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July 2020



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On the cover

Sandhills Images photographer Bob Rooney captured this shot of a colorful Nebraska landscape at dusk. He is a farmer and photographer from Brewster, Neb.





by Wayne Price

Take a vacation from high electric bills

My family was forced to cancel our summer vacation this year because of the situation with COVID-19. We've already been spending a lot of time at home together because of social distancing so we were looking forward to getting away for a while.

I was looking forward to seeing a reduction in our electric consumption at home during our vacation.

We all typically see a summer surge in electric use because soaring temperatures and sultry summer nights can cause electric bills to skyrocket. This summer, instead of going sightseeing or relaxing on the beach, I'm going to take my family on a vacation from high electric bills by making my home—and the family's habits—more energy efficient.

Air conditioning helps most Americans beat the sweltering summer heat. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), air conditioning accounts for as much as 50 percent of the average household electric bill. Proper maintenance and smart use of your home's cooling system will help keep your electric bill in check.

First, make sure your air conditioner's external unit is clean and free of debris. Clear away dead leaves or overgrown plants and weeds to enable the unit to perform as it should.

Second, check and change your filter regularly. Different filters in different homes require changes at different frequencies. If you are not sure about yours, check it monthly for one year until you understand how often and after how much use changes are needed. Fresh filters not only reduce the strain on your cooling system, but improve the air quality in your home.

Third, the DOE recommends that you set your home's thermostat as high as possible, while still maintaining a comfortable environment for your family during the summer months.

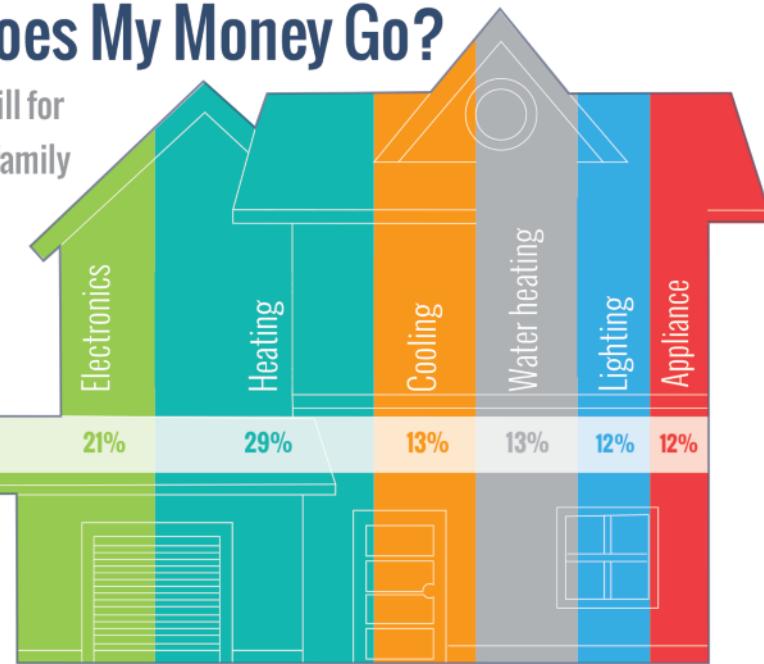
Bumping the thermostat up at least two degrees can make a noticeable difference on your power bill. Investing in a programmable thermostat can lead to even greater savings by automatically adjusting it so that the cooling system runs more often when you are at home and less often when you are away.

Where Does My Money Go?

Annual Energy Bill for a typical single family home is \$2,060

Electronics include:
telephone and external power adapters, consumer electronics (computer, TVs and DVD player), home office equipment, and small appliances

Appliance include:
refrigerator, dishwasher, clothes, washer and dryer



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by Tim Trudell

From the Gridiron to the Griddle

Trading the bright lights of Chicago for the backroads of Nebraska, Lance Lundberg took over the Trading Post in Niobrara and has transformed it into a popular place to buy barbecue ribs, handmade pizza, and more.

Lance Lundberg's career went from pancakes on the field as a Husker lineman to a career in the culinary arts.

During Lundberg's career with the Nebraska Cornhuskers, pancakes were the specialty of the house. Husker linemen prided themselves on pancake blocks, hits so hard that they lay out defenders flat on their backs. Lundberg, who started 33 consecutive games at left tackle for Nebraska 1991-93, was no different. The former eight-man football star from Wausa was part of the Nebraska's 1993 team that went undefeated during the regular season and came up a missed field goal and phantom clip from winning the national championship. The Huskers lost to unbeaten Florida State 18-16 in the 1994 Orange Bowl as Husker kicker Byron Bennett missed a game-winning field goal as time expired.

"I went to Nebraska on the five-year plan," he said. Lundberg played on the school's last freshman team – then referred to as junior varsity – in 1989.

He sat out 1990 as a redshirt season, before starting a successful run at left tackle, taking over for the final eight games of his sophomore season following the move of Erik Wiegert to guard. Lundberg also started that season's Orange Bowl. During his run



Lundberg played for the Nebraska Cornhuskers. Photograph provided by the University of Nebraska.

