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Magazine



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# Contents



## 6 Forging Memories at Ponca State Park

The Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca State Park brings history, nature, and adventure together through hands-on demonstrations, outdoor activities, and family-friendly fun. Visitors experience everything from blacksmithing and wildlife education to rock climbing, canoeing, and live reenactments—all offered for the price of a park permit.



## 14 Batteries Powering Tomorrow's Rural Grid

Battery technology has rapidly evolved from simple lead-acid units to today's advanced lithium-ion and emerging long-duration systems, becoming a vital tool for modern energy use.

*Photograph by LG*

## Departments

Editor's Page

Safety Briefs/Murphy

Energy Sense

Down Home Recipes

Marketplace

### ON THE COVER

*Ready. Aim. Visitors to the Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca State Park were able to pick up a bow and try out their budding archery skills. See the related article on Page 6. Photograph by LaRayne Topp*

# Editor's Page



Wayne Price

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[nebraskamagazine.org](http://nebraskamagazine.org)



SCAN ME

## Nebraska Magazine Marks Milestone

This month marks a special milestone for *Nebraska Magazine*—our 80th anniversary. For eight decades, this publication has been more than just something that shows up in the mailbox. It has been a trusted neighbor at the kitchen table, a friendly voice from across the state, and a storyteller that celebrates the people and places that make Nebraska what it is.

The magazine's story began in January 1947, when the Nebraska Rural Electric Association introduced a publication called *Nebraska Electric Farmer*. It was mailed to 15,500 readers who received electricity from 16 rural electric systems, which were called "projects" at the time. Postage for that first issue was just one and a half cents per copy, and a full-year subscription cost 50 cents.

In 1971, editor Bob Anderson gave the magazine a new look and a new name—*Rural Electric Nebraskan*. Nearly 50 years later, in 2020, the magazine took on the name we know today, *Nebraska Magazine*. Through all those changes, one thing has never changed: our commitment to telling stories that connect us.

What makes *Nebraska Magazine* special is its constancy and its connection to everyday life. Month after month, it has shared recipes passed down through families, stories of determination and innovation, and snapshots of rural communities that capture the heart of our state. It has followed the journey of public power in Nebraska, from the first lights flickering on in farmhouses to today's modern, energy-smart homes.

While many magazines have come and gone, *Nebraska Magazine* has stood strong. It has grown with the times while staying true to its mission—celebrating Nebraska's people and preserving a sense of belonging across generations. It's more than ink and paper; it's a reflection of who we are and what we value.

As editor, I am honored to carry forward this tradition with purpose and pride. Every month, our small team works to create something that informs and inspires readers. For less than the cost of a first-class stamp, we're able to edit, design, print, and mail 28 pages of meaningful stories to homes across the state.

For 80 years, you have invited us into your homes. That is a privilege we never take for granted. As we look to the future, we remain committed to keeping *Nebraska Magazine* rural, relevant, and rooted in the values that built it. Here's to many more years of telling our story.





Rick Nelson

Rick Nelson is the  
General Manager of  
Nebraska Rural  
Electric Association,  
headquartered in  
Lincoln, Neb.

## New Technologies Echo Old Power Concerns

I have always been a fan of history. To me it is fascinating to see what the struggles were before our time. Many years ago, I had a customer bring me a copy of the *Rural Electric Nebraskan* April 1972 issue. I was not exactly sure why, maybe they had an extra copy or wanted me to read something specific. While I have used the editorial by Bob Anderson, Spirit of Nebraska, in several articles over the years, I went back recently to read other parts of that magazine.

This was the issue that Bob Anderson also reported on the Irrigation vs Electric Power conference that was held at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. A panel was moderated by Gene Lienemann, then manager at Wheatbelt PPD, in the same magazine. Some may remember Gene, because if you played golf, you would have seen his bright, green pants.

William Mayben, partner at the time at R.W. Beck, an engineering firm that did some work for NPPD was also on the panel. Some may remember Mr. Mayben in another role at NPPD. Here are a few quotes that may set the stage for the punch line at the end.

“In Nebraska where the power supply costing base is shifting from purchases of low-cost federal hydroelectric power to costs associated with ownership of new, optimum-sized generation plants constructed and operated during this recent inflationary period, the ultimate consumer will undoubtedly incur power cost increases,” Mayben said.

“Since a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, I want to call attention of this conference that it is becoming more evident daily that Nebraska and most Americans will soon be faced with a critical power shortage,” said Governor James Exon. “...we are looking forward to someday, somehow, sometime, a shortage of electrical energy.”

