger problems.

Source:  
[www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov)



## 4 SOLAR ENERGY TRENDS TO WATCH

The efficiency of solar energy is improving through innovations and advancements. Here are four trends to watch:

- ▶ New materials for solar cells are being developed that are more efficient, durable and cost effective.
- ▶ Batteries are improving so that energy from large-scale solar installations can be stored and used more efficiently.
- ▶ New business models like community solar allow people to participate in solar programs without the hassle of installation and maintenance.
- ▶ Solar tracking is making solar panels more efficient with motorized systems that keep panels pointed toward the sun throughout the day.

# Sen. Grassley earns NRECA's distinguished service award

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) was recently presented with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Distinguished Service Award, which recognizes a lawmaker's outstanding contribution to the progress of electric cooperatives and the public power program in the U.S.

Grassley was recognized for his unwavering support for America's electric cooperatives throughout his six decades of public service, including his hometown co-op, Butler County REC in Allison. He played a leading role in advancing key electric co-op policy priorities, including enactment in 2019 of the RURAL Act, which saved co-ops from losing their tax-exempt status if they received government grants surpassing 15% of their non-member income. This legislation saved electric co-ops millions of dollars in federal taxes that now go directly toward serving co-op consumer-members.

Grassley also championed legislation to repeal the "Cadillac Tax" imposed on healthcare benefits that cooperatives provide for their employees. NRECA estimated that its member cooperatives would save more than \$30 million a year in pension insurance premiums because of this legislation.

"Butler County REC is proud to be Sen. Grassley's hometown cooperative," says Craig Codner, the co-op's CEO. "We appreciate his advocacy for cooperatives. From his support of legislation to his morning run with Iowa Youth Tour participants, his dedication is evident. We congratulate Sen. Grassley on his much-deserved Distinguished Service Award."

"We are honored that NRECA has recognized Sen. Grassley with this important award," says Chuck Soderberg, executive vice president and general manager,



Pictured at an award presentation held earlier this spring at Heartland Power Cooperative: Heartland Power Cooperative Director and IAEC Board Officer Roger Solomonson, IAEC EVP and GM Chuck Soderberg, Sen. Grassley, and Prairie Energy Cooperative Board President and NRECA Director Marion Denger. Photo courtesy of Jessica Marzen, Heartland Power Cooperative.



Additional photos taken at events prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. "Throughout his decades of public service, Sen. Grassley has gone above and beyond to fight for co-ops, their employees, their communities and the cooperative business model. We are incredibly grateful to have Sen. Grassley serving the state of Iowa and especially grateful that we can call him a true friend of America's electric cooperatives."

"Sen. Grassley is an exemplary

friend to electric co-ops and understands well the important role they play across the nation," says NRECA CEO Jim Matheson. "He has helped pave the way for co-op priorities on Capitol Hill, always with the goal of improving the quality of life in rural communities. I commend Sen. Grassley for his unwavering focus on the needs of his constituents and his commitment to ensuring the continued availability of affordable and reliable power." ⚡

# Unified efforts power the economic development puzzle

BY KAY SNYDER

The second week of May marks National Economic Development Week, providing an opportunity to highlight the strategic and unified effort that goes into supporting business growth and community vitality across Iowa. As part of its foundational principle of Concern for Community, your electric cooperative works with numerous partners to foster a thriving business climate in your area.

Economic development means different things to different people. On a broad scale, anything a community does to foster and create a healthy economy can fall under the umbrella of economic development. Most of the time, economic development focuses on promoting investment, creating jobs and improving the quality of life for residents. Economic development is truly a puzzle, with a diversity of essential players coming together to address dozens of core activities accomplished by accessing many programs and resources.

Recognizing the benefits of a unified effort to power the “puzzle of economic development” and fit these pieces together, Iowa’s electric cooperatives created the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) to serve as its economic development organization. For decades, IADG staff has been immersed in statewide economic development, compiling the network of partners, knowledge of programs and project experience needed to support this vital business initiative. IADG focuses on business attraction, existing business expansion, entrepreneurship and community development projects.



There are hundreds of examples of electric cooperative-inspired economic development success stories across Iowa, including the following two recent examples.

## Powering business growth

The Butler Logistics Park, located in rural Butler County near Shell Rock, provides a perfect example of how an industrial park can spark incredible regional growth through business location and job creation. Butler County REC, Butler-Grundy Development Alliance, Iowa Northern Railway Company (IANR) and Central Iowa Water Association are vital partners in developing this 230-acre and expanding industrial park.

