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NEBRASKA

September 2025

Magazine

**Crafting History
One Cup at a Time**

**Bringing History
to Life**

**Find Hidden Energy
Users at Home**

**Utilities Fight Back
Against Copper Crimes**



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Published monthly by the Nebraska Rural Electric Association, 1244 K Street, Box 82048, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501, (402) 475-4988.

Advertising in the *Nebraska Magazine* does not imply endorsement for products by the Nebraska Rural Electric Association. Correspondence should be sent to Wayne Price, Editor, *Nebraska Magazine*, Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501.

The *Nebraska Magazine* is printed by the Aradius Group, 4700 F Street, Omaha, NE 68117. Form 3579 should be sent to *Nebraska Magazine*, Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Neb. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Nebraska Magazine*, 1244 K Street, Box 82048, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Publication numbers are USPS 071-630 and ISSN 0193-4937.

Subscriber Services: Cost of subscription for consumers of participating member-systems is \$2.14 per year (17.8 cents per month), plus periodicals postage paid from equity accruing to the consumer. For nonmembers, a subscription is \$10 per year or \$20 for three years, plus local and state tax. Single copy, \$2.50.

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Christian Hagemann is a modern-day tinsmith who handcrafts tinware and shares his passion for historical trades as a volunteer interpreter at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park. From a formative purchase of a \$10 tin cup to mastering gunsmithing and historical reenactments, his journey blends craftsmanship, storytelling and a deep appreciation for American heritage.



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In June, 22 high school students from across Nebraska joined more than a thousand of their peers from across the U.S. for the 2025 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.—an immersive week that brought American history, government, and leadership to life.

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ON THE COVER

Chris Hagemann volunteers as a tinsmith at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park. He is walking back in time in the footsteps of Milo Moses, a soldier and tinsmith who actually practiced his trade at the fort in the early 19th Century. See the related article on Page 6. Photograph by LaRayne Topp

Editor's Page



Wayne Price

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SCAN ME

Fixing FEMA—A Lifeline for Rural Nebraska

When disaster strikes, public power districts and electric cooperatives are the first to act and the last to recover. From tornadoes to ice storms, Nebraska's rural electric utilities face the enormous task of restoring power to rural consumers that depend on them for basic survival. That's why the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act of 2025 deserves our attention—and our support.

This bipartisan legislation, backed by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), aims to cut through the red tape that slows recovery and burdens rural families with higher costs. Under current law, public power districts and electric cooperatives can wait years for reimbursement from FEMA's Public Assistance program, which provides essential funding to rebuild power infrastructure after disasters. During that time, many rural electric utilities are forced to take out loans to cover the upfront costs, with interest expenses that often get passed on to the very people they serve.

The new legislation would quickly change that. The FEMA Act sets firm deadlines for reimbursements: 120 days for emergency work and 90 days for longer-term rebuilding projects, with an additional 30 days to disburse the funds. That's a dramatic shift from the current system, where delays can stretch for years, compounding financial strain and delaying full recovery for rural electric utilities and their consumers.

The bill also brings a crucial shift in FEMA's philosophy: resilience over replication. Rural electric utilities would finally be allowed to rebuild smarter, not just restore what was destroyed. That means stronger poles, underground lines, and modern systems that can better withstand future storms. It's a commonsense change with long-term benefits for reliability, safety, and cost savings.

Another key element of the bill is structural. It would remove FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security and restore it as an independent agency reporting directly to the president. Supporters argue that this move would sharpen FEMA's focus on its core mission—responding to emergencies—while reducing bureaucratic drag.

As the bill moves through Congress, NRECA continues to advocate for improvements, including a provision to reimburse interest costs rural electric utilities incur while waiting for FEMA funds. It's a smart addition that would ease the financial load on rural families and reflect the reality of disaster recovery.

For rural electric utilities and the consumers they serve, this legislation is more than a policy shift—it's a promise kept. A promise that when the lights go out, help will come quickly. And when we rebuild, we will do it stronger than before.



Chet McWhorter is
the General
Manager of Cuming
County Public
Power District
headquartered in
West Point, Neb.

Storm Tested and Safety Approved

A major priority of all public power systems is to provide reliable service to our customers 24/7/365. Of course, we aren't perfect, there will always be storms and unexpected incidents. Because weather is always changing, PPDs have emergency response plans in place for these types of events that have a high probability of happening in our area. Storm outages, whether they be winter storms or tornados or straight-line winds are a reality in Nebraska, and it is very important that we are always prepared to react in a swift, logical manner. I always remember what the philosopher Aristotle said, "It is likely that something unlikely will happen."

