

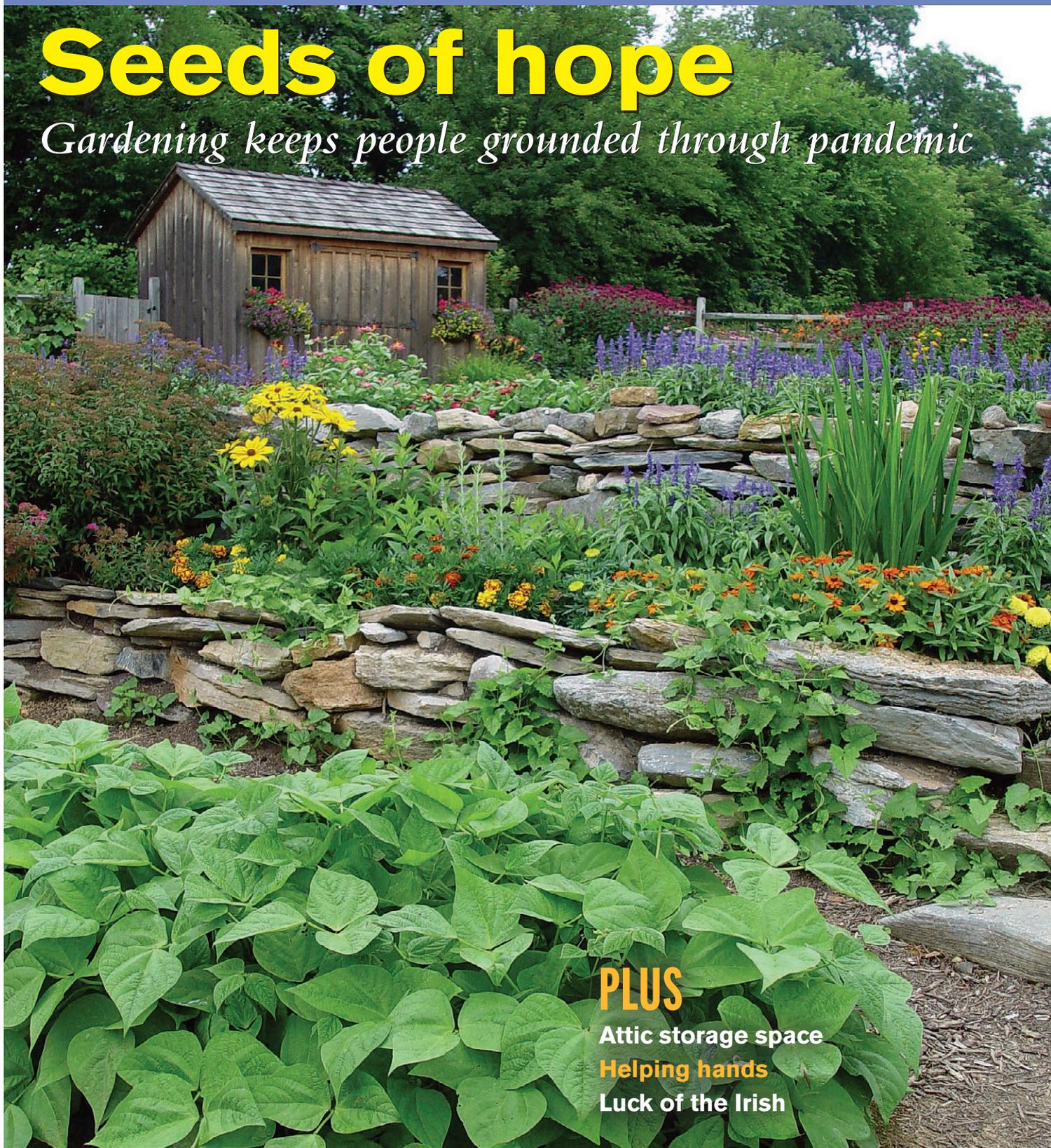
MARCH 2021

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### ON THE COVER

Gardens are an important retreat as well as a good cure for cabin fever.

This garden at the John and Susan Greenbaum residence in Carlisle, Pa., features vegetables, flowers, stone terraces and a wooden shed.

Photo by George Weigel



## News from across the Commonwealth

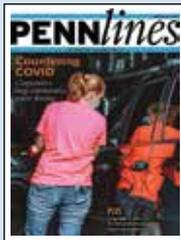
### READER RESPONSE

Dear Editor,  
I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed John Kasun's debut humor column, "Never pick a horse named Widow Maker,"

that appears in the February 2021 issue of Penn Lines. It was well written and I very much appreciate his sense of humor. I am already looking forward to his next column.

Please tell Mr. Kasun to keep up the good work!

James Jackson (Valley REC)



Dear Editor,  
If your goal with the picture depicted on page 8 of the February 2021 issue was to make folks think twice about getting the COVID-19 shot, you succeeded.

Look at the image:

- ▶ Does it really take two people to administer the inoculation?
- ▶ Does the recipient really need to contort themselves as shown?
- ▶ Is the needle really oriented the way shown?

Fortunately, I received the first dose prior to seeing this picture and the process at WellSpan Health in Gettysburg was quite different.

Jim Kane (Adams EC)



### Connect with Pennsylvania wildlife through livestreams

Many people enjoy watching wildlife in their natural habitat, but winter weather can make that difficult. How-

ever, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is offering four livestreams during the late winter/early spring season that allow viewers a chance to connect with wildlife round-the-clock from the comfort of their own homes.

They include:

- ▶ Black Bear Den Cam in Monroe County (this is the same location as the black bear den that was featured in 2019; it is not known if it is the same adult female bear that is hibernating under the cabin deck);
- ▶ Farm Country Eagle Cam that provides a bird's eye view into a long-established nest in a giant sycamore overlooking scenic farmland;
- ▶ Hanover Eagle Cam at Codorus State Park, which is back for its seventh year (viable eagle eggs typically hatch in mid- to late-March with the young fledging in June); and
- ▶ Snow Goose Cam located at the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area where viewers can watch the snow-goose migration, which typically peaks at the area from mid-February to mid-March.

All Pennsylvania Game Commission livestreams can be accessed through the agency's website at [pgc.pa.gov](http://pgc.pa.gov). The livestreams are a collaborative effort by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, HDOnTap and Comcast Business.

### USDA provides grant to fight spotted lanternfly

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced it is providing an additional \$1.5 million in grants to fight the spotted lanternfly invasion in Pennsylvania through the Plant Protection Act.

These funds will support projects

related to plant health and pest mitigation activities.

The spotted lanternfly, an invasive insect that feeds on the sap of more than 70 different types of plants, is considered to be an agricultural emergency, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. First spotted in Berks County, Pennsylvania, in 2014, it has been confirmed in 26 of Pennsylvania's counties, mostly in the southeastern and south central parts of the state, and several surrounding states.



### Erie falls in rankings for the snowiest city

In mid-January, Erie, Pa., ranked No. 1 in the Golden Snow Globe National Snow Contest for the snowiest U.S. city with a population of more than 100,000, but by mid-February, it had fallen to third place in the unscientific listing.

When released in mid-January, the contest showed Erie with 43.4 inches, 5.5 inches more than the next highest city, Buffalo, N.Y.

By Feb. 10, Erie's total snowfall for the winter had risen to 52.7, but that was behind both Worcester, Mass., at 63.9 inches and Buffalo, N.Y., at 58.3 inches.

Two other Pennsylvania cities made the mid-February "Top 10" as Pittsburgh ranked No. 6 with 48.4 inches and Allentown ranked No. 7 with 45.6 inches.

At the end of the 2019-2020 winter season, Erie ranked No. 2 in the same list, Pittsburgh came in at No. 6 and Allentown was No. 7, while Worcester, Mass., took the top spot. 🌧️

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# Recycling saves energy, money

*Find your way through the rules of recycling*

By Paul Wesslund

Can I recycle my mail with the stapled paper and plastic envelope windows? Do I need to break down cardboard boxes before putting them in the recycling bin? Or should I just give up on recycling because it's way too complicated?

Three of every five U.S. households have curbside recycling pickup, according to a study by the Sustainable Packaging Coalition. Another 14% have curbside service available but do not subscribe.

Reasons to recycle are both environmental and financial. Recycling 10 plastic bottles, for example, saves enough energy to power a laptop computer for more than 25 hours, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Recycling can also help out with your tax bill. Local governments pay for disposing home and office waste, traditionally by burying it in a landfill. But if some of that waste could be sold for reuse, the income would reduce the cost of the waste management program.

The list of recycling rules is long and complicated, but a way to help master them is to try three different types of thinking:

**Think like a sorter:** When your curbside bin gets emptied, it's taken to a Materials Recovery Facility where it is dumped onto a conveyor belt where workers pull off items that will gum up the next step in the process, a large screen that jiggles items into a different bin. Think about items that might cause problems with sorting.

