

COOPERATIVE UPDATE

Reflecting on Callaway Electric Cooperative's 89 Years of Service

Thomas W. Howard, CEO/General Manager

It was a beautiful day for Callaway Electric Cooperative's 89th Annual Meeting, and I want to thank each of you who attended. The presence of 370 registered members and over 525 attendees demonstrates the strong support and engagement of our membership, something that has been at the core of Callaway Electric Cooperative since its earliest days.

As we approach our 90th year, I can't help but reflect on what that first annual meeting might have been like. What were the pressing issues? Finding poles? Hiring linemen? Securing generation sources? While the details have changed, one thing remains the same – our commitment to delivering safe, reliable and affordable electricity to the people of rural Callaway and southern Montgomery counties.

A Community-Centered Event

This year's meeting had a few exciting additions. Associated Electric

Cooperative Inc. (AECI), our wholesale power provider based in Springfield, had a booth where members could view the "Journey of Electricity" through a virtual reality experience from the low-sulfur coal mines of Wyoming's Powder River Basin to AECI's power plant facilities, across power lines to homes and businesses.

It was an excellent way for members to get a behind-the-scenes look at how our power is generated. A second VR option this year included a "Line Worker Experience" which gave viewers a unique perspective of a cooperative line crew completing a pole replacement from start to finish. We appreciate the team at AECI for providing these experiences for our members.

Callabyte, our broadband subsidiary, was also on hand to assist members with streaming options, sign up new subscribers and answer questions about the service. We're incredibly proud of Callabyte's growth and the service it provides to our community. Although we had to discontinue our TV service, Callabyte remains strong,

Over the last 89 years, the details may have changed, but one thing remains the same – our commitment to delivering safe, reliable and affordable electricity to the people of rural Callaway and southern Montgomery counties.

providing high-speed internet and phone services to members. More than 200 members and subscribers attended our "Streaming 101" classes to explore their streaming options, highlighting the strong interest in

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Reflecting on Callaway Electric Cooperative's 89 Years of Service

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making a seamless transition.

Callabyte has continued to expand, surpassing 11,000 subscribers, including new service areas in southern Boone County. We're also proud to have launched 4Gbps internet service, ensuring members have access to some of the fastest speeds available for their homes and businesses.

We also provided information about Operation Roundup, sharing details about how this voluntary program benefits our community. Thanks to member participation, Operation Roundup funds go to local individuals and organizations in need. We signed up 19 new participants at the meeting. More information about this valuable program is available on our website or by calling our office.

Beyond business, we enjoyed a meal of fried chicken from Lee's Famous Recipe Chicken, served with the help of Hatton's 4-H Club members. The Callaway County Health Department provided blood pressure checks, and Dr. Amy Fleming performed hearing tests. We also awarded electricity certificates totaling \$1,000 to 14 lucky members who were attendees of the meeting.

Addressing Key Issues

During the meeting, I highlighted some of the challenges we faced in 2024, including supply chain disruptions, inflation and rising interest rates. These issues are ongoing, but we are continuously adapting and finding solutions to achieve our priority of providing affordable service. Our reliability efforts paid off in 2024, as our average outage time was 77.5 minutes per member, a significant improvement over our five-year average of 121.8 minutes.

One major topic was the Clean

Power Plan 2, a federal regulation that, if enacted, could result in the closure of most fossil fuel generation facilities by 2035. These facilities are essential in providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity. Many of you answered our call last year to contact your representatives about this issue, and I sincerely thank you for doing so. Callaway Electric and other cooperatives worked to urge Congress to stop the EPA's proposed power plant rules, which could strain the electric grid and increase the risk of rolling blackouts.

Election Results

During the business meeting, incumbent directors Wesley Zerr, David Guerrant and Anita Ruga were re-elected to the board. Three proposed bylaw amendments were also approved. The amendments require director candidates to have resided within the CEC service area for no less than 24 months; require director candidates by petition to disclose the same information as candidates selected by the Nominating Committee; and allows CEC to recover all debts owed by a terminated membership by early retirement of that membership's capital credits on a discounted basis.

Looking Ahead to 2025

I am more optimistic about the year ahead than I have been in quite some time. We're seeing signs of growth in the service area, including new economic activity and a strengthening workforce.

However, we also face rising costs, and a revenue increase was necessary to keep up with rising wholesale power costs. This increase took effect with March 23, 2025 usage and will appear on May bills. For an average residential member using 1,200 kilowatt-hours per month, the increase will be about

4.6% or \$10 per month.

Safety is an area of continued focus. Public and employee safety remain top priorities, as does maintaining our high standard of service reliability through proactive efforts such as vegetation management. Our system reliability consistently approaches the coveted 99.99% benchmark, a testament to the hard work of our team.

We're also investing in the future through youth programs. The National Rural Electric Youth Tour and the CYCLE program give high school students the opportunity to develop leadership skills and learn about the cooperative model. Many past participants have returned to the area as business owners, community leaders and cooperative supporters.

Our Commitment to You

Whether it's delivering electricity, providing broadband through Callabyte, or supporting our community through programs like Operation Roundup, our mission remains unchanged: to serve you, our members, in the best way possible. We are here to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity while maintaining sound business practices.

I want to thank our board of directors, our hardworking employees, and most importantly, you – the members – for making this cooperative what it is today. Your support and engagement ensure that Callaway Electric will remain strong for years to come.

Here's to another year of service and progress. We look forward to seeing you at our 90th annual meeting!

Until next time,

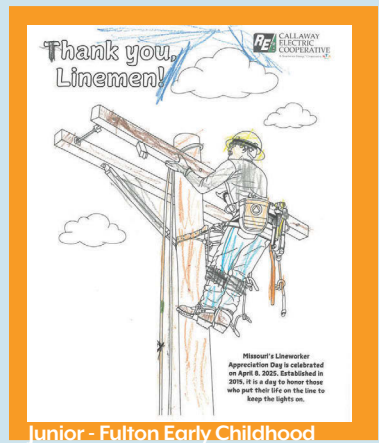
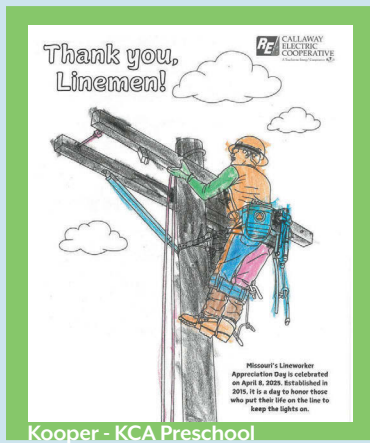
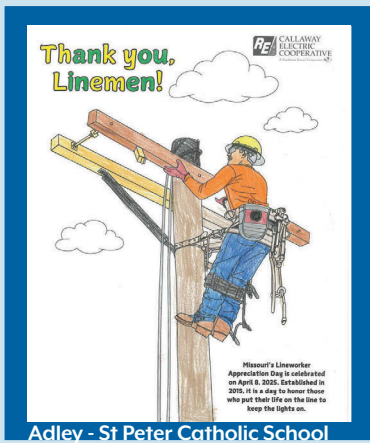
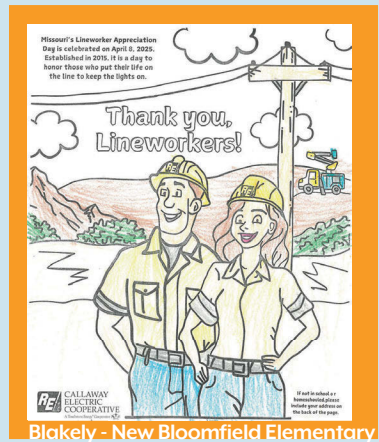
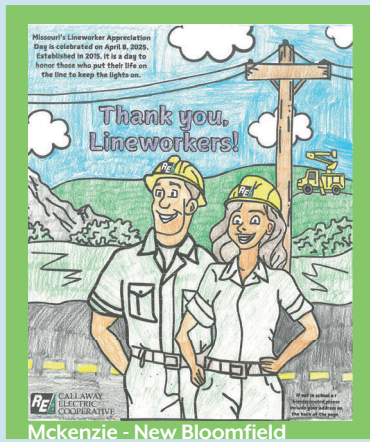
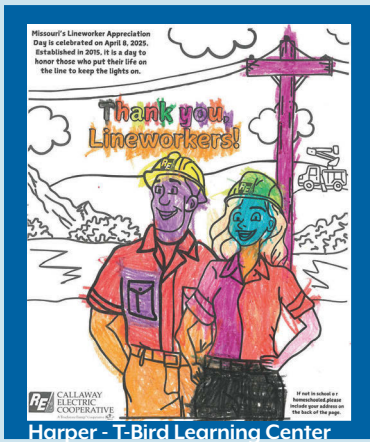
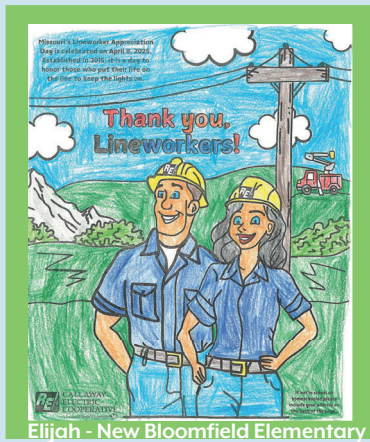
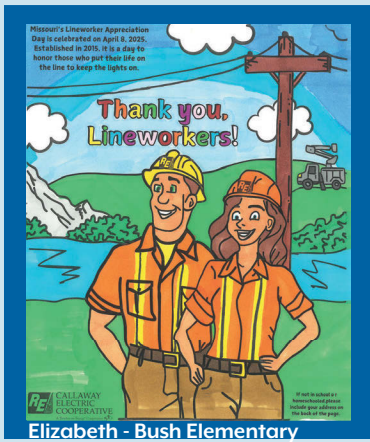


LINEWOMAN APPRECIATION day



COLORING CONTEST RESULTS

Special thanks to all who participated in this year's coloring contest! We enjoyed seeing creations from talented local young artists.





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Whether you are building a new home or remodeling an existing one, Callabyte can help ensure a quality experience with our fiber to the home internet and phone services.