One vital detail of these plans is Mutual Aid. When a storm hits that is too large for our employees to handle, we can quickly get in touch with our industry partners to get additional help headed our way. Our public power partners send great crews of linemen with equipment to help us out. When linemen from other districts show up it is a great example of service and sacrifice. They leave their responsibilities at home and put their personal lives on hold for the duration of an event and really show us the best of humanity. It is encouraging to witness these guys showing up to work in terrible conditions in an area that is not familiar to them and to help people that they've never met and will likely never see again. A highlight is seeing the trucks from neighboring districts rolling in to go to work here but the view of them going home after a storm is much more beautiful to me!

Of course, the most important thing to me is that throughout all the work before, during, and after a storm, there are no safety incidents involving any of our employees, mutual aid personnel, or any member of the public. A huge advantage among the NREA membership is that we all utilize the same safety manual and apprenticeship training requirements. This leads to a higher level of communication and understanding amongst our linemen which also leads to excellent safety outcomes. We anticipate stellar performance from our linemen and field personnel, and it is the expectation that we hold them to. We hold that there is no job so important that it can't be done safely and public power employees prove that repeatedly.

As of 2024, Nebraska ranked number three in the U.S. in terms of electric reliability per the Citizens Utility Board who is tasked with compiling data from all electricity providers across the country. While third out of fifty is pretty good, we will not rest on this, and we will continue to invest in grid hardening, tree trimming, and maintenance programs to achieve the highest level of reliability. Additionally, it is comforting to know that we are here for each other should one of us get hit by a storm or other calamity. Partnership truly is the best of public power.

Crafting History One Cup at a Time

Hand-operated machines designed to crimp, cut and construct pieces of tin line up on workbenches, while patterns for cups and pitchers, lanterns and candlesticks hang from rafters overhead. It's the workspace of a craftsman who not only shapes tin into shiny and utilitarian vessels, lanterns and pails, he also displays and distributes his wares at historical events and arts festivals throughout the country.

Christian Hagemann and wife Linda, who sometimes introduces herself as Dorothy to her Tinman Wizard, make their home near Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, where he volunteers as a historical interpreter. As such, he guides visitors through the tinsmithing process, harkening back to a time when hand-made tinplate items for the home were in high demand.

Hagemann's soft banter combines historical facts with his personal story as he talks, introducing his approach to metal work and all things tin. He mixes in a few jokes now and then which he will fire in a slow, black powder musket style, waiting with a steady eye and an easy smile to see if the listener has caught on.

As a military brat of a boy, he grew up in Virginia, and in 1974 he wound up making molded candles in Colonial Williamsburg. In 1976, during the nation's Bicentennial, he transferred over to the Powder Magazine where he purchased a tinplated cup built by a tinsmithing craftsman, paying \$10 for it. This was an amount his dad pronounced to be too expensive, although Hagemann hung on to that cup anyway. After all, this tinplated cup is what started it all.

As a student at Colorado School of Trades, Hagemann learned the art of Gunsmithing and later in his career specialized in custom pistols, designing and creating black powder muzzle loading target pistols. At various rendezvous—which are present-day gatherings of historical reenactors, reminiscent of the annual social gatherings between mountain men and other traders to exchange furs for essential supplies—he carried along his tinplated cup.

"It was the only one like it," Hagemann recalled. "The rest had cheap cups and nobody knew how to make any of them."



By the late 70's, Hagemann found himself working in Bellevue where he restored antique firearms, including black powder handguns from the 1800's. Moving on from there he worked in Fremont where in 1991 he became a member of the American Pistolsmith's Guild.

In 1994, Chris happened to take in the White Catfish Camp Memorial Observance at Lake Manawa, Iowa, part of the Lewis and Clark Trail Centennial. It was there that a collection of shiny objects once again caught his eye including hand-made tin cups. The craftsman was one of the historical interpreters, a man from Kentucky.

For two decades, Hagemann had been carrying around the cup he bought while at Colonial Williamsburg, hoping to meet someone who could show him how to design one.

"You made these?" he said to the craftsman. "I've been waiting 20 years to meet you."

The craftsman was a goldmine of information,



Left: For more than 30 years, Chris Hagemann has been a regular presence at Nebraska's Fort Atkinson State Park.

Above: A closeup of a candlestick, left, plus one of Chris's colorful reproductions.

Top right: Chris Hagemann at work in his tinsmithing shop.

Right: Chris displays a variety of his tin ware at events throughout the country.

providing an inside track on tinsmithing machines, kinds of metal, and places to find them.

Following that same weekend, in a convenient act of serendipity, Hagemann happened upon a place to purchase second-hand tinsmithing mandrils or "stakes" for a price Chris described as a "smoking deal." Although these stakes were rusty, he was able to clean and polish them to a usable and nearly-new state. Later, he found another local place that sold tinsmithing machines. As he took each one apart to clean its individual parts, he figured out how each one worked.

