Lake Manatee at Sunset

Kerry Wright, one of six PRECO 2019 photo contest winners, went to the lake near State Road 64 to photograph the setting sun. "The sunset was not good, so I turned in the opposite direction and saw great golden colors facing southeast," Kerry says. "At first I was disappointed that the boat was interrupting my scene, but then as it moved farther into the scene I saw an opportunity for a nice composition."
Now, from United of Omaha Life Insurance Company and Companion Life Insurance Company...

$25,000.00 Whole Life Insurance.

Are you between the ages of 45 and 85?*

Then this GUARANTEED ACCEPTANCE policy is for YOU!

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Why this policy? Why now?
Our graded death benefit whole insurance policy can be used to pay funeral costs, final medical expenses...or other monthly bills.
You know how important it is to be able to help protect your family from unnecessary burdens after you pass away. Maybe your own parents or loved one did the same for you. OR, maybe they DIDN’T and you wish they would have!

The important thing is that, right now, you can make a decision that could help make a difficult time a little easier for your loved ones. It’s a responsible, caring and affordable decision. And, right now, it’s something you can do with one simple phone call.

You may have been putting off purchasing life insurance, but you don’t have to wait another day. This offer is a great opportunity to start protecting your family today.

Your affordable monthly rate will “lock-in” at your application age* ...

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The rates above include a $12 annual policy fee.

This is a solicitation of individual insurance. A licensed insurance agent/producer may contact you by telephone. These policies contain benefits, reductions, limitations, and exclusions to include a reduction in death benefits during the first two years of policy ownership. In NY, during the first two years, 110% of premiums will be paid. Whole Life Insurance is underwritten by United of Omaha Life Insurance Company, 3300 Mutual of Omaha Plaza, Omaha, NE 68175 which is licensed nationwide except NY. Life insurance policies issued in NY are underwritten by Companion Life Insurance Company, Hauppauge, NY 11788. Each company is responsible for its own financial and contractual obligations. Not available in all states. Benefit amounts vary by state. Policy Form ICC11L059P or state equivalent (7780L-0505 in FL, 828Y-0505 in NY).

* Ages 50 to 75 in NY.
** In FL policy is renewable until age 121.
*** All benefits paid would be less any outstanding loan.

452747
Peace River Electric Cooperative is a not-for-profit electric utility owned by the members we serve. As a member-owner, you share in the profits, which are called margins. These margins are returned to members in the form of capital credits.

Returning margins is a two-step process that starts with the allocation of capital credits in the year the margins are generated.

**Step 1.** Margins are generated whenever PRECO collects revenue in excess of expenses. Annually, these margins are allocated to each member in proportion to the amount of electricity they buy that year.

**Step 2.** In the future, when it’s financially sound to do so, PRECO disburses capital credits through the retirement process.

A portion of the capital credits checks PRECO issued in 2016 were returned due to an incorrect address or not cashed. We have created a list of individuals and businesses that may have unclaimed capital credits.

There are two ways to see if you are on the list:

- **Go online.** Visit our website at www.preco.coop.
- **Visit a PRECO office.** PRECO Headquarters 210 Metheny Road Wauchula, Florida 33873 Manatee Service Center 14505 Arbor Green Trail Lakewood Ranch, Florida 34202 Office hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

If your name or business is listed, please call us at 800-282-3824, extension 4705. The deadline for claiming these funds is March 31, 2020.
PRECO’s 2020 District Meetings

Members of Districts 1, 4 and 7 are invited to attend their district meeting this month.

**District 1**
February 10
College Hill Community Center
Bowling Green

**District 4**
February 6
Craig’s RV Park
Arcadia

**District 7**
February 11
Risen Savior Lutheran Church
Lakewood Ranch

Members of these districts will receive a flyer by mail with additional details.

In addition to taking care of cooperative business matters, enjoy door prizes and light refreshments.

**All registered members receive a $10 electric bill credit.**

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**Important Information**

- Your district is listed on your electric bill.
- Must have photo ID to register.
- For faster registration, bring the flyer you receive in the mail.
- Only authorized individuals designated on the account may register on behalf of a business.

**Bonus Chance to Win!**

Registered members will be entered in a drawing* to win a Eufy RoboVac 30C Max robotic vacuum cleaner. This powerful, self-charging, Wi-Fi-enabled home cleaning device is valued at $320.

*One winner will be randomly drawn from all registered members who attend the cooperative’s three district meetings held in 2020.
Plan Now to Attend Your Co-op’s 80th Annual Membership Meeting

Peace River Electric Cooperative members are invited to the annual celebration of their local utility Saturday, March 21. Registration opens at 10 a.m. Bring photo identification to register for the meeting and qualify for door prize drawings.

**FREE!**
- Hot dogs
- Soft drinks
- Ice cream
- Fries
- Kettle corn
- Funnel cakes
- Live music
- Kids’ play area
- Informational and educational booths
- Door prize drawings for registered members

**March 21**
**PRECO Park**
**220 Knight Road**
**Wauchula**

**Classic Car Show**
Come see the more than 60 classic cars expected to be on display. Meet and talk with the owners.

**Southern Express Bluegrass Band**
A traditional bluegrass band, Southern Express brings years of professional experience in music and performing. The talented group serves up great family entertainment.

**California Toe Jam**
A local, well-loved, good-time oldies band, California Toe Jam’s family-friendly show brings smiles to faces of all ages.

SAVE THE DATE.
WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!
By Paul Wesslund

The thermostat on your wall marks a new era in electricity. Whether it’s a dial-style older than you or a digital model installed last month, it’s become more than just a way to set the temperature in your home. That familiar gadget is now a gateway to a world where consumers have more say over their electric service.

You might call it designer electricity. New technology, new regulations and new ways of thinking are reshaping the utility industry. Consumers can regulate the temperature in their home more precisely. They can even generate their own electricity with rooftop solar panels and sell that excess power back to their utility.

This new world started taking shape in the 1990s, says Andrew Cotter, a program manager for the Business and Technology Strategies Group of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Cutting costs and raising reliability for sensitive electronic equipment was top of mind. Companies were willing to pay extra for electric service that wouldn’t blink off for even a fraction of a second. Other companies didn’t need such high reliability, and looked for ways to pay less in return for occasional power interruptions.