Through active marketing, Trinity Industries became interested in the property as a location for the \$60 million TrinityRail Maintenance Services facility, which purchased the entire park. Local players came together to work through the company’s requirements. Butler County REC secured a \$2 million pass-through loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to support installing nearly 8,000 additional feet of rail to the IANR main track, necessary to meet the company’s requirements.

“With any project such as this, there are numerous parts that have to come together, including the work of many individuals,” says Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC. Our staff put in many hours toward this project and continues to be engaged as the park expands. We have a tremendous working relationship with the Butler-Grundy Development Alliance, who was instrumental in attracting the plant to the park.”

“I also cannot say enough about



the IANR team. This was a true partnership with everyone’s goal the same, to bring the plant to the Butler Logistics Park,” Codner adds.

The impact of the 230-acre rail maintenance facility is the creation of more than 250 career opportunities for current residents and those attracted by these positions, and an overall boost to the local economy.

Spurring additional growth, in October 2020, Mid-Iowa Cooperative, a farmer-owned cooperative based in east-central Iowa, broke ground on Shell Rock Soy Processing, a \$270 million soybean crushing plant located on an expansion of the Butler Logistics park. The facility is expected to create 50 high-quality jobs when operational in 2022.

### Powering community services and entrepreneurship

Concern for Community and Cooperation among Cooperatives are two of the cooperative principles that shine in this community

development project spotlight.

818 Forward with Faith (FWF) is a non-profit dedicated to building homes where adults with disabilities can lead lives of dignity while their specialized physical, emotional and social needs are met. FWF was founded by Jerry and Judy Fynaard, whose son Caleb was born with cerebral palsy. It was right after high school when Caleb was involved in an automobile accident, and the special care he needed became more than his current living facility could provide. That is what spurred the Fynaards to found FWF with the mission of providing homes for adults with disabilities that are an extension of their childhood home and a safe haven for the residents and their families.

Pella Cooperative Electric Association and Southwest Iowa REC provided \$300,000 from their Revolving Loan Funds to support the FWF home construction, which opened in Pella in November 2019.

With the goal of “one Faith House at a time,” FWF is working toward constructing a home for women also to be located in Pella.

“Pella is a small community where we step up to take care of each other and work to support those in need. Pella Cooperative Electric and Southwest Iowa REC were honored to use our resources to help Forward with Faith develop a solution for a need in our community,” Pella Cooperative Electric CEO Jon Miles says.

While just two projects were highlighted in this article, examples of large and small “wins” are frequently included in your local newspapers, electric cooperative and chamber newsletters, and *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine.

Rural utilities have an important presence in local communities. Throughout the past several years, the local ownership of businesses in rural communities continues to trend downward. So does the pool of stakeholders willing and able to invest, engage and support local business and community development efforts. Your electric cooperatives actively participate and contribute to business and community initiatives across the state.

We’re grateful that electric cooperative staff, and their members, volunteer time and talents to support local communities across Iowa. Every one of these roles is a vital piece of powering economic development. ⚡



Kay Snyder is the director of marketing and communications for the Iowa Area Development Group.

# RHUBARB & ASPARAGUS RECIPES



## Creamy Rhubarb Dessert

- ½ cup butter
- 1½ cups plus 2 tablespoons flour, divided
- 1 cup pecans, chopped, divided
- 4 cups rhubarb
- 1 cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar, divided
- 16 ounces cream cheese
- 2 teaspoons vanilla, divided
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1½ cups sour cream

Cut together butter and 1½ cup flour. Add ½ cup pecans and press into 13x9-inch pan. Mix rhubarb, ½ cup sugar and 2 tablespoons flour. Spoon over crust and bake at 350 degrees F for 15 minutes. Mix together cream cheese, ½ cup sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla until smooth, then add eggs. Pour over hot rhubarb and bake at 350 degrees F for 30-35 minutes. Cool 10 minutes. Mix sour cream, 3 tablespoons sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Spread over hot cheesecake, sprinkle with ½ cup pecans. Cool 1 hour then refrigerate. *Serves 12-16*

**Cindy Bru • Marshalltown**  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

## Chicken Asparagus Casserole

- 4 chicken breasts
- 1½ teaspoons seasoned salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 20 ounces frozen asparagus
- 10½ ounces cream of chicken soup (1 can)
- ½ cup mayonnaise or sour cream
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon curry powder
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, grated

