

# PowerLines

A monthly publication for member/owners of Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative

August 2015

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## Capital Credit Allocation

Check your electric bill included in this mailing for your 2014 capital credit allocation.

Allocations are made each year for all member/owners based on two things: the amount of electricity you purchased the previous year, and our overall financial condition.

Allocations cannot be applied to your electric bill, or used as payment for any other services.



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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

## Relax, we have you covered

These days, it seems like we're all moving at a quick pace. We also have a tendency now to take many of our conveniences for granted. Electricity is a great example of that. At the end of the day we want our lights to come on when we flip the switch, and we do not want to experience "sticker shock" when opening our monthly bill. In other words, we all want reliable and affordable electric service.

Here at Eastern Illini, we're very proud of our accomplishments in both of those areas. Remember, not-for-profit electric cooperatives like Eastern Illini were started in the late 1930s when the investor-owned utilities chose not to provide electric service in the scarcely populated rural areas. Thanks to some federal funding programs, and much grassroots effort, the rural residents themselves banded together to form cooperatives that enabled everyone who wanted access to electricity that option.

Today, we still face many of the same challenges in providing you with safe and reliable electric service. We currently have about three accounts per mile of line we maintain. Our neighboring investor-owned utilities have about 40 accounts per mile of line. Unfortunately, that means our fixed costs associated with providing our members electricity are split among many fewer accounts. In spite of these challenges, we have been able to keep our rates stable since our rate unbundling in early 2013, and we expect stable rates into the foreseeable future, barring any catastrophic or major regulatory impacts.

The safety and reliability of our electric system is something we take very seriously. We're proud of our 99.95% "on" rate in 2014.

Given our fickle weather conditions and sizeable windswept prairie territory, this is no small task. At this point, we are on pace to improve our reliability performance in 2015 compared to last year. We have also started construction on two of our three new substations we are adding to our system, which will certainly help further improve system reliability and restoration times.

None of this would be possible without our dedicated team of loyal employees. From our highly trained linemen and operations personnel that are always on call, to our outstanding customer service and other employees that keep your Cooperative running smoothly by providing service with a smile, it is our pleasure to be at your service. After all, you're much more than customers to us. You're not only members, but also owners of your electric cooperative.

So, let us worry about keeping your lights on, and you can relax and take the time to enjoy life.

Sincerely,

*Bob Hunzinger*



**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**

# Copper theft can turn deadly

**Please report any suspicious activity you see around electric equipment immediately.**

For several years, copper theft around utility equipment has been a serious issue. Recently, unfortunately, things seem to be getting worse. We are following this dangerous situation closely, and we're doing everything we can to prevent it. We could use your help!

Quite simply, copper theft from utility equipment leads to outages, expensive equipment repairs, and potentially serious injury or death for the thieves.

There are stories from all over the country that highlight the dangers involved when someone tries to steal a few dollars in copper. In southern Illinois, a man had cut into an energized wire while attempting to steal copper. He died instantly.

In North Carolina, a man broke in to an electric co-op's substation to steal copper. He was perched atop a high-voltage regulator when he apparently cut into a wire. The jolt of electricity knocked him 10 feet to the ground, and he was pronounced dead at the scene.



*Rolls of copper wire (above) can be very attractive to would-be thieves. Unfortunately, though, stealing copper from a utility is very dangerous, and usually doesn't yield much income. Grounding wire (below) is becoming a popular target. Please report any unusual situations involving power lines.*

Members of an Oklahoma electric cooperative are facing an estimated \$1 million repair bill because copper thieves wrecked a substation for just \$100 worth of copper. The damage caused an outage and destroyed regulators and a large transformer valued at \$600,000. Given the fire and destruction, co-op officials are amazed they didn't also find a burned body in the substation.

Fortunately, however, no one has been injured or died in the pursuit of copper from Eastern Illini.

It's extremely dangerous to tamper with any electrical equipment. People should always assume that there is live current flowing through those wires.