“This is a trend that’s been going on for a long time, but it’s just starting in homes,” Cotter says, noting that thermostat “can be the entry point for a lot of people to take advantage of smart-home technology and be more energy efficient.” A programmable thermostat can be set to avoid heating and cooling when you’re not home, or set separate temperatures for rooms you don’t use often. That’s just the beginning of ways consumers are making more of their own energy decisions.

Highly efficient LED bulbs can be controlled from your smartphone. Washers and dryers sense how much water and heat need to be used to clean and dry your clothes. All that efficiency makes a difference. Americans’ electricity use decreased by about 2% in the past three years, according to the U.S. Department of Energy’s Energy Information Administration. That trend is expected to continue for at least the next couple of years.

It Started With Batteries

While energy efficiency saves money, the story of battery storage shows the bigger picture of how consumers are putting utility decision-making into their own hands.

The story began with homeowners using portable, motorized generators to power refrigerators and other crucial appliances during extended outages. Driven by the demand for smaller and stronger chargers for smartphones and other electronics, battery technology improved.

Battery companies thought their improved product could grab part of the portable generator market. Tesla, the high-end electric car company, soon announced a battery designed to look attractive to homeowners. That’s where your old-fashioned wall clock—Tesla promoted its battery to the growing renewable energy market.

Homeowners installing solar panels on their roofs ran into a problem. They generated a lot of electricity in the middle of a sunny day, when no one was home to use it, and none at night, when they were home wanting to use electricity. Batteries can store the sunlight.

But Where Is the Price Point?

While the march toward more choices in electric service might seem inevitable, Cotter sees it as an uphill battle because of one key question: Is it worth it?

“Do you want to spend $10,000 for a photovoltaic system on your roof and another $10,000 for a battery to avoid 45 minutes a year of power outage?” he asks.

That’s where your old-fashioned thermostat could put you on the cutting edge of the trend toward more customer choice. You can decide you like things the way they are.

“People are generally happy with their electric service,” Cotter says. “Some hobbyists might want to design ways to manage their electricity, but a lot of others don’t want to pay money for hardware only to save a few dollars a year, he notes.

In an era of more energy options, vendors will be promoting batteries, solar panels and other gadgets. Cotter advises consumers to check with their utility before making major power-use decisions.

“Talk to your co-op first because they’re the local energy expert,” he says. “Vendors have a goal of selling products. The co-op—as a not-for-profit, member-owned utility—has a different perspective that will be more in your interest.”

Consumers have more options in how they use electricity, which means big changes for electric utilities. Here are a few of the major trends and developments:

**Energy Efficiency**

Efficient lightbulbs and other appliances have reduced electricity sales, even as the population increases, the economy improves and we use more electronic devices.

**Renewable Energy**

Rooftop solar panel use is increasing enough that some utilities notice a decrease in sales during the sunniest part of the day. Homeowners with solar panels are selling excess electricity back to the utility.

**Bigger, Better Batteries**

Spurred by research into stronger batteries for electric cars and smartphones, you can now buy a battery powerful and pretty enough to hang on your wall as a backup during power outages. Note: That cool gadget can cost up to $16,000!
Apply Now for a PRECO Scholarship!

Peace River Electric Cooperative’s charitable foundation, Operation Round Up, will award $100,000 in scholarships to college-bound students.

Who is eligible to apply?
- PRECO members.
- Dependent children of PRECO members.
- Graduating high school seniors.
- Students already attending a college.
- Adults who want to get a college degree.

For complete eligibility requirements and scholarship rules, download the Operation Round Up scholarship application today at www.preco.coop/community/scholarships.

Application deadline is February 28

Award Amounts
- Four-year scholarships of up to $8,000
- Two-year scholarships of up to $4,000

Operation Round Up is funded by the generous donations of our members who agree to round up their monthly electric bills to the next dollar.
UP CLOSE

A nearly 2,000-acre cattle ranch on the outskirts of Okeechobee is at the heart of everything Brad Phares does. He fits his many creative pursuits around day-to-day tasks on the ranch.
PHOTOS BY JENNIFER KOUKOS

Preserving an Endangered Heritage

By Pam Blair

He is not a typical rancher—or attorney. A Renaissance man, Brad Phares combines a love of learning and working the land with writing, painting and marketing ranch-inspired products.

An eighth-generation rancher, Brad’s motivation is to protect a Florida ranching heritage he sees being swallowed up by development.

“Ranchers are private, humble, keep-your-head-down-and-do-your-work people,” Brad says. “We don’t talk much about why we do what we do and why it is important. We were late realizing the need to spread that message.”

Through his oil paintings of ranch landscapes, short stories, cowboy poetry, photographs and a podcast he launched in January, Brad hopes to broaden people’s horizons.

Rather than be cooped up in a courtroom, he is putting his law degree to use by focusing on trying to save his way of life.

Little by little, Brad says, ranches are being squeezed out. He points to Google maps that show how previously wide-open greenspaces have been replaced by asphalt—and that is not without consequence, he notes.

“Ranches are the only thing left to protect greenspace in Florida,” he says. “Millions of people moved in here who don’t have the background or frame of reference for what has been here. People don’t understand how water has moved historically. Water can’t go to where it used to go.

“One of my aspirations is to share the unique and little-known story of Florida ranching with my urban neighbors so that they have a better appreciation for how Florida ranches have played an integral role in creating Florida as a mega-state as well as the vital role they play in protecting our natural resources for the future.”

A Multifaceted Path

Ranching is in Brad’s blood. So is his affinity for storytelling and the pursuit of knowledge.

As a second grader, Brad filled a spiral notebook with short stories and pictures he created while sitting in class. His parents steered him toward a career in veterinary medicine, and he started on that path at the University of Florida.

“I never gave a thought to whether I wanted to do it,” Brad says. “I discovered the vet school (at UF) was small-animal focused, and I was interested in large animals.”

He earned a bachelor’s in
animal science, then shifted his focus to English, literature and history before deciding to enroll in law school at St. Thomas University in Miami.