"There wasn't anyone around to teach me how; I just discovered it a little bit at a time."

Hagemann believes these machines were conceived by left-handed inventors. Each of us has a "dumb hand" and a "smart hand," Hagemann said, based on our dominant hand. The cranks on these machines are operated by the right or "dumb hand," Hagemann explained, and tinplate is guided through each machine

with the left, or "smart hand," a task that can seem impossible for a right-hander.

"Finally, I found something that was as difficult for a right-handed person as my life has been as a lefty," he said.

Various machines and mandrils are used throughout the creative processes: bending, shearing, body forming, seaming, soldering, wiring and beading machines. Chris begins with a sheet of tinplate metal, which he purchases in sheets of food grade quality in lots of 100 or more. He measures and cuts the sheets, depending upon which pattern he is using, bends the cut sheet into its required shape, creates the seams and solders all together, riveting on bails and handles where needed. He uses basic geometry, algebra and mathematics to design each item, then cuts and shapes, joining the pieces to create the main body.

It sounds simple enough. However, the first time

Continued on Page 8

From Page 7

Hagemann attempted to make a pattern from and reproduce his first cup, he fashioned a dozen. "Six of them didn't leak," he said, so he sold five of those at \$10 apiece.

A phone call to his dad followed, reminding Hagemann's father of Chris's first tin cup purchase for \$10.

As Hagemann began to display his tin cups, requests for other items followed: Can you make a bowl? A bucket? A lantern? A coffeepot? Today, Hagemann has reproduced and created patterns for more than 140 different items, a list which is still growing. (To obtain a catalog, you can contact Hagemann at Tinnmann56@gmail.com or 402-650-8612.)

In December of 2005, a motorcycle accident changed the course of Hagemann's life in more directions than one, an event he describes as a "cosmic revelation." Not only did the resulting broken ribs and spine, punctured lungs and brain hematoma leave him with an awareness of the fragility of life, plus a lengthy recovery, it also helped him walk away from a profession he'd held for more than 30 years.

As a result, he turned his part-time tinsmithing hobby into something that by 2009, had become his calling. He doesn't call it a job, because, as he said, "It's not work if you enjoy it."

For more than 30 years, Chris Hagemann has been a regular presence at Nebraska's Fort Atkinson State Park. Fort Atkinson was an active military post from 1819 to 1827, established as the main fort for the Yellowstone Expedition and designed to enforce the ownership of the newly purchased Louisiana Territory.

Fort Atkinson is located at Fort Calhoun, a town named for John Calhoun, a South Carolina statesman who served as Secretary of War in 1854 when the Territory of Nebraska was created. (Today, the primary electric supplier for the Fort Calhoun area is the Metropolitan Utilities District.)

In many ways, Hagemann is walking back in time in the footsteps of Milo Moses, a soldier and tinsmith who actually practiced his trade at the fort in the early 19th century. Hagemann's historical interpretation is as someone who happened to know Moses.

"I use his era tools as much as I can," Hagemann said.



Above: Chris and several of the coffeepots, candlesticks and lanterns he has recreated in his workshop.

Left: Hagemann makes a variety of coffeepots and other tin utensils from patterns (shown at left) which he has designed.

Some of Hagemann's wares are sold in the Fort's Sutler Store, as well as at other events he frequents: rendezvous, market fairs, outdoor expositions, Nebraska Game and Parks experiences, arts festivals and indoor trade shows across the United States. He is one of only a dozen or so tinsmiths in the United States who can profess to make a living at this craft.

Hagemann attends these events as a tinsmith, vendor and proprietor of Amalgamated Tin Ware. He also takes part in competitions involving bow and arrow and muzzle loading firearms once used by trappers and traders.

And all because a shiny tin cup led him back to an earlier time.



INSTALLING ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGERS

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR BUSINESS

Are you interested in installing electric vehicle chargers at your building or place of business? Adding level 3 charging can attract new business or provide an incentive to employees while showing your social corporate responsibility. Level 3 chargers provide 60-80 miles of range in 20 minutes. Installation typically ranges from \$30,000 - \$75,000.

EV CHARGING SAFETY



CORD MANAGEMENT

Prevent charging cord damage by keeping cord on its holder and tucking away excess length while charging



REPORTING DAMAGE

Report any charging cord damage to appropriate personnel



TESTED CHARGING EQUIPMENT

Ensure charging equipment has been rated and listed by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory such as UL, CSA, or ETL

EV CHARGING ETIQUETTE



TIME LIMITS

Establish time limits on chargers to ensure efficient use of chargers. Remind users of time limits



MULTIPLE USERS

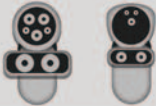


Prohibit users from disconnecting other user's electric vehicles. Establish a protocol for users who pass their allotted time on a charger



IMPROPER USE

Remind users of the importance of charging safely. Ensure users store charging cord properly by providing signage for proper storage

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING LEVEL 3 CONNECTORS

	CCS 1	CCS 2	CHAdeMO	TESLA
Type				
Vehicle Makes / Models	GM, Ford, Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, BMW, Mercedes, Honda, Kia, Hyundai, Volvo		Nissan LEAF, Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV	Tesla Only

CHARGE TO CHARGE?