Please be on the lookout for suspicious activity around substations, poles, towers, transformers, and storage sites. If you notice anything unusual, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, or hanging wire, please call us immediately at 800-824-5102.

If you see anyone other than utility personnel or contractors around substations or other electric facilities, call the police, too. Working together, we can help avoid outages, save the cooperative (and you) money, and potentially save a life.

As the value of copper has doubled in recent years, the metal is becoming more tempting to would-be thieves. There have been several attempted copper wire thefts from our equipment recently.



# Generators offer peace of mind

## Since we can't control Mother Nature, Eastern Illini offers Briggs & Stratton automatic standby generators.

We work hard to provide you with safe and reliable service. Often times, unfortunately, factors outside our control can lead to power outages. That's where a generator can come in handy.

Briggs & Stratton® Standby Generators provide automatic backup electricity for your air conditioner, appliances, lights, TVs or computers, and give you the peace of mind during power outages.

### Benefits of a Standby Generator

- Turns on and off automatically
- Is connected to your home's electrical system
- Senses power loss within seconds of an outage and automatically comes on
- Runs on natural gas or propane

- Can power select circuits or your whole house

### What size do I need?

Ranging in size from seven kilowatts (kW) to 60 kW, our generator program offers a size to fit your needs.

### Who can install the generator?

Eastern Illini works with local electricians to make sure the generators are installed safely and correctly. Our electricians have been to several Briggs & Stratton training sessions and are certified to install our generators.



Most homes require at least a 12 kW unit to run most of the items in your home. If you have an electric heating system, like geothermal, you will probably need a 20 kW unit (our most popular size).

### How much do they cost?

As a not-for-profit cooperative, we are able to pass along attractive pricing to you. Since each generator setup is unique, we offer a free in-home site survey to help determine what size system you need, and how much it will cost.

### I'm interested....now what?

If you're ready to get more information or move forward with a purchase, please call our office at 800-824-5102. We'll get you in contact with our installers to begin the process.

### Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month



Periodically inspect your dryer vent to ensure it is not blocked. This will save energy and may prevent a fire. Manufacturers recommend using a rigid venting material - not plastic vents that may collapse and cause blockages.

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

To dig in to specifics on what size is right for your situation, visit our website at <http://www.eiec.org/community/generators/>. There, you can find a link to an online sizing page.

# The taste of tomorrow

**Living Water Farms is focused on growing the highest quality specialty greens and micro greens year round.**

Living Water Farms is a family-owned, year-round hydroponic greenhouse located in rural Strawn.

## **Beginning**

At the conception of Living Water Farms, Kevin and Denise Kilgus had been married for 26 years and had been blessed with a large family of eight children. Their summers were nearly always filled with outdoor activities revolving around the garden and fruit patches.

“Our motto was, ‘Many hands make light work’, noted Kevin. Though the kids wouldn’t agree that the work was always fun, as they get older, they look back on those times with some degree of fondness. All three of our married daughters have gardens, so

it must not have been all bad!” Their garden eventually turned into a larger “truck patch,” with spring, summer and fall crops, which they sold to several local markets.

## **Growing**

When the opportunity to grow year-round presented itself, it seemed to be a natural progression. They teamed up with their second daughter and her husband, Mark and Natalie Schneider, to build what has become Living Water Farms.

“Since we had always included the whole family in our gardening, we brought them all in to help make some of the decisions regarding the farm – including the name,” noted Denise.

She continued, “Living Water Farms does have two meanings to us. The obvious meaning is that our produce is sustained and has its life through the hydroponic waters we feed it. The

second, and most important meaning to us is that we acknowledge that God is our spiritual ‘Living Water’ from whom all blessings flow and who gives us our life and sustenance.”

As the farm continued to grow, it was soon time to bring in another part of the family. Mark’s brother, Matthew, moved back to the area after graduating from the University of Illinois with a masters degree in accounting. The CPA now heads up the financial aspects of the family farm.