**Think local:** There are about 300 Materials Recovery Facilities around the country, and many of them have different equipment, meaning every community has its own set of rules for what can be recycled.

Find out who handles recycling in



BILL SMITH

**RECYCLING IS BENEFICIAL TO ALL:** According to a study by the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, 14% of American households that have curbside recycling pickup do not participate.

your community, and they will have a list of what can be recycled. And of course, there's an app for that. Two popular apps are Recycle Coach and ReCollect. Just type in your ZIP code to learn how your local recycling program treats individual items.

**Think like an accountant:** You might be thinking, it sounds like I'm doing the work for the recycling program. And you are. You could just dump anything and everything in your recycling bin and let the workers sort it out. They would do that — for a price. You can help keep recycling costs low by following the rules.

Here are some of the most-wondered-about recycling rules:

- ▶ **Mail:** With one exception, all mail can go in the bin. Staples and plastic windows get sorted out by the machinery. The exception is magazines wrapped in plastic — that kind of shrink wrap is better handled by supermarkets, which specialize in recycling bags and other plastic “stretch wrap” around food, paper towels, and other products.
- ▶ **Food containers:** When you're done with the peanut butter jar, no need

to rinse it out. It can go right in the bin.

- ▶ **Cardboard boxes:** The only reason to break them down is to save space in your bin. They'll get well crushed in the truck that picks them up.
- ▶ **Pizza cartons:** Don't leave crusts or garlic butter containers in them, but recycling equipment can handle a greasy pizza box just fine.
- ▶ **Plastic bottle caps:** Screw the lid back on, and recycle both the bottle and cap.
- ▶ **Labels:** You don't need to remove them.
- ▶ **Plastic straws:** Can be recycled, but smaller items tend to fall off the conveyor or through the screen sorters and onto the floor, where they get swept up and hauled off to a normal landfill.

If you want to take the next step in recycling, think about the big environmental picture — the point is to reduce the waste from your home into the world. First, reduce — if you don't really need to buy something, don't buy it. Second, reuse — bags and wrapping paper, for example, can have more than one life.

Remember, recycling helps our environment but can also reduce the cost of local waste management programs as well as save energy. Check with your local waste management program to learn more about specific recycling rules in your own community. 🌱

*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. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.*

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# Seeds of hope

## *Gardening keeps people grounded through pandemic*

**P**ennsylvanians usually end up with “cabin fever” this time of year after months of being stuck inside in cold weather.

A year’s worth of COVID-19 restrictions on top of that has us more ready than ever to do something – anything – outside.

For many, that “anything” is gardening.

Fueled by the coronavirus that emerged last year at this time, some 16 to 18 million new gardeners took to the dirt in 2020, according to industry estimates.

Call it “soil therapy.”

“This has been a very tough time for most people,” says Dr. Kevin Kelly, a family physician with UPMC-Pinnacle

By George Weigel  
Penn Lines *Contributor*

in Dauphin County. “We’ve seen daily routines turned upside down with social distancing, working from home, loss of a job, food and supply shortages, lack of travel, and the possibility, or reality, of getting sick or losing a loved one.”

### **Soil therapy**

Dr. Kelly says that’s led to a significant increase in depression and weight gain, which has led to worsening diabetes, injuries, heart disease, and disrupted sleep.

An avid gardener as well as a physician, Dr. Kelly has been “prescribing”

SOIL THERAPY: Dr. Kevin Kelly, a family physician with UPMC-Pinnacle in Dauphin County, whose flower-filled front yard is shown here, prescribes gardening to patients as a way to alleviate stress and related physical ailments.

gardening to many of his patients in the past year.

“While this is anecdotal evidence,” he says, “I’ve seen a number of patients who took my advice lower their blood pressure, reduce their medications, improve their diabetes, sleep better, reduce the need for tranquilizers and cope better with the restrictions.”

Garden centers also heard how gardening became a sort of pandemic “antidote” for people in the past year.

“Time and time again, we heard people say they were tired of being cooped up, and they wanted to get

out and enjoy the outdoors,” says Veto Barziloski Sr., whose 88-year-old Tunkhannock-based Bennies Nurseries, a member of the Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, had one of its best years ever in 2020.

“Once we opened, we got slammed all spring,” said Caleb Barshinger, tree farm manager at Rockelman’s Nursery Garden Center and Heritage Tree Farm in York County and a member of Adams Electric Cooperative. “We’ve been in business since 1964, and I’d say we had a record year (in 2020), even with being cut short the first month or month-and-a-half.”

Businesses from seed companies to garden centers to landscapers all ended up with banner years in 2020 as stuck-at-home families retreated to their yards and took solace in a place that was safe and familiar.

“The whole green industry had a very strong year,” says Ted Ventre, chairman of the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association.

Dr. Kelly thinks it’s related to an innate connection to trees, plants and nature that becomes more pronounced in times of trouble.

“History has shown that when people are exposed to an illness that threatens their mortality or that of a loved one, we naturally turn toward nature, which has been there before us and rejuvenates itself yearly in the spring,” he says.

## Growth industry

The first inkling of a pandemic-related gardening surge last year came with edibles. Nudged by grocery shelves that weren’t always full last spring and a desire to avoid trips out, numerous newbies decided it was a good time to grow their own.

National Garden Bureau Executive Director Diane Blazek says online seed retailers doubled, tripled and even quadrupled sales. By late March a year ago, some overwhelmed seed-sellers temporarily stopped taking orders to catch up.

Bucks County’s W. Atlee Burpee Co. reported selling more seed packets

in 2020 than any year in its 143-year history.

Barshinger says Rockelman’s “sold a tremendous amount of vegetables – more than we’ve ever sold. There were a lot of first-time vegetable growers. It was nice that we could explain to them what to plant and how to do it. Then later we were getting pictures from people showing us how their gardens turned out. That was rewarding.”

The veggie surge was only the beginning.

Soon, demand spilled into ornamental seeds and plants, plus fertilizers, sprays, pots, and even compost and soil to build those new gardens.

“A lot of people were new to gardening, but it wasn’t just vegetable gardening,” says Barziloski. “We sold a lot of bedding plants, too. People were limited to where they could go because of COVID, so I think a lot of them thought, ‘Hey, I’m stuck at home, at least I’d like something nice to look at.’”

## Family time

The act of gardening itself is “therapeutic” to many people, Barziloski adds.

Besides the physical exercise, gardening is a “mental and emotional relief for people,” he says. “And it gets families involved. People had more time on their hands, and they were looking



GARDENING IS FUN: Mia Barziloski spends time gardening with her father, Veto Barziloski Jr., whose family owns Bennies Nurseries in Tunkhannock and a member of Claverack REC. Here, Mia is shown with tomato plants in her home garden.



PHOTOS BY GEORGE WEIGEL

**SAFE AND FUN:** Despite the pandemic, garden centers and the entire green industry had a banner year in 2020 as people turned to plants and gardening as a fun and “safe” activity.

to get their kids away from the cell-phones and tablets and to do something outdoors. My son has a 7-year-old girl, and she spent a lot of time outdoors working in the garden with her father. It got people outdoors and got them together.”

“You can only sit and look at TV for so long,” says Barshinger. “The kids were home, and the parents were off work, so a lot of families came in together. It was neat to see. The kids would say, ‘Hey, Mom. I like that. Can we plant it?’”

“We had one family come in with three kids and two parents,” Barshinger remembers. “They all wanted something to plant. They were bummed out because they couldn’t go anywhere. They decided to each get a maple sapling and to take them home and plant them and see them grow. The kids thought that was the coolest thing.”

“There are a lot of positive things about gardening,” says Barziloski. “That’s been a silver lining in all of this. It’s helped people get back to the basics.”

Gardening’s calming and security-inducing effects aren’t imagined. Dr. Kelly points to numerous studies showing a wide range of health benefits from plants and working in the soil.

Most obvious is the exercise and physical health benefits.

“Gardening improves hand strength, balance, and dexterity, which translates into fewer falls and fractures as we age,” Dr. Kelly says.

## Healing powers

Just being outside in the sunlight leads to a 25% increase in vitamin D levels among gardeners, a change that reduces osteoporosis, fractures, and the incidence of prostate, bladder, and breast cancer, he adds.

Whether it’s the exercise or calming effect or both, Dr. Kelly says research has found that blood-pressure readings drop by 5 to 10 points when people work in the garden, correlating with a 10% reduction in cardiovascular disease.

Gardening’s capacity to build self esteem is a reason why garden therapy is increasingly part of substance abuse treatment and is often court-mandated as a transition from prison, Dr. Kelly says.

“Gardening also has been used as therapy for catastrophic injuries, strokes and cancer rehabilitation,” he adds.

Then there are the psychological benefits, such as reducing stress and anxiety.

Dr. Kelly says gardening “has a calming effect and increases the production of serotonin in the brain, which reduces depression and anxiety and improves sleep.”