Cut chicken into bite size pieces and season with seasoned salt and pepper. Sauté chicken in oil for 5-6 minutes until white and opaque. Remove and drain on paper towels. Cook asparagus as directed on package. Drain and place in greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Add chicken pieces. In a separate bowl, mix soup, mayonnaise or sour cream, lemon juice and curry powder. Pour over chicken and sprinkle with cheese. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes. *Serves 8*

**Linda Terlouw • Pella**  
Pella Cooperative Electric Association

## Rhubarb Surprise Pie

- 1 cup flour, sifted
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 3 cups rhubarb, diced
- 1 package strawberry Jell-O (3 ounces)
- ½ cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ cup butter, melted

Sift together 1 cup sifted flour, baking powder and salt. Cut in 2 tablespoons butter, add egg and milk then mix. Press into a greased 9-inch pie pan. Arrange rhubarb in pie pan and sprinkle with Jell-O. Combine ½ cup flour, sugar, cinnamon and ¼ cup melted butter and sprinkle on top of pie. Bake at 350 degrees F for 50 minutes or until rhubarb is tender. *Serves 6*

**Lea Bradley • Mount Pleasant**  
Access Energy Cooperative

Fresh Facts Source:  
Iowa Department  
of Agriculture and  
Land Stewardship

### MEDICINAL ROOTS

Rhubarb is a very old plant that dates back to ancient China in 2700 BC. At that time, it was used for medicinal purposes. The roots of the Chinese variety are still used in medicine today.



# Cherry Rhubarb Crunch

- 2¼ cups oatmeal
- ¾ cup flour
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ¾ cup oleo
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup water
- 1 can cherry pie filling
- 4 cups rhubarb, diced
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Combine oatmeal, flour, brown sugar and oleo. Cut together to make crumbs. Save ¾ cup crumbs for top and spread the rest in 9x13-inch pan. In saucepan, combine sugar, cornstarch and water; cook until thick. Remove from heat and add pie filling, rhubarb and vanilla extract. Pour over crumb crust and sprinkle with remaining crumbs. Bake at 350 degrees F for 40 minutes.

**Barbara Dather • Melvin  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

# Ham and Asparagus Roll-Ups

- 30 fresh asparagus spears
- 15 ham slices
- 8 ounces cream cheese

Trim asparagus to length of ham slices. Wash the asparagus and blanch briefly for 2 minutes in boiling water. Remove stalks and put in bowl of ice water. Spread cream cheese on ham slices then add two asparagus spears and roll them up. Keep refrigerated until served. *Serves 15*

**Ann Clark • Panora  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association**

# Rhubarb Dump Cake

- 1 pound rhubarb, chopped (3-4 cups)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 package strawberry Jell-O (3 ounces)
- 1 package yellow cake mix
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup butter, melted

Spread rhubarb evenly over bottom of a greased 9x13-inch cake pan. Sprinkle sugar over the rhubarb, then the dry Jell-O, then the cake mix. Pour water and melted butter over the top. Do not stir. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes or until rhubarb is tender. This comes out like a cobbler.

**Kathy Carter • Williams • Prairie Energy Cooperative**

# Asparagus Bacon Quiche

- 1 pound fresh asparagus
- 6 bacon strips
- 1 9-inch baked pastry crust
- 3 eggs
- 1½ cups half and half cream
- 1 cup grated Parmesan, divided
- 1 tablespoon green onions, sliced
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 pinch ground nutmeg

Trim asparagus and cut into 1-inch pieces, then cook and drain. Cook and crumble bacon. Arrange bacon and asparagus in pastry crust. In a bowl, beat eggs, then add cream, ½ cup cheese, onions, sugar, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Pour over asparagus and bacon. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake at 400 degrees F for 10 minutes. Reduce to 350 degrees F and bake for 23-25 minutes longer.

**Anna Domnick • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

## Wanted: Chicken Recipes The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

Winner, winner, chicken dinner! A versatile protein, chicken is a recipe favorite. Whether it's grilled, baked, fried or in sandwiches, salads or casseroles, the possibilities are endless. If we run your recipe in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at [www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com).