Do we see any parallels to today? The first is new technology coming into play in rural Nebraska in 1972, deep well irrigation. In today’s terms, that would be large data centers, bio-economy projects, etc. Constructing generating plants during “inflationary” times not just in Nebraska, but across the nation.

There was also discussion in the article about NPPD implementing new rates to “recover” the demand costs associated with this new load, a 12-month ratchet for 65 percent of the peak from the previous year.

The last parallel in the article is the governor’s concern about the ability to serve new load because Nebraska was facing “a critical power shortage.” As a side note, during this time it was thought that natural gas supplies had diminished to nothing and therefore, not a means of generating power, and the governor was excited about having two nuclear plants coming online in Nebraska.

**Continued on Page 11**





# Forging Memories at Ponca State Park

**by LaRayne Topp**

*Kody Keefer of Madison, South Dakota, shows onlookers  
what the life of an early-day blacksmith was like.  
Photographs by LaRayne Topp*

A tight crowd of 21st Century onlookers gather around the blacksmith, his brown, leather apron absorbing the heat radiating from the orange flames of fire before him and the metal stake resting in it. The stake grows progressively hotter until he transfers it onto a nearby anvil to hammer it into the desired shape: a stake to hold the edges of a canvas tent shading a neighboring tinsmith. Beyond him is a frontier trapper, all reminiscent of early-day settlement along the Missouri River. And all celebrated at the Heritage Encampment, nestled into the overhanging trees of the Missouri River Outdoor Expo, held annually at Ponca State Park.

Kody Keefer of Madison, South Dakota, has been forging through the Expos since he was a young boy of 11. At that time, he worked alongside his father and uncle, demonstrating how to pour loose gunpowder from a powder horn down the muzzle of an early-day firearm, as a member of the Hawkeye Pistol and Rifle Club. In those days, and in the 20 years since, re-enactors have been reliving the time when the United States was only a glint in the eye of frontiersmen and women alike.



Keefer grows nostalgic when speaking at the two-day Expo, held this year on September 20 and 21. He is reminded of happy days spent at Ponca State Park, the Expo in particular, enjoying time with his father and uncle. He appreciates the interaction between volunteers and visitors exchanged during living history demonstrations as the annals of the past come alive for those intent on watching.

“Book learning just doesn’t do it,” Keefer said. After all, he explained, many of the skills portrayed in the Heritage Encampment won’t be around forever.

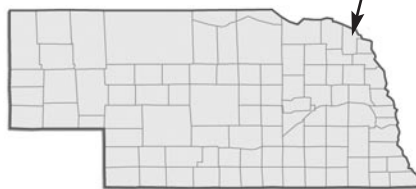
But history reenactments aren’t the only experiences offered at the Missouri River Outdoor Expo. Far from it. A multitude of vendors, activities and demonstrations all have their input, from bird banding, butterfly tagging, raptor watching and duck dog cheering, to rock climbing, canoeing and fishing, all found on the top levels of the park. Down by the River’s edge, at the lower level of the Park, are a plethora of additional activities: Hot Tin Cold Feet Adventure Meals and cannon firing, for example, plus such demonstrations as log rolling, wood cutting and axe throwing, offered by the “Farmers of the Woods,” the Axe Women Loggers of Maine.

In-between the sky-view and ground-level landscapes of the park expedition, transported by trolley up and down the park’s 37 acres of hilly terrain, visitors of all ages get to choose between a myriad of activities exemplifying the Ponca State Park signature slogan: “Where people and nature meet.” In fact, visitors didn’t have two seconds to rub together when there wasn’t something going on to bring people and nature together. In short, each year the Expo offers exciting things to see, taste, feel, smell and experience.

At the mid-level shooting complex, folks had an opportunity to pick up a bow and



**Ponca State Park**



*Clockwise from top: High ropes offer first tentative steps from one swinging branch to the next.*

*Xochitl Ponce, left, of Sioux City, Iowa, gets up close and personal with a Peruvian Harris Hawk, native to Peru. It’s being held by Regalia International Birds of Prey chapter member, Korie Williams of Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

*Savannah Jenn, 4, tries her hand at fishing, alongside her dad. Savannah is the daughter of Brady and Heather Jenns of LeMars, Iowa.*

*The Ax Women Loggers of Maine man their power saws in a Hot Saw competition.*

**Continued on Page 8**



## From Page 7

arrow, learn about deer tree stand safety, call a duck, ride a pony or a mountain bike, or meet President Teddy Roosevelt himself, known in his other life as Adam Lindquist of Northfield, Minnesota.