- Payment and payment methods are decided by charging station owner
- Requiring payments may help recover equipment and usage cost
- Options include charge per kWh used, time parked, or a flat fee



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Putting Artificial Intelligence into Action

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly popular tool for many industries and even in our daily lives. AI is a hot topic—sometimes exciting, sometimes a little scary. It has the potential to bring many opportunities—and a few challenges—to the electric utility sector. But machine learning takes time, and we're still in the process of determining how AI can really be utilized.

Many public power districts and electric cooperatives are already

exploring emerging technologies like AI, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Most of AI's current applications are task-specific—like using chatbots to answer common questions from consumers or analyzing data to better understand members' needs.

Contrary to what Hollywood would have you believe, AI can't think for itself. Its abilities depend on how it's programmed, the quality of its training and the data it receives. AI is essentially about learning from patterns and making decisions based on that input—not about having thoughts or opinions of its own.

Because AI interacts with both internal systems and external networks, cybersecurity is a top priority. As the electric industry looks to adopt tools powered by AI and other tech, we will ensure our systems are safe from potential cyber threats. Strong digital defenses are essential to using any new technology safely.

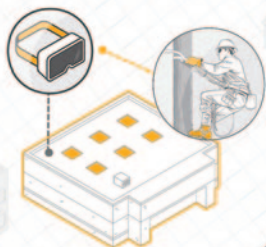
As we consider emerging AI tools, our focus won't be so much on the technology itself as on solving real problems. If AI can streamline a process, predict an issue or improve service for our members, it's worth considering. As the technology evolves, AI may eventually be built into smart meters to help members track their energy use more effectively. It could even help our staff better manage the local grid or predict storm damage to deploy crews more efficiently.

Another exciting area is AR and VR. Many electric utilities are currently testing AR for training, giving lineworkers a hands-on experience to prepare for dangerous situations before facing them in real life. In the future, smart glasses may help crews instantly identify and troubleshoot equipment in the field. Ultimately, AI, AR and VR are tools that can help utilities serve their communities better—making energy more reliable, services faster and operations more efficient.

AI IN ACTION

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

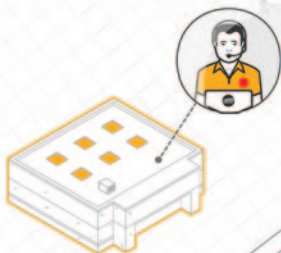
Through augmented reality, lineworkers can experience interactive, lifelike trainings for everyday tasks and life-saving safety techniques.



AI IN ACTION

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

AI tools like chatbots can enhance interactions for our members and provide a tailored experience based on energy use data.



AI IN ACTION

WEATHER FORECASTING

With the help of AI, weather forecasts will become more accurate, pinpointing areas to station co-op crews.



AI CHALLENGES

While AI provides many opportunities, its rapid growth is creating challenges for the energy sector.

DATA CENTERS

Data centers require massive amounts of electricity to operate, creating surges in power demand.



GRID STRAIN

This growing demand is straining the U.S. grid, which can lead to a higher risk of power outages.



THIS DIRT IS IN MY BLOOD.

GOOD THING, BECAUSE MOST DAYS A GOOD BIT
ENDS UP IN MY BOOTS, EYES AND MOUTH TOO.

Nebraska Corn Board IamNebraskaCorn.com

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NEBRASKA CORN
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YOUTH TOUR

Brining History to Life

Nebraska Students Join National Youth Tour in D.C.



In June, 22 high school students from across Nebraska joined more than a thousand of their peers from across the U.S. for the 2025 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.—an immersive week that brought American history, government, and leadership to life.

Sponsored by Nebraska's rural public power districts and electric cooperatives, the students and their two chaperones explored some of the nation's most iconic landmarks, including the Lincoln, Jefferson, and Washington Memorials. Their itinerary also took them to Capitol Hill, where they met with U.S. Senators Deb Fischer and Pete Ricketts to discuss current issues and experience government in action.

Beyond the monuments, the delegation discovered powerful exhibits in the Smithsonian Museums—from the Hope Diamond to the groundbreaking

Wright Brothers' 1903 Flyer. They walked the hallowed grounds of Gettysburg, stood in George Washington's home at Mount Vernon, and took in the deeply moving exhibits at the National Holocaust Museum.

