



Chariton Valley  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
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JANUARY 2022

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**CVEC assists GOLF22  
with business loan**

**Energy efficiency  
made easy**

**Slow cooker  
recipes**

**CVEC member-consumers to receive January bill credit ► See Page 4**



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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Chip Doolittle, a Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could win \$100!

# THANK YOU FOR STEADFAST VISION AND SUPPORT

BY RAND FISHER



The opportunity to author this statewide perspective was a timely invitation. I couldn't say no to the chance to offer a final commentary, and most importantly,

share my thanks and appreciation for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' support in my service as president of the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) these past 25 years.

## Crisis brings leadership

In the early 1980s, a gut-wrenching recession grabbed ahold of the Midwest. As farmers faced foreclosures, factories closed their doors and entire communities struggled, Iowa rural electric cooperative leaders came together to fashion plans for recovery and a brighter future.

By 1985, IADG was established with a mission of restoring hope, fostering investment, creating new jobs and enhancing community vitality. United in purpose, Iowa cooperatives committed to becoming leaders in economic development.

Following a crisis, individuals and organizations often revert to the status quo. They forget, or worse yet, give up on the investments and commitments that led them onward and upward. Fortunately, cooperative leaders are different. They take measured steps and then double down on what works and serves the best interests of their members.

## A 25-year long blessing

IADG was well-established and its economic development leadership and accomplishments were highly regarded by 1997. The organization was also amid its first executive transition. During the process, I received a call encouraging me to

consider becoming a candidate to lead the organization forward. Apparently, there were some rural electric cooperative leaders that felt my familiarity with business and community development, government and utilities might be a good fit.

I feel so fortunate for my selection 25 years ago. The opportunity to lead the efforts, services and support Iowa rural utilities make in advancing economic development for our state has been a true blessing.

## Cooperative vision creates success

Economic development participation and engagement don't come without risk. It often draws naysayers and skeptics and always comes with an abundance of public scrutiny. Thankfully, the investment that Iowa cooperatives have made in economic development has been rewarded by adding and diversifying power sales, welcoming new members and helping the communities they serve to revitalize and prosper.

During my tenure at IADG, cooperative leaders have held steadfast to their values of "cooperation among cooperatives" and "commitment to community." They have continued working together, creating new partnerships and a rich toolkit for continued business and community development success.

Change and transition are once again underway at IADG. The board of directors has chosen Bruce Nuzum, an IADG veteran, as the new president and CEO. He is well prepared with a rich skillset and capacity for hard work. His background and experience will allow him to hit the ground running. He also has a tremendous team to help him. Saying farewell to IADG stakeholders has been made easier by his selection.

Please accept my thanks, gratitude and best wishes for all you have made possible. Most of all, please remain committed to economic development.

*Rand Fisher is the president of the Iowa Area Development Group. He will retire on Jan. 31.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

# Win a Fitbit Versa 2!



Start the new year in style and by tracking your fitness activity. The Fitbit Versa 2™ health and fitness smartwatch includes a Daily Readiness Score, Alexa Built-in, sleep tools and more. The winner can select from three colors – Black/Carbon Aluminum, Stone/Mist Grey Aluminum or Petal/Copper Rose Aluminum.

## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Jan. 31, 2022. 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 \$100 gift card from the November issue was Debra Martin from Access Energy Cooperative.

# LET'S CONNECT

BY LEILANI TODD



When we say that we live in a “connected” world, most of us think about technology, like our smartphones and other devices and gadgets. But

when you are a member of an electric cooperative (that’s you!), there is so much more to being part of our connected cooperative community.

As a member of Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC), you help power good in our local communities through initiatives like Operation Round Up, food and toy drives, and other efforts that help the most vulnerable in our communities.

We depend on you because you power our success, and when CVEC does well, the communities we serve thrive because we are all connected.

## Connect with our programs and services

We greatly value our connection to you, the members we serve. And we would like to help you maximize the value you get from CVEC through a variety of programs, products and services that we offer our members. For example, we can help you save money on your energy bill through our energy audit program and our energy efficiency rebate program.