"A year into it, I figured out it may not be what I wanted to do as a career," Brad says. "I like the outdoors. I couldn't be shut in an office all day."

He says earning the degree helped him develop critical thinking and research skills that he puts to use daily:

"I'm entrepreneur-minded, so I looked for ways to use what I knew," Brad says. "I focused on agriculture and spreading the message about the big disconnect between coastal and urban Florida and rural Florida."

**Branding His Message**

His podcast, "Between the Beaches," is one more way Brad is trying to reach urban folks. His goal to start is once a week.

"The hardest part is countering 20 years of misinformation," he says. "Hopefully we can do that through my work and the cattle association."

Brad showcases his Florida ranching traditions through his family-owned business, Cowhunters Unlimited. All of his products are sold on www.cowhuntersunlimited.com.

That includes his paintings, his 2016 book titled "Celtic Cowhunter," photographs, hats, T-shirts and, soon, re introduction of his award-winning salsa that features his granny's guava butter, along with hot sauce, jams and seasonings. One of his paintings is on the salsa label.

Brad is co-authoring another book, "Dreams of a Rancher's Daughter," with his daughter.

He says he gets about five hours of sleep a night, using the quiet, uninterrupted time his wife, Sam, is sleeping to paint and write—to tell his stories.

In "Celtic Cowhunter," Brad wrote about the early Scots-Irish pioneers who migrated into what was then the Florida territory and helped birth the cattle industry and a way of life.

"I'm not sure any other culture had the fortitude to settle in and make a go of it," he says.

Brad is equally determined.

"That genetic coding is what binds us to the land, to our livestock and to our way of life," he says. "That fiercely independent fighting spirit is what unites us as we endeavor to preserve and protect our culture."

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**See His Work at Brighton Field Days**

The oil paintings of Brad Phares will be for sale at the 82nd annual Brighton Field Days Festival February 14-16 at the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena on the Seminole Reservation in Okeechobee.

The event features American Indian arts and crafts, a rodeo, authentic Seminole food, native dancers, live music, a snake show and alligator wrestling.

"I've built a pretty good following with the Seminole Tribe," Brad says. "Very few people are painting in a way that reflects their culture. I grew up close by. I always knew and was fascinated by the Seminole culture."

Brad says his paintings are contemporary portrayals that include historical aspects.

For more information about the festival, visit rezrodeo.com.

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Brad says the completed painting on his easel is the closest thing he has done to a self-portrait. It shows him and his kids, Jacqueline and Jared, in the spot where they always tie up their horses.
SPOTLIGHT

Keep your yard looking good when your body says, ‘Slow down!’

Great Gardens, Less Work

By George Weigel

Gardening doesn’t get easier as you age, as your creaky bones and sore back might remind you after that first yard-cleanup weekend of spring. Pretty much everything involves getting down, getting up, bending over or lugging items around. AARP-aged backs don’t tolerate that as well as 30-year-old ones, but “experienced” gardeners can compensate by gardening smarter instead of harder.

By doing necessary jobs more efficiently and skipping a few unnecessary ones, it’s possible to maintain a nice yard with less stress—and that’s a good goal no matter your age.

General Labor-Savers

Pace yourself. It’s OK to take breaks. Split jobs over several days instead of one-day marathons. You may even be able to spread work into the off-season, such as clipping spent perennials or edging beds during a winter thaw. Zone it. Carve the landscape into zones (front, back, vegetable garden, etc.) and worry about just one zone at a time. Tackle each by priority. This breaks one mammoth job into a series of manageable small ones.

Vary the work. Don’t overdo it by repeating the same motion hour after hour. Do a little digging, a little weeding, a little watering. Variety reduces soreness, blisters and repetitive-motion injuries.

Simplify. Walk the yard and assess which plants or gardens cause an unacceptable amount of work. Bite the bullet and replace them with plantings that need less care. Re-evaluate: Can you reduce or let go of unrealistic standards? Does the lawn really have to be totally weed-free? Can the hedge grow looser instead of being tightly clipped three times a season? Is that fresh coat of mulch really needed every spring? Get help. Hire out the toughest jobs first. Spreading truckloads of mulch might be a good place to start.

Jobs to Skip

Tilling. You probably will need to till a new bed and work in compost, but after that, regular tilling is counter-productive. It stirs up weed seeds, kills earthworms and harms soil structure when wet soil is tilled.

Raking. There is no need to rake every last leaf out of the yard. Leaves insulate plants during winter and feed the lawn when they’re moved in rather than raked off. Rake only if there are too many leaves on the lawn to effectively move them.

Spraying. Be more forgiving of temporary, cosmetic plant damage. Few bugs and diseases are plant-killers. For plants threatened by repeated potential fatal problems, consider replacing them rather than constantly rescuing them.

Mass-planting annuals. Cut back on planting and watering annual flowers by spotting them in smaller clusters, or switch to using them just in pots, hanging baskets and window boxes.

Bulb care. Skip braiding bulb foliage after the flowers bloom. It’s a waste of work and is counter-productive. Interplant bulbs with perennials so the emerging perennial foliage will hide the decaying bulb foliage, or lean toward short, small-leaved bulbs whose foliage fades away.

Weed-fighting

Prevention is the best medicine. Keep 2 to 3 inches of bark or wood mulch over beds, or use granular weed preventers over garden beds in early spring before new weeds begin to sprout.

No openings. Plant closely so your plants occupy all of the space. Low, spreading groundcover plants are especially effective. Remember, weeds love bare soil.

Get weeds when they’re little. You will save a ton of trouble by stopping weeds before they go to seed or fruit. It’s better to police for weeds often than to try to undo a massive invasion.

Weed when wet. Weeds come out easier in damp soil. hoeing is more effective in dry soil since cut-off weeds are less likely to regrow.

Use the right weapons. Switch to long-handled weeding tools if bending over is too hard on your back, or spot-spray weeds with an herbicide or vinegar.