The idea for the Youth Tour was sparked in 1957, when then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson addressed the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and urged electric cooperatives to send young people to Washington to experience their democracy firsthand. "If one thing comes out of this meeting," Johnson said, "it will be sending youngsters to the national capital where they can actually see what the flag stands for and represents."

The Youth Tour is more than a trip—it's a transformative experience. It connects students with the past, inspires their future, and builds friendships with fellow young leaders from across the country.



"By visiting Washington, D.C., I gained a lot of knowledge about the nation's history, government, and many career options. I also learned how to move throughout Washington, D.C., by using the Metro, which was a very fun experience."

Braxton Wisnieski,
Cornhusker PPD

"My trip to Washington, D.C., was an unforgettable experience filled with learning and fun. I really enjoyed visiting historic landmarks like the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial. Meeting new people from across the US made the trip even more special. From sightseeing to late-night laughs with new friends, every moment was exciting and meaningful."

Grant Eaton, Polk County RPPD



2025 Youth Tour Participants

Sawyer Cox, South Central PPD
 Cailey Klein, South Central PPD
 Peyton Dyer, Southwest PPD
 Kylie Hackbart, Norris PPD
 Brayden Burenheide, Elkhorn RPPD
 Nicholas Stock, Cornhusker PPD
 Braxton Wisnieski, Cornhusker PPD
 Lauren Bishop, Midwest ECC
 Grace Jones, Midwest ECC
 Kendall Anderson-McClintock, Midwest ECC
 Jensyn Weiss, Twin Valleys PPD
 Thane Wetjen, Perennial PPD
 Charlotte Welsh, Niobrara Valley EMC
 LaShanna Werth, Niobrara Valley EMC
 Megan Fritz, Niobrara Valley EMC
 Jacob Andrews, Loup Valleys RPPD
 Jessica Bauers, Polk County RPPD
 Grant Eaton, Polk County RPPD
 Nora Brodine, Dawson PPD
 Isaac Wooldrik, Cuming County PPD
 Moses Knerl, Burt County PPD

"This trip helped me realize there is so much to learn about the history and the people in our country. I enjoyed the different sites and I'd have to say standing in the rain on the water taxi was my favorite. I appreciated getting a sponsorship for this trip, and how easy the directors and organizers made it for us. I learned a lot about different wars and those who died for our country. Overall, the trip was fun, exciting, and different than anything I've experienced before."

Cailey Klein, South Central PPD



Photographs by Justine Heithoff, Niobrara Valley EMC



"Washington, D.C., was a great experience. It has impacted me very much seeing how real the sites are and is not another piece of history you read in the history books. My top three favorite sites were at the Holocaust Museum, the Battlefield of Gettysburg, and Mount Vernon."

Charlotte Welsh, Niobrara Valley EMC

Within our electrical equipment, appliances and power substations are materials that also serve as a lucrative incentive for thievery. Copper is used in our plumbing, fiber optics, and electrical systems. By stealing copper from these, thieves can sell it for profit. This means that electrical utilities as well as consumers can be a target for these thieves.

In addition to thieves killed in the process of stealing, impacts have ranged from power outages and costly equipment replacement to failures of emergency sirens, irrigation systems, and cell towers creating economic loss and risks to public safety.

Many utilities are taking steps against dangerous copper thievery, adding sensors or video equipment for surveillance. Warning signs and law enforcement patrols have all also helped deter copper theft. Tougher laws, penalties, and requirements that buyers document all transactions may discourage thievery.

Steps consumers can take include securing vacant homes and construction sites, hiding and securing scrap metal, and enclosing external equipment like air conditioning units. Consider upgrading to copper-welded wiring instead of pure copper.



Follow these additional steps to protect your property and electrical supply:

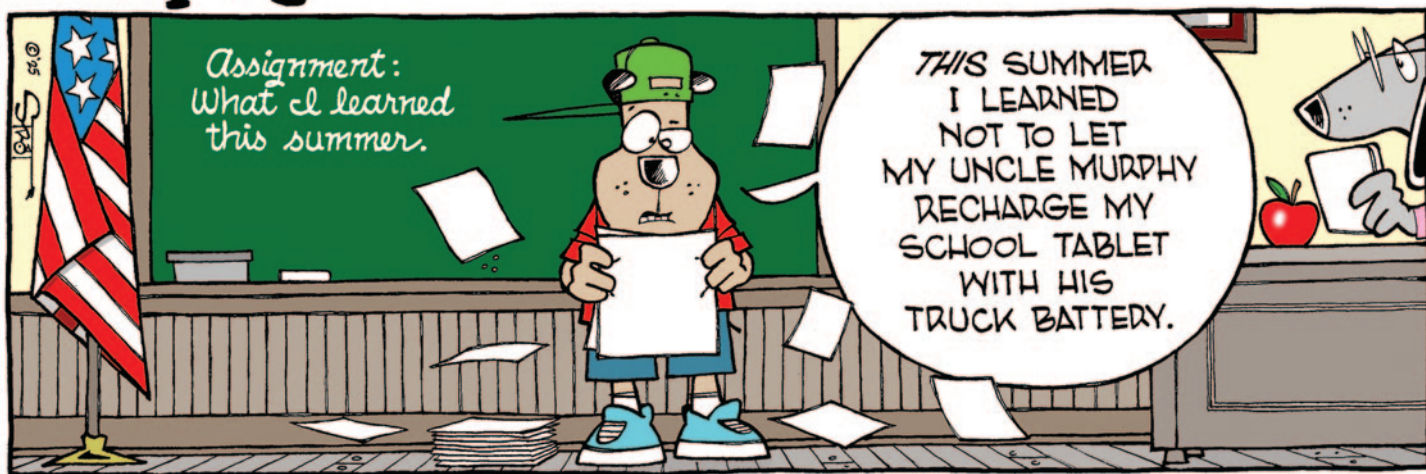
- Pay attention to your surroundings. Report suspicious activity in yours and neighboring areas.
- Take precautions when you are away. If you are planning an extended trip, designate a neighbor to keep watch over your property.

- A surveillance camera can help deter as well as identify thieves.
- Common targets for copper theft are construction sites, farming equipment, and electric utility property. If you notice suspicious activity around one of these copper theft targets, notify authorities. Do not try to intervene yourself.
- If you are responsible for a construction site or farm, properly secure your property. If you have large quantities of copper, you may consider

a tracking device that can help locate your copper if it is stolen.

- Store tools and wire cutters in a secure location, and never leave them out while away.
- If you see anyone around electric substations or electric facilities other than utility personnel or contractors, call the police.

Murphy



JUST RELEASED!

Cache of 832 Last Year 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars Still Pristine As The Day They Were Struck



No coin embodies the spirit of America more than the Morgan Silver Dollar. From the Comstock Lode discovery that provided millions of ounces of silver to make them, to outlaws robbing stagecoaches in the Wild West to pay for their bar tabs and brothel visits, the hefty Morgan Silver Dollar holds a special place in American history.

It's no wonder collectors and history buffs alike clamor to get their hands on them. That is, if they can get their hands on them.

Prized Last-Year Coins

Collectors love "lasts" as no collection is complete without the last coin struck. Last year coins are often hard to find and always in demand. Little did master engraver George T. Morgan know the legacy he was creating when he designed what has become known as "The King of Silver Dollars" but it came to an end 104 years ago with the last-year 1921 Morgan Silver Dollar, the most beloved coin in American history.

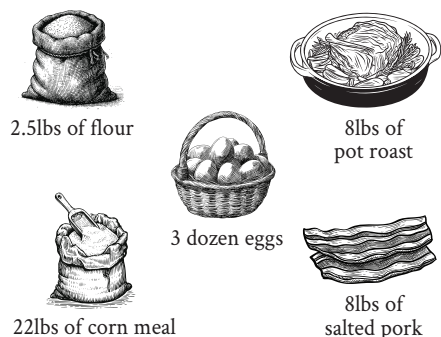
Public Release - Only 832 Coins Available

Rarcoa®, America's Oldest Coin Company, is announcing the public release of 832 of the very last year 1921 Morgan Silver Dollars, struck at the iconic Philadelphia Mint. Each coin today comes in Brilliant Uncirculated condition, pristine as the day they were struck!

Hold 104 Years of American History

Struck in 1921, each coin is one hundred and four years old. Could Charles Lindbergh have carried your coin in his pocket during his flight across the Atlantic? Or maybe your great-grandfather carried it while storming the beaches of Normandy during World War II before ending up in a small coin shop in Tuscaloosa, Oklahoma. Each coin has its own unique history and you can hold 104 years of American history when you buy yours today!

In 1921 This \$1 Could Buy:



A Miracle of Survival

Coin experts estimate that only 15%-20% of Morgans are still surviving today due to multiple mass-meltings over the years. The Pittman Act of 1918 melted over 270,000,000 coins, that's almost 50% of all coins produced at the time. Untold quantities were melted in the 1980s and 2000s when silver prices rose up to \$50 per ounce.

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Out of sight, out of mind. It is easy to overlook the hidden energy users in our homes. Yet, every plugged-in device and ready-to-use appliance can lead to higher electric bills.

Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

Your water heater could be using more energy than necessary. Storage water heaters heat water to a preset temperature. When hot water is used, cold water enters the tank, lowering the temperature, and the water is reheated to that preset level. If the water heater is set higher than needed, it wastes energy. Most water heaters are set to 140 degrees at the factory. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting the temperature to 120 degrees. This will save energy and reduce the risk of scalding. Do not set it lower than 120 degrees to prevent bacteria development in the tank.