- ▶ **Identify a central location for the 'wiring closet'**
One key thing is while walls are open, the installation of relatively inexpensive wiring will pay big rewards in the end. A first step would be to identify in your home a central location where a number of wires can be terminated. We will call this the wiring closet. In the closet, with the use of an in-home media panel, all wires can be neatly organized. Be sure to include an electrical outlet in your panel as there will ultimately be electronics needed for the final connections.
- ▶ **Hardwire TV locations for the best experience**
The largest consumer of internet in our homes today is typically our televisions. It is recommended that from the wiring closet to everywhere a TV may be located, two CAT-6 Ethernet cables should be ran. By running two cables, a Smart-TV can be directly connected, as can an additional streaming TV device. Depending on your preference, a coax cable (RG-6) can also be ran to each TV location. Be sure to think about locations where televisions are placed today, and where they may be located in the future.
- ▶ **Flexible conduit from the entry point to the wiring closet will simplify service installation**
To bring service from outside to the wiring closet, a flexible conduit should be installed from the media panel to an entry point on the outside of the home. A 3/4 inch flexible water pipe can be used for this purpose. In routing the conduit/water pipe, be sure to avoid sharp bends and kinks. It would also be best that the conduit be one continuous piece, absent of any couplers or fittings. If the budget will allow, two conduit runs will serve you well into the future.



▶ **Maximize performance in a larger home by planning for repeating hardware**

One additional consideration to think about when running cables, especially if your home is somewhat large, is the addition of wireless repeaters or mesh radios. While wireless technology can extend using wireless signals, to maximize performance, consider running CAT-6 Ethernet cable to locations where repeating hardware will be placed. With the addition of wire connecting wireless equipment, performance can typically be doubled. The cost of that improvement is very inexpensive while cables are easy to install.

The Callabyte Tech Team can help provide additional guidance and information about wiring your home in preparation of Callabyte service. Feel free to reach out for a free consultation by contacting us at 573-826-2371. One of our technicians will be happy to review your plans and share ideas to help simplify the process of preparing for your fiber optic service while the walls are open. By working together, our job is a little easier to install Callabyte service, and the look of your final installation will be more professional with all network cabling hidden in the walls.

Reach our team for more details
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ON THE COVER

Jheron Nunnely specializes in jumbo stuffed potatoes. His business was selected by our readers as Best Food Truck. Read about more of Missouri's best on page 13.



Community-focused careers

Electric cooperatives offer fulfilling, exciting jobs

If you want a job that offers more than just a paycheck, consider working at one of Missouri's 47 electric cooperatives. These community-focused organizations provide stable and rewarding careers with a mission-driven purpose: keeping the lights on and strengthening the local economy. Whether you're seeking your first job, a new challenge or career capstone, an electric cooperative could be the perfect fit for you.

Electric co-ops prioritize service over profit, meaning your work directly benefits the people in your community. This community-first mindset creates a workplace where employees feel valued and connected to their neighbors.

Electric cooperatives offer a wide range of career opportunities. Here is just a small sampling of the work you could do:

- **Engineering and Operations:** Design and maintain electrical systems that power homes and businesses.
- **Cybersecurity and Technology:** Protect the cooperative's digital infrastructure and develop broadband services.
- **Finance and Administration:** Track income and expenses of the co-op, while overseeing business operations.
- **Customer and Member Services:** Help members lower their energy bills and navigate service options.
- **Communications and Public Relations:** Educate the public and organize community initiatives.

Whether you're climbing utility poles, crunching numbers or planning events, there's a place for your skills at an electric cooperative. If you want a career with stability, great benefits and the chance to make a real difference, working at an electric cooperative is a smart choice. Just ask anyone you know who works at one, and you'll find out they offer long-term and exciting careers.

See job opportunities and learn more about co-op careers at www.moelectriccoops.com.

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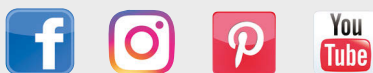
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RM | PERSPECTIVES

My favorite things

by Caleb Jones | cjones@amec.coop

Just like *Rural Missouri* does every April, I put together a list of my favorite things. Some are lifelong traditions, others are new experiences and a few are just good stories worth telling. In no particular order, here's this year's list.

Favorite race car driver: Up until a week ago, my favorite race car driver was NASCAR legend Carl Edwards (who also happens to be a Missouri electric co-op member). But Carl got beat this year by Beau Wankum, who proudly raced in the finals with his Willie Wiredhand Boy Scout Pinewood Derby car. I haven't seen Carl Edwards race Pinewood Derby cars, but if he ever does, he might have his hands full.

Favorite eye-opening experience: When I was 15, I spent a month in Takamatsu, Japan, through a 4-H exchange program. I didn't learn much Japanese or acquire a taste for anything wrapped in seaweed, but I did learn no matter where you live or what you do, people are more alike than different.

Favorite president: I've had the honor of working for the U.S. President and even served as president of my FFA chapter. But my favorite president? That is Missouri Electric Cooperatives Board President Loren Haines. He always stays true to the motto: What's best for our members is best for the cooperatives.

Favorite park bench: The boys down at fish camp surprised my family by donating a park bench at Bennett Spring State Park in memory of my grandfather, Carson Teel. He was the one who started taking us to trout season opening day over 40 years ago. This year, the fourth generation of Jones boys carried on the tradition and even brought home some trout. That bench will be a reminder that some traditions are built to last.



Beau Wankum, shown here with his Willie Wiredhand Pinewood Derby race car, is my favorite driver.

Favorite romantic date: Long ago, I was smitten with a blonde-haired damsel, and I needed to impress her. My buddy Chuck Caisley got me front-row tickets to watch the lighting of the Kansas City Country Club Plaza Christmas lights. Seventeen years, four houses, three dogs and two kids later — those Plaza lights are still twinkling for us.

Favorite magazine: I grew up reading *Boys' Life*, *Highlights* and the *Missouri Conservationist*, or at least looking at the pictures. It wasn't until I started valuing words and pictures, however, that I realized *Rural Missouri* tells the story of real Missourians. Now, it's my favorite magazine because every month it captures the people and places that make rural Missouri home.

Caleb Jones is the executive vice president and CEO of Missouri Electric Cooperatives. He is a member of Boone Electric Cooperative.

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Above: Junior Blake Gustafson launches a drone near the Mississippi River. **Below:** Students use thermal imaging in their drones to locate deer.

Taking off

SEMO students can earn drone degree

by Paul Newton | pnewton@ruralmissouri.coop



The slight buzz from the spinning propellers rises and falls as a trio of drones passes. At the northeast corner of Cape Girardeau, students split into two groups, each carefully navigating their drones overhead along planned paths. They aren't flying for fun though — this is drone school.

Equipped with thermal cameras, they are searching for deer. “In the fall there’s a managed deer hunt in these parks,” says Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) instructor Andrew Chronister. “We’re trying to see how effective that hunt is. For the last three years, we’ve come out here to count the deer with our drones and we give that data to our biology department to process, which in turn works with the Missouri Department of Conservation.”

Andrew leads SEMO’s unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) program — the only bachelor’s degree of its kind in Missouri. The program prepares students for a broad range of careers in drone technology.

Before joining SEMO, Andrew spent 25 years as a video



Instructor Andrew Chronister launches a drone while he was troubleshooting issues with students, from left, Audrie Clark, Kaci Dunlap and Lucky Okpanachi Atabo.

producer. While capturing aerial footage of buildings, he became fascinated with drones. His passion led him to build his own drone and eventually join the university as an advisor for agricultural drone technology. The UAS program was established at SEMO in 2017, and Andrew took over three years later.

“We’re trying to create well-rounded drone professionals,” Andrew says. “People who cannot just fly the drones, but manage departments and things like that.”

The curriculum covers a variety of other topics drone pilots need to know far beyond flying. Throughout their four years, students take classes on meteorology, GIS, basic circuits, microcomputer maintenance, technical communication, physics and more.

The first core drone class most students take is the fundamentals of aviation where they learn what makes an aircraft fly. Students start to become familiar with drones in UAS fundamentals where Andrew prepares them for their Part 107 FAA test so they can fly commercially. Another class focuses on remote sensing technology and students in the UAS design class build a drone from the ground up. Another class focuses on drone laws, policy and safety.

One of the final classes is UAS mission planning. “That’s where we take all the knowledge that we learned in the previous classes and we wrap it all up and go out and fly various types of missions, like counting the deer,” Andrew says. “We fly various missions like thermal, multispectral, hyperspectral and photography.”

A capstone course is personalized to each student who completes projects and missions. “There’s a physics student who’s researching light pollution on campus,” Andrew says. “Our capstone students have been flying missions around campus at various moon stages. Over the next few years, we’ll be expanding into agriculture spraying too.”

Currently, SEMO has a dozen students majoring in UAS, with more pursuing it as a minor. Graduates have gone on to work for Boeing, inspect wind farms and even work for companies specializing in counter-drone technology.

“The diversity of what we can do after we graduate is incredible,” says Audrie Clark, a UAS major from Poplar

Bluff. “Drones are in the baby stage and I think we’re going to see a huge growth in technology in the next five years. It’s exciting knowing there’s going to be new opportunities that come up.”

The most popular majors that minor in UAS are agriculture, construction management, professional pilot, law enforcement and communications, according to Andrew.

Austin Gross is a junior from Troy majoring in plant and soil science and minoring in UAS. He says he picked the minor to educate himself on drone spraying and land surveying. “I was completely new to drones in general,” he says after inspecting the area for deer. “Doing this program and flying in class has given me the confidence to know I can do this whenever I’m out of school.”

As drone and camera technology rapidly evolve, Andrew envisions them being used in more industries. First responders might put up a drone as soon as they arrive on a scene to survey the area, use thermal imaging to look for hot spots of a fire, search for possible criminals or to help with accident reconstruction. Quarry operators use drones to quickly measure piles of rocks. Electric cooperative employees use drones to help them inspect power lines.

“Package and food delivery are already happening in some places, but that will be big the next five years,” Andrew says. “I can envision someone in Marble Hill needing an auto part from a store in Cape Girardeau. They can order it and it gets loaded onto a drone and delivered to Marble Hill in 15 minutes.” By comparison, it would take 45 minutes one way to drive this distance.

Andrew says when people think about real-world applications of drones, they become increasingly interested in hearing about the UAS program. “Some people don’t realize there are professions specifically for drone pilots trained in all these things,” he says. “A lot of people just think of drones as toys, but there is so much more they can do.”