Curiously, one study in the *Journal of Neuroscience* reported that the soil has microorganisms that might act as antidepressants. Dr. Kelly says that study found that a harmless bacteria in the soil (*Mycobacterium vaccae*) gets on



**LOOKING FORWARD TO SPRING:** So many new gardeners, top, got into gardening last year that some seed companies had to temporarily stop taking orders. Gardens offer a variety of health and well-being benefits besides physical exercise such as digging and weeding, middle. Many kitchen vegetable scraps, bottom, will begin growing if set in water and then planted in the spring. See instructions on page 11.

our skin when digging in the soil, and small amounts then get ingested.

“This bacteria targets serotonin neurons much like the antidepressant Prozac,” he says.

Dr. Kelly says other studies have found that dementia decreases by 25% in persons over 60 who garden regularly and that children under age 7 who play in the dirt are exposed to immune-building microorganisms, leading to fewer allergies and autoimmune

problems as the children grow up.

The big question heading into this year is whether the gardening surge is here to stay or whether it'll eventually fade along with COVID-19.

"From what we're hearing, people are going to carry on with it," says Barzilowski, adding that more customers than usual are already signed up for new garden-bed-building jobs.

"I think this is going to stick," agrees Barshinger. "Once people get their foot in the water, they're going to dive in. (Beginning in the fall, we had) people pre-ordering fruit trees and flats of vegetables. We've never had

demand for that before."

"A tremendous amount of people saw how rewarding this was, how you can plant a little plant and end up with a plant that's 6 feet tall and loaded with tomatoes," he adds. "A lot of people never experienced that."

"Gardening is investing in the future," says Dr. Kelly, "and that in itself is the realization that we will come out of this dark tunnel sometime." 🌞

*George Weigel is author of two books about gardening in Pennsylvania and garden columnist for The Patriot-News/PennLive.com in Harrisburg. His website is <https://georgeweigel.net>.*

## Five gardening activities families can do together

Here are five projects to get your hands dirty in the garden from Kids-Gardening.org, the National Garden Bureau and Penn State Master Gardener Pamela Hubbard in Monroe County:

**1. Try a kitchen scrap garden.** You don't need store-bought seeds or plants to grow new ones. A surprising number of plants will grow from discarded parts scavenged from the kitchen, such as carrot, beet, and pineapple tops, the cut-off root end of celery, seeds from lemons and oranges, and "slips" from cut pieces of potatoes and sweet potatoes. Plant in soil or partially submerge pieces to encourage roots to emerge.

More details: <https://kidsgardening.org/garden-activities-kitchen-scrap-gardening>

**2. Sprout seeds.** Go the conventional route with seed-starting mix in plastic trays, or let kids see how and when different seeds sprout by lining a glass jar with a damp paper towel, adding seeds between the glass and towel, screwing on the lid, then watching for the seeds to sprout. Or place seeds on a damp paper towel on a foil pan and insert the pan into a sealed plastic bag.

More details: <https://extension.psu.edu/winter-gardening-activities-for-children>

**3. Go on a nature scavenger hunt.**

Explore the yard to see who can complete a list of curious finds. Objects might include butterfly chrysalises, different kinds of leaves, bird nests, earthworms, lady bugs, acorns, dried seed-heads, moss-covered rocks, and the season's first bulbs and buds. Supply little hands with a magnifying glass.

More details: <https://kidsgardening.org/scavenger-hunt-garden>

**4. Flower juice painting.** Gather bulb flowers, wildflowers, or any other flowers from the yard and press them onto drawings as you would when using a sponge. The pigments in the flowers will color the drawing, especially if you use a porous, absorbent paper. Salvia, marigold, calendula, larkspur, geraniums and dianthus flowers are some of the best.

More details: <https://ngb.org/2019/09/05/garden-games-kids>

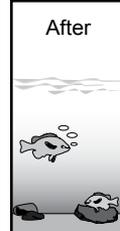
**5. Plan a theme garden.** Pick a theme that your child is interested in and plant a garden with plants around the theme, such as an alphabet garden with plants beginning with each letter of the alphabet, a zoo garden with plants that have animal names (lamb's ears, catmint, cardinal flower, bee balm, etc.), or a butterfly garden of assorted flowers that butterflies like.

More details: <https://kidsgardening.org/garden-activities-theme-gardens>



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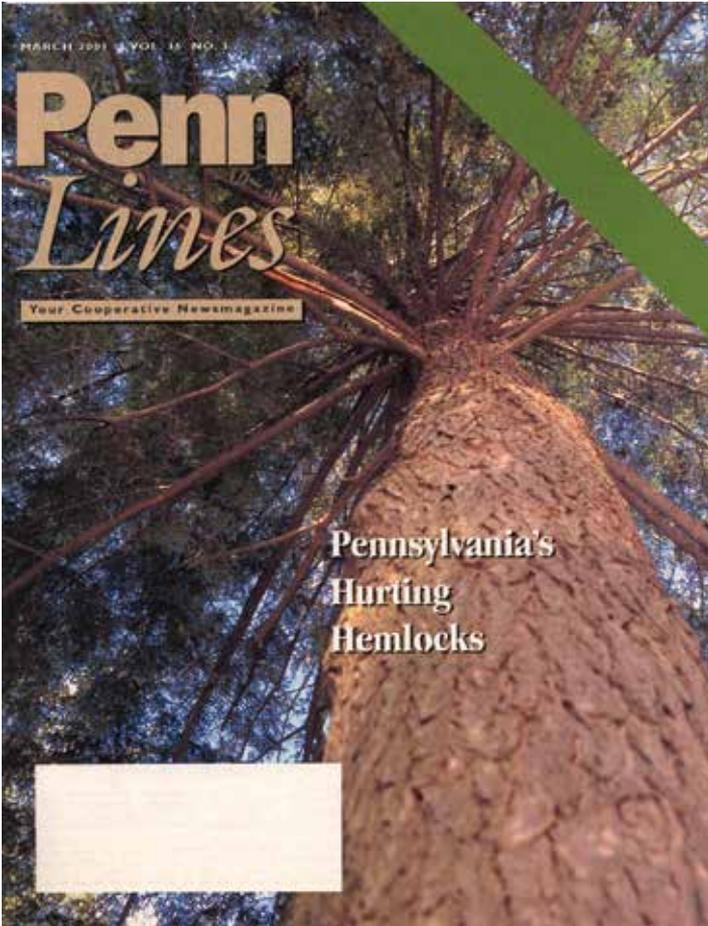
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Your Newsmagazine Through the Years



Officials gear up in an attempt to save the Commonwealth's state tree — the hemlock. Capable of reaching heights exceeding 100 feet and living 800 years, hemlocks have been under assault for decades with one of the most dangerous pests — the woolly adelgid — being no larger than the size of a poppy seed.

Named in part because of the protective white cottony clusters they produce near the base of the hemlock's needles, woolly adelgids have had a major impact on stands of the popular evergreen tree across Pennsylvania. But they are not the only problem that hemlocks face. Spider mites, scale and drought also cause problems for the hemlocks.

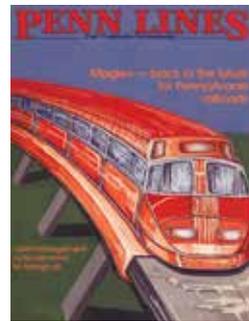
Hemlocks do more than serve as Pennsylvania's state tree; they provide environmental benefits, such as maintaining consistent water temperature in streams for the state fish, the brook trout, and serving as a home for dozens of bird and mammal species. The hemlock also has commercial benefits as it is harvested for lumber and pulpwood, and historically has served as a source of tannin for treating leather.

2001



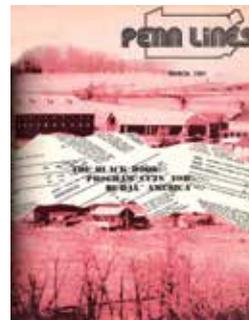
2011

Many Pennsylvanians are saying goodbye to tilling, digging and costly chemicals and saying hello to no-dig gardening, a way of growing vegetables and flowers naturally, and with less work.



1991

Lawmakers call for the development of "maglev" technology — technology that uses "mag"netic energy to "lev"itate a train-like vehicle over a guide rail at incredible speed.



1981

As a new administration takes over in Washington, D.C., word leaks out about a "black book" listing 143 federal programs the book's author would like to see shuttered.



1971

While government and industry join together with enough power to ignore any other interests, individuals can make a difference by relaying their concerns to government officials.

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**Jeff Fetzer**, *Local Pages Editor*

## Guest Column



# Working our way through a pandemic

By Pete Yastishock, *Director of Safety & Compliance*

TRI-COUNTY has an experienced team of employees who are highly skilled at keeping the lights on and restoring power, even under the intense and challenging conditions brought about by hurricanes, snowstorms and ice storms. But what about 11 months of working to keep the power flowing during a pandemic?

Working to ensure the reliable delivery of electricity and maintaining the high level of service you expect from Tri-County during the COVID-19 pandemic has required significant planning and adjustments.