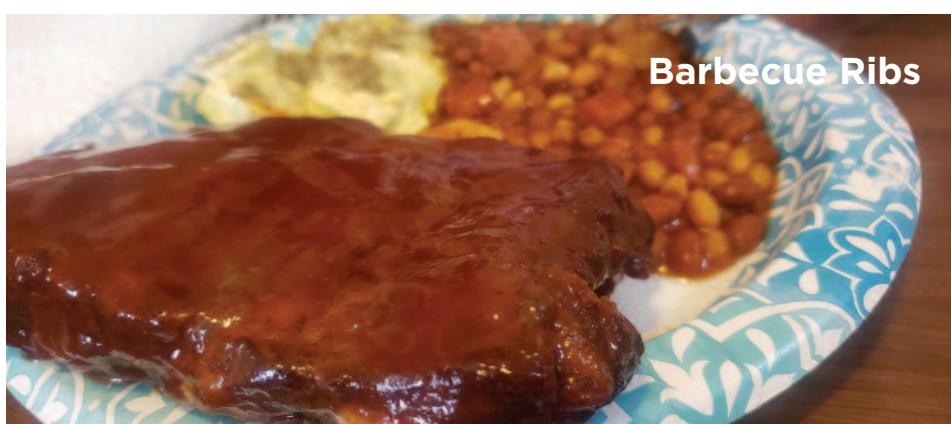


Lance Lundberg became the owner of the Trading Post in 2018. Photographs by Tim Trudell

with the Cornhuskers, they were 29-4-1 (27-4-1 as a starter). The 1993 team would be the Huskers' first to play for the national championship four times in the ensuing five seasons. Nebraska won the national title in 1994, 1995, and 1997. By all accounts, the 1993 team would have been Coach Tom Osborne's first national championship, but a phantom clip was called on a punt returned for a touchdown.

A first-team All-Big Eight selection and honorable mention All-American, Lundberg seemed destined to follow other members of the famed Nebraska offensive line pipeline to a career in the National Football League when the New Orleans selected him in the seventh round of the 1994 draft. He was the only lineman picked by the Saints during the draft. He seemed penciled in for a slot backing up future Hall of Famer Willie Roaf, whom the Saints drafted in the first round a year earlier.

But, Lundberg had other priorities. After reporting for preseason camp, he



decided he had played enough football. He decided it was time to start a new life, so he quit. There was to be no wearing of the fleur de lis logo on Sunday afternoons. The criminal justice major set out to write a new chapter of his life. During college, he had met a fellow athlete at Nebraska, Tina Coutretsis, a tennis player, and the two headed for her hometown of Chicago for a new life together. So, the all-state football player from small-town Wausa, Nebraska, left for the nation's third largest city, Chicago.

It was Chicago where Lundberg would find the next love of his life – and the lady that would eventually bring him home – when he enrolled in culinary school at Kendall College. Long a fan of home cooking, Lundberg dabbled in classes before eventually leaving the school to work full-time in the culinary arts.

"I like food," Lundberg said. "I enjoy making food. I really thought it was a business I could be successful in."

In Chicago, his forte was high-end

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Lundberg

From page 7

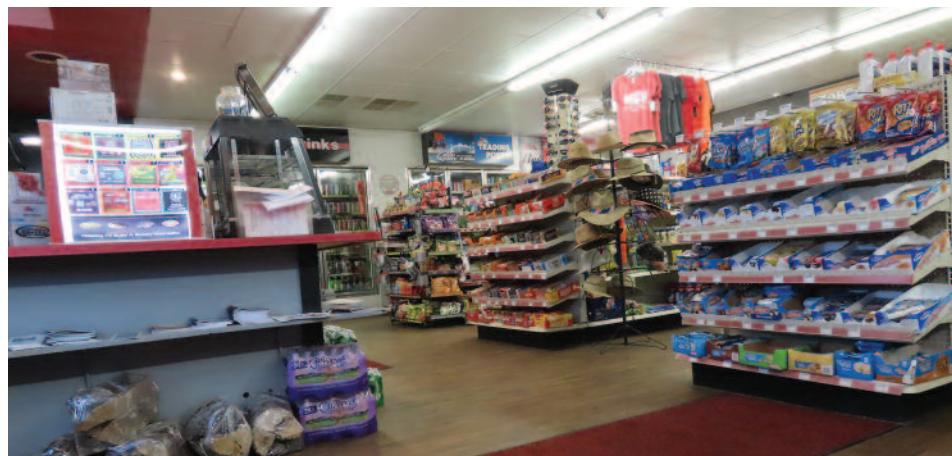
breakfast. He exchanged pancake blocks for flipping pancakes, working for a number of high-end restaurants. He spent a decade with Walker Brothers Original Pancake House, working a variety of positions, including as a general manager. Walker Brothers is a Chicago-area stalwart, celebrating 60 years in business after opening in 1957 as a franchise for the Original Pancake House, based in Portland, Oregon. Walker Brothers is anything but a typical pancake restaurant, Lundberg said.

He eventually partnered with his father-in-law when they opened The Grove Kitchen, an upscale family restaurant. They served comfort food with style, he said.

But, he and Tina's four children were reaching an age where the family needed to decide if they were going to stay in Chicago or move back to Lundberg's home state. Wausa won the battle of hearts, and the Lundberg clan relocated to the rural Knox County community of about 500 people five years ago. When they arrived in Wausa, the Lundbergs' two eldest children – twins Tommy and Claire were in high school. They are now juniors at Wayne State College, where Tommy is a social studies and education major, while Claire studies business. Two younger daughters – Ali and Kate – will be a junior and freshman at Wausa High School, respectively.