Watch what you plant. Some plants become weeds by rampant reseeding (i.e., morning glory, johnny jump-ups, nigella, sweet annie, borage, snow-on-the-mountain). Some “pass-along” plants given by friends and neighbors (i.e., ribbon grass, bishops weed, hoaryvina, lamiustrum, mint) become invaders since people tend to dig it up and give away what’s getting out of control in their garden.

Lightened Lawn Work

Cut high. Longer but level grass still looks neat, conserves moisture and shades emerging weeds. Cutting short just encouraging faster growth and more mowing.

Stop bagging. Let grass clips lie. It saves work and cuts landfill costs. Moreover, decaying clips return nutrients to the soil. Cut often enough that clips don’t form clumps. Fertilize less. Do you really need four or five applications a year? Organic or slow-release nitrogen fertilizers give you good but slower-growth results and can be done just twice a year.

Overseed to keep lawn thick. Dense grass is a great defense against weeds. There’s no room for anything else.

Reduce lawn size. In the long run, low-care beds of dwarf shrubs, perennials, compact evergreens and groundcovers are less expensive and less work than lawns. What other plant do we prune 25 times a year?

Smarter Plant Selection

Watch sizes. Most pruning is done because we put too-big plants in too-little spaces.
Lean toward compact, dwarf varieties in any new plantings, or at least give adequate growth space.

More trees. Some of the lowest-care landscaping is island beds of groundcovers, shade-tolerant shrubs and low-care perennials growing under trees. Pick small to mid-size ornamental trees that do more than one thing in one season.

Homework. Research how much care a plant needs before buying it. Lean toward varieties that seldom run into pest problems. Good resources include garden centers, public gardens and local cooperative extension services.

Other Labor Savers
Prune when needed. For plants already outgrowing the space you’ve given them, it’s better to prune them lightly each year than to let them overgrow for several years, then try to whack them back into submission.

Let perennials stand over winter. It’s easier to rake off semi-decayed perennial plants at winter’s end than to cut still-rigid ones in fall. Plus, birds appreciate the dried seeds and nesting material.

Eliminate edging. Lay stone or brick around bed perimeters. Set one upright and butt a second one against it flat and level with the ground on the lawn side. This holds in mulch, keeps grass out and lets you run the mower wheels over the flat course.

Use tools that fit. Switch to more ergonomically designed tools that are comfortable to use. You may need to switch to power tools from people-powered ones as you age. Keep whatever tools you’re using sharp.

George Weigel is a horticulturist, garden consultant, author and newspaper garden columnist. His website is http://georgeweigel.net.
Gardening With Pets: A Sensible and Cautious Approach

By Pamela A. Keene

When you’re gardening, you’re in your pet’s natural environment. Most pets thrive on being outdoors with their owners. However, experts suggest using care when combining gardening and time with your pets, especially when they’re young.

“Dogs love to roll around in the grass and to explore,” says Suzanne Brosche, owner of Arts of Stone Gardening in Dahlonega, Georgia, north of Atlanta. “Plus, dogs and cats often eat grass as an aid to digestion. Puppies and kittens tend to chew on just about anything, so they need to be watched more closely.”

Planning your landscape and gardens with your pets in mind can go a long way toward the safety and health of your plants.

Safe Choices
Create a shady pet-safe area for your canine friends. Build a sandbox or sand pit for dogs to dig and lie down in to cool off. Wood chips can encourage animals to use the area as their own. Plant pet-friendly flora such as catnip or its horticultural relatives to encourage cats to nibble, rub against it or roll in it. Give it a separate area of the garden. As a perennial, it will grow for a season, die back, then sprout the next year. It may need to be pruned periodically to keep it from overtaking the space.

Landscape with edible plants that are also safe for humans, such as marigolds, pansies, violets and roses. Herbs—including parsley, mint, rosemary and thyme—are nontoxic. Because of their strong odors and taste, your pets may naturally avoid them.

For maximum safety, garden organically, avoiding chemicals, pesticides and synthetic fertilizers on your lawn, trees, shrubs or gardens.

Fence Your Gardens
Start training your pets from a young age about where they are allowed to go in your yard. Be consistent and firm.

Keep an eye on your pets when you’re outdoors, and make time to play with them.

There is more to worry about than your pet destroying your garden, such as your pet’s safety. Set aside a pet-safe area and teach your pets from an early age to avoid dangerous plants.

Use Caution
If you must use chemicals, read package labels completely, from directions for use to cautions when using around pets and children.

Fire ants are a risk to humans and pets. It can be difficult to rid your landscape of them naturally. If you must use chemical bait, read the package instructions and cautions, then cordon off the area after applying to prevent exposure to your pets—and your children.

Beware of natural risks to your pets, such as mushrooms and fungi that grow in the fall and spring. Most are not toxic, but it’s better to be cautious and remove them before letting your pet out.

Avoid planting certain vegetables, such as tomatoes and onions, unless your garden is fenced. According to the American Kennel Club, leaves from both are toxic to dogs.

Other plants are poisonous. Oleander, sago palms, mistletoe, Asiatic lilies and azaleas—plus tulip, daffodil and hyacinth bulbs—can be harmful or fatal to pets. If you have these plants in your garden, fence the area to keep your pets away. Store bulbs on high shelves or in drawers, and don’t let dogs dig in gardens where bulbs have been planted. Poisoning symptoms can include vomiting, excess salivation/drooling, diarrhea or seizures.

A word about houseplants: Many—such as Easter lilies, Christmas and Easter cactuses, poinsettias, peace lilies, cyclamen, pothos, English ivy and chrysanthemums—are harmful to pets. Keep them out of your pet’s reach.

“If your pet eats a poisonous plant or bulb, or you suspect that she has, call your veterinarian immediately,” Suzanne says. “It’s better to be overly cautious than to hope the symptoms will disappear on their own.”
Strawberry Breakfast Cream Puffs

Puffs
1 cup water 1 cup white flour
½ cup ghee 4 eggs
2 teaspoons honey 1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon sea salt 1 teaspoon ginger

Heat oven to 400 F.