One of the main concerns has been that a group of employees would get sick or be under quarantine at the same time, potentially leaving us with an insufficient workforce to take care of our members properly. And we certainly did not want to spread the health risk to members. So we developed workplace protocols to protect our employees, co-op members, vendors and suppliers to the best of our ability.

Changes required to continue working through the pandemic have included wearing masks, spending extra time sanitizing vehicles and work spaces, communicating while maintaining separation between people, driving to job sites separately, taking up the slack for employees who were off sick, closing office lobbies but taking additional phone calls, and making arrangements for appointments.

Even with those protocols, some employees did contract the coronavirus over the course of the past year, but the procedures we put in place have helped

keep our workforce intact and allowed us to safely continue our focus on keeping power flowing to your homes.

We know the pandemic has also affected many of the cooperative's members. We saw about a 25% increase in the number of members unable to pay their bills due to financial hardships caused by the pandemic. Our member care department spent additional time on the phones, receiving and making calls to assist members to make payment arrangements and helping to find assistance for those in dire need.

The challenges to keep people separate while still conducting staff and board meetings and interfacing with members was largely overcome by utilizing technology in new ways. This required us to quickly make adjustments to how we communicate and to significantly modify our computer infrastructure. It also emphasized the need for broadband in our rural communities. The need to separate our employees to prevent the spread of COVID required, in some instances, relocating office space or using technology to enable employees to work remotely — providing them adequate internet service.

I am proud of how our employees have pulled together and adjusted for an extended period of time to keep the lights on, while also reducing the risk of virus spread to members and coworkers. We need to remain vigilant, but we look forward to the day when we can return to normal operations and once again work directly with our members without having to think about contracting or spreading a deadly virus. 

## Library project brings children's books to local communities

By Jeff Fetzer

TWO YEARS after his passing, a Tioga County teen's passion for reading lives on through a book-sharing program established locally in his memory.

Parker Sprouse entered the world prematurely, at 31 weeks, and left it that way, too, succumbing to influenza at age 13 on March 22, 2019. He battled a myriad of health issues throughout his brief life, but his positive energy and love of books were evident to all who knew him, according to his mother, Jackie Sprouse of Gaines Township.

"Nothing got that kid down," Jackie says. "He would just exude this light and positivity, and people were drawn to him for that."

Parker continues to touch lives today through Little Free Library, a book-sharing project Jackie initiated in Tioga and Potter counties to share her son's love of reading with children in the region.

Little Free Library is a free neighborhood book exchange designed to promote literacy and encourage reading. The lending libraries typically feature a weather-proof, wooden case placed in a public area and filled with dozens of children's books.



**BOOK EXCHANGE:** Jackie Sprouse of Gaines and Tri-County member Tom Shatto of Germania display the region's first Parker James Sprouse Little Free Library, which was placed in Galeton in 2019 in memory of Jackie's son, Parker, who died at age 13 in March 2019. Jackie decorated the library, constructed by her father, Tom Prouty of Ulysses, with a superheroes theme.

After learning about the program following Parker's death, Jackie decided to begin a local Little Free Library project.

"Because Parker liked to read so much, his father, Raymond, and I thought it would be a great way to keep his memory alive," she says.

She invited family and friends to construct the wooden book displays, and the first lending library was built by Jackie's father, Tom Prouty of Ulysses. That library, which can hold about 40 children's books, was placed near the Galeton Post Office at a site overlooking Galeton Lake in 2019.

Since then, Little Free Libraries created by the Losey family, Paige Grant of Galeton and Fred Hollar of Germania have been erected at the Galeton Little League field and in Coudersport and Austin.

Two additional libraries have been constructed by the Sprouses' former pastor, Tri-County member Tom Shatto of Germania (please see next page). One will be placed near Packer Park in Wellsboro this spring, and the other is expected to be located in Mansfield or Westfield later this year.

"Pastor Tom would visit Parker, and he'd sit on the floor and read to him," Jackie says. "Like everybody, he took a real shining to Parker, and when he asked to build some little libraries, that really meant a lot to me."

As the steward for the local project, Jackie visits each Little Free Library every few weeks to inspect and clean them and restock books, if needed. While the motto of the program is "Take a book, share a book," she says the books are not always replaced.



**REMEMBERING PARKER:** Tri-County members Tom and Pat Shatto enjoy a moment with Parker Sprouse. Parker, who had suffered a variety of health issues since birth, passed away March 22, 2019, after contracting influenza. A local Little Free Library was established by his mother, Jackie Sprouse, in memory of Parker and in tribute to his love of reading.

"More often than not, the kids take them and don't replace them, and that's fine because some of them don't have books to share," she says. "I'm excited for the kids who maybe don't have books. If this would push young parents to sit down and read their child a bedtime story, that would make me very happy."

Jackie says Parker began reading at age 4 and had amassed a collection of more than 1,500 books by the time he turned 13. She utilizes his collection to replenish the shelves of the local Little Free Libraries.

"I think the reason he loved books so much is because books really have a way of taking you to other places," Jackie says. "So when we were stuck here or had to miss a social gathering, he could read a book and be transported into that, like an adventure."

Anyone can utilize the libraries for free, and Jackie says she's been very happy with the reception the project has received from the communities in which the book displays have been placed.

"It's a way to keep my son's memory alive, and that helps me, because I'm still in the grieving process," she says. "And I know Parker would be so very pleased that his love of reading is brought to others." 🌻

## Tri-County member builds book displays to honor avid reader

By Tom Shatto

PARKER SPROUSE is the reason I constructed two Little Free Libraries.

I met Parker and his parents at church some years ago and occasionally visited at their home. During visits I sometimes read to Parker from his seemingly endless supply of books. On one of those visits, I nearly fell asleep while reading to him, something I did frequently when reading to my own children when they were young. Parker must have sensed that my narration was growing weak. He gave me a little nudge with his elbow.

I learned through these visits that Parker was an avid reader. His reading interests spanned a wide range, including science, nature, fantasy and adventure. And he knew the stories. This is the main thing I remember about his reading. He was able to project himself into the stories and become one with the characters and the action. And he could converse on a variety of topics and subjects. Parker grew in wisdom and stature by reading.

Parker's positive attitude and personality drew everyone to him. He was happy even though he was living with serious health issues. He shared his happiness through smiles, kind words

and interest in everyone who crossed his path. Although his years on Earth were few, he lived well.

In his memory, Parker's family and friends conceived a community project to share his love for reading and encourage others to read by placing Little Free Libraries in the area. When I learned of this project in Parker's memory, I decided to join the effort in some way. And that led to the construction of two Little Free Libraries.

Working on the libraries in my garage gave me time to think about my connection with Parker, and envision how the libraries might provide inspiration and enjoyment for other young persons, and that their reading might build in them the love and hope and joy that I saw in Parker. Getting inside a story, as Parker did, can be a great comfort in good times and a source of strength in difficult times. So my hope is that the libraries might be a source of light and confidence for all who make use of the books inside.

For anyone who might like to create a Little Free Library as a memorial or as a way to honor someone, there are two online resources. The first is [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org). On this site you'll



**VOLUNTEER:** Tri-County member Tom Shatto of Germania displays one of two Little Free Libraries he constructed in memory of Parker Sprouse. The Disney-themed library will be erected near Packer Park in Wellsboro this spring.

find information about the origin and development of the organization, including a map where libraries can be registered. The second is [rockler.com/learn/little-lending-library](http://rockler.com/learn/little-lending-library). This site includes a variety of plans for constructing a library.

Little Lending Libraries promote reading by young persons. That's a good thing. As Doctor Seuss says: "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go." 🌟

*Tom Shatto is a Tri-County member and retired United Methodist minister who resides in Germania with his wife, Pat. He is a member of the cooperative's Member Advisory Committee and, until last year, had served as chairman of the Tri-County Elections and Credentials Committee.*

### Beware of scam artists posing as utility workers

Tri-County advises members to be suspicious of anyone who attempts to get inside their homes by stating he or she works for Tri-County.

"Tri-County workers do not perform repairs on household wiring systems," says Bryan Berguson, director of member services. "In fact, our employees have instructions not to enter members' homes unless it is an emergency or for pre-arranged visits for services such as conducting energy audits."

Each Tri-County employee carries a laminated plastic identification card with his or her photograph. Employees drive vehicles that are clearly marked with the Tri-County logo on the doors.

If someone unexpected comes to your door and states he or she is a Tri-County employee, protect yourself by:

- ▶ Asking to see identification
- ▶ Calling Tri-County at 1-800-343-2559 to verify work and employee identities if there is any doubt
- ▶ Looking for clearly marked service vehicles
- ▶ Reporting any suspicious activity to the police.

### OFFICE CLOSING

All Tri-County offices will be closed Friday, April 2, in observance of Good Friday.

# Tri-County CEO to retire; veteran co-op exec appointed to top post

By Jeff Fetzer

TRI-COUNTY Rural Electric Cooperative's longtime top executive, President and CEO Craig Eccher, will be retiring from his post in May, closing out a career with the co-op that spanned three decades.