When you download our MYCVEC app, you can monitor and manage your home energy use, pay your bill online and access a menu of additional options for potential savings and more. You can also sign up for text alerts and receive advance notices on outage and restoration information, billing updates and changes to CVEC event details.

## Join us on social media

When you follow CVEC on social media, you can stay up to date on power restoration efforts, tree trimming planning, co-op director elections, giveaways and more. You will also see photos of our line crews in action and our employees helping with community service projects – and who doesn’t enjoy seeing good things happening in our community!

## Update your contact information

By connecting with us, you can get real-time updates from your co-op.

That is why we want to make sure we have your most current contact information on hand. If we cannot connect with you on these platforms or in person, you could miss out on potential savings or important information.

CVEC relies on data for nearly every aspect of our operations, and up-to-date contact information from our members helps ensure that we can provide the highest level of service that you expect and deserve.

We hope you will connect with us whenever and wherever you can, no matter if that means attending our annual meeting, providing feedback on a recent visit or call with our employees, or simply downloading our app.

CVEC exists to serve our members, and when we are better connected to you and our local communities, we are better prepared to answer the call.

To update your contact information or learn more about co-op products and services that can help you save, visit [www.cvrec.com](http://www.cvrec.com), call 641-932-7126 or stop by our office at 2090 Highway 5 in Albion.

We look forward to connecting with you!

*Leilani Todd is the CEO/general manager of Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative.*

## THANK YOU FOR BEING A VALUED MEMBER

As a member of a not-for-profit rural electric cooperative, you share in the profits or margins that remain after all expenses and/or reserves are paid. Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative is thrilled to pass on a portion of the 2021 margins by providing a 40% billing credit on your January bill. The amount credited to our members totaled \$309,668.00.

The exact credit for each cooperative member is based on the amount of kWh used during the month of December 2021. This bill credit will be reflected on a separate line item on your monthly statement.

Our resolution to you this year, and always, is to provide reliable service, competitive rates, member focus and community enrichment. We are here for YOU, our members!

**Thank you for being a valued member!**



Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



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# VICTORIAN STROLL



Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) once again participated in Albia's Victorian Stroll, demonstrating the Cooperative Principle No. 7 – Concern for Community. This year's window theme was "Christmas Magic." We also refurbished 100 old light bulbs from streetlight change outs and transformed them into one-of-a-kind Christmas ornaments.

We sold a total of 76 light bulbs on the day of Victorian Stroll. We are hopeful to sell the remaining 24 bulbs and be able to make a \$1,000 donation to the Albia Victorian Stroll.



# GIVING BACK

Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative volunteered to ring bells for Salvation Army and the Albia Ministerial Association the second Friday in December. It was a rewarding and worthwhile project, and we are happy that we could give back to our community!



# MAKING DOLLARS AND SENSE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY

BY PAUL WESSLUND

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, ENERGY STAR®-rated appliances can save you 10% to 50% of the energy required for standard models that don't receive the ENERGY STAR® sticker.



The term “energy efficiency” can cause confusion. Some see it as a way to a cleaner environment. Others see extra expense and inconvenience. Sorting out those views gets even more complicated as technology gives us a dizzying array of choices for using electricity, from smart thermostats to varieties of light bulbs.

The basic idea of energy efficiency is simple – use less energy to do the same amount of work, which can save you money on your electric bills.

Here’s where it starts getting confusing. Sometimes you have to pay more for something that’s considered energy efficient. It costs more upfront but actually saves money in the long run. That may sound illogical at first, like the old phrase, “You have to spend money to make money.” But it makes sense after you think about it for a minute. Most moneymaking projects require an initial upfront investment, whether it’s a factory or a lemonade stand.

### **Pay a little now, save a lot later**

From computers to major appliances, manufacturers are increasing the energy efficiency of their products. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), ENERGY STAR®-rated appliances can save you 10% to 50% of the energy required for standard models that don’t receive the ENERGY STAR sticker. Considering most major appliances last 10 years, those savings can stack up over time.