For more information on SEMO’s UAS program visit www.semo.edu.



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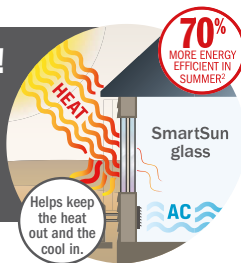


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Each category has a first place, second place and editors' choice. Those who submitted their choices for every category on the online ballot were entered in a sweepstakes to win one of two \$250 Visa gift cards. This year's winners are Amy Davison of Princeton and Constance Wyrick of Tuscumbia, members of Grundy and Gascoage electric cooperatives, respectively.

Use this magazine as road-trip inspiration this year (always check to ensure their business hours match your plans). We'll display these pages in the Missouri Electric Cooperative Building during the Missouri State Fair.



RESTAURANT



1st: Beckett's, Glasgow

Beckett's has been a Glasgow staple for more than three decades. Nikki Gouge bought the former sports bar in 2007 and transformed it into a downtown dining destination known for their fresh, made-from-scratch food and housemade sauces. Nikki doesn't consider Beckett's upscale, but rather elevated. That starts with their popular steak pita. Fresh-cut rib-eye is grilled to your liking, placed inside warm pita bread and topped with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, feta cheese and Beckett's creamy garlic sauce. Pair it with hand-cut fries or sweet potato waffle fries with housemade honey jalapeno sauce. Other popular dishes include their hand-pattied burgers and hand-breaded tenderloins. Can't get enough? You can purchase Beckett's ranch, creamy garlic and honey jalapeno sauces to take home.

2nd: Fulton Cafe, Fulton

Editors' Choice: Carson's, Sikeston

1st: Wabash BBQ, Excelsior Springs

You don't have to be an engineer to find award-winning barbecue in Excelsior Springs. Diners have been lining up since 1997 for Wabash BBQ's ribs, brisket, burnt ends and more. You'll be right on track with the Piggback Combo featuring smoked brisket, ham, turkey, pulled pork and a pair of fall-off-the-bone ribs along with two sides aka Signals and Switches. If you want your barbecue between two slices of bread, Wabash has you covered with sandwiches ranging from 4 to 12 ounces of smoked meat. Start your meal with their fresh-cut, hand-dipped onion strings and you won't be disappointed.

2nd: Sweet Smoke BBQ, Jefferson City

Editors' Choice: Duke's BBQ Shack, Wentzville

BARBECUE



PIZZA



1st: Firehouse 54, Eagleville

Pizza aficionados don't need to visit the big city to find big taste. Tana Kinder started Firehouse 54 food trailer in 2005 eventually moving into a permanent location in 2009. Tana's pizzas feature fresh ingredients and unique pairings. There's meat, supreme and veggie pizzas for those seeking more traditional pies. For something different, opt for one of Firehouse 54's chicken pizzas. The most popular is the chicken fajita pizza with a base of marinara topped with peppered chicken, green and red peppers, onions and a blend of mozzarella and provolone. The pizza is topped with a garlic sprinkle and the crust is buttered just before serving. All of Tana's pizzas are offered as a keto-friendly pizza bowl as well.

2nd: Brooklyn Pizza, Fulton

Editors' Choice: Mother Tucker's, Lamar

1st: Fireside Bakes and Brew, Fayette

Nichole Atkins used her culinary school background cooking high-end, three-course meals for years. However, the late hours weren't suited for the self-described "morning person." Nichole thought coffee would be the perfect fit for her. She opened her mobile coffee shop, Fireside Bakes and Brew, in May 2021, and a few months later moved into a vacant building just off the downtown square in Fayette. Nichole says Fireside's unique tastes come from the air-roasted beans they source from The Roasterie Coffee Co. in Kansas City. The white caramel mocha is Fireside's most popular year-round drink, especially for students at nearby Central Methodist University. When the leaves change colors in the fall, Nichole can't make enough of her pumpkin pie latte.

2nd: Bourbon Cafe and Coffee Saloon, Bourbon

Editors' Choice: Knox County High School Bus Cafe, Edina

COFFEE SHOP



BAKERY



1st: Hoeckele's Bakery and Deli, Perryville

From classic glazed donuts to specialty caramel pecan rolls, Hoeckele's Bakery and Deli has something for everyone. Founded in 1937 by brothers Joe and Paul Hoeckele, this bakery has become a southeast Missouri staple that attracts customers from across the nation. Their menu, now overseen by cousins Eli Hoeckele and Leslie Hoeckele-Esselman, has sweet treat options for every generation, including cake donuts, long johns, French pastries and specialty cupcakes. Need a break from the sugar? Try their deli menu, which includes signature sandwiches, homemade soups and fresh salads. Their recently added drink menu offers frozen coffees and espresso beverages, as well as fruit smoothies and teas. Early morning visits are imperative if you want to snag a treat, as many of their fan favorites sell out daily!

2nd: Rolling Pin Bakery, Glasgow

Editors' Choice: Black Oak Bakery, Dearborn

1st: My Murphy's Stuffed Potatoes, Mexico

Before Jheron Nunnely opened his food truck in 2019, he knew he would specialize in jumbo stuffed potatoes. Inspired by date night meals he'd cook with his wife, Kendall, Jheron knew the over-the-top potatoes could be made relatively quickly and would be well received in mid-Missouri. The most popular potato is the McMurphy. A giant spud is split open and topped with smoked ground beef, bacon, lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle, cheese sauce, a mustard-based barbecue sauce, sour cream, crumbled potato chips and chives. While potatoes are Mr. Murphy's specialty, the toppings are also available on salads and nachos. Jheron's potatoes were so popular that in late 2024, he opened a permanent Mr. Murphy's in downtown Mexico.

2nd: Mad Moose and Crew BBQ, Cuba

Editors' Choice: Smokin Pickle, Fulton

FOOD TRUCK



BURGER



1st: Rich's Famous Burgers, Sullivan, St. James, Owensville, Steelville and Bel-Nor

For nearly a decade diners have been flocking to one of Rich's Famous Burgers locations to try owner Jason Cusick's twist on classic burger flavors. Jason named his original restaurant in Steelville after his friend and mentor, the late Rich Robson. The Angus beef at Rich's is never frozen and hand-pattied each morning. Likely the most unique item on the menu is the Jam Burger. Angus beef patties are cooked to order and topped with thick-cut bacon, gooey peanut butter and Rich's housemade hot pepper strawberry jam and all served between two slices of Texas toast. Other interesting burgers include the Big Cheesy, which is topped with deep-fried jalapeno mac-n-cheese bites and the Breakfast Burger with a runny egg and bacon.

2nd: Dukes on the Boulevard, Jefferson City

Editors' Choice: Mary Jane Burgers and Brew, Perryville

1st: Stone Hill Winery, Hermann

Set atop a hill that overlooks downtown Hermann is Stone Hill Winery. It is Missouri's oldest winery and has received more accolades than can be counted. The distinct taste of their wine starts with the grapes grown on their 192 acres of vineyards spread across seven locations on rolling hills surrounding Hermann. If you're a fan of Norton wine, you're in for a treat with Stone Hill's 2022 Cross J Norton. At the 2024 Missouri Wine Competition, the red varietal was named the best Norton wine, best red wine and took home the prestigious Governor's Cup. Stop by Stone Hill on your next Hermann trip, fill up a meat-and-cheese tray and enjoy the postcard-worthy views, which are only topped by the unforgettable wine.

2nd: Spencer Manor Winery, St. James

Editors' Choice: Charleville Brewery and Winery, Ste. Genevieve

WINERY



BREWERY/ DISTILLERY



1st: Public House Brewing Co., Rolla and St. James

Josh Stacy started his career in the corporate world, traveling across the country nearly every week. His family home brewed beer, so fittingly, Josh would always find the newest craft brewery on his travels. "I just knew someone was going to open a brewery in Rolla and I was going to resent it if it wasn't me," he says. He opened the Public House Brewing Co. in 2010 serving a handful of beers brewed behind that bar in Rolla. They expanded and started distribution in 2013 with a second location in St. James. This year they're expanding and renovating their original location in downtown Rolla. Josh says the Public House's two most popular brews are the Cream Ale — an easy-drinking light beer they've sold for more than a decade — and the Elusive IPA, made from a blend of five or six different varieties of hops.

2nd: Pinckney Bend Distillery, New Haven

Editors' Choice: Piney River Brewing Co., Bucyrus

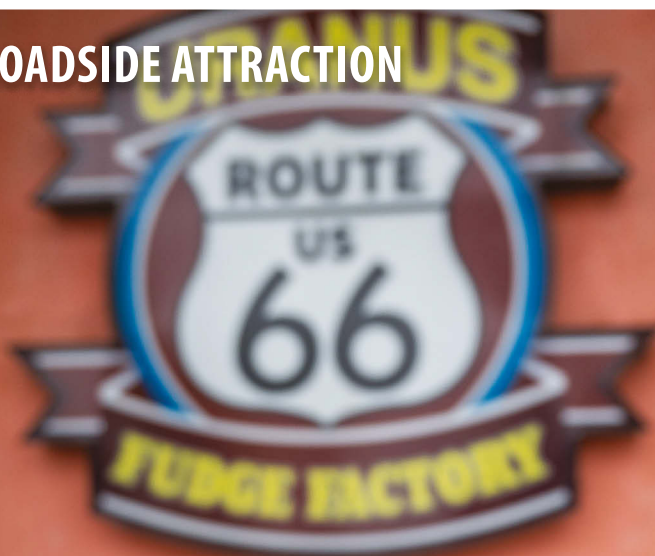
1st: Uranus Fudge Factory and General Store, St. Robert

It's hard to miss the Uranus Fudge Factory and General Store as you drive across Missouri on Interstate 44. Plenty of not-so-subtle billboards draw your attention to the one-of-a-kind roadside attraction complete with an oddity-filled sideshow museum, mini golf course, escape room, ice cream and 80 flavors of taffy. The real draw is the housemade fudge, which is made daily and cut to order. If you think your friends need a souvenir from the over-the-top pitstop, they offer rows of apparel, stuffed animals, playing cards and more adorned with the unforgettable name.