Wandering through the demonstrations, visitors had a chance to taste samples of freshly-caught haddock as well as the more exotic elk or wild boar sausage, or even take part in a burger eating contest.

For the youngsters who had absorbed all they could, there remained the Kids Outdoor Discovery Zone, a place they typically wouldn't find in their own backyard: piles of sand to sift through or towering stacks of hay bales to climb up on, and slide down.

Some events seem to be a simple fit; while others seem more, well, adventuresome. Take volunteer Myra Kingsbury's job. When close to 35 schools brought around 700 children on the Friday preceding the Expo, it was her task to oversee the Critter Corner, and a type of animal Crime Scene Investigation.

Students met with a park naturalist to see furs, skulls and artifacts, firsthand. They heard how animals adapt to their various environments, plus had an opportunity to meet some resident critters. Students in Kingsbury's group found out about an owl's vision, hearing and habitat. They also had a chance to dissect owl pellets.

Owls, it seems, eat their food whole; from there it makes its way into one of two stomachs. Because the food is eaten whole, and the owls lack teeth or a crop to break down their food, bones, fur and feathers are compacted into a pellet which the owls later regurgitate. Students were able to dissect these pellets to determine what each owl had eaten, often discovering a skull, leg bone or rib.

"The students had tons of classes to take," Kingsbury explained. "It was a cool thing, and very organized." It's great to see families come out to the Expo, Kingsbury said, and enjoy what she refers to as a low-cost event.

Although the event may be low-cost for families, the amount of time and effort it takes to put on something as vast as the Missouri River Outdoor Expo can't be measured. The Expo isn't realized through happenstance, but the untold hours and extensive efforts of the Nebraska Parks Division, plus local citizens from Ponca and surrounding communities numbering in the 100s, some of whom have volunteered the entire 20 years of the



*Top: Ada Smith, 7, Cameron Groves, 7 and Parker Groves, 5, take command of a stack of bales before sliding down to the bottom. They are the children of Adam Groves of Sioux City, Iowa, and Katie Smith of Laurel.*

*Above: Teddy Roosevelt steps out of character to visit with Expo volunteer Judy Forman of Lincoln. In today's world, Teddy goes by the name of Adam Lindquist of Northfield, Minnesota.*

Expo's existence.

Throughout the year, staff ponder the best ways to stage the event, held annually the third weekend in September. They also think about which activities have stood the 20-year-test of time and new ones to add, such as boat tours which were brought back in 2025 by popular demand.

Also involved are groups such as local chapters of Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and the National Rifle Association. And let's not forget the support of generous sponsors.

As for the Expo visitors, however, a trip to the Missouri River Outdoor Expo—surprisingly—can be experienced, all for the price of a park permit.



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# Prepare Now to Stay Safe Through Winter

When winter settles in and temperatures sink, staying safe and warm becomes more than a comfort. It becomes a necessity. No matter where you live, winter storms can be powerful enough to disrupt daily life, and almost every American will experience an extreme winter event at some point. Nebraska Rural Electric Association wants you to be ready before the snow falls and the winds blow.

Heavy snow and ice can take down power lines and cut electricity to entire areas of Nebraska. Losing power in bitter cold isn't just inconvenient, it can be dangerous. Line crews will always work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but you can make a tough situation easier by preparing ahead of time.

One of the first things to consider is how you will stay warm if the power goes out. A fireplace or a wood-burning stove can provide steady heat, but they must be used carefully and never left unattended. If you rely on devices that burn gasoline, propane or natural gas, keep them outside where they belong. Any fuel-burning heat source needs proper ventilation, and it is important to read the manufacturer's instructions before using it.

Food and water are equally important. The CDC recommends stocking several days' worth of ready-to-eat items that do not require cooking. Simple choices like crackers, cereal, canned goods and bread can go a long way when you cannot use your stove. It is also wise to store at least five gallons of water per person

in case an outage lasts longer than expected.

Safety on the roads is another major concern. Outages often mean power lines are down, and winter storms can make travel risky even under the best conditions. If you must drive, bring a survival kit and avoid traveling alone. Should you encounter a downed power line, always treat it as if it is live and keep as much distance as possible. Call your local electric utility to report the hazard as soon as you safely can.