There’s even more savings in store if you’re replacing older appliances that weren’t built with today’s efficiency standards in mind. Improvements in refrigerators are cutting their energy

use in half about every 15 years. So, if your fridge is more than 20 years old, replacing it with a new high-efficiency model could save you \$300 in operating costs over the next five years.

Smart power strips also show how spending now on efficiency can make money in the future. Keeping your phone charger and other electronic devices plugged in can consume electricity even after they’re fully charged or not in use. A smart power strip cuts off the electricity once charging is complete. A smart strip costs about \$40 and, depending on your electric rates and how much charging you do, it could save as much as \$40 a year on your electric bills.

Another example of returns on energy efficiency investments comes from the world of real estate. Realtors will be the first to tell you that energy efficiency sells houses. If you’re in the market to sell, spending a little extra on insulation and efficient appliances increases resale value.

### **Save \$200 a year on light bulbs**

Light bulbs offer the most dramatic story of efficiency technology improvements. By spending \$5 to \$10 on an LED bulb (compared to about \$1 for an old incandescent), you get a product that uses 75% less electricity and, incidentally, can last 20 years compared to about a year lifespan for an incandescent bulb. The DOE estimates the average home could save more than \$200 a year by replacing incandescent bulbs with LEDs.

Maybe the best news of all is that as efficient products improve and gain



popularity, they’re not always more expensive. Many cheaper appliance models have similar annual operating costs compared with the pricier versions.

If you’re interested in turning energy efficiency into dollars, be sure you know what you want from your energy use and do your homework. Products come with a wide range of features that cost extra and may actually be less efficient. For example, do you want a refrigerator that offers the best efficiency, or do you want to pay more for a less-efficient model that has an ice dispenser in the door?

Don’t hesitate to ask for help. Your local electric co-op has energy experts who can tell you how to make the best use of electricity. To compare efficiency among appliances, look for the yellow Energy Guide label, which shows information like estimated annual operating costs. Explore the [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov) website for online calculators and additional resources that can help you turn efficiency data into real savings on your energy bills.

*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.*



Efficiency improvements in refrigerators are cutting their energy use in half about every 15 years. If your fridge is more than 20 years old, replacing it with a new high-efficiency model could save you \$300 in operating costs over the next five years.



Photos: Whirlpool

# SLOW COOKER RECIPES

## EASY BEEF STEW

- 2 pounds stew meat
- 1 26-ounce can tomato soup
- 1 soup can water
- ½ onion, chopped
- 3 large carrots, sliced
- 3-4 potatoes, peeled and diced
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon vinegar

Place all ingredients in slow cooker for 5-6 hours on high, or 6-8 hours on medium. You can substitute 1½ pounds browned ground beef, 1-2 tablespoons cooking wine and a few shakes of Worcestershire sauce in place of stew meat; or canned carrots and potatoes in place of fresh, adding canned items toward the end of cooking time.

LeAnn Lamaak • Britt • Prairie Energy Cooperative

## SLOW COOKER SPAGHETTI SAUCE

- ½ pound ground beef
- ½ pound ground sausage
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1-3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 28-ounce can chopped tomatoes
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 6-ounce can tomato paste
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

In large skillet, brown the beef and sausage over medium-high heat with onion and garlic until cooked through. Drain grease if necessary. Combine in slow cooker with the rest of the ingredients, and cook on low for 6-8 hours. Serves 8

Theresa Hays • Redfield  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative

## MANGO CURRIED CHICKEN

- 1 onion, sliced
- 4 frozen chicken breasts (2 pounds)
- 1 mango, cubed or 1½ cups frozen mango cubes
- 1½ cups cubed butternut squash, frozen works best
- 1 14-ounce can coconut milk
- 1 4-ounce jar red curry paste
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 5-ounce bag fresh spinach or kale
- 2 cups cooked rice, wild rice works well
- 1 skinless, seedless roasted red pepper, diced
- 2-3 limes, cut in half