Combine water, ghee, honey and salt in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil. Add flour. Stir until mixture resembles a smooth ball of dough. Remove from heat. Add eggs slowly, one at a time, and beat until dough becomes shiny and silky. Drop the dough by the spoonful (slightly less than ¼ cup each) onto a large, ungreased baking sheet. Bake for approximately 30 minutes, until slightly golden. Remove from baking sheet immediately and cool on a wire rack.

Cream and filling
¼ cup lemon juice
½ cup maple syrup
16 ounces fresh strawberries, sliced
2 cups heavy coconut cream (gently spoon out the thick, top part of canned coconut milk from the liquid and use the thick cream)

Mint leaves for garnish

Combine lemon juice and half of the maple syrup in a bowl. Add the strawberries. Chill for at least 30 minutes. While the strawberries are marinating, whip the coconut cream and remaining maple syrup until smooth.

Once ready to serve, slice the puffs in half, leaving the bottom half thicker. Discard excess liquid from the berries. Stir the berries and cream mixture together. Fill each of the puffs and replace each top. Garnish with mint leaves before serving.

Serves 4
Recipe by Chelsea Glanz

Heart-Shaped Tea Bites

Fresh-baked sourdough bread (about ½ loaf or enough for four full-sized sandwiches), sliced into eight large pieces
¾ cup cream cheese
Juice of one lemon
1 teaspoon dill
½ teaspoon sea salt
1 tablespoon Caesar dressing
1 bunch fresh watercress, chopped
1 English cucumber, peeled and sliced
4 teaspoons capers
Cherry tomatoes
Heart-shaped cookie cutter

Whip together cream cheese, lemon juice, dill, salt and dressing with a fork or firm whisk until thoroughly combined and creamy. Spread the cream cheese mixture evenly onto one side of each of the eight pieces of bread. Carefully lay cucumber slices on top of the cream cheese on four of the slices. Place half of the watercress and capers on top of the cream cheese on the other four slices. Pair the cucumber-and watercress-topped slices together to make four large sandwiches.

Carefully cut heart-shaped pieces out of each sandwich, using a medium cookie cutter so two mini sandwiches are obtained from each larger sandwich. Arrange on serving dishes on a bed of watercress and cherry tomatoes.

Serves 4
Recipe by Chelsea Glanz

Cranberry Lemon Spritzers

1 cup cranberries
1 cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
½ cup raw, unrefined sugar
16 ounces seltzer water
8 to 10 thyme sprigs for garnish

Put cranberries in a small saucepan. Add just enough water to cover. Simmer, covered, until cranberries are thoroughly cooked and soft, about 30 minutes. Once cooked, strain the berries out of the remaining liquid. Discard the berries and retain the juice.

Pour the cranberry juice and lemon juice into a large pitcher. Add the sugar and seltzer water. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Add half of the thyme sprigs and let sit for about 30 minutes to infuse with a light herbal flavor.

Serve in cocktail glasses over ice. Garnish with fresh thyme sprigs.

Serves 4
Recipe by Chelsea Glanz
Pink, Red and White Pretzels

Approximately 12 large pretzels (for best results, use soft, warm pretzels)

Red food coloring

2.5 cups premade frosting (or homemade frosting; see note below)

Candy sprinkles

Evenly divide frosting into three wide-mouth bowls. Add single drops of food coloring to one bowl of frosting, stirring thoroughly, until frosting is desired shade of red. Add fewer drops of red food coloring to the next bowl of frosting, stirring consistently, until a desired shade of pink is achieved. Leave the third bowl of frosting white. Dip each pretzel face down in frosting, varying colors. Decorate with candy sprinkles.

To make homemade frosting: Whip four parts confectioners’ sugar with one part butter or ghee, until desired consistency is achieved. Add ⅛ teaspoon vanilla extract and 2 tablespoons heavy cream per 2½ cups frosting for an extra-buttery texture.

Serves 4

Recipe by Chelsea Glanz; photo by Dan Glanz
IT WASN’T THE FIRST TIME I was stranded on an airplane during a Super Bowl or World Series game because of a snowstorm. Air travel in late fall or winter is always uncertain, which can be frustrating for a sports fan. In years past, the pilot or a flight attendant would sometimes announce the score of a big game. But with today’s smartphone technology, hardcore fans don’t have to miss important game moments.

A few rows ahead of me, football fans leaned into the aisle to watch the closing minutes between the Philadelphia Eagles and the New England Patriots during the 2019 Super Bowl.

Most of us will never photograph a Super Bowl or World Series game, but that should not keep us from looking for pictures that reveal the excitement of the event. Stay focused on the fans during big plays, especially early or late if the game is close.

If a television screen is in your picture, use a slow shutter speed, 1/30th of a second or less. You can then bounce flash off a white card or low ceiling to properly expose those reacting to what is happening on the screen. If the screen isn’t in the picture, and there is enough light to see faces, consider using a higher ISO, 1600 or higher, and a wide aperture, 2.8 or however wide open your lens will open, and turn off the flash.

Reader Challenge: Photograph the Big Game, But Without a Ticket

People gather for parties, buy truckloads of snacks and beverages, and congregate in groups anywhere a big screen television shows the Super Bowl. Storytelling pictures are everywhere. See if you can capture the mood and emotions—the joy, despair and anxiety—surrounding the "Big Game."

To respond to this challenge, and share your work, email your best image to social@pur.coop with a caption and photo credit. We will share the best submissions on our website or social media channels.

David LaBelle

David LaBelle
spent his boyhood years taking photos and began his storied photojournalism career while still in high school. He has worked for 20 newspapers and magazines in nine states, and taught at three universities. The internationally known photographer, author and lecturer has shared his photo tips and life perspectives here since 2009. For more information, visit www.greatpicturehunt.com.

Capture Moments From the ‘Big Game’
The answer: Although tremendous strides have been made in Advanced Digital Hearing Aid Technology, those cost reductions have not been passed on to you. Until now...

MDHearingAid® uses the same kind of Advanced Digital Hearing Aid Technology incorporated into hearing aids that cost thousands more at a small fraction of the price.

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A study by the National Institute on Aging suggests older individuals with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop Alzheimer’s and dementia over time than those who retain their hearing. They suggest that an intervention — such as a hearing aid — could delay or prevent this by improving hearing!