Lundberg stayed in the food industry, working for Sysco, a food distributor. One of his clients was Stacy Fritz, owner of the Trading Post, a gas station and convenience store in Niobrara. The business relationship developed into a business deal, with Lundberg buying it from Fritz in 2018. Lundberg took over as the first non-family owner of the northeast Nebraska business in several years. It's a position he takes seriously.

"I appreciate the support of



The Trading Post is not your typical convenience store. The lunch menu has featured a chicken fried steak sandwich, pizza burger, and spicy chicken sandwich.

Niobrara and the community," Lundberg said. They could have looked at him as an outsider, he said, even though he grew up only 43 miles away.

The chance to run his own kitchen again, as well as the convenience store, appealed to him in deciding to take over the Trading Post, Lundberg said.

And does he deliver in the kitchen. The Trading Post is far from your typical gas station cuisine. You won't find stale pizza slices or hot dogs on rollers. While you can buy prepackaged sandwiches, the Trading Post offers a menu of freshly prepared meals, from biscuits and gravy in the morning to fresh pizza, burgers, and even barbecue ribs. A large combination with fresh vegetables or a meat lover's loaded with all kinds of meat is enough for a family of four.

"The pizza is made from scratch, per order," Lundberg said. "When you use quality ingredients, you end up with good food."

While the reputation was there for quality hamburgers and cheeseburgers, Lundberg added a new flattop grill in early summer, which improves cooking speed and seemingly the quality of the burger. It helps with searing the meat, improving the quality, he said. Fans – yes, the Trading Post has foodie fans – love the taste of the burgers. Sue Lee, who recently moved to Niobrara from Port Orchard, Washington, craves the

cheeseburger. Not sure of the seasoning Lundberg uses, Lee savors the taste, and even enjoys a burger cold as a leftover, she said.

"We're a generous, quality food place," Lundberg said.

While the traditional fare scores high with locals, Lundberg is always looking for new challenges and menu items. The lunch menu has featured a chicken fried steak sandwich, pizza burger, and spicy chicken sandwich.

The Trading Post even offered a gyro and French fries as a lunch special.

"There are people in Niobrara and northeast Nebraska who haven't tried it before," Lundberg said. It may reappear on the menu based on the results, he said.

While he dabbles with menu ideas, the standards remain.

"The broasted chicken is a favorite," Lundberg said. "The broasted chicken is phenomenal."

While he loves owning a business again, the responsibility doesn't end when he leaves for the day.

"I usually get in around eight in the morning and try to leave around 5 p.m.," Lundberg said. "Weekends may vary for hours, but it's definitely a seven-days-a-week business."

But, he's not alone at work. The Trading Post is a true family affair. Tina is a half-owner and handles the books and ordering. Tommy and Claire help out, with Claire running the store and Tommy helping their

dad cook. In fact, Tommy said he's leaning toward joining the family business after college.

"We'll see what Claire decides," Lundberg said.

Besides family, the store has other employees, who he deeply appreciates, Lundberg said. Susan Glowcheski makes a 13-mile drive each day from Running Water, South Dakota, to run the counter and make breakfast. She's also known for the desserts, such as cinnamon rolls and cheesecake. Robin Klug, who lives in Niobrara, is one of the evening employees. Each has only nice things to say about Lundberg. And that view is reciprocated.

"I try to treat the staff how I like to be treated," he said.

The store is also home to the Coffee Room, a small in-store dining area with about six tables. Locals gather daily for breakfast and coffee and a little chit chat.

Named to the Nebraska Eight-man Football Hall of Fame in 2020, Lundberg shies away from discussing

his football career. When people ask about it, he may briefly mention a couple of things before moving on to their stories.

"I prefer to listen to other people's stories," he said.

While the Trading Post is a popular food stop for locals and visitors, Lundberg is impressed with the Niobrara food scene. With a population of about 350, the Missouri River town is home to three popular eateries.

Sportsmen's Bar and Two Rivers Hotel is located inside a wild west storefront. You feel like you need to ride a horse into town and tie it to a post outside the bar and grill. Inside, you'll find some of the best home cooking this side of the Niobrara River. With outstanding steaks and prime ribs among the burgers and sandwiches, the Sportsmen's has regulars who drive up to 90 miles each weekend just to enjoy one of its juicy steaks and sides.

Down the road, the City Café is

known for its farm-to-table menu, working with local farmers who provide eggs, meat, and vegetables. In the mornings, it's common to see local farmers help themselves to a cup of coffee as they discuss and solve the world's problems, all before 8 a.m. The City Café owners are so trustworthy that if diners don't have cash (they don't accept credit cards), they'll accept a check or allow people to mail them the payment. They've yet to be shorted, the owners said.

So, it may seem odd that the third leg to the Niobrara foodie scene is a gas station. But, it works. The Trading Post, where you can pump your own gas, buy a soda and chips for the road, and, add a slab of barbecue ribs, fresh pizza, burgers, and even fried pickles, is more than just a convenience store. It's a conduit to amazing food.

Instead of becoming a New Orleans Saint, Lance Lundberg became a convenience store chef. And, as his college coach Tom Osborne might mutter, a darned good one.