Spread slow cooker with desired oil. Layer floor of slow cooker with onion slices. Layer frozen chicken breasts over onion slices. Place mango (if using fresh, add core for flavor) and squash on top of chicken. In a separate container, stir together coconut milk, curry paste, salt, ginger and turmeric then pour over slow cooker mixture. Cover slow cooker and cook on high for 4 hours or low for 6-8 hours. Using two forks, shred chicken. To serve: Fill bowls with spinach or kale. Using an ice cream scoop, place rice on top of spinach. Pour chicken mixture over rice and add red pepper to the top. Squeeze lime over all. Serves 4-6

Anita Doughty • Ankeny • Consumers Energy



## CABBAGE-HAMBURGER SOUP

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 1 small head cabbage, chopped
- 2 14.5-ounce cans diced tomatoes
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- ½ cup water
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon Greek seasoning

Sauté onions in oil; add ground beef and cook until just done. Add garlic and simmer 1-2 minutes. Add hamburger mixture and remaining ingredients into slow cooker. Cook on low for 4-6 hours, on high for 2-4 hours, or until desired tenderness. The longer it stews, the tastier it is! *Serves 8-12*

Ruthann Murphy • Dougherty  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

## CHILI CON CARNE

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ¾ cup green pepper, chopped
- 1 16-ounce can tomatoes, cut
- 1 16-ounce can dark red kidney beans, drained
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- ½ teaspoon dried basil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

In a skillet, cook beef, onion and garlic until the meat is browned. Drain off fat. Put mixture in slow cooker, stir in green pepper, undrained tomatoes, beans, tomato sauce, chili powder, basil, salt and pepper. Cover and cook on low setting for 8-10 hours. *Serves 4-6*

Carole Ristau • Eagle Grove  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

## CHILI FOR BAKED POTATOES

- 2 pounds hamburger
- 2 cans chili style beans
- 1 15-ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- water

Brown hamburger and drain. Put all ingredients in slow cooker and cook all day on low. Add water as needed.

Leora Van Middendorp • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## EASY SLOW COOKER CHICKEN TORTILLA

- 3-4 boneless chicken breasts
- 16 ounces salsa
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 can chunk pineapple, optional
- tortillas, optional
- shredded cheese, optional
- sour cream, optional

Put chicken, salsa, beans, corn and pineapple in slow cooker on low for 8 hours, then shred chicken with two forks. This is good by itself, or on a tortilla shell rolled up with shredded cheese and sour cream toppings.

Cynthia Halbmaier • Albia  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## FANTASTIC POT ROAST

- 2 2-pound boneless beef chuck roasts
- 1 envelope ranch salad dressing mix
- 1 envelope Italian salad dressing mix
- 1 envelope brown gravy mix
- water
- flour, optional for gravy

Place roasts in a 5-quart slow cooker. Combine dressing mixes and gravy mix in a small bowl. Stir in ½ cup water then pour over meat. Cover and cook on high for 5-6 hours, or on low for 7-8 hours, or until tender. Leftover juices make a good gravy. First, strain and skim fat from the juices. Add 3 tablespoons flour mixed into ½ cup cold water for each cup of juice. Bring gravy to a boil, stirring constantly until thickened. *Serves 12-15*

Elaine Knoblock • Larchwood  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

### WANTED:

## EGG SALAD, CASSEROLE AND QUICHE RECIPES

### THE REWARD:

**\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is Jan. 31, 2022**

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@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

**MAIL: Recipes**

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# 5 TIPS FOR SAVING ENERGY AND MONEY THIS YEAR

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

# 1

Hard surfaces feel colder than soft surfaces. Create coziness to add warmth.

Welcome in the new year by resolving to save energy and money! You don't need a lot of money to save on your energy bills. There are many low-cost, simple adjustments you can make in your home, whether you rent or own.

We all want to afford being comfortable in our homes. If you're having trouble paying your energy bills, you are not alone. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports 1 in 3 households face challenges meeting their energy needs.

Decreasing monthly bills and being more efficient at home is something we all should practice. Here are some budget-friendly energy efficiency tips targeting one of the biggest energy users in the home: the heating system. Heating and cooling account for nearly half of a U.S. home's energy consumption.