The deadline is May 31, 2021. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **Also provide the number of servings per recipe.**

**EMAIL:** [recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com](mailto:recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com)  
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

**MAIL:**  
**Recipes**  
*Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Urbandale, Iowa 50322



**ONLY EAT THE STALKS**  
Rhubarb is a perennial plant that is usually eaten fresh and harvested in the spring when the stalks are tender. Only the stalks (petioles) should be eaten because the leaves contain moderately poisonous oxalic acid.

FRESH FACTS

**THREADED ON STRAW**  
Strawberries are thought to have originated with the Romans, maybe as far back as the Greeks. The name "strawberry" may have resulted from children in the 19th century, who threaded the berries on straw and sold them.

FRESH FACTS

**PACKED WITH VITAMIN C**  
Strawberries contain vitamin C, folic acid, potassium and fiber. Eight fresh strawberries provide approximately the same amount of vitamin C as an orange.

FRESH FACTS

# Trending now: Home improvement

## Tips for making environmentally friendly and cost-effective choices

BY JULIA ROBINSON

With ongoing pandemic concerns and expanded remote working options, many of us are not only spending more time at home, but we're also considering a home office upgrade, creating a music room or enhancing an outdoor space. Mischa Fisher, chief economist for HomeAdvisor, says the growth in home improvement in 2020 was huge: "We nicknamed it the year of the home."

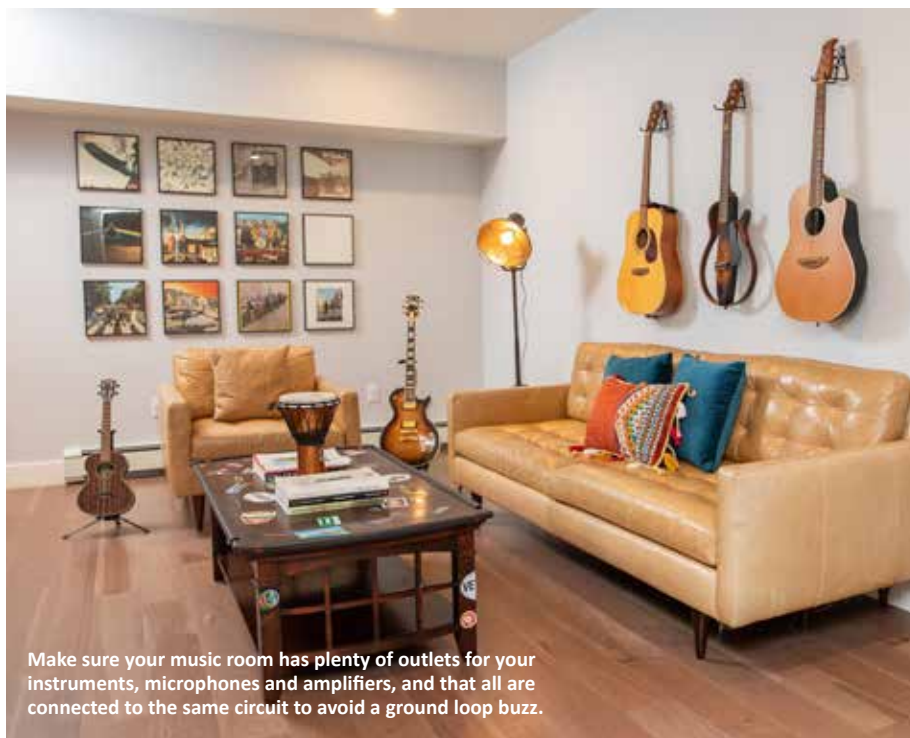
"In past years, there was a significant focus on return on investment," Fisher says. "People do a project because they're planning on selling their house." Last year was different because 41% of people said they planned upgrades specifically to make their homes better suit their lifestyle. It's a trend that's continuing in 2021.

No matter what project is on tap, it's essential to start with basic improvements that ensure your energy needs are met safely and efficiently. HomeAdvisor, a digital marketplace that aims to connect clients with prescreened local service professionals, found home maintenance budgets doubled in 2020 compared to previous years. Simple updates to infrastructure can make every home kinder to the environment and safer, with the added benefit of trimming electric bills.

### Green building with simple improvements

Simple improvements based on a home's current condition can go a long way toward improving energy efficiency. "Often improvements are more beneficial than investing in newer technology, such as solar panels," says Peter Pfeiffer, president of an architecture firm and an early advocate for the ENERGY STAR® program, which encourages energy-efficient appliance purchases.