Craig Eccher

In conjunction with Eccher's retirement, the Tri-County Board of Directors appointed Kevin Brownlee of Hot Springs, Ark., as the company's incoming president and CEO. Brownlee, who has over 20 years of utility management experience,



Kevin Brownlee

takes over day-to-day oversight of the cooperative on March 1, 2021. Eccher's affiliation with Tri-County began in 1990, when he was hired as the cooperative's manager of engineering services. In 1999, he was named president and chief executive officer of the cooperative's jointly owned subsidiary, Wellsboro Electric Co. He continued to serve as Wellsboro Electric's CEO until retiring from the position at the end of 2019.

Eccher was named as executive vice president and chief operating officer of Tri-County in 2003 and was promoted to president and CEO of the cooperative in 2006. He also served as co-president and CEO of C&T Enterprises, a subsidiary of Tri-County and Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative, since 2008. Additionally, Eccher has served as president and CEO of Tri-Co Connections, the cooperative's fiber-to-the-home high-speed internet subsidiary, since leading its launch in 2018.

"We have certainly enjoyed working with Craig Eccher at Tri-County over the years and wish him the best in his retirement," said Gerald A. "Arnie" Kriner, chairman of the Tri-County Board of Directors. "The board appreciates his many years of service to the

cooperative, as well as the long list of accomplishments he has achieved during his tenure as CEO. We are confident we will see that tradition of exceptional leadership carried forward by Kevin Brownlee in his new role as the chief executive officer, and we look forward to working with him."

Eccher will be stepping down from his CEO post March 1 but will continue working for Tri-County in an advisory capacity until his official retirement date of May 1, 2021.

"It has been a pleasure working with a fantastic team of talented employees, a progressive board of directors, and, most importantly, the great membership base that holds dearly the values of rural life," Eccher said. "I leave the cooperative knowing that it's in great hands and that it will continue making a positive difference in our region."

Brownlee holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C., and a bachelor's degree in accounting and finance from Charleston Southern University.

Tri-County's incoming chief executive has 21 years of electric cooperative experience, including 10 years as chief executive officer of South Central Arkansas Electric Cooperative and its fiber-to-the-home subsidiary, South Central Connect. Prior to that, he served as vice president of marketing and economic development for Lynch River Electric Cooperative in Pageland, S.C.

He currently serves as the deputy city manager for the City of Hot Springs, Ark., where he manages one of the largest water, wastewater and storm water utilities in Arkansas.

"We are fortunate to gain a leader with Kevin's experience and talent," Kriner said. "I am confident that he will lead Tri-County forward as it continues its mission to provide safe, reliable electricity and make broadband internet service available to members across our service territory."

Brownlee and his wife, Kathy, have

two children, Bryce, 18, who will be attending the U.S. Military Academy in June 2021, and Meredith, 15, a high school freshman.

"I am honored to be appointed as the next president and CEO of Tri-County Electric and Tri-Co Connections," Brownlee said. "I look forward to working with the board, members and employees on continuing their long tradition of excellence and service." 

## Even out your payments with Levelized Billing

You can avoid large fluctuations in your electric bill from month to month by participating in Tri-County's Levelized Billing plan.

The program allows you to level out your monthly payments throughout the year.

Levelized Billing is available to members with at least one year of electric use, provided they have fewer than two late payments in the prior 12 months.

This plan is particularly helpful to members with electric heating or central air conditioning systems, since their electric bills tend to increase significantly during the heating and cooling seasons. It's also convenient for those on fixed incomes.

With Levelized Billing, there is never a need for a once-a-year "true-up," because participants' bills are adjusted every month.

Here's how Levelized Billing works:

Your current month's kilowatt-hour use is combined with that of the previous 11 months. This figure is then divided by 12 (the number of months in one year) to obtain a levelized total. You are billed the levelized amount, while a running balance accounts for the difference between your actual and levelized charges. In this way, the variance between billings is reduced, making your budget more manageable.

As the 11-month time period changes each month, so will your levelized bill. So the cooperative will not need to send out an annual bill to settle levelized accounts. Instead, the system continues on a rolling basis, with differences between actual and levelized charges being settled through continued monthly leveling.

For more information on Levelized Billing, contact the billing department at 1-800-343-2559.

# Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place

For more tips on smart tree planting in your community, contact your local electric cooperative or visit [www.ArborDay.org](http://www.ArborDay.org).

Trees beautify our neighborhoods, and when planted in the right spot, can even help lower energy bills. But the wrong tree in the wrong place can be a hazard... especially to power lines.

## LARGE TREES

Height/spread of more than 40 feet, such as:

- Maple
- Birch
- Oak
- Sweetgum
- Spruce
- Linden
- Pine

## MEDIUM TREES

Height/spread of 25 to 40 feet, such as:

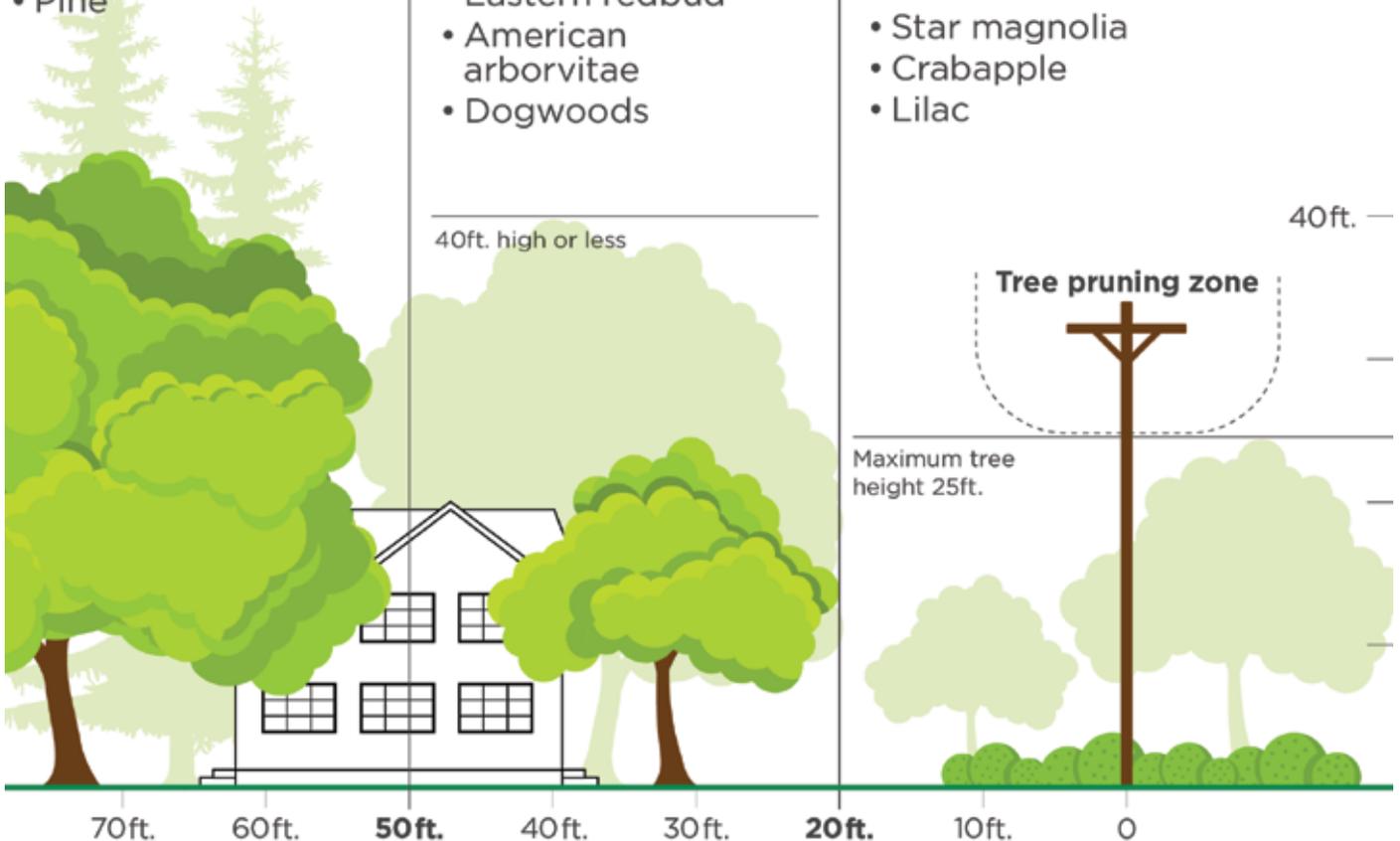
- Washington hawthorn
- Goldenraintree
- Eastern redbud
- American arborvitae
- Dogwoods

## SMALL TREES

Avoid planting within 20 feet of power lines. When planting within 20 feet is unavoidable, use only shrubs and small trees.