## Add coziness to your home

One way you can feel warmer in your home without turning up the thermostat is by making your home cozy.

The way our bodies perceive the temperature of a room is based more on the surfaces in the room than the air temperature. In general, harder surfaces feel colder. For example, your tile floor will feel cooler than your fabric sofa.

Cold floors in a room make us feel colder. Adding an area rug to a hard-surface floor can make us feel warmer, even with the same setting on the thermostat.

The same goes for windows. Windows are typically the least-insulated surface in a room and can feel cold in winter months. Adding or closing curtains can help the room feel warmer.



## Check your windows

Make sure your windows are closed and locked. Locking windows pulls the sashes tighter together, reducing gaps that allow air to flow through and cause drafts. If your sash locks don't form a tight fit, adjust them or add weatherstripping.

There's a variety of window weatherstripping products available for less than \$20. Most are simple to install and only require tools you most likely already have around the house, such as scissors and a tape measure.

Some are more permanent solutions, and some are intended to be used for one heating season and then removed. Temporary solutions, such as caulk strips, putty, pull-and-peel caulking or window insulation films, can be used if you rent your home and can't make permanent changes.

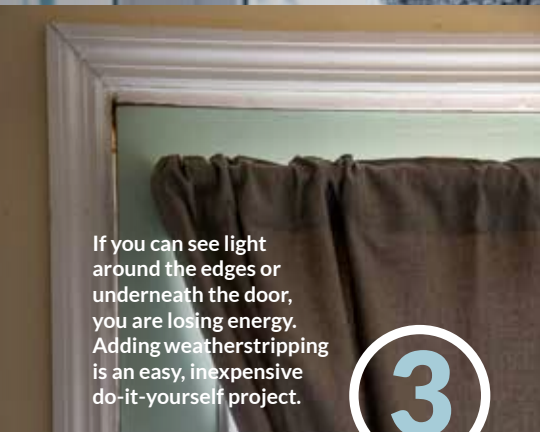




Make sure your windows are closed and locked to reduce gaps that allow air to flow through and cause drafts.



Weatherstripping around windows is a low-cost, easy-to-install solution to ensure warm air does not escape from your home.



If you can see light around the edges or underneath the door, you are losing energy. Adding weatherstripping is an easy, inexpensive do-it-yourself project.



Close a wood-burning fireplace damper when not in use.



Keep your feet warmer by wearing slippers.



### Seal your doors

Weatherstripping doors is an easy do-it-yourself project. Make sure your doors seal tightly and don't allow drafts to pass through around the edges or under the door.

Make sure any doors leading to an unheated space – outside or into a garage – are sealed tightly. If you can see light around the edges or underneath the door, or feel air movement when the door is closed, you know you are losing energy.

Because doors need to open and close easily, expect to do a bit of adjusting after installing weatherstripping. If weatherstripping isn't installed correctly, it can make the door hard to close. Making it too loose defeats the purpose. You need to get it just right.



### Close the damper

If you have a fireplace, make sure the damper is completely closed when not using it. Leaving the damper open is like leaving a window open – it's just harder to see. The air you just paid to heat your home will go right out the chimney.

The only exception is some gas fireplaces need to remain open for gas fumes to exit the home. If you have a gas fireplace, check the owner's manual for more information on the damper position.



### Layer up

Dressing for the season prevents going overboard on your energy use. It can be tempting to adjust the thermostat to increase your comfort. Putting on a sweater or comfy sweatshirt can have the same comfort impact without increasing your energy use. Slippers can be a big help, too, especially when your feet touch a cold floor.

*Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.*

**The next time you consider turning up the thermostat a few degrees, try some of these tips first to stay warm and leave increased energy bills out in the cold.**

## INVESTING IN YOUR ELECTRIC SYSTEM

For Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) linemen, flame-resistant (FR) clothing is an essential type of personal protective equipment (PPE) used every day. High-quality, specially engineered FR garments protect our linemen from burns caused by flash fires, electric arcs and combustible dust – allowing them to tackle potentially hazardous tasks.