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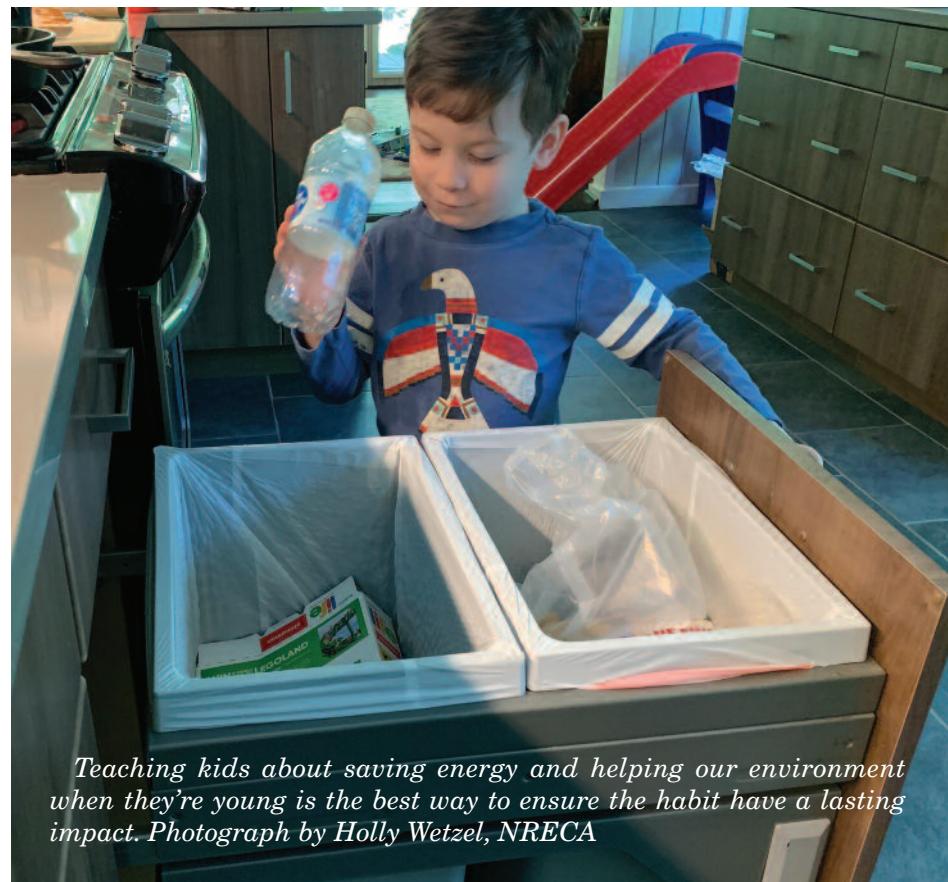
Northeast
community college
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by Maria Kanevsky

Three Ways to Get Kids Interested in Saving Energy

Getting kids interested in saving energy can seem tough at first, but it doesn't have to be. With warmer months upon us, saving energy will be crucial for keeping electricity bills low, and getting kiddos engaged now will help them form energy-saving habits for the future. Believe it or not, there are fun ways to teach kids how to be energy efficient that will actually get them excited about saving energy.

Create a reward system. One simple method is a star chart. You can use the chart to keep track of stickers and reward your child for every 10 stickers that they earn for doing some activity that saves energy. Stickers could be earned every time your child remembers to turn off the light in a room after they exit, unplugging devices (like phone chargers) that they're not using, or showering in less than five minutes. Rewards can be small things that get your child excited, like a piece of candy or a small toy. These actions taken by your kids will add up over time and help save energy around the home.



Teaching kids about saving energy and helping our environment when they're young is the best way to ensure the habit have a lasting impact. Photograph by Holly Wetzel, NRECA

Turn the learning experience into a game. Games create a fun, interactive option for kids to become engaged with learning more about saving energy. One example is to create an "energy treasure hunt" around the home, where the family searches for devices or appliances that use the most electricity. After finding these items, you can discuss with your kids a few ways for those devices to use less energy. You could also have them search for other proactive efficiency measures, like weather stripping, LED bulbs and air filters.

Another game to play with your kids is "I Spy" for any energy-saving technologies in stores while out running errands. Encouraging your kids to find a wide variety of devices around stores can keep them even more engaged. Teach them about the EnergyStar logo, which identifies the most energy efficient devices and appliances. The more interested you are in finding those technologies, the more interested your kids will be too.

Discuss lifestyle changes as a family or as an individual, but also making the changes fun. This could be getting the family together to play a boardgame instead of watching television. You could also suggest reading a book together instead of using electronic devices. Encourage them to play outdoors with friends instead of playing video games indoors. Incorporating energy-saving practices into everyday life is the best way to ensure the habit has a lasting impact.

Got teens? If your kids are a little older and the suggestions noted above won't work, try getting them involved in simple efficiency projects around the home. There are several DIY tasks that teens can help with, like caulking and weather stripping around windows and doors, or replacing the HVAC filter.

Teaching your kids to save energy can be easier when you make it fun. Each of us, including our kids, can do our part to save energy.

SWIMMING POOL SAFETY



Make sure that any lighting equipment in your pool is up to code and regularly examined by a professional. To change or repair a light, ensure the electricity to the pool is first turned off at the circuit breaker.

If you are in the water and feel electric current, which can cause a tingling sensation, shout to let others know, try to stay upright, tuck your legs up to make yourself smaller, and swim away from anything that could be energized. Do not use a metal ladder to exit the pool.

Remember, water and electricity are a dangerous mix, even outside the pool. Never touch any electrical appliances or outlets when you are wet or standing in water.