Winter weather has a way of surprising even those who have lived through many storms. A little planning now can prevent a crisis later.

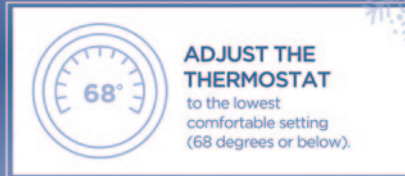
If you're fortunate enough to make it home from work or school, you'll want to have supplies on hand for at least a week. Rather than joining the last-minute frenzy at the grocery store, keep an emergency kit in your closet. This should include:

- Five days worth of non-perishable food
- Can opener
- Drinking water (especially for homes on a well)
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- extra prescription medicines
- food for pets

If your home has a fireplace or wood-burning stove, make sure you have enough firewood available to stay warm. Others should look into purchasing a kerosene heater or other portable option for emergency heat. In addition, you'll need a battery-powered carbon monoxide detector to help ensure safe air quality when burning emergency fuels.

## Best Bets

### Best Bets for WINTER SAVINGS



### Best Bets for WINTER SAVINGS



### Best Bets for WINTER SAVINGS



## From Page 5

The take away.....some 53 years ago there was a newly found load in rural Nebraska called irrigation and it was assumed that it would be the end of low-cost power. Generation plants were built to handle the added load. It feels like we are there again today, but now the new load is data-related load along with value-added agriculture load.

Somehow, Nebraska survived and thrives today after this traumatic experience in the history of the electric industry and a lot of trials and tribulations. New generation was added, and a new rate was implemented by NPPD to recover the costs, thankfully that had changed many years ago, but that is my point.

Nebraska will prevail and history will show yet again that it often repeats itself and smart people will find the right solution for Nebraska. We can learn from the historical narrative that shaped the electric industry in Nebraska.

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# Grassroots Strength Needed This Legislative Session

by James Dukesherer, NREA Director of Government Relations

As you read this article, the Nebraska Legislature is beginning their second session of the 109th Legislature. The brief sixty-day session is scheduled to conclude on April 17th, leaving senators with a very limited period of time to identify their legislative priorities, work through the hearing process and legislative debate, and finally get their bill signed into law by the governor. The state budget and projected deficit promise to take up a significant amount of the available time and debate. The time for each senator to pursue their personal priority bill could be limited. Any bills which do not claim priority status will likely not be scheduled for floor debate before the session adjourns.

This time of year is extremely busy for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association (NREA). More than 600 bills will likely be introduced before bill introduction concludes on January 21st. This gives the NREA a very brief period of time to analyze proposed legislation before public hearings start and bills begin to make their way through the legislative process.

The NREA Legislative Committee and Board of Directors plan to meet the first week of February to discuss proposed legislation and take our association positions on bills. From here, the NREA government relations team will reach out to senators, staff, and interested parties as we advocate our position for these bills. We will also make preparations to attend bill hearings and provide testimony on the bills in which we have established positions.

With so much emphasis placed on lobbying and legislative activity, the NREA would like to remind you of the importance of our grassroots organization. It is not the NREA government relations team that provides the strength of our organization but the active involvement of our membership and support of the public that ultimately carries the most weight. The NREA is a conglomeration of 35 rural public power districts and electric cooperatives scattered across all of rural Nebraska. Our members electrically serve in the districts of 23 senators and every senator in Nebraska is an electric consumer of public power.

It can be difficult for each individual to understand the importance of their active participation. Representatives do want to hear from their constituents. Collectively, a well-organized grassroots movement can be an incredibly powerful advocacy tool if a critical mass of participants is mobilized behind a shared message. The issues the electric industry faces may not always be front page issues, like healthcare or tax relief, but the public is interested and cares about keeping their electric rates low and service reliable. In most cases, given the opportunity to engage elected leaders on these issues, many will act.

In a year like this one with a projected budget deficit, the fiscal restraints of the state's budget will likely ensure that very few bills that carry a fiscal note (cost the state additional money) will be adopted. The NREA will not be pursuing any of our own legislation this year, but we expect to see legislation introduced that will impact utility-scale battery storage resources, public power governance, private ownership of electric generation and transmission, and the funding of the Perkins County Canal Project. As these bills, and others, are introduced, we will be working to protect public power from those that would try to diminish our successful public power model.