Height/spread of no more than 25 feet such as:

- Star magnolia
- Crabapple
- Lilac



**Be safe! Always call 811 before you dig to locate any buried utility lines.**

# Create usable attic storage space with insulated, sealed entrance cover

By James Dulley

**D**ear Jim: I want to use my attic for storage. It will need a retractable ladder with a larger easy-to-open cover. What efficiency and design tips do you recommend?  
— Rick M.

**Dear Rick:** The temperature inside an attic can vary tremendously, so keep this in mind when considering what items you plan to store up there. Your existing attic entrance is probably just 2 feet wide and covered by a piece of plywood or drywall resting on uneven molding.

You most likely will need a larger opening. Measure the dimensions of the items you want to store in the attic. For easy access, the opening should be at least 4 inches larger than any of the items.

Installing a complete insulated attic stair/ladder kit is your best and safest option. Select one that includes the framing for the rough opening. Common sizes vary from 2 by 3 feet to 2.5 by 5 feet long. Two inches of urethane or Styrofoam insulation should provide adequate efficiency.

Select one of the designs of wood and steel stairs or ladders that fold up as you close the insulated cover. Steel ones are strong, include telescopic safety handrails and grab bars at the top, and collapse into a small space. Wooden ones typically fold up into three sections on top of the cover.

Enlarge the opening in the ceiling and prepare the area around it to support the items you plan to store. Don't just lay some pieces of plywood up there because they will compress the attic insulation. This can also trap moisture-laden air in the insulation.

Cut pegboard pieces to size to fit



around the opening to create the storage floor and nail furring strip to them. Locate them so they run perpendicular to the attic floor joists. This provides extra depth to reduce insulation compression, and the pegboard holes allow moisture to pass through.

When covering a large attic area, remove the old insulation and replace it with high-density fiberglass batt insulation.

If you don't plan to access this storage space often and don't want the added expense of installing stairs, plan on using just a tall stepladder. In this case, add insulation and weatherstripping to the entrance cover.

Put several layers of 2-inch polyurethane rigid foam insulation on top of the plywood cover. Glue or tape it in place. Attach adhesive-backed foam weatherstripping on the ceiling molding where the cover rests. Mount a heavy object over the cover to compress the weatherstripping.

There are several attic opening

insulation covers specifically designed for efficiency and easy access. One of the simplest and least expensive is a corrugated box. It is delivered flat. You assemble it and attach rigid foam insulation to the top and sides. It's lightweight and easy to lift.

Another convenient cover has insulation between flexible skins. It is domed to fit over a folding ladder when closed and has a zippered opening in the center. The lower edges are stapled to the edge of the opening framing for an airtight seal.

Still a third option is a domed cover made of rigid foam insulation for high insulation value. It is extremely lightweight, making it easy to push up and move to the side when entering the attic. ☀



Have a question for Jim? Send inquiries to **James Dulley**, Penn Lines, 6906 Royalgreen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit [www.dulley.com](http://www.dulley.com).

# Glamping puts the glamour in camping

By Mitchell Kyd

“News from the Path Valley Hotel”

Remember camping? I do. Fresh trout and fried potatoes sizzling in a skillet. Fabulous desserts cooked on sticks. Bugs dropping from the trees onto my plate. Industrious spiders rebuilding their webs in our tent. Waking up soggy, cold and sore. I loved it! By the time March rolled around each year, my husband and I were already making lists for camping on opening weekend down at the lake.

What I don't remember about any camping experience is pillow-top mattresses, private showers and tents with heated floors. But then again, I never went glamping. If you want to get back to nature but not too far back, glamping could be your ticket. In short, it's glamorous camping, a growing trend that lets you enjoy the great outdoors in the extremes of comfort. After a year that has driven us all indoors, stomped vacation plans and rewritten what it means to get away, the idea is enticing.

From tree house retreats to large, heated yurts (circular tents), the amenities at some glamping locations include gourmet meals, spa treatments and on-site breweries. Expect a Keurig in your tent and hand-milled soaps in your private loo. Others even offer a recreation attendant to assist you with making a fire, one who arrives with the makings for s'mores. Preview a range of glamping sites you might want to explore online, including several hundred here in Pennsylvania.

If those upscale sites seem a bit too posh for you, smooth out some camping rough spots with simple upgrades in your gear. Maybe your age or experience says it could be time to get



back in the woods but with a trade-up. Equipment retailers are standing by.

Try expanding into a multi-cabin tent. My little family slept snuggled together on one tent floor, lined up like four hot dogs on the grill. Now there are affordable, multi-cabin tents with separate but connected rooms that give everyone a little more privacy and some personal real estate. As a bonus, you won't risk squashing your mate or your offspring as you step over them in the dark to close the flaps against a downpour.

Expecting guests? Add an inflatable, pull-out sofa to your packing list. But remember, the reason you left home in the first place was to escape your family and your friends. They might find you. Do you really want to look prepared for entertaining and a sleepover if they show up?

Guests or no guests, everyone has other business to attend to, and sometimes late at night. For those inconvenient calls of nature, travel with the kind of portable toilet that folds down to the size of a briefcase. You'll avoid those midnight runs to the camp-

ground facilities, the ones that always require an uphill trek under the most dire circumstances.

Thinking of adding on? You can buy a private shower tent complete with changing room. And forget the plastic jug you used to use for solar water heating. Invest in a portable, propane water heater designed specifically for camping.

You can even swap out your old camp stove for a two-burner, two-rack camp oven. Some have the capacity to cook up to 400 degrees for as long as five hours on a single pound of propane. That means you can cook and bake in camp just like you do at home. But why?

I miss camping in the days when one skillet, a pot and a few pointy sticks handled all our cooking needs, or at least I miss the memories. There was no threat our phones would ring or kids would beg for screen time. I can't imagine a stranger bursting onto the scene to make our campfire, but I think I could possibly envision melting into a recliner, not a lawn chair, for star gazing after dinner. And a private bathroom would be nice. And possibly air conditioning for those muggy, summer nights ... Glamping. Yes, my bones are older now. I think I could get used to it! 🌞



**YVONNE BUTTS-MITCHELL** writes and blogs (deadmousediarist.com) under the pen name Mitchell Kyd. The “News from the Path Valley Hotel” series was inspired by her encounters with contractors, critters and assorted creepy crawlies while rehabbing her family cabin after its 17-year stint as a giant closet.

# Helping hands

## *Mutual aid program highlights cooperation among cooperatives*

**F**rom the earliest days of rural electrification, cooperatives have relied on each other. Here in Pennsylvania, they formed their own trade association as a united front to better serve their consumer-members. They also established their own power supply cooperative to provide these consumers with a reliable and affordable source of energy. That spirit of cooperation among cooperatives is especially evident in times of need, like an extended power outage. This concept of mutual aid promises rapid restoration of power to electric cooperative consumer-members.

“Nobody wants to have their consumer-members out there without power — without heat — in the winter time,” says Mike Shawley, outside

By Michael T. Crawford  
*Associate Editor*

operations manager at New Enterprise Rural Electric Cooperative (REC). “The goal is to restore power as quickly and safely as you can.”

The most common time of need for rural electric cooperatives follows storms, meaning the mutual aid process begins with keeping an eye on the weather. The Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) — the statewide trade organization for 13 electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey — monitors weather alerts for conditions that could disrupt power, such as snow, heavy winds, or thunderstorms, and passes those alerts on to cooperatives.

“We’ll monitor outages to get a feel

for how severe an event is, which is a potential indicator for mutual aid requests from cooperatives,” explains Rich Geosits, manager of power delivery for PREA and Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny), the wholesale power provider for the electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. “When appropriate, we’ll ask cooperatives to share with us any outages, crews that can help others if needed, and if they think they might need help from other cooperatives.”

### **Win-win**

When a request for help comes, PREA matches the request for help with those who can provide it.

“All the co-ops across the state can evaluate their own situation and determine whether they have any crews and

**CREW AT WORK:** Lineworkers from DuBois-based United Electric Cooperative use a digger truck to lift a pole that will carry power to a new consumer-member’s home.



equipment to go help,” Shawley says. “You have to think about your crew and their stamina. You work a storm for three or four days, 16- to 20-hour shifts, your guys are going to get tired and worn out, and things are going to slow down. There’s an increased chance of an accident happening due to fatigue, but if you get other crews in, you can start to rotate crews in and out — while one set of crews is getting rest, another is out doing the work. It’s a win-win: it enables your guys to get the rest they need when they need it, and it allows you to stay productive, restoring outages around the clock.”

Once crews from another cooperative arrive to provide assistance, a member of the cooperative receiving aid works alongside the visiting crew to show how a specific system functions — such as the locations of fuses and breakers and directional flow of electricity — to ensure crews can work safely.

“As far as the construction and the wiring, they (the systems) are all the same, but you don’t know where the feeds are coming from and which are energized,” says Walt Tubach, manager of electric operations at Forks-ville-based Sullivan County REC. “In all of the co-ops that I’ve been to, I have never felt threatened. I’ve always had excellent people who I’ve went with to tell me where to start, where to end, where the feeds are, what to ground and where to go.”