Learn more at

Safe Electricity.org®



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Use caution with Fourth of July fireworks

Every year, thousands of people are injured by fireworks, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

The federal government has banned sales of the most dangerous fireworks to consumers, such as cherry bombs and M-80s. But sparklers, firecrackers, and other smaller fireworks remain legal in Nebraska.

To help make sure your holiday celebrations don't end with a trip to the emergency room, follow these safety tips from the CPSC:

- Sparklers aren't safe for small children. They burn at very high temperatures—up to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to melt some metals—and can easily set clothes on fire.
- Ignite fireworks in a clearing, away from power lines, homes, other structures, dry leaves and grass, and other flammable materials. Never light them in any type of container.
- Keep a bucket of water handy in case of emergencies and for fireworks that fail to ignite or explode.

- Check instructions for storage, but generally keep fireworks in a cool, dry place.

- Do not place any part of your body directly over fireworks while you're lighting them, and immediately move away as soon as the device is lit.

- "Homemade" fireworks kits are illegal. Never try to make your own.

- After fireworks have completely burned out, soak them with a hose before throwing them in the trash to help prevent fires.

The Fourth of July is a time to celebrate, but always use caution with fireworks and always look up for power lines before you shoot anything skyward.

Keep your best friend safe

1 in 5 dogs go **missing** after being scared by fireworks.



images: Freepik.com

Murphy



The Invention of the Year

The world's lightest and most portable mobility device

Once in a lifetime, a product comes along that truly moves people. Introducing the future of personal transportation... The Zinger.

Throughout the ages, there have been many important advances in mobility. Canes, walkers, rollators, and scooters were created to help people with mobility issues get around and retain their independence. Lately, however, there haven't been any new improvements to these existing products or developments in this field. Until now. Recently, an innovative design engineer who's developed one of the world's most popular products created a completely new breakthrough... a personal electric vehicle. It's called the **Zinger**, and there is nothing out there quite like it.

"I can now go places and do things that I wasn't able to go or do before. It has given me a new lease on life and I am so happy I found it!"

-Dana S., Texas

The first thing you'll notice about the **Zinger** is its unique look. It doesn't look like a scooter. Its sleek, lightweight yet durable frame is made with aircraft grade aluminum. It weighs only 47.2 lbs but can handle a passenger that's up to 275 lbs! It features one-touch folding and unfolding— when folded it can be wheeled around like a suitcase and fits easily into a backseat or trunk. Then, there are the steering levers. They enable the **Zinger** to move forward, backward, turn on a dime and even pull right up



Available in Green,
Black (shown) and Blue

to a table or desk. With its compact yet powerful motor it can go up to

6 miles an hour and its rechargeable battery can go up to 8 miles on a single charge. With its low center of gravity and inflatable tires it can handle rugged terrain and is virtually tip-proof. Think about it, you can take your **Zinger** almost anywhere, so you don't have to let mobility issues rule your life.



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by Paul Wesslund

Alexa, Can you help me save energy?



Before this year's virus protection measures turned business meetings and even family gatherings into smartphone conference calls and video conferences, your electric appliances jumped on the bandwagon of internet-connected energy.

If that makes your gadgets and gizmos sound almost human, well, in some ways that's exactly what's happening. Talking to a computer isn't just for Captain Kirk on Star Trek anymore—surveys show about one in four American adults owns a smart speaker or technology like the Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple HomePod. Now we can just ask Alexa or Siri to tell us the weather or how to save money on our electric bill.

Appliances you control from your phone aren't just luxury items anymore, says Brian Sloboda, director of consumer solutions with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

"Two years ago, when you would buy a smart appliance, you were really buying a high-end product. Now they're in the middle," he says. "More and more appliances are smart, and they have come down in price. It's everything from light bulbs you screw into your table lamps, to your microwave, to your washing machine, to your thermostat that you can control through a voice assistant or apps on the phone."

Sloboda says that all those internet-connected devices

can not only make you more energy efficient, but can help you take advantage of your electric service in ways you never even thought of. But if your machines are acting more like people, you'll also want to take precautions to protect your security and privacy—smart speakers are on and listening in all the time, after all. Sloboda advises that you might want to get in the habit of reading the fine print that comes with instructions and app downloads, so you know how your personal information is being used.

Sloboda keeps up with appliance developments as his full-time job, but he also recently brought one of those humanoids into his home.

"My washing machine sends me an email every month telling me how much electricity it has used," he says. "It gives me tips on how to save energy. It suggests I could wash the clothes in cold water to save energy. It will gently tell you that rather than washing a small load, it's more efficient to let the clothes accumulate."

If all that sounds a little creepy, smart speaker manufacturers and marketers understand. They try to encourage customers to get more familiar with their devices. They want you to ask your smart speaker to tell you a joke or play music. Sloboda says that in electric co-op studies of how people might use voice-activated devices to manage their energy use, owners like making those personalized connections.

"Consumers in these focus groups refer to Alexa as their friend," he says. "They start to give them human attributes. They really do refer to Alexa as 'she' rather than 'it.'"

While apps and speakers can help you use energy more efficiently by alerting you to lights on in rooms you're not using or suggesting you clean the filter in your washing machine, Sloboda says smart thermostats offer some of the biggest potential energy savings. Heating and cooling are among a home's top energy users, and high-tech thermostats are getting easier to use and more innovative. These days, they not only can change temperatures set for daytime or nighttime, but can track your phone as you leave the house or move from room to room, figuring out your habits and making adjustments based on your lifestyle.