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**WHERE IS IT?**

Weeki Wachee Springs State Park is close to the Gulf Coast, about an hour north of Tampa in Hernando County.

**WHAT IS IT?**

Weeki Wachee is an ancient spring where you can watch a mermaid show, take a river boat cruise, learn about Florida wildlife, swim in the pristine waters at Buccaneer Bay or paddle down the Weeki Wachee River.

**HISTORY**

The park has been entertaining visitors since 1947 and is one of Florida’s oldest roadside attractions. Navy veteran Newton Perry developed the original tourist destination with the now-famous mermaid show as main attraction.

**MERMAID SHOW**

The world-famous Mermaids of Weeki Wachee perform their version of The Little Mermaid live in a submerged 400-seat auditorium. They also perform classic feats, such as eating and drinking underwater. The Mermaids also share historical information and technical aspects of the show.

**WHEN TO GO**

Go any weekend in the winter or fall to avoid crowds. The attraction is open year-round, except Christmas Day. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily.

**MORE INFO**

The park is at 6131 Commercial Way, Weeki Wachee, Florida. For more information, call 352-592-5656, visit weekiwachee.com, or www.floridastateparks.org/WeekiWachee.
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Include Your Upcoming Event
Want to share a family-friendly event with the readers of Florida Currents? Please send details to info@floridacurrents.com. Include the date, time, location, how to register or get information. Please submit the item at least 40 days before the event (due to press deadlines). If you own rights to a print-quality photo promoting your event—perhaps from a past year—please include it along with photo credit information. Thank you.

February 1-2, Lake Placid
Lake Placid Arts and Crafts County Fair
Make what you will, with more than 100 booths, entertainment, demonstrations at Devine Park. tourlpenz.com; 863-645-4335

February 5, Islamorada
Lecture Series
Author and retired law enforcement officer Bob Lee talks about "Bad Guys, Bullets and Boat Chases" at 6 p.m. at the Keys History & Discovery Center. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Reservations should be made at info@keysdiscovery.org; 800-299-1787

February 8, Tavernier
Anual Italian Dinner The San Pedro Women’s Guild offers homemade spaghetti with meat sauce, choice of meatballs or eggplant rollatini, bread and dessert from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Masonic Temple. Cost is $10. All tickets must be purchased in advance at 305-748-7000. For reservations, please call 305-748-6353 or email 305-748-6353

February 8, Ft. St. Joe
Winter Bay Day
Tour the St. Joseph Bay Preserve and its rare and endangered plants, and take part in the shrimp boil and open house from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The cost is $10. The event will take place at the St. Joseph Bay State Park, 850-640-3380

February 8-9, Okeechobee
Top of the Line Art Festival Okeechobee Main Street supports local galleries and artists, with a kids’ art zone and live entertainment scattered among the booths. At night, Park Street turns into Kids Night, with the Taste, where you can sample dishes from four downtown Okeechobee admission is $25. okeechobeeartfestival.com; 863-357-4244

February 14-15, Palm Beach
15th annual Sunseed Antique Bottle Show See antique bottles—most made before 1950 and some before 1900—in bottles, insulators, pot- teries, artifacts, advertising of all types, fossils, old tins, postcards, coins and more at the Manatee River Fair Association Building 1402 14th Ave. West. Early buyers are welcome from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Admission is $25 for both keys. Free teas, and free items are offered at entrance on Saturday at 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday-only admission is $6. Children under 12 and younger are admitted free. when accompanied by an adult. MRAFB; 863-640-0573

February 15, Palm Beach
Century City Bottle Show
PCB Trumps & Craft Beer Festival
Photos, tins, tervys, and of course, craft beers will live Aaron Besseant from noon to 5 p.m. Admission is set at $25. keysfoodtruckfestival.com; 954-277-9500

February 17, Penascola
Sea Turtle Presentation
Cathy Holmes from the Navarre Beach Sea Turtle Conservation Center will discuss the sea turtles in the Pensacola area at 1 p.m. at the Pensacola Bay Bridge, 850-434-1214

February 19, Islamorada
Lecture Series
Author Peggy Macdonald talks about her new book “Old Key West” at 6 p.m. at the Keys Community Concert Band. Author and retired law enforcement officer John Christopher Fine talks about his book “Mount Pelee” at 6 p.m. at the Keys Community Concert Band. The free presentation takes place at the Visitor Center in Wayside Park, 850-640-3380

February 20, Pensacola
Black Violin: Impossible Tour The classically trained duo of Kevin Marcus and Wil B. plays hip hop on the cello at the Saenger Theater. Tickets start at $25. saengerpensacola.com; 850-931-3330

February 21, Panama City
Sidewalk Stargazing
Bring binoculars or a telescope for guided stargazing between 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Meet outside the Bay County Public Library. okeechobeeartfestival.com; 863-357-4244

February 21, Key Largo
Lecture Series
Dr. Donald F. Bukheel from the University of Miami talks about the history of the Florida Keys on this John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park visitor center and aquarium from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cost is $5, or free if you wear red, pink or hearts. www.floridastateparks.org/events; 954-255-2177

February 21, Panama City
Writer’s Rendezvous: Love’s Winter Edition
Bring your loved work or just listen at open mic night at 6 p.m. at the Panama City Center for the Arts, 19 East St. Admission is $5, or free if you wear red, pink or hearts. www.panamacityartscenter.org; 850-640-4670

February 21-22, Fort Myers
PCB Fly Fishing and Tractor Show
Fly fishermen from all walks of life to the PCB Fly Fishing and Tractor Show. Meet and talk about a disease that afflicts the coral reefs off Southwest Florida. Registration for the walk is at The Flats near the Casino Beach parking lot. www-keysdiscovery.com; 305-952-1500

February 21-22, Fort Myers
Festival of Legends - Tribute to George Strait
Nationally recognized bands and theKeys favorites perform from noon to 7 p.m. at Fort Myers Beach. www.keysdiscovery.com; 305-952-1500

February 22, Islamorada
Kids and Pirates Parade
Catch some teeth and join the Mardi Gras walking procession for children and pets at 2 p.m. starting from the Casino Beach parking lot. A pre-parade show is at 1:40 p.m. Children participate for free. Pets are $5 each. Parking is free. www.pionnerparkdays.com; 305-368-4778