He recommends that homeowners plan their improvements based on



Make sure your music room has plenty of outlets for your instruments, microphones and amplifiers, and that all are connected to the same circuit to avoid a ground loop buzz.

increasing overall energy efficiency, beginning with modest repairs. The next step involves pricier improvements like replacing windows and upgrading to more efficient appliances. The most advanced improvements center on renewable energy generation and storage.

Pfeiffer suggests homeowners start by eliminating energy-wasting gaps in the home's structure and shading windows and walls.

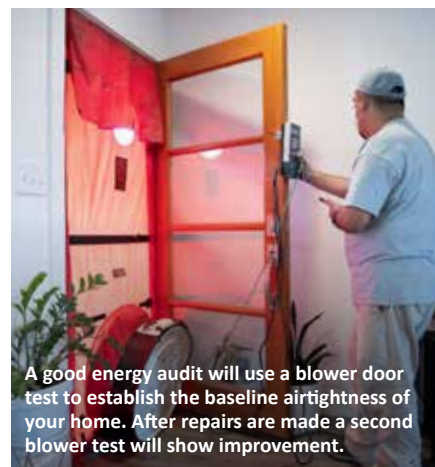
### STEPS TO ELIMINATE ENERGY-WASTING GAPS

#### ① Audit energy use

To find your home's trouble spots, engage a professional for a home energy audit. Your electric co-op offers advice on audits, which likely includes a review of your electric bills and a thorough examination of your home. Auditors will inspect the quality of insulation, test for electrical

hazards, make a thermographic inspection with infrared scanning, and conduct a blower test that measures the quality of air sealing around ducts, doors and windows.

The auditor then prepares a report detailing their findings and recommendations. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average home has enough air



A good energy audit will use a blower door test to establish the baseline airtightness of your home. After repairs are made a second blower test will show improvement.

Replacing regular window screens with solar screens can keep your home 10-15 degrees cooler in the summer by blocking the sun's rays that can heat the inside of your home.



leakage to add up to a 2-square-foot hole that remains open 24 hours a day. Fortunately, simple remedies can save up to 30% on utility bills. With your co-op's guidance, an energy audit will help you prioritize fixes for tightening your home and using shade to your advantage.

## ② Keep outside air outside

Managing the infiltration of outside air can affect homes year-round. Common recommendations are to update weatherstripping and caulk around doors and windows, clean filters and vents, and seal leaks in your ducts. Pfeiffer points out that leaky ducts are more wasteful than an inefficient air conditioner. It's more important to make sure you have an airtight heating, ventilating and air conditioning system before upgrading to a new air-handling system.

## ③ Prevent radiant heat

Radiant heat is absorbed from sunlight and can be transmitted through roofs and windows into the home. Pfeiffer advises using roof overhangs, awnings or planting trees and landscaping to shade west-facing windows to prevent the sun's rays from hitting the windows directly. Thermal drapes and window coverings can also deflect heat from sunny rooms. Radiant barriers in an attic can prevent heat from the roof from transferring to the attic floor and warming the rest of the house in the summer, saving money on cooling bills.

## ④ Add insulation

Adding insulation to a home's attic, basement, walls or crawl spaces will improve



With good planning, adding insulation to your home can be a successful DIY project.

energy efficiency. Pfeiffer says that optimal roofing materials combined with shade will prevent radiant heat from leaking into the home in the first place. Sealing basements and crawl spaces and wrapping your water heater in a thermal blanket also improve energy efficiency.

## ⑤ Upgrade lighting

Efficient lighting and lighter colors are key considerations when adding a home office or hobby space.

Replace lightbulbs with energy-efficient CFLs or LEDs to decrease energy consumption. An Energy-Star qualified CFL uses about one-fourth of the energy and lasts 10 times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs, and Energy-Star-qualified LEDs last 15 to 25 times longer. Light fixtures should hang close to the work or hobby space without getting in the way.

"The color of the horizontal reflecting surfaces in the room makes a big difference in how much energy you use," Pfeiffer says. "You need about three times as much lighting if you've got dark countertops compared to light-colored countertops."

## ⑥ Take additional steps to reduce demand

Once you've invested some time and a little money into making basic improvements, Pfeiffer advises implementing additional energy-saving measures. Replacing older appliances and windows with ENERGY STAR®-rated and e-coated products will save energy over the lifetime of your home. Solar panels can help you create your power, but they won't have as big of an impact unless you first address your energy demands.