Before buying a smart thermostat, Sloboda advises learning about it to make sure it's compatible with your heating and cooling system. Also, check with your local electric utility—they may have an energy management

program with a recommended model.

Sloboda sees the future of smart technology getting even smarter. He says rural electric utilities are involved in studies where people describe their values to their apps and speakers. If saving money is the most important thing to you, your lights might dim in a part of the room you're not using. If comfort is your top priority, the temperature will stay within a certain range. For those especially concerned about the environment, the dishwasher might delay its start until renewable power is available because the sun is shining or the wind is blowing.

Along with all those mind-blowing benefits comes the need for precautions. Anything connected to the internet can be hacked—that could be a home security system, a baby monitor or a TV.

The first safety step Sloboda advises is to change the password on any of those devices. Every one of them comes with a ridiculously-easy-to-crack password like "1234" or "Password." Check regularly for software updates and install them—they often add protections from the latest cyberthreats.

In addition to security, also pay attention to privacy. Many interactions with the internet will collect information on you. A smart speaker is listening to everything that goes on in your home all the time. Reading all those tiny-type agreements before you click "accept" might seem like an unrealistic pain, but they

generally will tell you what kind of protections are in place to keep your personal information private.

Sloboda also recommends getting involved in online communities about your internet devices, so you can know more about privacy, security and how to make the best use out of your smart technology.

"All of these devices generally have some sort of online community for people to engage in and learn from each other," says Sloboda. "Folks love talking about their devices, whether it's a car or a doorbell. People love talking about technology, and they love showing off the things they've figured out."

He even sees high-tech as a way to bring people closer as they make better use of their electricity.

"We sometimes look at smart technology and we think it is meant to isolate us, but you can really turn it around and go to in-person meet-ups or engage online to share tips and tricks," says Sloboda. "I am a real big believer that technology can actually bring us together."

Five home energy hogs to avoid

by Pat Keegan

Q : Our family has been trying to reduce our monthly expenses. The other day, my sister-in-law and I compared our electric bills. I was surprised to find out her energy costs were significantly lower than mine, even though our homes are similar in size and built around the same time. What could be causing my bill to be so much higher?

A : You are certainly not alone in these trying times as you search for ways to cut costs, and your energy use might provide some potential opportunities for savings. Even though you noted the similarities between your home and your sister-in-law's home, you may have a hidden energy hog causing your bills to be higher. Here are five energy hogs that may be increasing your energy use.

A fridge or freezer in the garage

That second fridge or freezer may be costing more than you think. If

the model was produced prior to 1990, it's likely using twice as much energy (or more!) than a newer EnergyStar-rated model. If it's located in the garage, it may run constantly in the summer, which could lead to higher electric bills.

Cooling or heating an uninsulated area

Cooling or heating an uninsulated workshop or garage can be expensive. To give you an example, during a past energy audit I conducted, I found that the homeowner heated an uninsulated shed to keep several half-empty buckets of paint from freezing. So, he was paying more to keep his paint warm than the paint was even worth. Pet owners have been known to heat and cool an uninsulated garage to keep pets comfortable, not realizing that this might be costing more than heating their actual home. If you really want to heat or cool these types of spaces, they need to be well insulated and

heated/cooled efficiently, perhaps with a ductless mini-split system.

Hot Tub

The average operating cost of a hot tub is \$250 per year. But that amount may be higher if your hot tub is an older, less efficient model, or if you live in a colder climate. A smaller hot tub with better insulation, a cover and a pump that runs on a lower voltage will use less energy than other models. In the end, getting a 'good deal' on a used hot tub may cost more in energy bills in the long run.

Swimming Pool

If you have a swimming pool, consider installing a smaller, more efficient pump and reducing how often it runs. You can also look at installing a larger filter and maximizing the flow of water through the pipes by making them larger and reducing how sharply the corners turn. These measures could cut your electric use for the pool pump by as much as 75%. Consult with a pool installation specialist to find the most efficient setup that will still keep your pool clean.

Pumps

If you live on acreage or on a farm, you probably have several pumps, including irrigation, well, septic and sump. If you're like most of us, you use those pumps until they break down. Consider replacing the oldest and most-used pumps over time with new, more efficient ones that are sized correctly for their task. Also, make sure you're eliminating leaks in the water lines, which make your pumps work harder and longer.

If one of these five energy hogs doesn't explain the difference in energy use between your home and your sister-in-law's, there are many other possibilities. I recommend conducting an energy audit, which should give you the answers you seek.



Before buying a hot tub, make sure you're ready to pay to operate it. The average annual energy cost for a hot tub is \$250 a year. Photograph by Andrew Holmes

Stand Up Straight and Feel Better

Discover the Perfect Walker, the better way to walk safely and more naturally



It's a cruel fact of life, as we age, gravity takes over. Our muscles droop, our bodies sag and the weight of the world seems to be planted squarely on our shoulders. We dread taking a fall, so we find ourselves walking less and less—and that only makes matters worse.

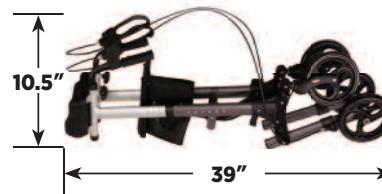
Well, cheer up! There's finally a product designed to enable us all to walk properly and stay on the go. It's called the Perfect Walker, and it can truly change your life.