2nd: Jim The Wonder Dog Museum, Marshall

Editors' Choice: Maxie the Goose, Sumner

ROADSIDE ATTRACTION



PARK



1st: Maramec Spring Park, St. James

Whether you're trying to catch your limit, go for a hike or take in the history of the first iron works west of the Mississippi River, Maramec Spring Park in St. James has you covered. One of the biggest days at the park each year is March 1, when anglers from all over descend on the park for the opening day of trout season in Missouri. The 1,860-acre park's spring-fed waters are stocked with rainbow trout for the day. Maramec Spring is the fifth largest spring in the state with 96 million gallons of water flowing through it daily. The park is privately owned and managed by the James Foundation which dedicates its efforts to the preservation and conservation of the natural history and beauty of the park.

2nd: Bennett Spring State Park, Lebanon

Editors' Choice: Elephant Rocks State Park, Belleview

1st: Apple Butter Makin' Days, Mt. Vernon

For more than five decades, folks have descended on the courthouse square in Mt. Vernon for the annual Apple Butter Makin' Days each October. Today the festival draws more than 100,000 visitors across three days making it one of the biggest celebrations in the state. The main attraction is homemade apple butter. The apple butter is cooked every day in giant copper kettles over open fires and the sale of apple butter helps fund charitable projects in the region. Other highlights include plenty of vendors, a parade, an apple pie baking contest and weiner dog and terrapin races. This year's festival will be held Oct. 10-12 and will have free admission.

2nd: Septemberfest, Tipton

Editors' Choice: Tom Sawyer Days, Hannibal

COMMUNITY EVENT



FLEA/ANTIQUe MARKET



1st: Dusty Daisy Trading Co., Clinton

At Dusty Daisy Trading Co. in Clinton, you can find just about anything — from depression glass to costume jewelry to metal signs to refurbished fishing poles. Owner Nancy Burkhart says she always wanted to own a shop, and she opened Dusty Daisy in 2021. "We pride ourselves in offering new-to-you treasures and on having the friendliest customer service," she says. "We love visiting with our customers." Around 30 vendors sell their wares at Dusty Daisy — and they add items weekly. For visitors to Truman Lake, the shop is a great rainy-day activity.

2nd: Sara's Treasure, Cameron

Editors' Choice: Jacob's Cave Swapping Day, Versailles

1st: Midway Golf and Games, Columbia

Your family is going to need more than one trip to take in all the action at Midway Golf and Games just outside of Columbia. Golfers of all skill levels have options including a par 3 course, mini golf, Toptracer driving range and even foot golf. Not into golf? No problem. Work on your swing inside the batting cages or press the gas on the outdoor go-kart track. Other outdoor activities include axe throwing, Blitzball and archery tag. After a day full of adventure, relax outside with their wide variety of yard games such as oversized Jenga and checkers, ping pong, cornhole and much more. Once you've worked up an appetite, you can watch golfers tee off on the driving range from inside 44 Tavern, which serves up mouthwatering burgers, nachos, tacos and more.

2nd: St. Louis Zoo, St. Louis

Editors' Choice: Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium, Springfield

FAMILY FUN



OUTDOOR ADVENTURE



1st: Dogwood Canyon Nature Park, Lampe

You'll never want to go back indoors after you visit Dogwood Canyon Nature Park. The 10,000-acre outdoor wonderland is dedicated to promoting conservation and protecting the outdoors. Options abound with a working gristmill, conservation center, horseback riding, more than 8 miles of paved and off-road trails, trout fishing, wildlife tours and a treehouse for those young and young at heart. You can take it all in while surrounded by impossibly beautiful flowing water, towering bluffs and wildlife in the park that is nestled in the Ozark Mountains. If your outdoor adventures at Dogwood Canyon Nature Park have you feeling hungry, you can satisfy your appetite at the Mill and Grill Restaurant with items such as elk sausage, potato and kale soup or the bison burger.

2nd: Katy Trail State Park, Clinton to Machens

Editors' Choice: Float Trip, Ozark National Scenic Riverways

1st: St. Charles

Rooted in history, downtown St. Charles has something for everyone all year long. Founded in the 1760s, the Missouri River town is home to Missouri's First State Capitol, was the starting point for Lewis and Clark on their journey to the Pacific Ocean and is the finish line for the MR340 boat race each summer. More than two dozen restaurants and plentiful shopping options flank the brick-lined historic Main Street. There's at least one festival each month of the year with highlights including Once Upon a Valentine: Stories for the Loved and Loveless featuring pro- and anti-Valentine's Day festivities and St. Charles Christmas Traditions, which brings the Christmas spirit of the past to life with food, carolers and costumes.

2nd: Jefferson City

Editors' Choice: Cape Girardeau

MAIN STREET



MADE IN MISSOURI



1st: Dandelion Creek, Plattsburg

What started as a kitchen hobby has turned into a burgeoning brick-and-mortar business for Lori and Mathias Nelson. The couple own Dandelion Creek Co., a business that specializes in handmade goat milk soap. Their soap is made from the milk of their Alpine and Saanen goats. Depending on the season, you can choose from dozens of flavors of soap, such as lavender and chamomile, midnight merlot, open meadows and roadhouse. Lori also makes beard oils, lip balm and other bath products. If you're lucky enough to time your visit during kidding season, you can even cuddle some of the Nelson's baby goats.

2nd: Burgers' Smokehouse, California

Editors' Choice: Southern Gent Candles, Rocheport

1st: Flat Rock Leather, Pilot Grove

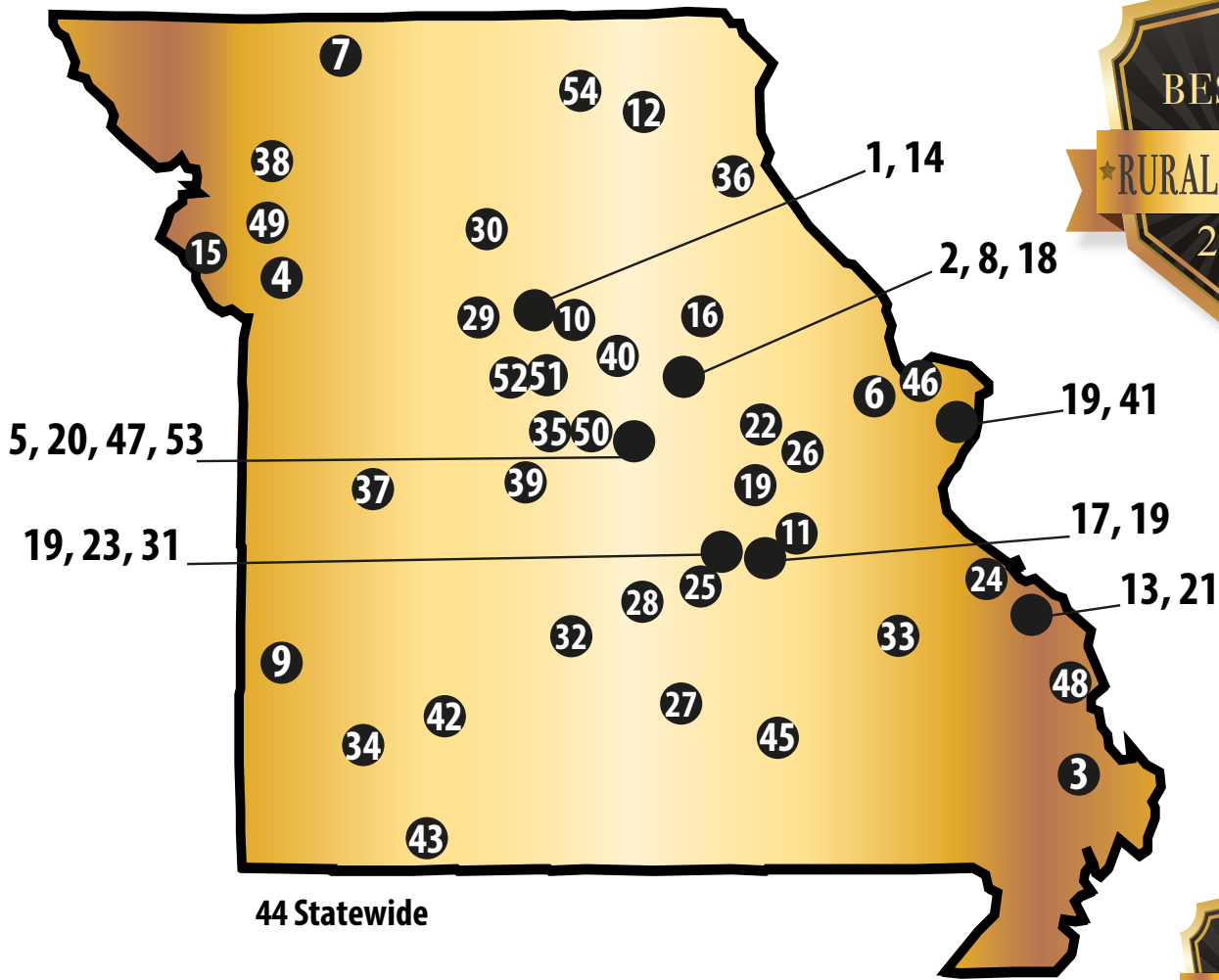
Molly Gerke's love of horses growing up began transitioning into a passion for leather work and the cowboy culture as a teenager. Her parents caught her with a screwdriver and hammer trying to make cowboy designs on leather. Shortly thereafter, Molly received a proper leather working kit for her 15th birthday and Flat Rock Leather was born. Today she specializes in creating custom, intricate leatherwork on everything from gun slings to belts to cattle record books from her studio in Pilot Grove. "The cowboy culture did draw me to the leatherwork initially," she says. "But once I started working with it more and saw how versatile it is; it's something that just kind of spoke to me."