"Before you go to the sexy things like solar on the roof, or things that you can talk about at a cocktail party, let's reduce the demand of energy first," Pfeiffer says.

## Make safety a priority with home improvement projects

Rewiring your lights and adding new electrical systems to your home are complex and hazardous tasks that are best left in the hands of a licensed electrician.

Replacing old electrical outlets with ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets, while not a cost-saving improvement, is a necessary safety upgrade for outlets around water. GFCIs protect against shocks by breaking the flow of electrical current if they detect a fault. They are required in new construction, but the Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates 40 million homes do not have these lifesaving outlets in all "wet" rooms.

In addition, consider having an arc-fault circuit interrupter (AFCI) breaker professionally installed. AFCIs protect against fire-causing arcing that is commonly caused by damaged or worn wiring. ⚡

# Indoor and outdoor home improvement projects



## Take it outside: Prepping for a deck

When planning an outdoor project like a deck, an additional dwelling unit, a home office or even a treehouse, review local building codes before hammering a single nail. Jim Dulley, a mechanical engineer and energy efficiency author, warns against cutting any corners that might affect the long-term safety of your project.

Dulley recommends composite decking material like Trex for decks and other outdoor projects because it will hold up longer to the elements and require less maintenance. “It’s easy to work with, exactly like you would with wood,” Dulley says.

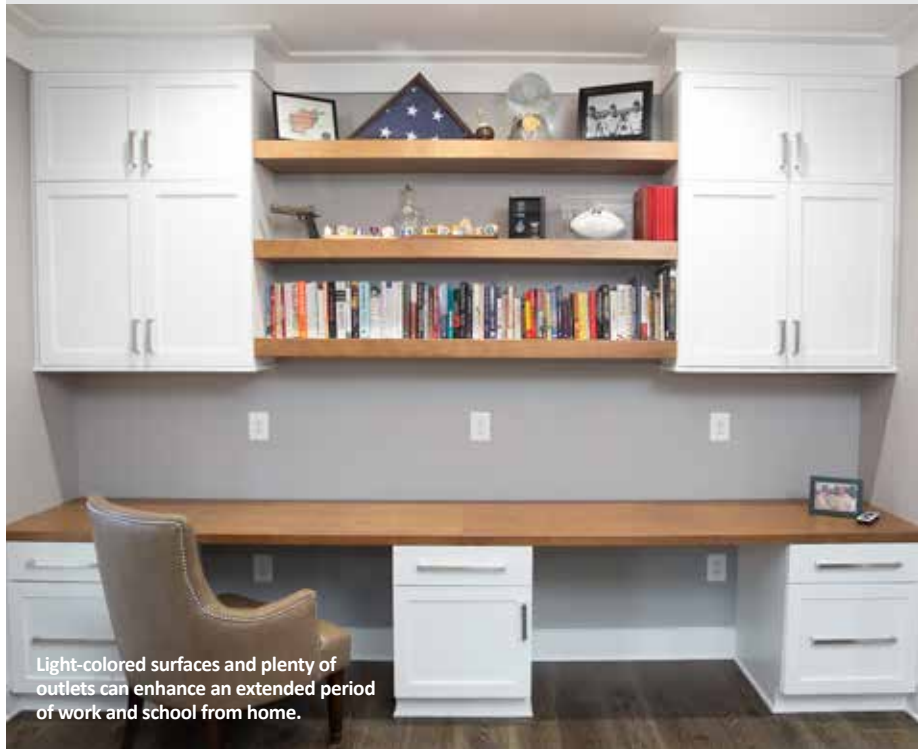
Planning is essential before starting the assembly of a project. Cut the pieces out and lay them out first. Wearing safety glasses and an N95 mask or respirator is also essential for cutting wood, stone or composite material.

“The silica in stone and the sawdust from sanding can be just as bad as asbestos for your lungs,” Dulley says.

If any project is outside of your DIY wheelhouse, HomeAdvisor’s Mischa Fisher advises hiring a competent contractor. “The first, second and third piece of advice is make sure you get a really good pro,” he says. “If a pro charges 20% more but you get double the life span out of your project, you’ve now halved the cost of your project.” ⚡



## Get to work: Planning a home office for optimal productivity



Light-colored surfaces and plenty of outlets can enhance an extended period of work and school from home.