## Long history

Jim Seymour, outside operations manager at Bedford REC, began as an apprentice lineman nearly 33 years ago. Four years into his career, the super-storm of 1993 — which the National Weather Service estimates cost the lives of 49 Pennsylvanians — showed Seymour the mutual aid program in action.

“Back in that period of time, a fair amount of our system was cross country, meaning there was no way of getting a truck into it — you had to walk into it in knee-deep to waist-deep snow,” Seymour recalls of the 1993 blizzard that interrupted power to approximately 10 million house-



**EDUCATION:** Lineworkers from eight rural electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania learn how outages are identified using the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system during the 2018 Voltage Regulator/Substation School, part of the PREA Job Training & Safety program, at Indiana-based REA Energy Cooperative.

holds in the eastern United States. “It was almost traumatizing as to how ... we were going to get these people back on, and how bad they were as far as whether their pipes were going to freeze or if they needed oxygen.”

He continues, “When we requested mutual aid, we had other co-ops throughout the state that didn’t have the trouble we had. ... It was the third day of the storm when they really started rolling people in here. We were so dead tired with very little sleep and it was a great help. You just took them there and they did most of the work.”

While cooperative systems may be nearly identical, Seymour says the identical training Pennsylvania rural electric cooperatives receive makes the mutual aid program efficient.

“We’re all taught the same,” Seymour says. “We all go to the same PREA schools to learn everything the same way.”

## Safety first

Through its nationally recognized Job Training and Safety (JT&S) program, PREA offers training and safety instruction to cooperative employees.

“The No.1 concern in any situation — whether it’s just another day out in the field or a mutual aid scenario — is safety,” says Joe Selnekovic, PREA/Allegheny JT&S manager and environmental adviser. “We cover the safe work practices, which are pretty much

identical across the cooperatives, at all our schools. Most accidents can be prevented by taking the time to review your basic safety protocols. ... Taking shortcuts, bypassing safety — that’s when the job gets dangerous.”

While mutual assistance agreements are in place among all cooperatives affiliated with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, PREA also maintains mutual assistance agreements with Wallingford Electrical Division in Connecticut, UGI Utilities, Inc. in Wilkes-Barre, Borough of Chambersburg and Pike County Light & Power, as well as several FirstEnergy companies, to ensure the widest range of service restoration resources is available.

Transmission and distribution infrastructure owned by electric cooperatives is built to federal standards, so line crews from any cooperative in the country can provide each other with emergency support. In recent years, cooperatives across the Commonwealth have provided aid after major disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. In coordination with PREA, Pennsylvania rural electric cooperatives have assisted those in need across the United States, including Kentucky, Vermont, New Hampshire, Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina.

“We’re pretty good at watching each other’s backs,” Shawley says. “If there’s a co-op that calls for help, there’s always other co-ops willing and able to help.”

# Luck of the Irish

By Anne M. Kirchner

**M**y first trip to Ireland was in March 2007. I immediately fell in love with Irish culture — Celtic crosses, medieval structures, rolling green hills, grazing sheep and genuine Irish hospitality. I attended a St. Patrick’s Day parade in Galway and will always cherish the Irish tunes and jovial spirits. It was a misty day, but we found comfort from the cold weather in an Irish pub. Eating vegetable soup and Irish soda bread next to a stone hearth warms the body and the soul.

Ten years later, our family participated in the Ulster Project, which involved hosting an exchange student from Northern Ireland. The program is designed to reduce religious tensions and develop leadership skills among youth. The experience led our daughter to new friendships, and our family gained a new member. In 2018, we visited our Northern Irish “daughter” and reconnected with the Ulster Project youth and counselors. Once again, we were blessed with cultural experiences.

A traditional Irish lunch includes soup and soda bread. The first time I ordered vegetable soup in Ireland, I received a bowl of smooth, creamy puree. I quickly learned this was “normal” compared to my chunky version. Soda bread evolved in the late 1830s due to Ireland’s financial struggles and limited access to ingredients. Using baking soda instead of yeast, soda bread is easy to make and remains a country staple. Irish stew is considered a national dish of Ireland and is the result of a culinary tradition of cooking over an open fire.



Trained in public relations, **Anne M. Kirchner** focuses her writing on human connections, travel and culinary arts. She enjoys researching food origins, exploring cooking techniques and creating new recipes.



## Vegetable Soup

- 1** tablespoon butter
- 1** clove garlic, minced
- 1** white onion, diced
- 1** leek, sliced (use white and light green parts only)
- 2** large baking potatoes, cubed
- 3** large carrots, sliced
- 3** stalks celery, sliced
- 4** cups chicken or vegetable stock
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Chopped parsley for garnish

Melt butter over medium high heat. Add garlic, onion, leek, potatoes, carrots and celery. Sauté for 5 minutes. Add the chicken or vegetable stock and lower the heat. Simmer for 20 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. Place soup in food processor or blender and puree mixture to develop a thick, creamy soup. Return soup to pot and keep warm until serving. Season with salt and black pepper. Garnish with chopped parsley and serve with Irish soda bread. Makes 6 to 8 servings.



## Irish Soda Bread

- 3 1/2** cups flour
- 1** teaspoon baking soda
- 1** teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 1/2** cups buttermilk

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Combine flour, baking soda and kosher salt in a large mixing bowl. Add buttermilk and stir with a wooden spoon until well blended. Turn dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead until a smooth ball is formed. Dust the outside with flour and place on an ungreased baking sheet. Using a sharp knife, slash a 1-inch deep cross on top of the loaf. Bake for 35 minutes or until golden brown. Makes 6 to 8 servings.



## Traditional Irish Stew

- 1/2** cup flour
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 1/2** pounds beef stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/3** cup olive oil
- 1** yellow onion, diced
- 1** clove garlic, minced
- 8** medium carrots, peeled and cut into rounds
- 1 1/2** pounds red potatoes, cut into chunks
- 8** cups beef broth
- 2** tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1/4** cup chopped parsley

Season flour with salt and pepper. Add beef and coat well with flour mixture. Heat olive oil in a heavy pot over medium high heat. Add beef and any extra flour mixture. Brown meat for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring often. Add onion, garlic, carrots and potatoes. Stir ingredients and slowly add beef broth and Worcestershire sauce. Cook on medium low heat for at least one hour allowing stew to thicken. Add chopped parsley and serve with Irish soda bread. Makes 8 to 10 servings.

# Smart home tech for your budget

By Maria Kanevsky

Smart home devices can add comfort and convenience to your life, but the price tag for some of these devices can be another story. Since many smart home technologies are new and cutting-edge, the cost of owning these devices can sometimes be a major barrier. Luckily, there are several inexpensive options for smart home devices that won't break the bank, while still offering nearly all the same benefits. If you're new to smart home technologies, here are three inexpensive options to get you started.

Smart home speakers provide a wide range of features such as the ability to play music, call friends or family, or even locate a misplaced smartphone. One of the most useful aspects of smart home speakers is that they act as a smart home hub for your other smart devices. Each smart speaker comes with a voice assistant, like Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant, which can be used to control additional smart devices in your home. When choosing a smart home speaker, make sure your other smart devices are compatible with the system. Google Assistant, for example, works best with other Google products, rather than Amazon or Apple products. Several smart home speakers, especially smaller, entry-level types like the Amazon Echo Dot and Google Home Mini, can cost as little as \$30 or less. This makes them more affordable than the larger versions, like Amazon Echo and Google Home, while still offering nearly all the same features.

Another affordable smart home technology is the smart plug. The technology works by directly inserting the smart plug into an outlet, then plugging your device into the smart plug. This can make any device "smart" by con-



ABBY BERRY, NRECA

CONVENIENT CONTROL: Smart home speakers, like this Amazon Echo Dot, offer a wide range of features that provide consumers convenient control of smart home devices.

necting it to your Wi-Fi through the smart plug. They can also be used with smart home speakers. One of the best features of a smart plug is that they can help you reduce your monthly energy use. This can be done by programming automatic shut-off times to prevent devices from drawing energy when they're not in use. There are plenty of inexpensive and well-performing smart plugs available under \$20.

Smart lightbulbs are among the cheapest and the easiest smart devices to install in your home. They can be controlled through your phone or by voice if connected to your smart home speaker. Some interesting features include the ability to choose different lighting colors and shades, dimness levels, and the ability to turn them on or off entirely. There is an extensive market for smart LED bulbs, but some of the less expensive options have prices ranging from about \$8 to \$20 per bulb. For multi-bulb fixtures, an alternative to buying several smart bulbs is to buy a smart light switch to control the entire fixture. However, this option doesn't allow for different color choices and requires a bit more handiwork to

manually change out the switches.