February 22, Key Largo
Sea Turtle Presentation
Cathy Holmes from the Navarre Beach Sea Turtle Conservation Center will discuss the sea turtles in the Pensacola area at 1 p.m. at the Pensacola Bay Bridge, 850-434-1214

February 23, Pensacola
Ballet Penetration's Paquita and Rocket Man
Classical and contemporary music come together with a performance of the 19th century Paquita and a retelling of the life of Elton John at the Pensacola Little Theatre. Tickets start at $17. pensacolalittletheatre.com; 850-432-2022

February 23-26, Panama City
Ballet Penetration's Paquita
Black Violin: Impossible Tour
The classically trained duo of Kevin Marcus and Wil B. plays hip hop on the cello at the Saenger Theater. Tickets start at $25. saengerpensacola.com; 850-931-3330

February 25, Panama City
Indie Indian Lakes Estate Tribute to George Strait
Enjoy a journey through the life and music of legendary George Strait with a performance by Darin Delby at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. General admission starts at $25. For tickets, visit www.EventBrite.com (no refunds). The price includes admission, a complimentary tea party, an art exhibit of locally made and a silent auction. Tickets are $20. wwwERCHANT.com; 850-932-4817

February 25, Marathon
Fourteenth Annual Coastal Road Music Festival
National artists Mike Zito and Koko Taylor perform from noon to 6 p.m. at the Marathon Community Center. The free competition begins at 7 p.m. dmvgroups.com; 305-446-9737

February 26, Marathon
Marathon Pops in the Park Festival
Fourth annual Coral Head Music Festival
Pet owners can bring their fur babies to enjoy a variety of musical acts. The free competition begins at 7 p.m. dmvgroups.com; 305-446-9737

February 27-29, Zolfo Springs
Fourth annual Cow Key Channel Run
The antique engine and tractor show features more than 200 antique tractors and antique farm equipment and vehicles from the early to modern years. Registration for the walk is at The Flats near the Casino Beach parking lot. www-keysdiscovery.com; 305-952-1500

February 29, Key West
Sixth annual Cow Key Channel Bridge Run
Join any age, any species, any breed or sex to raise money for the Key West Triathletes' Training Fund. www.keyscommunitycrossing.com; 305-651-4550

February 29, Bradenton
The Parkinson's Expo National experts gather at the Bradenton Area Convention Center to discuss and educate individuals who are as many as a million Americans. Hours will be 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. www.nwrls.com; 850-595-3380

February 29-Bradeneton
Emerald Coast Boat and Lifestyle Show
From padduboats and outdoor kitchens to usediboats and boats, find something you could want for a day of fun on the water at Aaron Besseant from noon to 5 p.m. Admission is $5. A children's area and化石tear parade and your favorite stuffed animal for a special surprise. www-keyscommunitycrossing.com; 305-651-4550
WHEN PLANTS ARE crispy, brown and damaged from cold snaps, do you have the urge to prune your landscape? If so, you are not alone. But the time may not be right. There are different seasons to prune depending on the type of plant. While some plants should be pruned during winter months, others should not.

Let’s explore the recommendations regarding pruning common landscape plants.

Trees that lose their leaves in the cool season should be pruned when dormant. January and February are good times to prune crape myrtle, chaste trees and many deciduous fruit trees. Pruning in the winter allows us to see the structure of the tree and make strategic pruning cuts.

Note that trees do not need to be pruned annually. Some—like crape myrtle—may never need pruning if they are planted in the right spot.

Many deciduous fruit trees need to be pruned every year to maintain a size that makes it easy to harvest their fruit.

Evergreen trees and shrubs such as juniper, cedar, podocarpus and holly can be lightly pruned any time of year because they do not go dormant. Frequent, light pruning two to three times a year serves them best. Heavy cuts made too deep in the shrub may prevent the plant from flushing back out, and cut branches will stick out like a sore thumb.

It is best to prune spring-blooming plants after they are finished flowering. Southern shade garden plants such as azaleas, camellias and spiraea fit in the spring-blooming category. Prune spring bloomers any time after the danger of frost. In central Florida, the last freeze can happen as early as mid-February or as late as mid-March. For freeze dates specific to your area, contact your local UF/IFAS Extension at http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/extension. When frost or freezes occur, it is best to leave the damaged material on the plant to protect tissue and prevent damage further into the plant. Prune tender plants once freezing weather is no longer expected for the season. When plants suffer damage from cold temperatures, wait and let the plant tell you where to prune. Do this by allowing the plant to flush out with new growth. Prune the stems back to just above the emerging leaves.

Herbaceous, tender and warm-season plants such as hibiscus, duranta and Persian shield should not be pruned until after the danger of frost.

Hybrid tea roses are the oddball plant when it comes to winter pruning rules. They should be forced into winter dormancy no later than Valentine’s Day, and pruned back to a vase-shaped structure.

For more information on pruning, visit the University of Florida’s website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_tree_pruning.
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Will a pet door affect your energy bill?
Pet doors are convenient for pet owners and pets, but they can affect energy bills. A poorly made or improperly installed pet door will create unwanted drafts that increase energy bills and reduce the overall comfort level of your home. The wrong type of door also may be pushed open during high winds.

Consider installing a pet door certified by the Alliance to Save Energy, or one that has a double or triple flap. These types of pet doors can reduce energy loss and make life easier for you and your furry friends.

The best solution may be a high-quality electronic door that is activated by a chip on your pet’s collar.

It’s difficult to undo a pet door installation, so we suggest doing your homework before taking the leap. There may be other strategies that will give you and your pet some of the convenient benefits without the downsides.

How much hot and cold can your pup and tabby handle?
Cats and dogs can handle the cold better than humans. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which regulates facilities that house cats and dogs, requires facilities to maintain temperatures above 50 F.

Some exceptions are allowed for breeds accustomed to the cold or if some form of insulation is provided for the animals. Your pet’s tolerance really depends on their breed and coat thickness.