2nd: Caricature Artist Jim Dyke, Jefferson City

Editors' Choice: Sculptor Brandon Crandell, Brashear

CRAFTSPERSON





44 Statewide



Restaurant

- 1. Beckett's
- 2. Fulton Cafe
- 3. Carson's

BBQ

- 4. Wabash BBQ
- 5. Sweet Smoke BBQ
- 6. Duke's BBQ Shack

Pizza

- 7. Firehouse 54
- 8. Brooklyn Pizza
- 9. Mother Tucker's

Coffee Shop

- 10. Fireside Bakes and Brew
- 11. Bourbon Cafe & Coffee Saloon
- 12. Knox County School Bus Cafe

Bakery

- 13. Hoeckele's Bakery and Deli
- 14. Rolling Pin Bakery
- 15. Black Oak Bakery

Food Truck

- 16. Mr. Murphy's Stuffed Potatoes
- 17. Mad Moose and Crew BBQ
- 18. Smokin Pickle

Burger

- 19. Rich's Famous Burgers
- 20. Dukes on the Boulevard
- 21. Mary Jane Burgers and Brew

Winery

- 22. Stone Hill Winery
- 23. Spencer Manor Winery
- 24. Charleville Brewery & Winery

Brewery/Distillery

- 25. Public House Brewing Co.
- 26. Pinckney Bend Distillery
- 27. Piney River Brewing Co.

Roadside Attraction

- 28. Uranus Fudge Factory
- 29. Jim the Wonder Dog
- 30. Maxie the Goose

Park

- 31. Maramec Spring Park
- 32. Bennett Spring State Park
- 33. Elephant Rocks State Park

Community Event

- 34. Apple Butter Makin' Days
- 35. Septemberfest
- 36. Tom Sawyer Days

Flea Market/Antique

- 37. Dusty Daisy
- 38. Sara's Treasure
- 39. Jacob's Cave

Family Fun

- 40. Midway Golf and Games
- 41. St. Louis Zoo
- 42. Wonders of Wildlife

Outdoor Adventure

- 43. Dogwood Canyon Nature Park
- 44. Katy Trail State Park
- 45. Float Trip

Downtown

- 46. St. Charles
- 47. Jefferson City
- 48. Cape Girardeau

Made in Missouri

- 49. Dandelion Creek
- 50. Burgers' Smokehouse
- 51. Southern Gent Candles

Artist/Craftsperson

- 52. Flat Rock Leather
- 53. Jim Dyke
- 54. Brandon Crandall



Scan to get a map of all the winners on your phone.

During the 22-year history of the Best of Rural Missouri contest, some restaurants, places and people have emerged as perennial favorites among readers. In 2023, we created a Hall of Fame for these top picks. The list below highlights those entries which have received five or more first-place wins during the history of the statewide contest.

- Hall of Fame:**
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 St. James Winery
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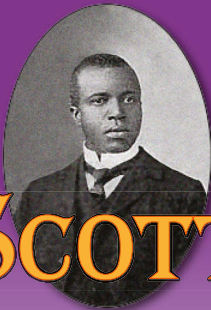
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Easter Treat Traditions

Spencers' Sweet Call continues 100-year candy legacy in Webb City

by Sara Schafer | sschafer@ruralmissouri.coop

With the precision of a chemist and the patience of a preacher, Charles Spencer approaches the rotating machine filled with shimmering liquid gold. He carefully ladles out just the right amount of chocolate — heated precisely to 86.8 degrees. He pours the chocolate into a charming bunny mold, which is held tightly together by three binder clips.

Once the chocolate fills a little under half of the mold, Charles slowly rotates the mold to inspect every angle. “You tap the molds so that the chocolate gets into the features,” he says. “You can see like there’s a little bubble there on her nose, so you have to keep tapping up until the bubble goes out. You usually want them heavier at the bottom, so the bunnies can stand up.”

After Charles is happy with the thickness and consistency, he adds one more clip to the bottom of the mold and stands it up on his worktable to let it cool and set. One bunny done, and several hundred more to go. These bunnies will delight children and adults alike this Easter — offering a sweet taste of nostalgia and fun.

Charles and his wife, Malinda, own Spencer’s Sweet Call at the Minerva in Webb City. They are just the third family to run a business at this location, which originally opened in 1917. The couple opened their store in 2017, after the shop had been closed for several years. “I’m one of the people who got themselves in trouble on the internet,”

Charles and Malinda Spencer own Spencers' Sweet Call at the Minerva in Webb City. This historic candy shop is known for its intricate and delicious chocolates, especially their Easter bunnies and candy-filled eggs.



From left: Charles uses a variety of molds to create his chocolates, which can either be solid or hollow. Two molds are clipped together to form a cavity to fill with chocolate. The chocolate is tempered in a specialized machine. The chocolate goes through a series of temperature changes to make it the correct consistency. Charles rotates the mold to make sure the chocolate evenly coats the mold and doesn't create any air bubbles. Once he's happy with the coating of chocolate, he lets the excess drip out the bottom to be used for another creation. After the chocolate has set, the final step is to carefully pop it out of the mold. The goal is the least amount of handling possible so you have a perfect treat.

Charles says. "I was just looking for used candy equipment online to use as a hobby. Instead, I found a whole candy store."

Charles has always enjoyed making sweet treats. His other job is serving as Presbyterian minister, so he and Malinda would commonly make and take cakes, pies and breads to church functions. Charles was wrapping up his time with a church in Lee's Summit when he found the candy equipment and store for sale in Webb City.

While Malinda was surprised by the idea, she was open to it. "It seemed right, which helped," she says. "It was a lot of change, but you have to be open to change."

The couple moved south and started restoring the store, which was famous for its dozens of varieties of homemade candy, including chocolate hearts for Valentine's Day and candy canes at Christmas. They scrubbed the blue-and-white tile floors, touched up the tin ceiling and worked to bring the antique candy equipment back to life.

Today, the shop's cases are filled with caramels, fun chocolates shaped for various holidays, old-fashioned ribbon candy, pies and cakes. They also have modern-day bulk candy, 80 varieties of soda in glass bottles and other seasonal goodies.

For Easter, the star of the candy case is giant eggs. "The eggs are a big local tradition," Charles says. "People were asking us, 'When are you going to do the eggs?' I asked, 'What are the eggs?' They said, 'Oh, you know, the chocolate eggs with candy inside.' We had to talk to a lot of people to actually get to the bottom of what they were."

The memorable treats include a hollow chocolate egg that's made in an ornate mold. Customers then choose a third of a pound of candy to fill the egg. Charles fills the eggs with treats such as jellybeans or chocolate-covered caramels, then he seals the two egg halves with royal icing.

"You have to make the shell thick enough that it has structural integrity, but thin enough it is like the consistency of a chocolate bar," he says.

Eggs come with two tickets — one with the price (\$16 or \$18 depending on the candy) and one to say what candy is inside. That way grandmothers with large orders know exactly who gets what egg. "You're always worried you'll switch them up," Charles says.

Charles and Malinda admit owning a candy shop came with a steep learning curve. "I have a chemistry degree, and this is the closest I've come to using that degree," Charles says.

The two enjoy seeing customers — whether they are locals or tourists visiting Route 66, which runs a block from the store. They are honored to carry on a 100-year-plus tradition and play a special part in their customers' Easter baskets.



Spencer's Sweet Call at the Minerva is open Wednesdays and Thursdays, 1 to 5 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. It is located at 12 S. Main St. in Webb City. Learn more at sweetcall.net.



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SO YOU WANT TO BE A LINEMAN?

*Here's how to get
to the top of the pole*

Andy Garcia works with a hotstick during the annual Lineman's Rodeo. The event helps him hone his skills as a third-year apprentice lineman for Barry Electric Cooperative.



Left: The Climbing Certification Lab put on by Missouri Electric Cooperatives is often the class that makes would-be linemen think about another career. Most conquer their fear of heights, however. Here participants in the course show off their skills at the lineman school in Jefferson City. **Right:** Briar Meek carries part of a pole that was replaced by a Barry Electric crew. As a first-year apprentice, he mostly works from the ground.

by Jim McCarty | jmccarty@ruralmissouri.coop

You say you like working outdoors? You crave that office with a view. You don't mind putting in the hours and long for a little excitement in your day. Could be you would make a good lineman.

Andy Garcia checked all those boxes when he considered his career path. "My first plan was playing baseball, but I ended up getting injured," says the 22-year-old apprentice lineman. "I knew I wanted to be outside. I knew I wanted to do something different every day. This trade has provided it."

He had little knowledge of what linemen did until his cousin, Osiel Aldava, told him he was looking at lineman school. "I asked him, 'What's line school?'" Andy recalls. "And he kind of told me a little bit about what they do. So, I looked into it. There is a program at Ozark Technical Community College. They had a two-year program and we both applied."

Today both cousins are linemen at electric cooperatives: Andy at Barry Electric, Cassville, and Osiel at Ozark Electric, Mt. Vernon.

It's not easy getting into a lineman school, Andy learned. It helps if you have some exposure to the trade. Fortunately, the cousins knew a lineman who worked for a contractor. "He was able to take a truck home one day, and he took us up in the bucket," Andy says. "That was my first time being in a bucket, being up that high. And I loved it. Just being up there, seeing things from a different perspective. I wasn't scared at all."

That feeling may have changed a bit on the first day of class at Ozark Tech where he was accepted in the college's Electrical Distribution program. Linemen can't be afraid of heights. Besides working from bucket trucks high above the ground, they also must climb poles when the need arises.

"Day one they had us climbing poles," Andy says. "The instructor was having us climb 5, 10 feet just to get used

to it. You started seeing kids climb all the way to the top of the pole, and here I go. I didn't want to be the last one. Just being up there, it can be scary."

Occasionally someone would "gaff out," meaning the spikes strapped to their boots would kick out of the pole. Years ago, a lineman who had this happen might ride a pole to the ground, then spend a few days pulling creosote splinters from their arms. These days linemen wear belts with teeth that grab the pole and stop them from falling.

Briar Meek, 29, is another apprentice lineman at Barry Electric Cooperative. He took a different path to the job. "I was doing natural gas before this, and had done it for about nine years," he says. "I just kind of got bored. I enjoyed working outside but wanted to do something different. So, I ended up going to line school."

Briar went to Northwest Lineman College in Texas, and like Andy, quickly started climbing poles. "I hope it doesn't fall over," Briar says he wthought the first time he was on a pole. "I was nervous because I'm a large guy and I hit the ground pretty hard. But it's one of those things you're going to do if you want to work in this trade."

Most electric cooperatives hire beginning linemen who came to them through one of the technical schools. But some will hire a person with no training, provided they possess a good work ethic.