FR clothing is any garment that has been specifically designed to protect the wearer from flames and thermal injury. FR clothing resists ignition and self-extinguishes once the source of the ignition is removed. This helps to prevent burns from both initial exposure to the flames and from residual heat transfer. However, it is important to note that FR does not mean fireproof, and all FR clothing will burn if it is heated for a long enough period of time.

The difference between everyday clothing and FR clothing is the fabric. To be considered flame resistant, a FR garment must undergo a complex and costly process using special fibers and/or treatment and rigorous testing before it reaches our linemen's hands.

CVEC supplies our linemen with quality FR ARC-Rated clothing to keep them safe while they are tackling even the most hazardous of tasks for our members!

**How much does it cost to clothe one lineman with FR clothing on a winter day? (Clothing items include pants, shirt, sweatshirt, bibs, coat and balaclava.)**

- A. \$500
- B. \$700
- C. \$900
- D. \$1,100

Answer: D

## CHARITON VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSISTS A NEW LOCAL BUSINESS



The Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) board of directors are pleased to join with a local bank in assisting Darin and Jeni Fisher with the opening of their new business, GOLF22 on the north side of the Albia square.

GOLF22 features two state-of-the-art golf simulators with more than 80 simulated golf courses. There is also great food and beverages to enjoy while in the climate-controlled atmosphere of the former Albia Brewery.

This new business project was completed with the help of CVEC's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awards funding for eligible projects through Rural Utilities Service (RUS) borrowers, such as CVEC. Chariton Valley Electric operates our RLF program for the economic advancement and overall



betterment of the communities we serve. These funds provide access to low-interest financing for projects where the cooperative serve as a conduit to fund programs in the communities we serve as they are repaid.

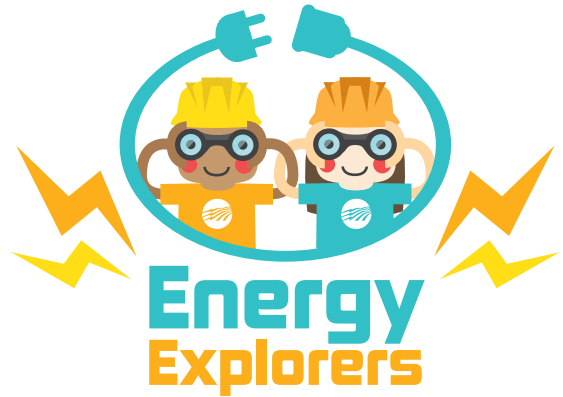
GOLF22 officially opened its doors on Dec. 4. CVEC congratulates the Fishers on their commitment to opening this exciting new social amenity in Albia!

For more information on REDLG or RLF loans, visit [www.cvrec.com](http://www.cvrec.com) or contact Tod Faris at 641-932-7126.