A report by the Purdue Center for Animal Science says Siberian huskies can tolerate temperatures below freezing, but some short-haired dogs require temperatures of 59 F or warmer. Older animals may require warmer temperatures than younger ones.

During summer, cats and dogs handle the heat in different ways. Cats clearly enjoy warmer temperatures more than dogs, and do a good job reducing their activity level as temperatures climb. But both cats and dogs can get overheated. The USDA says room temperatures in facilities housing dogs or cats should not exceed 85 F for more than four hours at a time.

Is it OK if your pet sleeps in the garage overnight?
USDA rules suggest this should be fine if your garage temperature stays between 50 F and 85 F. Pets might be able to handle a lower temperature if they have a warm, insulated bed.

I do not recommend heating or cooling your garage for your pet. This could lead to extremely high energy bills, which makes sense. An uninsulated, but heated, garage could easily cost more to heat than a home. A better solution is a heated pet house, which you can buy from multiple retailers. If you’re willing to spend a little more, you can find climate-controlled pet houses that include heating and cooling options.

You can also buy heated beds for cats and dogs. Some beds use as little as 4 watts of electricity, so they won’t drain your energy bill.
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PEACE RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE PRIVACY POLICY

At Peace River Electric Cooperative, confidentiality is important to us. As we strive to improve and expand our services, we recognize our members’ need and desire to preserve their privacy and confidentiality. PRECO recognizes the trust members place in us and is committed to safeguarding member information. The following policy affirms our continued commitment to preserving member confidentiality.

The Information We Collect
We receive and retain information about our members through many sources:
• Information we receive on member applications or other forms.
• Information on usage and data gathered by our metering systems.
• Information through member transactions with us, our affiliates or others.
• Information we receive from consumer-reporting agencies.

The Way We Use Information
We limit the use and collection of nonpublic personal information to that which is necessary to maintain and administer financial services. We do not share this information with outside parties unless:
• The information is provided to help complete a member-initiated transaction (such as credit reporting agencies, document processing companies, etc.).
• The member has requested it.
• The disclosure is required by law (e.g., subpoena, investigation of fraudulent activity, etc.).
• The disclosure is required by banking regulation (e.g., Fair Lending Reporting Act, Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, etc.).

When member information is provided to any of the third parties mentioned above, that third party must agree to adhere to privacy principles that provide for keeping such information confidential.

Limiting Employee Access to Information
PRECO limits employee access to member information to those with a business reason for knowing such information. All of our employees are educated on the importance of confidentiality and member privacy. Any employee who violates the financial privacy of our members is subject to appropriate disciplinary measures and possible termination.

Protection of Information Via Established Security Procedures
To prevent unauthorized access, maintain data accuracy and ensure the correct use of information, we have put in place appropriate physical, electronic and managerial procedures to safeguard and secure the information.

Maintaining Accurate Information
We have established procedures so our members’ financial information is accurate, current and complete in accordance with reasonable commercial standards. PRECO will respond to requests to correct inaccurate information in a timely manner.

Questions?
At PRECO, we value our member relationships. We want you to understand how we use the information you provide and our commitment to ensuring your personal privacy. If you have questions regarding our privacy policy, please contact us at 800-282-3824.

Nondiscrimination Statement
Peace River Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

If you wish to file a civil rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call 866-632-9992 to request the form.

You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter by mail to U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax to 202-690-7442 or email to program.intake@usda.gov.
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The portable, folding, battery-powered chair that offers easy one-handed operation

Remember when you were a child and got your first bicycle? I do. It gave me a sense of independence... I felt like I could go anywhere, and it was so much easier and more enjoyable than walking. Well, at my age, that bike wouldn’t do me much good. Fortunately, there’s a new invention that gives me the freedom and independence to go wherever I want... safely and easily. It’s called the Zoomer, and it’s changed my life.

If you are one of the countless Americans who need a little help getting around, there is a safe, simple and easy-to-use solution... the Zoomer. It is propelled by small yet powerful dual motors for speeds of 3.7 miles per hour over a variety of terrains, on up to a 10 degree incline. Its innovative airline-safe Lithium Ion battery enables you to go 8 miles on a single charge, and the automatic electromagnetic brakes let you stop on a dime.

What’s more, it folds up easily so it can fit in a trunk or a back seat. Why spend another day watching life pass you by, when instead you could be Zooming around! Call now and a knowledgeable, friendly Zoomer expert will tell you all about it. You’ll be glad you did.

The secret to the Zoomer is its intuitive steering system. You operate it with a simple-to-use joystick, giving you precision maneuverability and the ability to navigate tight spaces easily with a 25” turning radius. It is designed to let you pull right up to a table or desk. You no longer have to move to another chair to work or eat at your table.

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Your District Meeting: Attend, Learn, Win Prizes

Electric co-ops, including Peace River Electric, are owned by the people they serve. As a member and owner of PRECO, you play an essential role in the life of the co-op by attending your district meeting.

Each February, district meetings are held in three of PRECO’s nine districts. PRECO conducts district meetings to elect or affirm member representatives to a three-year term on the board of directors. Your district meeting provides an opportunity to exercise your right of co-op ownership by taking part in this process.

This month, we invite members of Districts 1, 4 and 7 to attend their district meeting. If you live in one of these districts, you will receive a flyer in the mail with the date, time and location of your district meeting. It also will have important bylaw requirements, registration instructions and biography information.

At your district meeting, you’ll also learn about the programs and services we offer, hear updates on electric utility industry issues and meet many of the employees who keep your cooperative running smoothly.

Having a democratically elected board of directors ensures PRECO is continually maintained and operated with your best interests in mind. The board’s duties include ensuring compliance with governmental regulations, maintaining sound financial standing, impartially representing the interests of all members and more. This is why having a qualified board of directors is so vital.

PRECO members who register to attend the meeting:
• Receive a $10 electric bill credit.
• Participate in door prize drawings.
• Are entered in a drawing for the grand prize: a self-charging robotic vacuum cleaner.
• Enjoy light refreshments, coffee and soft drinks.

See page 4 for more information. Watch for a flyer in the mail, then plan to attend your district meeting.

Randy Shaw