That was how Johnie Hendrix came to the trade. After serving in the Army Reserve and deploying to Iraq, Sgt. Hendrix became lineman Hendrix at Barry Electric. He worked the co-op's lines until he moved to Missouri Electric Cooperatives as a safety instructor. Today he heads the association's Risk Management and Training Department.

Part of the department's mission is to train linemen through its Apprenticeship Program and supplemental courses for those wanting to improve their skills. While line schools like State Tech in Linn and Ozark Tech in Lebanon and Nixa help students learn the basics of the trade, the education doesn't end with graduation. "There's a whole schooling of on-the-job training ahead of them to



Left: Andy Garcia puts cover-up materials on the hot line he will be working on. He is a third-year apprentice and can work energized lines as long as he is supervised by a journeyman lineman. **Right:** Briar and Andy knock dirt off the auger as the hole for a replacement pole is dug. Apprentice linemen do a lot of the grunt work for electric cooperatives. They will need 8,000 hours of on-the-job training to advance to journeymen.

become a journeyman lineman,” Johnie says.

Newly hired linemen begin as first-year apprentices. They will spend the next four to five years earning their journeyman certification. As they move up in the process, they can perform more and more duties on the job.

To advance in the profession, apprentices must take classes through a program that is accredited by the Department of Labor. Most in Missouri use the Apprentice Lineman Program through Missouri Electric Cooperatives in Jefferson City, Johnie says.

Here they must complete five core classes over four years. They also must complete four 10-unit Power Delivery Program modules. Beyond this is the 8,000 hours of on-the-job training that comes at the hands of veteran linemen. “I’m learning every day,” Andy says. “You can never stop learning.”

Briar agrees. “You’ll learn every day,” he says. “If you quit learning, you probably need to do something else.”

For these linemen the day begins at 7 a.m. when Barry Electric linemen get their orders for the day. On a typical day in late February, Andy and Briar are part of a crew that will change out a pole in Exeter. Their work order is marked “urgent.” Poles are constantly inspected for defects that make them unsafe, and this one showed signs of rot.

Disconnecting the power is not an option, so the crew of six work it hot. Their task is to set a new pole, then transfer the wires from the old pole to the new one.

They use three trucks. One is a digger-derrick, which will drill the hole and lift the new pole into place. As it digs into the soft earth, Andy and Briar knock the soil from the auger. Now the new pole is framed. They do this on the ground, which is much easier than doing it in the air.

Once the pole is set, Andy backs his bucket truck to one side of the pole while journeyman lineman Drew Crain positions a second truck nearby. This is Andy’s job, and Drew will supervise. Andy starts by donning rubber gloves and sleeves. The next step is covering the hot wire with rubber blankets.

As he works Andy is aware he is working next to 7,620 volts. “Safety is a big deal,” he says. “You’ve got your sleeves and gloves to protect you. There was another guy up there with me, so you’ve got to have that trust. They’re watching your back. You’re watching their back. You’ve got to be careful with it, because it can be dangerous.”

Meanwhile, Briar is on the ground with the rest of the crew. He works to set anchors that will help this corner pole hold the strain of the wires. “I enjoy working outside and working on good crews,” he says. “You can joke and cut up and give each other a hard time, but at the same time you’re there to do a job and do it right and make sure everyone goes home the same way they came.”

He says working for an electric co-op allowed him to stay in Cassville. “I coach Mighty Mites football, so that’s something I wanted to continue to do. You are part of the community here,” he says.

Briar has yet to work any major storms. That’s not the case for Andy. He was part of the all-out effort to restore power this past Memorial Day when strong winds plunged a good part of the co-op’s members into darkness.

“That’s when I realized it was going to be a long week,” he says. “I haven’t really had a worst day on the job. You just know you have your hands full. The best day was after all the power was back on. You’d be driving through some neighborhoods, and everybody was outside clapping after you got their lights on. That’s a good feeling.”

The job of a lineman is a tough one, but most agree it’s a job they love. Andy’s advice is to give it all you have.

“Every day is an interview,” he says. “Get out there and do your best.”



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Below: This huge pile of walnut logs will soon be turned into valuable lumber at Missouri-Pacific Lumber Co. — better known as MO PAC Lumber — in Fayette. Most of the logs are sourced from landowners in north Missouri. **Right:** Bucky Pescaglia, president of the company, examines logs that will provide figured wood for gunstocks.



Walnut for the World



by Jim McCarty | jmccarty@ruralmissouri.coop

It starts with a squirrel burying nuts in the forest. Some of these are dug up for food in the wintertime. But others are forgotten and grow into tall walnut trees. The landowner decides to thin the mature trees so sunlight can reach the new ones sprouting below. The tree is cut by a local logger, sold to Missouri-Pacific Lumber Co. and hauled to the state-of-the-art sawmill in Fayette.

Then begins a process of sorting, debarking, sawing, steaming, drying, grading and straight-line ripping that might end more than two years later. The result will be crafted into beautiful boards highly prized for the rich beauty and luxurious patina by woodworkers the world over.

MO PAC Lumber, the name it does business under, got its start accidentally. Its founder, Louis Pescaglia, shoveled coal for home heating in the 1930s. One day a truck ran a stop sign and slammed into his coal truck. The driver didn't have insurance, so he offered to pay for the damage with his load: timbers destined for the Illinois coal mines.

Louis decided it was easier supplying lumber than shoveling coal. He bought a small sawmill in 1935 and began cutting timbers. In 1960 his son, Jim, joined him in starting Pekin Hardwood Lumber Co., which specialized in lumber for industrial purposes. This changed when Jim convinced his dad to let him saw some furniture-grade hardwood. He hauled the boards to Chicago and returned with a new direction for the business.

"That completely changed the trajectory of the business," says Jim's son, Bucky, now president of the company. "We were trying to expand in Illinois. We cut every species of wood in the forest because there's not that much forest in Illinois. It was my dad's idea to focus on just one species, walnut. Hardly anyone was cutting it at the time in large volumes."

Jim's younger brother, Jerry, joined in 1970. As the business grew, it became apparent the supply of hardwoods in central Illinois wouldn't keep up with the demand.

MO PAC Lumber strives to be the gold standard for black walnut hardwood



Above: Scott Schrader is one of the most experienced among the highly skilled workers at MO PAC Lumber. He has spent 43 years behind the controls of the bandsaw that turns logs into lumber. He works two joysticks with seven buttons each to override the computer programming and manipulate logs for the best cuts.
Below: Freshly cut lumber is sorted by thickness and stacked on carts so material handlers Matt Overstreet, left, and Gauge Weaver can wheel them to an all-concrete building where the boards will be steamed for 84 hours to ensure uniform color.
Right: Rakiim Chairse-McCutcheon loads steamed and dried boards onto rollers where they will move to be graded, a critical step in adding value to the wood.





Left: Inspector Sean New flips boards so he can examine and mark them for the 11 different grades of lumber. Properly grading lumber can make or break the company. These skills are learned at schools put on by the National Hardwood Lumber Association, which set standards for lumber grading not long after its establishment in 1898. **Right:** Nothing is wasted at MO PAC Lumber. Sawdust and scrap pieces of wood are burned to create steam and to heat the drying kilns. What's left is sold to a company in Auxvasse that turns them into landscape mulch, or they go to the University of Missouri where they help fuel its power plant.

When Bucky left home to learn the trade, the family business moved to New Franklin, Missouri. With the move came a new name — Missouri-Pacific Lumber Co. — and a new focus on black walnut production.

Missouri ranks first in the nation for black walnut trees, and the move put the mill close to the supply. “Missouri has more walnut trees than the next two states combined,” says Bucky. “It’s definitely the walnut mecca of the world.”

The Howard County location also provided easy access for shipping to the West Coast, hence the Pacific in its name. The move to Missouri proved to be a good one — until it wasn’t. The company thrived until the Missouri River almost destroyed it.

Its location 2 miles from the Missouri River should have been enough distance to keep its lumber high and dry in the worst of floods. “We’d had floods in the first several years we were there,” Bucky recalls. “Just a little backwater from the creeks behind us.”

But the Great Flood of 1993 caught the business by surprise and drowned it under 14 feet of water. Virtually the entire stockpile of logs floated away, along with pallets of finished lumber. Employees took to johnboats and searched the river for the missing wood.

“We took rope, and we took fence staples, and we’d go out and hammer the rope into the logs,” Bucky says. “We’d make a train of those logs and try to pull them to shore. The lumber was everywhere for miles and miles.”

With the business underwater for 30 days, employees stayed busy rescuing its products and cleaning the thick mud from what they found. They worked for 100 days straight to put the business back on its feet.

Despite their efforts, a move back to Illinois seemed inevitable, taking 40 good jobs away from an area that desperately needed more employers. That’s when Howard Electric Co-op stepped in. Its manager at the time, Richard Fowler, and Operating Superintendent Don Frevert

stopped by to see what it would take to keep the business in Howard County. They learned Jim Pescaglia was frustrated with a search for land out of the flood plain.

Compounding the problem, another flood hit the business in 1995. There was no flood insurance to cover the losses from the floods. That prompted Howard Electric’s board to offer the business a \$150,000 loan. They spearheaded an effort to find suitable ground for the move and found it at a former airfield just south of Fayette.

Howard County received a grant from the Missouri Department of Economic Development to buy the land. A Community Development Block Grant was used to add water and sewer. The U.S. Small Business Administration chipped in a \$1.5 million loan, and the deal was made.

“My dad sat in his pickup truck with a napkin and drew out what it would look like,” Bucky says of the new location, now served by Howard Electric. “This will never flood. And if it does, Noah will be coming by. We were in a good area. We had great employees, so we wanted to stay here.”

In 1996 the first board came off the high-tech bandsaw at the new location. Its capacity expanded by 25 percent, with plenty of room for future growth. Today more than a million board feet of lumber is ready for shipment at any given time. Walnut only grows in the United States. MO PAC Lumber ships 50% to 60% of its products overseas, including destinations as far away as China and Germany. It’s sold in bundles of 1,000 board feet.

“Walnut is known as the aristocrat of hardwoods,” Bucky says. “There is this level of respect in the marketplace that if you are using walnut you are using one of the finer hardwoods that’s available.”

The best walnut, he says, grows north of the Missouri River. While MO PAC Lumber does source logs from the Ozarks, the wood tends to have more defects so north Missouri trees are preferred.