Millennials are creating home offices at a rate three or four times higher than baby boomers. Boomers are often in larger homes that might already have a dedicated workspace or are close to retirement.

When owners upgrade their current home office, they tend to spend a larger percentage of the budget on improved infrastructure. Such improvements include enhancing a home Wi-Fi network’s connection speed to accommodate telecommuting and distance learning.

If you suddenly have four people in the house trying to connect to the same Wi-Fi signal, the quality of the network connection is more

important. Running a physical cable from a wireless access point to your modem and router will work much better than so-called mesh networks or Wi-Fi repeaters, which use a lot of bandwidth to connect to the original router.

If videoconferences are part of your daily routine, home office sound upgrades might be necessary. Powered computer speakers are popular in many areas. They provide a higher-quality sound than the desktop speakers that were popular 10 to 20 years ago. A good quality pair of noise-canceling headphones can also help manage a houseful of distractions while working and schooling from home. ⚡

# Manternach family history sparks gravestone restoration

BY DANIEL CHARLAND

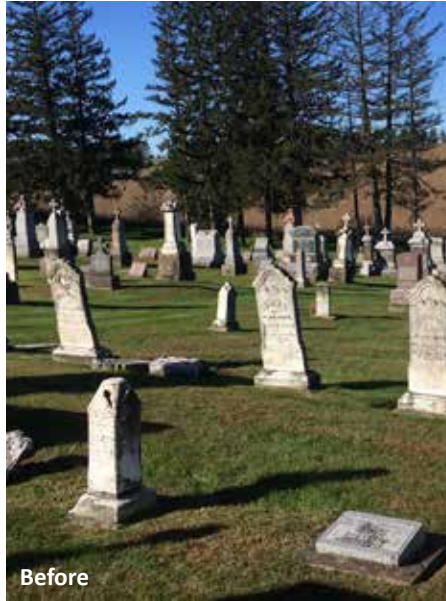
Five old limestone gravestones have recently been restored at St. Mary's Cemetery in Cascade. These stones mark the burial sites of members of the May family who died in 1874, and their restoration was arranged by Gene Manternach, a distant relation who felt a connection while researching his ancestry.

"It has a lot to do with my search for family history," Manternach says. "When I was young, my dad told me that my great-grandparents settled the farm that I now own. It was originally the May farm. Searching through my ancestors, I discovered that my great-grandmother's mother died when she wasn't even a year old. Her father remarried, probably within a year of it, and he had another child with his second wife. I discovered that this great-great-aunt of mine married the oldest May brother, so it wasn't a direct relation."

Manternach says that the story of the May family is a sad one of sickness, as many of the May children died of smallpox when they were young.

"My great-grandmother's half-sister married the oldest son of the May family who wasn't there when smallpox hit, which is why he survived," Manternach explains. "The kids started dying, and it had to be something like smallpox because my dad said that when they died, someone had to wrap them in a blanket and pass their bodies through an open window because nobody would come into the house. From what I understand, these bodies were taken directly to the cemetery to be buried. I don't know if they had a box or anything because they had to be buried right away with no service."

He adds, "These stones are very close to my great-grandparents, and I'd noticed they were in sad shape for some time, but when I discovered this terrible story, it got to me. I just



couldn't imagine in my heart and mind what was going through the minds of the parents and kids as their brothers and sisters were dying right in front of them."

Manternach decided to help restore the stones and inquired with the cemetery on how it could be done. He spent the next couple of years doing periodic search to find people he could hire with the proper certifications to work on the stones. Eventually, he found the Monticello Monument Company and hired Pam Kraus to do the stonework restoration. Concrete restoration of the stone bases was arranged through Tom Connolly of Connolly Construction.

"We met at the cemetery around midyear, and I showed him what I wanted to be done. A month or two later he sent me a price. Pam had already removed the stones to a shop to start working on them, so he just had to pour the new concrete slab. The cemetery let Pam use the maintenance shop to work on the stones, because, out of the five, two were broken and she had to repair the breaks. The others were leaning



pretty hard," he says.

Manternach adds that he has learned in this process that families have a greater responsibility to maintain their gravestones than they often realize, as the perpetual care department of the cemetery only mows the grass and doesn't have the resources for stone restoration.

He intends to continue restoring other old stones from the May family in the cemetery and wishes to encourage other families to take care of their stones as well. ⚡

Article and photos reprinted with permission from the Cascade (Iowa) Pioneer/Daniel Charland, author.