Traditional rollators and walkers simply aren't designed well. They require you to hunch over and shuffle your feet when you walk. This puts pressure on your back, your neck, your wrists and your hands. Over time, this makes walking uncomfortable and can result in a variety of health issues. That's all changed with the Perfect Walker. Its upright design and padded elbow rests enable you to distribute your weight across your arms and shoulders, not your hands and wrists. Helps reduce back, neck and wrist pain and discomfort. Its unique frame gives you plenty of room to step, and the oversized wheels

help you glide across the floor. The height can be easily adjusted with the push of a button to fit anyone from 5' to over 6'. Once you've reached your destination you can use the hand brakes to gently slow down, and there's even a handy seat with a storage compartment. Its sleek, lightweight design makes it easy to use indoors and out and it folds up for portability and storage.



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by Derrill Holly

STOPPING SCAMS

for Better Service

Electric consumers urged to help fight utility fraud

Our increasingly connected world is giving scammers more opportunities to connect with unsuspecting consumers, and local authorities, utilities and other businesses are working overtime to keep people informed. They suggest that ‘if you see something, say something,’ is a vigilance adage that can help prevent you, your family or your business from being victimized.

“The Federal Trade Commission has been hearing about scammers impersonating utility companies in an effort to get your money,” said Lisa Lake, a federal consumer education specialist. “Your reports help us fight these scams.”

Suspect a scammer? Here's what to do if the call seems suspicious:

- 1 Hang up.
- 2 Call your utility provider at the phone number on your bill.
- 3 Call the police.



DO NOT pay over the phone if immediate payment is demanded to avoid a disconnection.

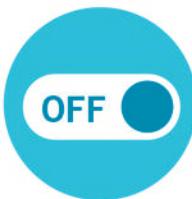
HOW TO SPOT A SCAM

Don't become a victim.

In one of the most common scams, a caller may:



Pretend to be from your utility.
(Your caller ID may even display your utility's name.)



Threaten to turn off power, water or natural gas service to your home or business within an hour.



Demand immediate payment – often by prepaid debit card.

Public power districts and electric cooperatives are among the businesses and consumer organizations supporting Utilities United Against Scams (UUAS). The international consortium of electricity, natural gas, water and sewer providers, and trade and industry associations is sharing information on payment scams, identity theft, sales and service schemes.

Imposter scams are the most common type of fraud reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), according to UUAS officials. “Impersonators call homes and small businesses demanding payment for supposedly delinquent bills and threatening to terminate service.”

The frequency of the incidents picks up during peak heating and cooling seasons, in part because consumers are most concerned when temperature extremes increase the urgency of maintaining utility service.

Variations on the scam are also becoming more common. Rather than making an initial claim that a consumer owes an outstanding balance, some scammers are now claiming an overpayment is the reason for a telephone call to a consumer. They will make contact in an attempt to get banking information so they can process a refund.

“Never give banking information over the phone unless you place the call to a number you know is legitimate,” wrote the FTC’s Lake in an FTC blog.

There has also been an uptick in door-to-door scams by people claiming to represent utility providers like your public power district or electric co-op. Representatives knock or ring the doorbell offering to replace or repair a meter or other device, or solicit personal information to sign a consumer up for programs that could reduce their energy bills.

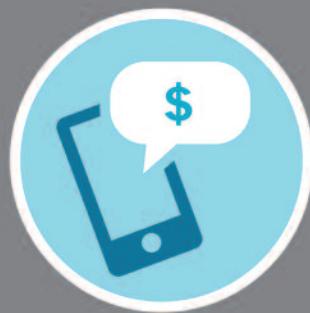
They may try to charge you for the phony service, sell you unnecessary products, collect personal information for use in identity theft or simply gain entry to steal valuables, officials said.

High-pressure demands are a common tactic in many of the schemes. Urging immediate decisions or actions, like immediate payment, particularly by a specific option like a gift card, wire transfer, cell phone or third-party computer app should raise serious concerns.

Utility-connected scams are common, because utility services are so common. Lighting, heating, water and sewage services are all essential to modern living, so any threat of service disconnections can provoke a lot of anxiety.

Your first defense is personal awareness of your account status, including knowing whether balances are up to date. This is becoming more important as scammers use more automatic dialers or robocalls to phish for potential marks.

“Even if the caller insists you have a past due bill, that’s a big red flag,” said Lake, offering an alternative response. “Contact the utility company directly using the number on your paper bill or on the company’s website. Don’t call any number the caller gave you.”



Utilities will never demand payment with a credit card by phone.



Utilities will never ask you to buy a prepaid debit card.



Utility employees will never ask you to pay immediately.