Matthew noted, “I had always dreamed of someday running my own business and when the opportunity presented itself, I jumped at the chance to make a real difference joining my brother and the Kilgus family in helping manage Living Water Farms. Today, I get satisfaction knowing that I am a vital part of the strategic planning for our farm as well as getting my hands dirty in the day to day farming.”





*Living Water Farms employs the equivalent of 14 full-time workers. Here, Mark Schneider checks the progress of pea tendrils. Much of their growing technology comes from European greenhouses.*

### **Sustainability**

They now grow all of their products in a chemical-free and sustainable environment, and their 9,000 square feet of growing space is comprised of numerous living salad greens, mesclun, bibb, basil, cress, arugula, kale, various micro greens, pea shoots, pea tendrils, and wheatgrass.

As founding members of the Stewards of the Land, the Kilgus and Schneider families support growing practices that are fundamentally sustainable.

Their involvement with Stewards of the Land also opened the door for some increased business opportunities. Mark commented, “There are a great number of chefs, in the Chicago area especially, that are looking for locally grown, fresh greens. Stewards has allowed us to reach those chefs.”

From growing in organic, compostable soil plugs, to recycling waste product back into compost, Living Water Farms definitely believes in sustainability. Mark

noted, “We’ve researched growing techniques from all over the world. Europe has some amazing greenhouse technology. We’ve incorporated much of that, when possible.”

One interesting technique that they utilize is shipping many of their greens with the roots and a small

amount of dirt still attached. This helps the greens stay fresher longer.

They also use geothermal heating and cooling to help maintain the correct environment of the greenhouse while supporting year-round growing operations. Water recirculation reuses irrigation water, which significantly reduces the amount required in their growing process.

### **Local Connection**

Excess product that is not sold is donated to the Midwest Food Bank in Bloomington, Ill. where it goes to support food pantries and shelters throughout the state.

While most of Living Water Farms products are sold wholesale in Chicago and St. Louis, you can find some of their greens at local Schnucks and Whole Foods grocery stores and at Dave’s Supermarket in Fairbury.

For more information about Living Water Farms, visit their website at [www.livingwaterfarms.com](http://www.livingwaterfarms.com) or call them at 815-848-2316.



*Living Water Farms utilizes a geothermal system to help keep their greenhouse at optimum growing temperatures. They also earn a lower electric rate by utilizing the efficient system.*

# Local students visit Washington, D.C.

**The Youth to Washington tour highlights Eastern Illini's involvement in youth programs.**

At Eastern Illini Electric Co-op, we are investing in youth education and engagement programs throughout our local communities.

Some of our activities include performing electrical safety presentations at area schools, working with local 4-H clubs to promote electricity learning, and sponsoring several scholarship programs.

Abby Fischer and Meegan Massey, both graduates of Watseka High School, joined more than 1,600 students across the country (including 65 students from Illinois) as they took part in the National Rural Electric



Cooperative Association's 50th annual Electric Cooperative Youth to Washington Tour.

The object of the tour is to introduce the young leaders to our democratic form of government. During the tour, they visited many of our nation's historic sites, including Gettysburg, Arlington National Cemetery, the National Cathedral, and the many memorials, monuments and museums.

Massey noted, "This has been one of the best weeks of my life. I'm so thankful I have been able to enjoy the trip of a lifetime."

Fischer said, "I had an amazing trip! Along with seeing the historical sights, I have made many new friends. I will remember this trip for years to come. I'm extremely grateful for this wonderful opportunity."

For more information about any of our youth programs (which are all offered at no charge), or to schedule events at your school, please contact us at 800-824-5102 or [info@eiec.coop](mailto:info@eiec.coop).



*Above: Fischer (left) and Massey (right) meet with Congressman Adam Kinzinger during the Youth to Washington tour. Right: the students visited the National Cathedral while on the trip.*