**Editor's Note:** Concern for Community is a fundamental cooperative principle. It's a philosophy that guides your local electric co-op and how directors, employees and members support their areas. Gene Manternach, featured in this article, is a director representing Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative and Central Iowa Power Cooperative. To share a community story with us, email: [editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com](mailto:editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com)

# New contest shines the light on community volunteers



Iowa's electric cooperatives are excited to announce a new statewide contest, which celebrates our cooperative commitment to community. Called **Shine the Light**, the contest will accept nominations in June and award three winners with a \$1,500 check to their local charity or community organization.

"We're excited to launch this cooperative effort to shine the light on local volunteers," says Erin Campbell, director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. "So many people throughout the areas served by Iowa's electric cooperatives deserve to be recognized for making a positive impact."

Sponsored by the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa, the Shine the Light contest will accept contest entries online during the

month of June. The three winners will be announced during the Iowa State Fair in August. In addition to receiving a \$1,500 donation for their charity or nonprofit of choice, the winners will also be featured in the September issue of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine.

### How to nominate

Member-consumers and employees of Iowa's electric cooperatives are eligible to nominate local volunteers. If you receive electricity from an electric cooperative in Iowa, you're a co-op member-consumer and invited to nominate someone who is making a positive impact in the community. The volunteer being nominated does not need to be a co-op member-consumer. Minors may be nominated with consent from their parents or legal guardians. ⚡

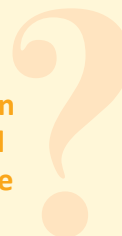
### Step 1:

Go to [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) from June 1-30 to make a nomination and to review the contest rules.

### Step 2:

As a nominator, provide your contact information and answer the following question in 500 words or less.

**How has your nominee made a positive difference in the community, and why do they deserve to be recognized?**



# Gardening genes don't grow here

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

Once spring quits messing around and gets into high gear, all those garden-minded folks will be out staking, planting and cleaning out old beds. I have great respect for them. They are feeding their families and their neighborhoods. They are enjoying nature and providing beautiful bouquets.

I do not appear able to scale their ranks.

## Skipped by the gardening gene

Somehow the gardening gene skipped me. My grandparents had lovely spreads beside their houses. My mother's flower garden includes heirloom blooms from her great-grandmother. My dad enjoys planting a few beans and peppers. Together, they can and freeze apples, pears and peaches. My uncle, for many years, owned a huge truck farm and sold at markets all over central Iowa.

I have some irises in front of my house.

Oh, it's not that I didn't try. When we moved into our present home 20 years ago, I was determined to have a little bed behind our house. It was a gush of optimism – new home, fresh dreams of the Becky Home-Ecky in me coming out. Even then, I'm not sure what made me think it would work. When Kent and I lived in Pammel Court at Iowa State University, we rented a small garden allotment from the university. Despite a brave start, the result was a complete disaster, with the rabbits eating most of what we had grown. In retrospect, I think we were the trashy allotment, the one the neighbors despaired of. We didn't renew the next year.

## Putting faith in peas and zinnias

However, going forward, I bravely put my faith in pea pods and zinnias. My 15-by-15 foot garden seemed so



small when I started. I'd be able to fill it up immediately! That was before I reckoned with our property's extreme clay soil. I clawed the seeds into the ground where they stayed, a pathetic patch of doomed dreams and a real pain to mow around. In desperation, I put out some mint plants, which immediately took over the entire area. Even today, when I mow, the scent of chocolate mint wafts up.

Over the years, I've half-heartedly tried a few things. Tulip bulbs were dug up by the voles and squirrels in the area. My dependence on perennials and thinking they'll come back every year, and I won't have to do anything, met a quick death when they bloomed one year and refused to, well, perennial. The weeds in my little

flower patch quickly get ahead of me unless I'm incredibly determined. My one glory are my irises, which seem to like our difficult soil and my glibly negligent care.

I have resigned myself to being the broken link in a family line of green thumbs, although that trait seems to have passed itself to my middle son, who has a new sunroom full of plants and a yard with lots of bulbs that seem undisturbed by wildlife, neighbor dogs or little kids.

I hope things work out for him. If not, I'll lend him a few irises. ⚡

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Valerie Van Kooten is a writer from Pella who loves living in the country and telling its stories. She and her husband Kent have three married sons, two incredibly adorable grandsons and a lovely granddaughter.



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