A brunch menu fit for family mornings

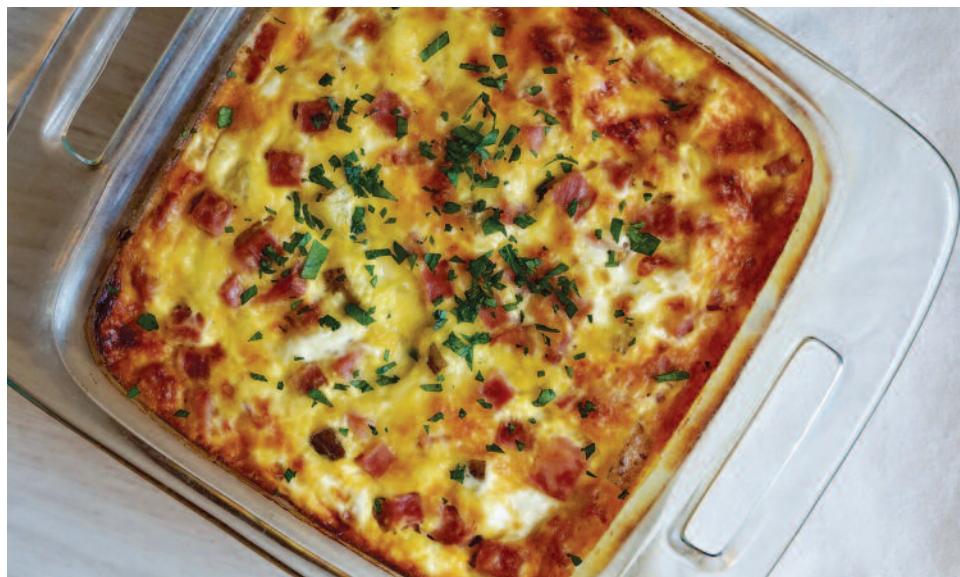
Many celebrations call for fabulous food, specifically dishes fit for brunch, even if your “crowd” is simply your nearest loved ones gathered at the family table. A wide variety of recipes may fit the festivities, but a combination of comforting bites with sweet and savory flavors is perfect for appeasing all appetites.

Whether it's just part of a brunch spread or the focus of your meal, an egg-based casserole is a perfect way to appease a morning crowd.

This version of Breakfast Casserole calls for potatoes, ham, eggs, milk and cheese for a simple dish that requires little preparation before popping in the oven.

Having fun in the kitchen can be an easy way to get kids involved for a family-friendly activity. These Fiesta Snacks call for flavors many kids love stacked up in a way that allows them to aid in the process.

Recipes provided by Culinary.net



Breakfast Casserole

- 1 pound red or white potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces**
- water**
- 1/2 small onion, coarsely chopped (about 1/2 cup)**
- nonstick cooking spray**
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, divided**
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper**
- 1 cup reduced-fat and reduced-sodium, chopped, cooked ham (about 4 ounces)**
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Swiss or cheddar cheese**
- 4 eggs**
- 1 1/2 cups skim milk**
- 1 tablespoon mustard**

Heat oven to 350 F.

In large saucepan, cover potato pieces with enough water to just submerge. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer, covered, 5 minutes. Add onion. Return to simmer, covered, about 5 minutes, or until potatoes are

just tender. Drain well. Cool slightly.

Coat 8-by-8-by-2-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Place potato-onion mixture in baking dish. Sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper. Gently stir to combine. Sprinkle ham and cheese on top.

In medium bowl, lightly beat eggs. Whisk in milk, mustard and remaining salt. Pour over layers in baking dish. Bake, uncovered, 40-45 minutes, or until knife inserted near center comes out clean. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

Reader Submitted Recipes



Fiesta Snacks

1 pound chicken, chopped
1/2 cup salsa, divided
1/4 cup sour cream
8 tortillas (8 inches)
1/3 cup refried beans
1/2 cup guacamole
6 ounces shredded cheese

Heat oven to 350 F.

In skillet, cook chopped chicken until done.

In medium bowl, mix cooked chicken, 1/4 cup salsa and sour cream until blended.

In small bowl, mix refried beans and remaining salsa until blended.

Lay two tortillas on baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Spread chicken mixture over both tortillas. Place second set of tortillas over chicken mixture. Spread guacamole over top tortillas. Place third set of tortillas on top and spread refried bean mixture over tortillas. Place fourth set of tortillas on top and sprinkle shredded cheese over tortillas.

Bake 10 minutes until cheese is melted.

To watch a video of this recipe being made, scan the QR Code or visit the URL

https://youtu.be/_5cjZ1mUcmo



Shrimp Salad

2 cups cooked shell macaroni, cooled
1 can shrimp, cleaned and drained
1 cup diced celery
1/3 cup chopped cucumber
1/4 cup chopped green pepper
3 hard cooked eggs, chopped
1/2 cup salad dressing

Toss together and chill for two hours before serving.

Darlus McWilliams, Norfolk, Nebraska

Asian Cabbage Salad

1 16 oz. package coleslaw mix
1/2 cup chopped green pepper
1/2 cup chopped onion

Dressing:

4 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon black pepper
6 tablespoons rice vinegar
2 teaspoons salt
1 cup canola oil
1 package ramen noodle flavoring mix

Mix coleslaw mix, green peppers and onion. Just before serving add dressing and 1 package crushed ramen noodles and 1 cup cashew pieces. Toss and serve.

Barbara Burr, Eddyville, Nebraska

Lemon Cheesecake

Crust:

1 1/2 package graham crackers, crushed
1 stick butter
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon

Filling:

1 13 oz. can milk
1 package lemon Jell-O
1 8 oz. package cream cheese
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla

Prepare crust, pat into a 9" X 13" pan. Refrigerate can milk and beaters from mixer. Dissolve lemon Jell-O with 1 cup boiling water. Cream the cream cheese, 1 cup sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Add "cooled" Jell-O mix. Beat in large bowl the can of milk. It will be light and fluffy. Blend in Jell-O mixture. Pour over graham cracker crust. Sprinkle with crumbs and refrigerate.

Bev Young, Dannebrog, Nebraska



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