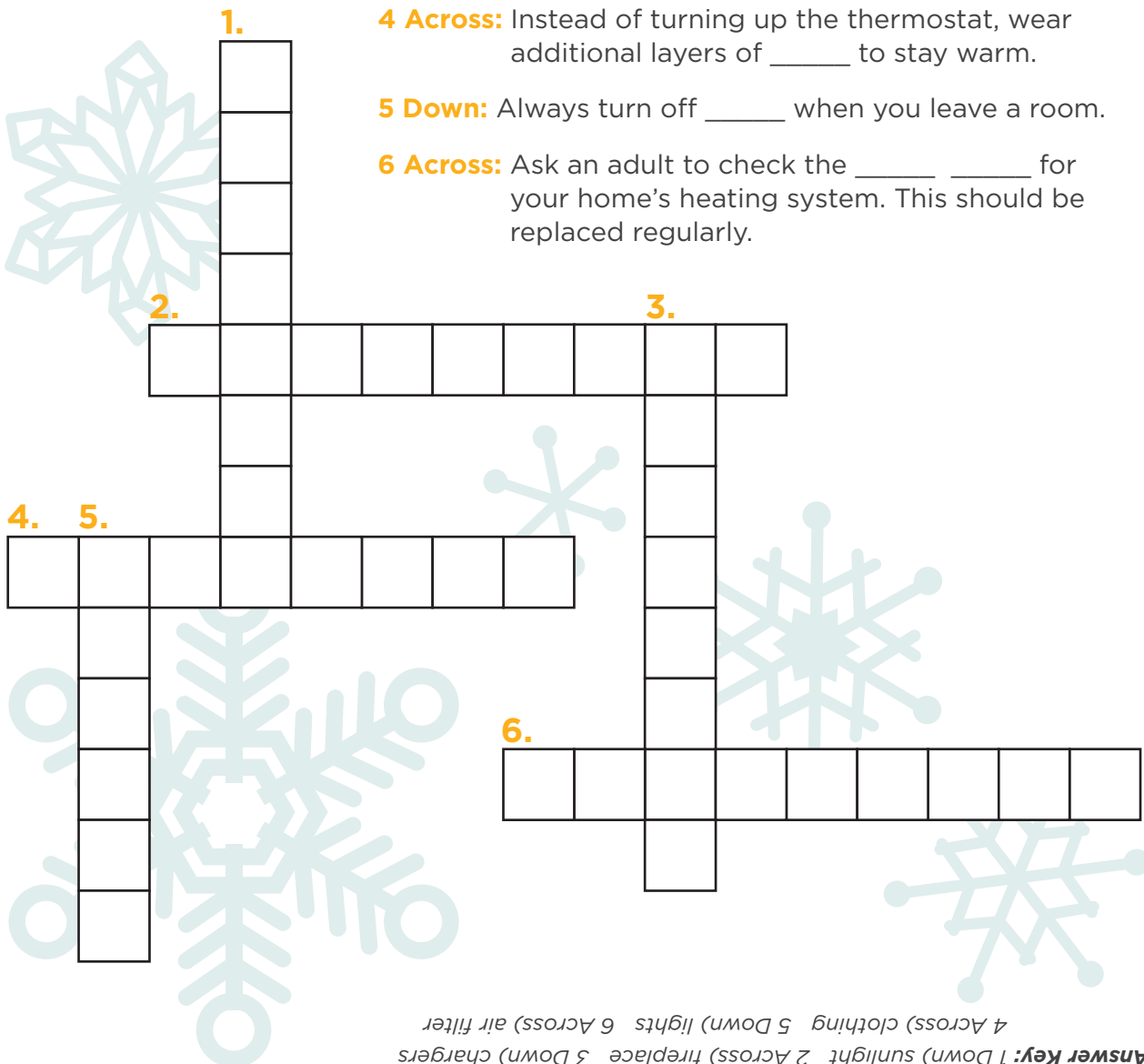


# WINTER ENERGY EFFICIENCY CROSSWORD

Did you know there are several ways you can fight the winter chill *and* save energy at home? Complete the crossword puzzle below to learn how to save energy during winter months.



- 1 Down:** Open curtains and blinds during the day to allow \_\_\_\_\_ in to warm your home.
- 2 Across:** If you have a \_\_\_\_\_ at home, ask an adult to close the flue when a fire is not burning.
- 3 Down:** Unplug phone and tablet \_\_\_\_\_ when they're not in use.



# IMPROVE SAFETY WITH SMOKE ALARMS AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR UPGRADES

BY DERRILL HOLLY

If that old smoke detector – discolored, stained with paint or years of household grime – could send you a message silently, it might say “please replace me.” Those lifesaving warning devices designed to alert us to smoke and fire were never meant to last forever.

## Replacing alarms

The National Fire Protection Association and Underwriters Laboratories suggests replacing smoke alarms every 10 years, reports Nicolette Nye, a public affairs specialist with the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Both organizations cite sensor degradation rates of 3% per year for their replacement recommendations.

“After 10 years, there would be a potential of a 30% failure rate,” says Nye, who also cited a CPSC recommendation that consumers look for smoke alarms rated or certified by Underwriters Laboratories designated by the symbol “UL” or the Electrical Testing Laboratories, marked with the “ETL” logo.