As we begin to watch this year's session unfold, and as news of proposed legislation begins to be reported across the state, please keep an eye on issues that can impact electric rates and the reliability of our electric grid. An engaged citizenry is our strongest advocate. Nebraskans currently enjoy some of the lowest residential electric rates nationwide and we are proud of the fact that Nebraska operates one of the nation's most reliable electric grids. Yet, despite public power's success, there will most assuredly be legislation introduced that will try to alter our electric system in the pursuit of a new model, likely that of private, profit-seeking companies. Ultimately, it is you, the consumers, that own our public power model. You are represented by your local-elected power district board and by this Association. As these issues come to the forefront, we look to you to engage and to be strong grassroots advocates for rural Nebraska and for public power. Thank you for your continued support of public power.

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By Jennah Denney

# Batteries Powering Tomorrow's Rural Grid

Battery technology has rapidly evolved from simple lead-acid units to today's advanced lithium-ion and emerging long-duration systems, becoming a vital tool for modern energy use.

Not long ago, when people talked about “batteries,” they meant the kind that powered flashlights, phones or watches. Today, batteries are transforming the way we power our homes, farms and even the electric grid that keeps our lights on. Across the country, battery energy storage is helping public power districts and electric cooperatives keep power more reliable, affordable and resilient.

The journey began with early rechargeable batteries like lead-acid models, which were used in vehicles, tractors and backup systems for lighting or telephones. These systems were bulky, short-lived and required frequent maintenance. Later, nickel-cadmium and nickel-metal hydride batteries became popular in cordless tools, early electronics and hybrid vehicles. While they marked a step forward, they remained expensive and weren't well suited for large-scale energy applications.

A major turning point came with the development of lithium-ion batteries. These are lighter, longer lasting and capable of storing more energy in less space. Initially used in laptops and mobile phones, lithium-ion technology now powers most electric vehicles and many of the grid-scale systems that can keep thousands of homes running for hours. And innovation hasn't stopped there. Researchers are now exploring solid-state



*Often paired with rooftop solar panels, residential battery storage systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running.*

*Top: Photograph provided by Base Power*

*Bottom: Photograph provided by LG*

and sodium-ion batteries, which use safer, more abundant materials and promise to make battery energy storage even more affordable and accessible. Each advancement brings batteries closer to becoming a foundational part of everyday life.

Across the country, public power districts and electric co-ops are helping to deploy battery energy storage systems. Batteries can store excess electricity from renewable sources like solar and wind, then discharge it when demand rises, which can help balance supply and demand and improve grid stability. They also provide an



*Utility-scale storage technologies are helping electric utilities improve reliability, integrate renewable energy and manage infrastructure costs. Photograph provided by Jackson EMC*

alternative to traditional infrastructure upgrades. In areas where energy use is growing, a strategically placed battery can handle short-term peaks in demand, reducing the need for new substations or extended power lines. This can lower capital costs and reduce construction timelines.

More than 70 rural electric utilities in 24 states have installed or are testing battery energy storage systems, according to NRECA. Most systems currently in use are designed to deliver power for two to eight hours. However, long-duration energy storage (LDES) technologies are emerging that can store energy for 10 hours or more, and in some cases, multiple days. These battery storage systems could help utilities manage extended periods of low renewable generation or respond to prolonged grid stress events, especially in remote or weather-sensitive areas.

Battery storage may also offer benefits to rural electric utility consumer-members. Residential systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. For homes with rooftop solar, batteries allow excess energy to be stored during the day and used at night. Some rural electric utilities offer time-of-use rates, where electricity costs less during off-peak hours. Batteries can store low-cost energy and use it later,

helping reduce monthly bills.

Your public power district or electric co-op can assist in evaluating system size, installation requirements and available incentives or rate options.

Battery innovation is also being driven by the growth of electric vehicles. Manufacturers are working to improve battery performance, extend battery lifespan, reduce charging time and lower costs. These improvements are influencing the broader energy storage market. Some EVs now include vehicle-to-home (V2H) or vehicle-to-grid (V2G) capabilities, allowing a car to supply power to a home during an outage.

From early lead-acid batteries to today's advanced lithium-ion and emerging long-duration systems, battery energy storage has evolved into a practical tool for modern power systems.

As the costs of this technology comes down, batteries could begin to help public power districts and electric co-ops improve reliability, integrate renewable energy and manage infrastructure costs. For electric utility consumer-members, batteries offer greater control over energy use and added resilience during outages. Together, these developments can contribute to a more flexible and dependable electric system that supports entire communities.