Once the logs are delivered to the mill, they are sorted



Bucky stands inside one of many warehouses filled with high-quality walnut lumber ready to ship to the end user. The sawmill located in Fayette ships walnut all over the world where it might be used in everything from furniture, Rolls-Royce car interiors, gunstocks, kitchen cabinets and caskets. MO PAC Lumber annually produces 3 million board feet of walnut in a process that can take two years from start to finish.

into piles based on the expected quality. The best logs are resold to veneer mills. Forked logs, which tend to produce highly figured wood, might go to gunstock makers. Everything else goes into one of 13 piles destined for boards.

The bark is ground off and the log passes through a metal detector to prevent damage to the 14-inch-wide, 42-foot-long bandsaw blade. “We want to make sure there’s no wire, nails, rifle bullets,” Bucky says. “The weirdest thing I’ve ever found is an entire framing square. But we’ve seen all kinds of things. There’s this myth that if you hang a horseshoe on a walnut tree it’ll produce more walnuts.”

Armed with 43 years of experience, Missouri Pacific’s sawyer Scott Schrader runs the computerized bandsaw that scans the log and determines how best to cut it into pieces. He often uses his wisdom to override the computer’s directions using two joysticks with 14 buttons to manipulate the log.

Once cut, the boards are carried down the line where they are cut to uniform length, stacked on carts and moved to a building where the wood is steamed for 84 hours to give it a uniform color.

Now saturated with water, it goes into huge stacks outside where it dries naturally for a period of time based on its thickness. This drying can take up to two years for thicker boards.

Then it’s moved into huge kilns, where air heated by burning sawdust and woodchips dries the lumber to 7% moisture. From there it will be sorted into different grades by highly experienced inspectors.

While business is booming for MO PAC Lumber, it faces many of the same issues that plague the rest of Missouri’s forest products industry. Competition from wood substitutes like vinyl flooring, concrete railroad ties and plastic pallets has led to a push from the Missouri Forest Products Association to encourage consumers to use real wood.

Despite the challenges, Bucky sees a bright future for MO PAC Lumber. “I’ve got all three of my boys working in this company,” he says. “If I wasn’t convinced there’s plenty of resources out there, that the trees are growing way faster than they’re being harvested, that our products are quality and sustainable, I wouldn’t be encouraging them to work in this company. We make a great product. The world has a desire for these products. We just have to educate them and inform them about the benefits of using real hardwoods.”

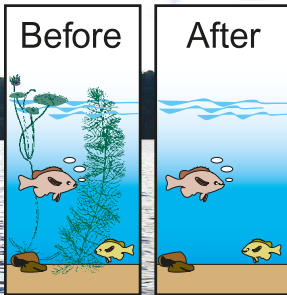


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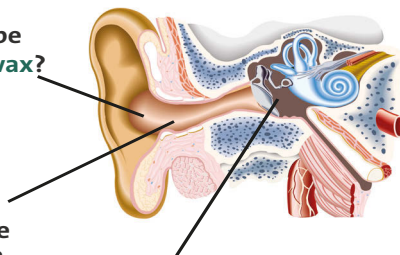
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Cheesy Baked Potato Casserole

5 pounds red potatoes, cubed
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 1 pound cheddar cheese, cubed
 1 pound cheddar cheese, shredded
 1 yellow onion, chopped
 1 cup mayonnaise
 8 ounces sour cream
 1 tablespoon chives, minced
 1 teaspoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon pepper

Heat oven to 325 degrees.

In large bowl, combine potatoes and bacon.

In separate large bowl, combine cheeses, onion, mayonnaise, sour cream, chives, salt and pepper. Add to potato and bacon mixture and mix well until combined.

Pour into 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Bake 50 to 60 minutes until browned and bubbly.

recipe courtesy Culinary.net

Chocolate Caramel Peanut Butter Pie

8 ounces cream cheese, softened
 1 cup powdered sugar
 1 cup peanut butter
 1/2 cup milk
 8 ounces whipped topping
 1 graham cracker crust
 Chocolate chips
 Chocolate syrup
 Caramel syrup

In bowl of stand mixer, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Add powdered sugar and peanut butter; mix until blended. Add milk; mix until blended. Fold in whipped topping.

Pour into crust. Sprinkle with chocolate chips. Drizzle with chocolate syrup and caramel syrup. Freeze until set.

recipe courtesy Culinary.net



Parmesan Crusted Chicken

1/2 cup mayonnaise
 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
 4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 1 1/4 pounds)
 4 teaspoons Italian seasoned dry breadcrumbs

Heat oven to 425 degrees.

Combine mayonnaise with cheese in medium bowl. Arrange chicken on baking sheet. Evenly top with mayonnaise mixture, then sprinkle with breadcrumbs.

Bake 20 minutes or until chicken is thoroughly cooked.

recipe courtesy Culinary.net





Stuffing Filled Pork Chops

Stuffing:

- 1 small box biscuit mix
- 1 stick butter
- 2 to 3 stalks celery, finely diced
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1 to 2 cups chicken broth, divided
- 1 bag cornbread stuffing mix
- 2 eggs, beaten
- Salt and pepper, to taste

6 bone-in or boneless pork chops

Oil

- 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon sage, minced
- 1 teaspoon thyme, minced
- 1 teaspoon rosemary, minced

To make stuffing: Bake biscuits according to package directions 1 day ahead. Dry biscuits will absorb more broth.

Heat oven to 350 degrees.

In skillet, melt butter then add celery and onions. Saute until onions are translucent then add poultry seasoning and half the broth. Set aside to cool.

In bowl, combine stuffing mix, crumbled biscuits and eggs.

Add onion mix to bowl and mix well. Add leftover broth if mixture is too dry. Set aside.

Slit each chop on rounded side, cutting almost through to bone, to create deep pockets for stuffing.

Season chops with garlic, sage, thyme and rosemary. Fill each chop with stuffing mixture. Use toothpicks to keep chops closed.

Preheat skillet with oil over medium-high heat and sear each chop 2 to 3 minutes on each side.

Once chops are seared, add chops and remaining stuffing to pan, cover with foil and bake 30 to 45 minutes until chops reach 140 degrees in center. Remove foil for last 10 minutes to brown top of stuffing, if desired.

recipe courtesy Coleman Natural Foods

Mac and Cheese with Pecan Breadcrumbs

- 8 ounces cavatappi pasta
- 1 teaspoon salt, plus additional for salting pasta water
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 8-ounce block cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup raw pecan pieces
- 15 ounces part-skim ricotta cheese
- 4 tablespoons sour cream
- 1/4 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

Heat oven to 375 degrees.

Cook cavatappi in salted boiling water. Drain, reserving 1/2 cup pasta cooking water. Return pasta to pot and stir in butter.

Using box grater, shred cheddar cheese.

Using food processor, combine 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese with pecans.

Process to coarse breadcrumb consistency.

Add remaining cheddar cheese, ricotta, sour cream, 1 teaspoon salt and pepper to warm pasta. Stir until thoroughly combined. Add egg; stir. Add 2 to 4 tablespoons reserved pasta water to loosen mixture; stir until smooth.

Pour into buttered 9-inch square or round casserole dish and top evenly with pecan topping.

Bake 30 minutes.

recipe courtesy American Pecan Promotion Board



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The Heart of a Champion

A teenager teams up with a one-eyed, barrel-racing horse

Much of Libbey Colvin's 13 years has been spent around horses and in saddles. Growing up around the rodeo left an unforgettable impression on her. "I want to be the best, Christ-like role model I can be to other little girls because I was once that little girl," she says.

by Savanna Kaiser | info@ruralmissouri.coop

The first time Libbey Colvin sat in a saddle, she was 3 years old. She learned to ride on a miniature pony named Tucker her parents gave her for Christmas. He was the first horse to steal her heart, and he wouldn't be the last.

Libbey, now 13, grew up around the rodeo, watching her older brothers compete in team roping events. She participated in several events close to her home in Stockton, and even shows at the Missouri State Fair, but she longed to go faster. "Then I attended the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, which covers everything in rodeo," Libbey says. "After watching other girls barrel race and hearing their stories, I knew I had to try it."

Her unlikely partner in the ring is Hollywood, a 20-year-old mare with only one eye. "Hollywood has one good eye and she's beating a lot of horses with two," Libbey says. "She's an amazing horse and she's taught me so much."

In a typical local race, 30 to 50 riders compete. Over the last year, Libbey has won a saddle, multiple buckles and money along the way, but it's the thrill of the race that's hard to beat. She and Hollywood will compete at the National Barrel Horse Association's Youth & Teen World Championships in Georgia this July, after her recent final

landed her in the top 10 in her division. This event will bring thousands of competitors together from across the country.

Liz, Libbey's mom, isn't surprised Hollywood and Libbey are a winning pair. "We have a lot of older horses, but I believe that's the best for youth to learn on," she says. "There's a lot of technique and fundamentals required, and I wanted to give Libbey a horse that had that foundation she could build her confidence with."

They don't know what happened to Hollywood's eye, but otherwise, she is sound. "A big part of the reason we bought her was because she had really good feet and didn't have to wear shoes," says Liz, a member of Sac Osage Electric Cooperative. "Some horses are tender-footed and more apt to slip than others or be lame, but she is not."

The quarter horse had been previously trained to barrel race and Libbey was eager to improve her skills. Creating a bond between horse and rider was the first goal. "I couldn't expect her to do her job if she didn't know me, so I started out by brushing her a lot and spending time with her," Libbey says. "Establishing that trust between us was the first important step."

Getting around that first barrel was the next challenge they had to overcome. Since Hollywood is missing her left eye and the first barrel requires a left turn, the mare must

pay close attention to Libbey's signals from the saddle. "If I didn't put my hands forward or sit down in the saddle just right, Hollywood wouldn't know when to bend around the barrel," she says.

Many horses start with a right turn, but Hollywood's pattern allows her to go left first and only face one blind barrel. The next two are right turns and she knows what she's doing. "Her motto is go!" Liz says. "Working with Hollywood has really taught Libbey about body language. It took them several difficult races to figure each other out and learn how to work together and trust each other. It has really strengthened them as a team."

Neither the horse nor its rider lets that one handicap hold them back. At race time, Hollywood is as spry and sassy as any other competitor in the arena. "A red-headed mare with a teenager is a real interesting combo," Liz says with a laugh.