Exterior security lights, porch lights and barn lights can use more energy than needed. If they are on every night, all year long, that adds up to 4,380 hours, or half the hours in a year. If those lights use outdated, inefficient technology, they waste energy. With that many hours, even a slight increase in efficiency can yield big energy savings. Switch to energy efficient LED bulbs. If lights need to stay on, consider upgrading to motion sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night.

Pools and hot tubs can also be big energy users. Since you don't see the pumps or heaters by design, it's difficult to know when they are operating and consuming energy. Pumps filter water to keep it clean and safe for swimming. Energy Star®-certified pumps run at lower speeds and can be programmed to match your pool's filtering needs, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. They can pay for themselves in two years, are quieter and can prolong the life of your pool's filtering system. Schedule your hot tub to a lower temperature when you're not using it to reduce energy use. If your electric utility offers time-of-use rates, consider scheduling accordingly.

Plug load is anything in your home that is plugged into an outlet. As we use more and more appliances and technology in our homes, plug load energy use increases.



Upgrade outdoor lights to motion sensor lights so you aren't drawing energy all night. Photograph by Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources

Find what is plugged in around your home. If you aren't using it, unplug it. For computer stations and entertainment centers, consider using smart power strips. These devices sense when energy is being used and turn peripheral devices on or off as needed.

Gaming consoles are another hidden energy user. Gamers often put them in rest mode when not in use. This allows them to complete updates and reduces start-up time for the next session. It also means they are still consuming energy even when not actively used. Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy. Ask the gamers in your life to power off. It may require a bit more time for updates, but every kilowatt-hour counts when it comes to saving energy.

It's easy to make a habit of powering down and unplugging once you identify everything drawing power in your home. For upgrades, reach out to your rural electric utility about available rebates to help cover costs.

Why Your HVAC Filter Matters More Than You Think

During this time of the year, many are switching their thermostats from “cooling” to “heating” mode. This is also a good time to check and change filters in heating and cooling (HVAC) systems. Some may have not been replaced since the start of the cooling season or longer.

But how important could a filter be if your HVAC system still seems to provide adequate heating and cooling? Consider the following potential impacts:

Inefficient heating and cooling

The whole reason you have an HVAC system is to keep comfortable inside. Dirty filters reduce airflow and the system's ability to condition the air in your home. According to the Department of Energy, a furnace or air conditioner with a clogged filter can use 15 percent more energy than one operating with a clean one.

Higher cost of utility bills

Every year, energy efficiency professionals start hearing concerns about the high cost of utilities after homeowners and renters receive their first bills after an extended cold period. An inefficient HVAC system only makes these bills higher.

Uneven temperatures inside

Most duct systems are designed with the assumption that, with a clean filter, the furnace or air handler will move an adequate volume of air to keep temperatures balanced throughout your home. Diminished air flows due to a dirty filter often result in a room or rooms not receiving the same amount of conditioned air as others.

Short cycling or equipment failure

Reduced air flow due to a dirty filter can cause your heat exchanger to overheat and shut off before your thermostat's setpoint is reached. Over a relatively short period of time, the HVAC system will continue to cycle on and off. If this happens too often, the system's electronic "limit switch" can fail, and the furnace won't fire up at all. Now, on top of higher utility bills, a HVAC technician will leave one for parts and labor. Of course, Murphy's Law states this will occur on one of

the coldest days of the year and after normal business hours to optimize the technician's fees.

A similar problem can occur in the middle of summer. A clogged filter can cause the evaporator coil to freeze up because not enough air is moving through it to remove condensation produced during the cooling process. This seems to inevitably occur to filter abusers over the Fourth of July weekend in order to once again, optimize the HVAC technician's fees. Also, dirt that gets past a filter can also make its way into the fan motor and other parts, causing damage to those components. As if the repair bill didn't cost enough!

Puts the burden on your lungs

Relying on your lungs to filter out all the contaminants that can potentially be in indoor air could mean you find yourself sick or feeling ill more often. Those contaminants might include: dust, mites, spores, mold, ash, pollen, pet dander, bug parts, hair, lint, tobacco smoke, food particles, pesticides, paint vapors or fumes from cleaning products. A clean filter helps remove these contaminants to create a healthier home.

Changing your filter once a year is probably not often enough. However, if you're not currently changing your filter at all, it's a start. Some heating and cooling experts recommend replacing your filter every month. While this practice may ensure you never operate your system with a dirty filter, you may be throwing a good filter away prematurely if your indoor air is relatively clean. Instead, check filters monthly for one year until you understand how often needs to be replaced. Some do may require monthly replacement, but if your system operates very little, such as during mild months, you may get additional use from the same filter. Also note that some filters are designed to last multiple months. Only through observation and following manufacturers' recommendations can you best gauge optimal replacement frequency.