Remember, if you're looking to buy more than one smart home device, make sure the devices are compatible with your smart home hub (Google Home Mini with Google products, or Amazon Echo Dot with Amazon products) to ensure the best performance of all devices. As with any smart home device, access to a secure and stable Wi-Fi connection will be crucial to using the technology properly. Smart home devices will almost always be more expensive than their "non-smart" counterparts, but they provide additional comfort and convenience that traditional devices simply cannot. The value of these devices is up to you, the consumer, to determine if they are truly worth the price. 🌞

*Maria Kanevsky writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.*

# Classified Advertisements

<b>ISSUE MONTH</b>	<b>AD DEADLINE</b>
May 2021	March 17
June 2021	April 16
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- 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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- Employment Opportunities
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- Livestock & Pets
- Miscellaneous
- Motor Vehicles & Boats
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## Portable Generator Safety Tips

Take precautions for your safety and the safety of those working to restore your power

### Always

- ▶ Read and follow all manufacturer's operating instructions
- ▶ Use your generator outdoors, away from open windows, vents or doors
- ▶ Allow the generator engine to cool at least 2 minutes before refueling
- ▶ Store the recommended type of fuel for the generator in an approved, properly labeled safety can
- ▶ Maintain your generator according to the manufacturer's schedule
- ▶ Have a battery-operated carbon monoxide alarm to check for deadly buildup
- ▶ Turn off the generator and let it cool before refueling to prevent a fire
- ▶ Start or stop the generator ONLY when no electrical loads are connected
- ▶ Allow at least 4 feet of clearance on all sides of the generator when it is operating
- ▶ Keep children away from generator at all times

### Never

- ▶ Never use a generator inside your home, garage, basement, crawl space or other enclosed area, even with ventilation, as carbon monoxide buildup can kill
- ▶ Never operate the generator near combustible materials
- ▶ Never plug your generator directly into your home outlet as this presents an electrocution risk to utility workers and neighbors served by the same utility transformer – have a qualified electrician install a power transfer switch instead
- ▶ Never operate a generator under wet conditions or touch it with wet hands (put it on a level, dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure)
- ▶ Never overload the generator or connected appliances and components can be damaged
- ▶ Never cut corners when it comes to safety

# Looking for a recipe for bluebird stew

By John Kasun

It's that time of the year when my wife goes on full bird alert. It starts in late February and early March with glances out the window and murmurs of "They will be coming soon." Those short glances turn to blank stares about mid-March until it finally happens.

One morning I was deeply engrossed in a cup of hot chocolate, reading the morning paper when it happened. "They're here! They're here!" my wife shouted as she burst into the kitchen. Startled, I spilled half of the hot chocolate on the newspaper, but there still was enough left to land directly in my lap. I learned quickly that in a game of hot chocolate versus a pair of under-shorts, the hot chocolate wins hands down. I immediately tried to remember from health class the first aid steps for scalding. My wife completely ignored my plight except to say, "Don't drip on the floor, I just scrubbed it."

The excitement centered on the fact that my wife had sighted the first pair of nesting eastern bluebirds. Her bluebird houses were all set in place and cleaned out, ready for their new occupants. "I have to start feeding them," she said. My wife has been successful in getting several pair to nest over the past few years, often raising two broods of birds from each nest. Convincing them to stay involves providing an abundance of food for the birds and their young. When it comes to my wife and bird food, she will go to any length to be successful, but I had no idea just how far.

After I changed clothes and cleaned what appeared to be half the kitchen of splattered hot chocolate, I found her busy at the computer ordering mill worms. Mill worms are small



worms about one to one-and-one-half inches in length. It is claimed that mill worms are one of a bluebird's favorite foods, but that claim is usually made by people who sell mill worms. Actually, I think they eat them because they are free, and my wife keeps the feeders filled with fresh squiggly worms so they are not hard to find.

"How many worms did you order?" I asked. My guess was around 500 to 1,000. I had to catch my breath when she replied, "I rounded it off to an even 5,000. We get a price break at that number, and I had them shipped overnight air freight with heat packets added. That will keep them warm in shipment so we won't lose too many in transit."

"You ordered 5,000 worms?" I stammered. "If the birds eat half of those worms they won't be able to fly or do anything else so there won't be any baby birds to feed. As a matter of fact, if the adult birds can fly now, why didn't we simply tell the birds where the worms were being shipped from and they could have flown to get them saving us the air freight?"

She ignored my comments as she handed me a note to buy bedding material for the worms at the feed store. I quickly learned that the bedding required was a wheat bran that came in a 25-pound bag. I figured that would be enough to keep 5,000 worms alive for about 12 years. Of course I had to add apple slices for moisture and Quaker Oats for a food supply.

Rounding off the cost of this project in my head, I figured I could have rented a room for the birds at a Holiday Inn, let them order room service and I would have still saved money. I sat down at the computer and searched the internet for bluebird recipes. I had so much money tied up in these birds the only way to get any return was to eat them. Bluebirds are pretty small, but at least mine were going to be fat. 🍖



A writer with more than 30 years of experience, **John Kasun**, a lifelong Pennsylvanian, looks for the humor in everyday life and then tells a story from that perspective. He is a member of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative.

## Last gasp of winter

It's been a long winter, but by the end of this month, expect to see some signs of spring. But no matter what the Pennsylvania weather brings, we want to see your photos highlighting the Commonwealth's people and places.

This month begins a new Rural Reflections contest year — 2021 winners in five categories (artistic, human, landscape, animal and editor's choice) will receive \$75 and runners-up will each receive \$25.

Amateur photographers are encouraged to send photos to Penn Lines Photos, P.O. Box 1266, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1266. Include name, address, phone number and the name of your electric cooperative.

Please send spring photos by the end of March, summer photos by May, fall photos by July and winter photos by September. 2021 photos will be returned in early 2022 if you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. 📧



Joann Kline  
Tri-County REC



Paul Fedornak  
REA Energy



Natalie Ling  
REA Energy



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# dish

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# NETFLIX

**- Fully Integrated -**  
Just Change The Channel  
And Watch!  
Netflix subscription required.

## Add Internet!

# Blazing-Fast + Internet

~~\$59<sup>99</sup>~~  
month  
for Internet

**\$40**  
per month  
for Internet

- Speeds from 25Mbps-1 Gbps
- No Matter Where You Live
- Now with Unlimited Data!

## Save up to \$20/month!\*

\*\$ off discount offers vary by service address. TV service not required for Internet. Speeds and prices vary by provider. Call for details or visit godish.com/internet/hughesnet.

godish.com/pricelock 🔍

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# 1-866-290-7151

Mon-Fri: 7am-10pm • Sat: 7am-9pm • Sun: 10am-7pm Central Time

**dish**  
Authorized Retailer

Offer for new and qualifying former customers only. Important Terms and Conditions:

Qualification: Advertised price requires credit qualification and 24-month commitment. Upfront activation and/or receiver upgrade fees may apply based on credit qualification. Offer ends 7/14/21. 2-Year Commitment: Early termination fee of \$20/mo. remaining applies if you cancel early. Included in 2-year price guarantee at \$64.99 advertised price: America's Top 120 programming package, local channels, HD service fees, and Hopper Duo Smart DVR for 1 TV. Included in 2-year price guarantee for additional cost: Programming package upgrades (\$79.99 for AT120+, \$89.99 for AT200, \$99.99 for AT250), monthly fees for upgraded or additional receivers (\$5-\$7 per additional TV, receivers with additional functionality may be \$10-\$15). Regional Sports: RSN Surcharge up to \$3/mo. applies to AT120+ and higher packages and varies based on location. NOT included in 2-year price guarantee or advertised price (and subject to change): Taxes & surcharges, add-on programming (including premium channels), DISH Protect, and transactional fees. Premium Channels: 3 Mos. Free: After 3 mos., you will be billed \$30/mo. for Showtime, Starz, and DISH Movie Pack unless you call or go online to cancel. Remote: The DISH Voice Remote with the Google Assistant requires internet-connected Hopper, Joey, or Wally device. Customer must press Voice Remote button to activate feature. The Google Assistant Smart Home features require Google account and compatible devices. Google is a trademark of Google LLC. Other: Netflix streaming membership required. All packages, programming, features, and functionality and all prices and fees not included in price lock are subject to change without notice. After 6 mos., if selected, you will be billed \$9.99/mo. for DISH Protect Silver unless you call to cancel. After 2 years, then-current everyday prices for all services apply. For business customers, additional monthly fees may apply. Free standard professional installation only. Indiana C.P.D Reg. No. - 19-08615. ©2021 GoDISH.com. All rights reserved. Internet speeds, prices, and providers vary by customer address. \$40 price refers to widely available plan from multiple providers. Restrictions apply. Nationwide availability of 25 Mbps plan is subject to change without notice. The application of "Unlimited Data with no Hard Data Limits" varies by provider, but commonly mean that your access to the internet will not be stopped by going over a data limit, but that speeds may be lowered. Call for details. Internet not provided by DISH and will be billed separately.