Libbey started racing in local events and shows across the state. They kept working, getting better and more consistent. "Hollywood has a really big heart," Libbey says. "She's very smart and she's definitely trained for speed."

When they're not competing, Libbey does a lot of round pen work with Hollywood. "I take her on frequent trail rides too. It's important to get her mind off the barrel racing," Libbey says. "If all she does is train and do drills, it's not good for her brain. She needs rest just like people do."

Libbey hopes to compete at the National Finals Rodeo and get a pro card when she turns 18. She also wants to join the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. For now, she's enjoying her horses while also juggling school, sports and, in the summer, showing sheep and pigs at her local county fair.

Animals have always been a huge part of Libbey's life. "It's been an adventure from the start," Liz says. "It's really helped Libbey learn the value of hard work, responsibility, managing money and respect. Caring for something other than yourself by owning animals is so important while growing up."

This one-of-a-kind horse has made Libbey the rider she is today. "Hollywood has really helped prepare me for a younger horse. When that day comes, I'll be switching places and training them like she trained me," Libbey says. "That younger horse will have big shoes to fill someday."



You can reach Libbey about her rodeo career at Lizcolvin4@hotmail.com.

Kaiser is a freelance writer from Hartville.

Since Hollywood is missing her left eye, barrel racing could be a difficult sport for the quarter horse. But, Libbey has taught the horse to pay close attention to her signals from the saddle. "Hollywood has one good eye and she's beating a lot of horses with two," she says. "She's an amazing horse and she's taught me so much."



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April 2, Jefferson City, Landing After Hours, Jefferson Landing State Historic Site, 573-751-2854

April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, Linn Creek, Country Market & Bazaar, Camden County Museum, 573-873-2990

April 3-4, Winona, Discover Nature Fishing, Twin Pines, 573-325-1381

April 3-5, Mountain Grove, Book Sale, Library, 303-868-1936

April 4, Cape Girardeau, Lesson & Dance, Cape Ballroom, 480-857-7286

April 4, Chamois, Seafood Buffet, Catholic Church, 573-645-8094

April 4-6, Boonville, Swapper's Days, County Fairgrounds, 660-621-1032

April 5, Columbia, Aladdin Lamp Show, Stoney Creek, 573-696-3619

April 5, Winona, Heritage Day, Twin Pines, 573-325-1381

April 5, Wentzville and Liberty, Horseshoe Tournaments, mohpa.us

April 5, Steelville, Jim Messina, Wildwood Springs Lodge, 573-775-2400

April 5, Vienna, Craft & Vendor Show, Knights of Columbus, 573-690-3195

April 5, Hermann, Farmers' Table Wine Trail, Wine Trail, 573-294-2228

April 6, Clover Bottom, Shooting Match, St. Ann Parish Center, 636-239-3222

April 6, Catawissa, 30 Target Shoot, Three D Archery, 314-952-9386

April 6, Glenallen, Spring is Here Horseshoe Tournament, Backyard Horseshoe Club, 573-208-3215

April 7, Lebanon, Paolo Schianchi, Cowan Civic Center, 573-746-2172

April 11, Mexico, Dance, KB Event Center, 660-676-2301

April 11, Hermann, Summer Sausage Class, Wurst Haus, 573-486-2266

April 11-12, Colony, Flea Market, 47805 State Hwy. V, 217-617-8947

April 11-12, Clinton, Fly Fishers Expo, Convention Center, 417-646-5568

April 11-12, Fair Grove, Cinnamon Roll Sale, Senior Center, 417-759-9455

April 11-12, Rutledge, Flea Market, 46001 State Hwy. V, 660-216-3223

April 11-13, Charleston, Dogwood Azalea Festival, Citywide, 573-683-6509

April 12, Lamar, Goat Milk Soap Workshop, The Belt, 417-214-2564

April 12, Ste. Genevieve, Spring Milice Encampment, Downtown, 573-883-3290

April 12, Ste. Genevieve, STG Gravel Classic, Downtown, 314-608-5082

April 12, Steelville, Karen Peck & New River, Meramec Music Theatre, 573-775-5999

April 12, Hermann, Antique Show, Festhalle, 573-291-1275

April 12, Springfield, Fabric Sale, Ozark Piecemakers Quilt Guild, 417-766-0137

April 12, Jefferson City, Spring Into Quilts, McClung Park, 573-403-7812

April 12, West Plains, Balloon Glow, Fairgrounds, 417-256-8835

April 12, Plattsburg, The Big Pink Huddle, Courtyard, 816-225-8988

April 12, St. Louis, FOCUS Mess Night, Sunset Country Club, 314-712-5192, onecau.se/focusmessnight

April 12, Rocheport, Second Saturdays, Citywide, 573-489-4536

April 12-13, Humansville, Rodeo, Double J Indoor Arena, 816-651-2836

April 12-13, Oronogo, Ivy Ridge Swap, 20901 E. Ivy Road, 417-262-2335

April 13, Climax Springs, Fish Fry, NWFPD Station 1, 816-590-4274

April 13, Cassville, Easter Egg Hunt, Zone 4 Mini Golf, 417-846-8954

April 14-23, Hermitage, Book Sale, County Library, 314-749-3525

April 19, Sedalia, Mike Baldwin, Liberty Center, 660-827-3228

April 19, Crystal City and Bucyrus, Horseshoe Tournaments, mohpa.us

April 19, Lebanon, Book Sale, Public Library, 417-589-2699

April 19, Carthage, Trade & Swap, 330 Old 66 Boulevard, 417-262-2335

April 19-20, Ste. Genevieve, Afternoon Tea, Quintessential Rivertown Spice & Tea, 573-880-7037

April 20, Lamar, Poultry Swap, New Beginnings by Design, 417-262-2335

April 23, Winona, Watercolors with Sally, Twin Pines, 573-325-1381

April 24, Winona, Pine Needlers, Twin Pines, 573-325-1381

April 25, Mexico, Silver Wings Band, KB Event Center, 660-676-2301

April 25, Ste. Genevieve, 4th Friday Art Walk, Downtown, 573-330-2620

April 25, Hermann, Wurst Making Class, Wurst Haus, 573-486-2266

April 25, Cape Girardeau, 1920s Dance, Cape Ballroom, 480-857-7286

April 25-26, Ste. Genevieve, F100 Rally, Community Center, 573-535-4955

April 25-26, Cleveland, Vintage Market, 6205 E. Pony Creek Road, 913-221-1957

April 25-27, West Plains, OzCon, Civic Center, 417-256-8835

April 26, Camdenton, Pancake Breakfast, Methodist Church, 573-525-9430

April 26, Versailles, Master Gardener Plant Sale, Fairgrounds, 614-323-7703

April 26, Wheatland, Job Fair and Business Expo, Senior Center, 417-308-9177

April 26, Rogersville, Meet The Morgan Horse, Equine Collective, 417-827-4044

April 26, Piedmont, Ian Michaels, Gooch's Good Eats & Treats, 573-561-0077

April 26, Cassville, Trivia on the Patio, Zone 4 Mini Golf & More, 417-846-8954

April 26, Houston, Emmett Kelly Clown Festival, Downtown, 417-967-3348

April 26, Jefferson City, Spring Has Sprung Horseshoe Tournament, Capitol City Horseshoe Club, 636-541-3232

April 26, Liberty, Youth Only Horseshoe Tournament, Don Harris Arena, 816-419-5631

April 26, Camdenton, Lake of the Ozarks Train Club Train Show, Community Christian Church, 573-480-9509

April 26, Owensville, OPRD Market, Memorial Park, 573-437-8231

April 27, Bonne Terre, Artifact Show, Elementary School, 314-291-1165

April 27, Wright City, Gateway Country Music Association, Lions Club, 636-278-0261

April 27, Oranogo, Spring River Swap, 22035 Maverick Road, 417-262-2335



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Items needed:

Hard-boiled eggs, food coloring, vinegar and cooking oil

- Once your hard-boiled eggs have cooled and dried, pour enough vinegar into a small bowl or mug so you can dip the eggs and completely cover them in vinegar.
- Dip one egg into the vinegar, then set it onto a spoon and lower it into a small ceramic bowl or short disposable cup. Don't let the vinegar dry (you'll have about 5 minutes before it dries).
- Drip food coloring directly onto the egg. When the top of the egg is covered, use the spoon to roll the egg around in the bowl into the food coloring that dripped into the bottom. Add more drops of food coloring to any white spots on the egg (about 15 drops of food coloring for the first egg of every color).
- Use the spoon to carefully set the egg on a paper towel lined baking sheet to dry.
- To make another egg of the same color, dip a new egg in the vinegar, then use the spoon to set the egg into the bowl and roll it around in the food coloring that was left at the bottom. Add more drops of food coloring to make sure the egg is covered. (You'll only need 6 or 7 drops for the second and third eggs).
- Repeat the steps for each new color, but make sure you use a clean bowl and spoon for each color.
- Once the eggs have completely dried for about 45 minutes, pour a few drops of cooking oil onto a paper towel. Rub the oil all over the egg to give it a shiny finish.

Find the hidden words in the puzzle below.

B	O	L	L	T	L	A	M	B	G	S	S	A	D
Y	O	B	S	W	B	H	J	C	B	P	I	F	V
D	F	E	L	I	A	G	P	S	E	R	X	A	Q
B	N	E	S	T	S	J	Q	E	K	I	P	M	H
Z	F	S	M	C	K	D	P	D	F	N	L	I	Y
A	T	I	H	H	E	C	O	E	D	G	E	L	Y
N	V	B	D	I	T	G	I	C	Z	Y	I	Y	T
N	X	R	H	C	B	R	X	O	U	R	E	I	G
X	Y	H	S	K	L	A	B	R	P	K	M	P	Y
V	P	O	B	D	R	S	E	A	U	Z	K	A	J
Z	S	P	D	U	E	S	V	T	M	X	D	R	Q
I	L	Q	N	P	N	G	B	E	L	N	Y	A	R
B	L	E	G	G	S	N	K	A	U	H	E	D	F
R	T	Q	I	S	Y	B	Y	S	A	R	Z	E	E

CHICK	EGGS	DYE	BUNNY
SUNDAY	SPRING	BASKET	FAMILY
APRIL	GRASS	NEST	DECORATE
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