Not sure which filter to select? Visit with your HVAC technician or retail expert to assure your selection provides the best filtration possible without negatively impacting your system's performance.

OLD GLORY BAIT SHOP MINATARE, NEB.

Tucked near the north edge of Lake Minatare, the Old Glory Bait Shop is part convenience store and part weekend smokehouse.

The bait shop began as a retirement project for a local woman. Over time, her hobby grew into a full convenience store. It changed owners in 2017 before Steve and Holly stepped in. Since then, they have stocked the shelves with all the basics people tend to forget on their way to the lake. “We try to have a bit of everything in here,” Steve said. Holly added, “Everything that people forget when they’re camping.”

Old Glory is open from early January, when the lake opens for the season, through Labor Day. After that, only a few fishermen and locals remain. But during the busy months, the shop comes to life with weekend visitors and the smell of smoked meat.

On weekends, Steve cooks pulled pork, ribs, brisket, pizzas, breakfast burritos, and baked beans using a wood-fired smoker. He prefers red or white oak wood because it burns longer and hotter. In 2021, he bought a barbecue grill in Virginia, followed by a smoker in 2023 in Wyoming. He combined both onto a single trailer, added a cover, and made several improvements to make it easier to use. He also built a small building nearby for food preparation. The meals are meant to be taken to go, and Steve even delivers to people staying around the lake.

“When we got started, there wasn’t any barbecue out here. I thought it would be perfect,” he said.

Steve also takes part in local events, especially those that support veterans. He cooks for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Office of Human Development’s Christmas party. As a former Army medic who served in the Persian Gulf and Middle East,



giving back to veterans is important to him.

When Steve is not cooking or helping at the store, he runs his business, Gould Glass. He has been working with automotive glass for 29 years and now operates on his own. He replaces windshields, fixes chips, and does custom glass cutting.

Holly runs the store in the mornings while Steve closes it in the evenings. “She’s the boss,” he said with a grin. “I just work here part time.”

At Old Glory, the flag waves high, the grill stays hot, and community comes first.



Shrimp Spaghetti

- 1 pound spaghetti noodles
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup avocado oil
- 1 package (12 ounces) raw shrimp
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder, divided
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 cup frozen or fresh spinach bread, for serving

Cook spaghetti noodles according to package instructions.

In skillet over medium heat, add butter, avocado oil and shrimp. Mix in 1 tablespoon garlic powder and paprika. Remove shrimp after they begin to turn pink; set aside.

Add chicken broth, Parmesan, heavy cream, remaining garlic powder, onion powder and spinach to skillet and mix well. Add shrimp back to skillet to finish cooking. Mix in noodles and serve with bread.

Recipe courtesy of “Cookin’ Savvy”

Reader Submitted Recipes

Fish Tacos with Cilantro Lime Slaw

For the Cilantro Lime Slaw:

- 2 cups shredded green cabbage
- 1 cup shredded purple cabbage
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- Juice of 1 lime
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon honey
- Salt and pepper, to taste

For the Fish:

- 1 lb. white fish fillets (like cod or tilapia)
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- Vegetable oil, for frying

To Assemble:

- 8 small corn or flour tortillas
- Lime wedges, for serving
- Extra chopped cilantro, for garnish
- Optional toppings:
- Avocado slices
- Pickled red onion
- Hot sauce

For the Sauce:

- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon cumin
- Salt, to taste

Start by making the Slaw. In a large bowl, mix green and purple cabbage, cilantro, lime juice, mayo, and honey. Season with salt and pepper. Toss well and refrigerate until ready to use. Then make the Sauce. In a small bowl, whisk together sour cream, mayo, lime juice, garlic powder, cumin, and salt. Chill until ready to serve.

Next prepare and cook the Fish. Pat fish dry and cut into taco-sized strips. Brown fish in hot skillet, season with paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Finally warm the tortillas and assemble the tacos. Place crispy fish pieces in each tortilla, top with a handful of slaw, drizzle with sauce, and garnish with extra cilantro or your favorite toppings. Servings: 4 (2 tacos per serving.)

Cindy Zurn, Alliance, Nebraska

Kool-Aid Pie

- 1 12 oz. can evaporated milk
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cups marshmallow fluff
- 1 package strawberry Kool-Aid
- 1 graham cracker crust

Whip evaporated milk and marshmallow fluff together until it's doubled in size. Add sugar and Kool-Aid and beat for 5 minutes. Place in graham cracker crust. Chill and top with Cool Whip when serving.

Helen Kohmetscher, Lawrence, Nebraska

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