Nearly half of American families use alternative heating sources such as space heaters, fireplaces, or wood/coal stoves to stay warm this time of year. Fixed and portable space heaters, including wood stoves are a leading cause of home fires, and are involved in 74-percent of fire related deaths. Carbon monoxide is also a killer, and each year over 200 people die from carbon monoxide produced by fuel burning appliances in the home including furnaces, ranges, water heaters, and room heaters.

The Red Cross is calling on everyone to take steps that can save lives, especially during the winter months when home fires are more common:

- Keep all potential sources of fuel like paper, clothing, bedding or rugs at least three feet away from space heaters, stoves, or fireplaces.
- Portable heaters and fireplaces should never be left unattended. Turn off space heaters and make



*While a fireplace may warm a small area of your home, it can also suck heated air from the room out through the chimney. Always close the fireplace flue when a fire is not burning.*

sure any embers in the fireplace are extinguished before going to bed or leaving home.

- If you must use a space heater, place it on a level, hard and nonflammable surface (such as ceramic tile floor), not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes. Keep children and pets away from space heaters.
- When buying a space heater,

look for models that shut off automatically if the heater falls over as another safety measure.

- Never use a cooking range or oven to heat your home.
- Keep fire in your fireplace by using a glass or metal fire screen large enough to catch sparks and rolling logs.
- Have wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, and furnaces professionally inspected and cleaned once a year.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector on each level of your home.
- Install smoke alarms. At a minimum, put one on every level of the home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas.
- Make sure that everyone in the family knows how to get out of every room and how to get out of the home in less than two minutes.
- Practice the fire escape plan, and keep track of the time it takes. It should be not more than two minutes!

## Murphy





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There is something special about the heat of a fire. It's cozy, comforting and a heat source for households across the country. Whether it provides primary or supplemental heat, a wood or pellet stove must operate safely and efficiently.

Here are some signs your stove may need to be replaced, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

- You often smell smoke in the house with all the windows closed. Smoke can harm heart and lung health, especially among children and older adults.
- Smoke comes out of the chimney more than 15 minutes after a cold start or reload.
- Watery eyes and stuffy noses are common in your household when operating the wood stove.
- You must continually feed the stove with wood.

The EPA recommends replacing wood stoves manufactured before 1990 with cleaner, more efficient models. This can save you money and make your home safer by reducing fire risk and improving indoor air quality. It also reduces outdoor air pollution. If the back of your stove doesn't have an EPA label, it's likely more than 30 years old.

Next, start comparing equipment to find the best fit using the EPA Certified Wood Stove Database. It provides a list of wood and pellet stoves with efficiency ratings, sizes, heat outputs and other details. Local retailers can help you, too. Work with a reputable dealer who can

explain the features most important to you. Don't forget to ask about the highest efficiency models.



*New wood stoves release more heat from the same amount of wood while reducing indoor air pollution.*

*Photograph by Miranda Boutelle, Pioneer Utility Resources*

Here are some things to consider when choosing a new wood or pellet stove.

Modern wood stoves require less wood, produce less ash and emit almost no smoke. They come in catalytic and noncatalytic options. In catalytic models, smoke gases and particles are burned in a coated ceramic honeycomb, thereby increasing burn time and reducing air pollution. The operation of noncatalytic models is more standard. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, new catalytic wood stoves have efficiencies of up to 83% higher heating value—or amount of heat released—while noncatalytic models are typically in

the 65% to 75% range.

A pellet stove is another option to consider. It burns compressed pellets made of wood or other biomass materials. Like a wood stove, there are free-standing units or inserts. It can burn cleaner and doesn't require hauling wood. Pellets are loaded into the hopper, which feeds them into the combustion chamber for burning. Most pellet stoves use electricity for the hopper and a fan to push warm air into the room. Plan to power them during an outage, if needed. Some models come with battery backup. An EPA-certified pellet stove has a 70% to 83% higher heating value.

Make sure the wood or pellet stove you select is properly sized for your home and heating needs.

Consider the cost of the fuel source—whether you have to buy wood, harvest it yourself or stock up on a specific type of pellet. Reduce fuel consumption and smoke by burning wood that is dry and seasoned, meaning it is split, covered and aged for at least six months. Do not burn trash or treated lumber indoors. It can create indoor air pollution and damage your wood stove. Burning softwood can lead to creosote buildup, which can cause chimney fires.