Both smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are designed with a timeframe or useful lifespan of 10 years, says Shawn Mahoney, a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) technical services engineer.

“Once they start to reach their end of life, consumers may notice alarm signals – typically a chirping sound that is either a low battery or an indication of the device’s end of life, meaning that it’s time the unit was replaced,” says Mahoney.

## Testing and replacing batteries

The NFPA not only recommends that batteries be replaced once a year, but also urges you to test the unit once a month as an added precaution against failure. Chirping, prompted by a drained battery will typically



Photo Source: Scott Van Osdel

stop within seven days and when that happens, the unit stops functioning.

“If you’re just waiting to hear the sound and not testing regularly, there’s a possibility that you’re going to miss it, especially if you have battery-only systems,” Mahoney says.

## Investing in safety

According to the CPSC, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors represent good investments in your family’s safety, says Nye.

“Consumers who have working smoke alarms in their homes die in fires at about half the rate of those who do not have alarms,” she says. “Install working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the home and outside

of sleeping areas. CO detectors are designed to sound the alert before carbon monoxide reaches life-threatening levels.”

## Updating for design and building codes

Design improvements are another great reason to consider replacing of older units. Modern smoke detectors use the best features of past popular models, including ionization, photoelectric and lithium-battery technologies.

Many states have upgraded building codes to require hardwired smoke alarms with battery backup power, and carbon monoxide detectors in all new residential construction.

As fire codes have evolved to require smoke alarms near cooking appliances, manufacturers have improved the technology. Mahoney says they can distinguish between an actual fire in the home and cooking fumes, reducing the incidence of nuisance alarms.

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Photo Source: Abi Begum



# NEW YEAR'S SLEDDING FAMILY TRADITION

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

For many years, my family hosted a giant sledding party on Jan. 1, weather permitting, of course. The last few years have not lent themselves well to our party, being brown holidays. But every year in December, we start talking about whether this will be the year we can hold it.

The party always takes place in a field with a hill on my parents' farm, about a half mile from our place. For obvious reasons, it's always better if it has been a soybean year opposed to a corn year – thumping over the submerged cornstalks can be a jolting experience.

Adjacent to the hill is a wooded spot protected in the side of a cliff. It is the perfect out-of-the-way place to have a fire. We call it the “cook spot.”

## **Impromptu party planning**

Most of our best parties are spontaneous. The day before, my sister will text and ask if the cook spot has any tables left, or have cows rubbed against them and destroyed the tables. My mom will report on whether a path to the hill has been bladed. I'll chime in with the status of my 30-cup coffee pot and whether it will perk one more year with the gallons of water needed to offer hot chocolate.

We'll put our respective spouses to work taking care of the above. We'll call and text other family members and a few friends to come around 2 p.m. on New Year's Day and to bring some snacks, sleds and lots of warm clothes. As they drift in, they'll bring their food offerings to the makeshift tables (plywood on sawhorses), and we'll drag stumps and logs to the fire to use as chairs.

## **A memorable ride**

My mom usually stays close to the roaring fire, keeping the water hot. Only once was she lured to foray down the hill with two other friends.



They each sat on the edge of a large inner tube and wound their feet around each other to stay in. The older boys gave them a hard push, and they careened down the hill, sliding up the bank at the bottom and tipping over into the creek.

“I tried to get out,” my mom says. “But our legs were too tightly tangled with each other.” The trio emerged with scratches and a slight concussion, but my mom maintains that the greatest indignity was hearing, as they flew down the hill, a kid yelling, “Mom, those old ladies are going to crash!”

One year, in a magical twist, the sun was dropping around 5 p.m. and it

started to snow – big flakes that you'd see in a Hollywood musical. We stood on the edge of the cook spot, watching the last of the silhouetted sledders make their way down the hill and then head to the woods to warm up.

Over the years there have been bruises and a few broken bones. But if we get a white New Year's this year, we'll introduce the tradition to the newest in the family.

**Bonus:** This year was a bean year.

*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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