Installation by a certified technician ensures the job is done right, preventing chimney fires and indoor smoke. Have the stove cleaned and inspected by a professional annually. Also, install carbon monoxide detectors.

# Public Power Strengthens Nebraska's Energy Future

Most folks are being squeezed by increasing prices from the grocery store register to the gas pump. Escalating costs for fuel, including coal and natural gas, and utility construction materials like steel, transformers, and copper, are pressuring electric utilities as well.

Nebraska's rural electric utilities are stepping up to the challenge to keep electricity affordable in the face of what has become an industry-wide "perfect storm." In looking out for their consumers, public power districts and electric cooperatives lead the utility industry in implementing energy efficiency programs and supplying power from renewable energy



and other reliable sources like coal and nuclear.

We are on the cutting edge when it comes to testing and deploying new technologies, such as plug-in hybrid electric vehicles and advanced meter reading devices. We are also recognized industry leaders in promoting energy efficiency to help consumers reduce electricity consumption and

save money on their energy bills.

Public power utilities in Nebraska remain committed to providing safe, affordable, and reliable electric power by ensuring that our state's power needs are met through a blend of energy efficiency programs, clean coal, nuclear, and renewable generation sources.

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Struck from 1971-1978 to honor President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the "Ike" was the last large-sized circulating dollar struck by the US Mint. But from 1971-1974, the US Mint released a special 40% Silver version struck in a Brilliant Uncirculated finish.

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Only minted at the San Francisco Mint, known as the "Granite Lady", the Silver Ike was only available if you ordered one from the Mint. Each Brilliant Uncirculated silver dollar was delivered in a special packaging in a blue envelope, earning the nickname of "Blue Ikes". You'll get all four coins delivered in their original blue envelope packaging, a miracle considering it's been 55 years since the first Ike Silver Dollar was struck.

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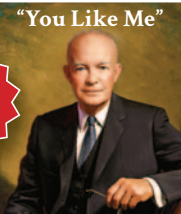
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## THE BLUE BISON HEBRON, NEB.

The Blue Bison in downtown Hebron is a place where community and good food come together. Rob and Natalie Marsh bought the restaurant in October of 2024 after deciding they wanted to keep a local favorite going strong. The building sits on Fourth Street and has been part of Hebron's story for many years. It has been a furniture store, a mortuary, and even a thrift shop. The upstairs once held the Masons Lodge, and though it has not been used in a long time, Natalie says it still has a lot of potential. Some staff members even believe the building has a friendly ghost named Horace, who occasionally closes doors or knocks things off tables.

When the restaurant went up for sale, the Marshes knew it was the right time to take a chance. Natalie had always dreamed of owning a coffee shop. She had been working as a registered nurse at Thayer County Health Services, and Rob farms outside of town. With four daughters at home, Natalie wanted a schedule that allowed her to spend more time with them. The girls now help at the restaurant too, waiting tables and pitching in wherever needed. For the Marshes, running The Blue Bison is a true family effort.

They have spent many months renovating both the seating area and the kitchen. The kitchen is now twice its original size, and they added a pizza oven along with a growing lineup of craft beers on tap. The menu offers something for everyone, including artisan style pizza, gourmet burgers, deli style sandwiches, salads, and specialty coffees. The pizza has been especially popular because it brings something new to Hebron. The Marshes wanted to create a place where people of all ages would feel welcome. It is a spot to grab lunch, meet friends for coffee, or let high school students hang out



after sports. They also made room inside for the Good Intentions boutique, which gives visitors another fun reason to stop in.

Hebron, located along Highway 81 and home to the World's Largest Covered Porch Swing, has a population of just under 1,400. Even so, The Blue Bison has more than 40 employees. Many are high school or college students who work a few shifts each week. Natalie says she has been very lucky because people truly want to work there. Parents also feel comfortable with their teens working at a family friendly place.

The Marshes both grew up in Hebron, and support from the community has meant a lot to them. They kept the name Blue Bison, which honors the Little Blue River and the bison that once roamed the area. Today, the restaurant stands as a lively and welcoming space that blends history with fresh energy, giving locals and visitors a new favorite place to gather.

*Photographs provided by Natalie Marsh*



## Cheery Cherry Overnight Oats

- 2 cups rolled oats
- 4 tablespoons chia seeds
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 teaspoons pure almond extract
- 4 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 1/2 cup Northwest Cherries, roughly chopped, plus additional for serving (optional)
- Greek yogurt (optional)
- sliced almonds (optional)

In mixing bowl, stir oats and chia seeds to combine.

Add milk, almond extract and maple syrup. Stir to combine until uniformly mixed.

Using 1/4 cup measuring cup, divide oats mixture among four small jars, adding layer of cherries between scoops. Top with remaining cherries.

Seal jars and transfer to refrigerator overnight, or at least 6 hours, before serving.

Serve on their own or top with Greek yogurt, additional dried cherries and sliced almonds, if desired.

*Recipe courtesy of Northwest Cherry Growers*

## Reader Submitted Recipes

### Sausage Potato Soup

- |   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 14 oz. package Smoked Kielbasa Sausage with Chipotle and Monterey Jack Cheese | 1/2 cup sliced carrots          |
| 6 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed   | 3 cloves minced garlic          |
| 2 cups frozen corn  | 1/4 cup diced onions            |
| 1 1/2 cups chicken broth  | 1/2 teaspoon salt               |
| 2 ribs sliced celery  | 1/4 teaspoon pepper             |
|   | 1 1/2 cups whole milk           |
|   | 2/3 cup shredded cheddar cheese |
|   | 1 teaspoon minced parsley       |

In a large saucepan, brown the sausage, drain. Set the sausage aside. In the same pan combine the potatoes, corn, broth, celery, carrots, and seasoning. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Add milk, cheese, parsley, and sausage. Cook and stir over low heat until cheese is melted and soup is heated through. Yields 6 servings.

**Nancy Robinson, North Platte, Nebraska**

### Czech Goulash

- |                              |                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| 3 lbs. beef, cubed           | 1 teaspoon Paprika |
| 3 stalks of celery, chopped  | Salt               |
| 1 Bottle of Catsup           | 12 gingersnaps     |
| 1 Tablespoon of Chili Powder |                    |

Cook small pieces of beef in about 1 quart of water with celery, catsup and seasoning. Boil all until meat is tender. Lastly, add about 10 to 12 gingersnaps which have been soaked in cold water for a few minutes. Add 1 quart of water, and re-heat. Serve with warm corn bread or biscuits.

**Bernadine Lloyd's recipe submitted by daughter Jenifer Sprague, Madison, Nebraska**

### Farm Style Biscuits

- |                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 cups flour              | 1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar |
| 4 teaspoons baking powder | 1/2 cup oleo                 |
| 2 teaspoons sugar         | 2/3 cup milk                 |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt         | 1 egg                        |

Cut oleo into dry ingredients in mixing bowl until coarse mixture. Add egg and milk all at once. Stir until dough leaves side of bowl. Turn dough onto lightly floured board and pat until it's about 3/4 inch thick. Cut out rounds with biscuit cutter. Place and bake on baking sheet at 450 degrees for about 12 minutes or until lightly browned. Makes about 12 biscuits.

**Kaye Einspahr, Enders, Nebraska**



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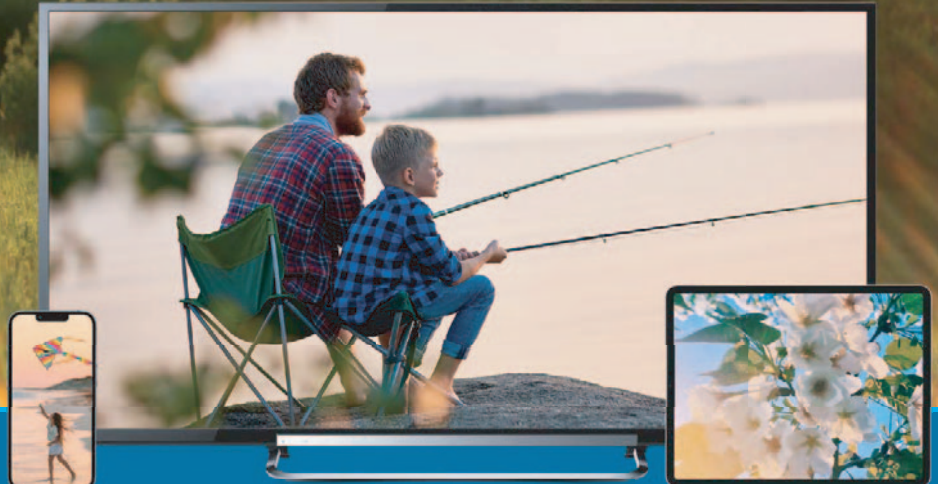
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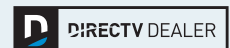
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