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At a time when prices on everything seem to be climbing, public power remains a great value. Ten cents won't get you much in this world, but when it comes to the electricity that we depend on every day, 10 cents can do a lot.

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On the cover

Doug Throener of West Point, Neb. opened Cooper’s Chase Distillery in 2009. See the related article on page 6. Photograph by Wayne Price.
Have a safe and scary Halloween

Halloween is approaching and each day closer causes an increase in my level of excitement. This spooky pseudo-holiday has always been one of my favorites, right up there with Christmas and the Fourth of July. Part of that reason is because I’ve long been a fan of monsters. And candy.

I can remember my attraction to monsters really started when I was a kid. I would stay up late on the weekend to watch “Creature Feature” with it’s creepy host, Dr. San Guinary on KMTV in Omaha. I loved the movies with titles like “The Incredible Melting Man” and “Murder Motel”. I think I even dressed up as Dr. San Guinary once for Halloween.

I’m a big fan of the classic Universal monsters, too. There is just something magical about Bela Lugosi as Dracula, Boris Karloff as Frankenstein’s monster, and Lon Chaney, Jr. as the Wolfman.

As you prepare to turn your home into your own version of “Murder Motel” it is important to keep the small visitors in mind. The excitement of the night combined with the elevated amount of chocolate and sugar often cause children to forget about safety.

It is a good idea to keep all sidewalks and steps clear of decorations that could cause a child to fall. The wooden scarecrow that you bought at a craft store because it was so adorable could cause a child to trip and fall down your steps.

Make sure your yard is clear of such things as ladders, garden hoses, and flower pots that could trip small children. If you put out decorations such as headstones and coffins, place them where they will not be in the way.

Keep the path and stairs to your front door well illuminated. Check to make sure all the outside lights are working.

Battery powered jack-o-lantern lights and glow sticks are preferable to real flame candles. If you do use candles, place the carved jack-o-lantern well away from where trick-or-treaters will be walking or standing.

Inspect all your electrical decorations. Look for cracked or frayed sockets, loose or bare wires, and loose connections.

Make sure electrical decorations are approved by a nationally recognized certification organization like “UL” (Underwriters Laboratory) and marked for outdoor use if you are using them outside. Check www.cpsc.gov or www.ul.com for recalls.

Many Halloween toys have been recalled in the past by the CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission). Make sure decorative lighting is well-ventilated and a safe distance from anything flammable like dry leaves and shrubs.

It’s a good idea to have a fully charged fire extinguisher handy, just in case.

If you are taking small children trick-or-treating, be sure to go over some basic safety rules before you leave the house.

Make sure the child’s costume fits properly, so the child will not trip over any part of the costume. Use face paint instead of a mask. Buy costumes that are flame resistant or flame-retardant. The fabric will resist burning and will be extinguished quickly.

One way to increase visibility is to decorate or trim costumes and bags with reflective tape that will glow in the beam of a car’s headlights. Reflective tape is usually available in hardware or craft stores.

Children should also carry flashlights to see and be seen.

If your child’s costume includes swords, knives or other accessories, make sure they are made of soft, flexible material.

I’ve invested in a few packages of nylon cobwebs and a battery-powered flying bat to decorate the porch this year. And I’ll have some scary sounds playing on a hidden boom box. Stop by if you’re in the neighborhood.
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One Bottle at a Time

Doug Throener had one goal in mind when he started Cooper’s Chase Distillery in 2009 - make the best tasting vodka that could go up against premium spirits in blind taste tests and still be affordable for the customer. He is earning his customers one bottle at a time.

A mutual friend in the liquor business knew Throener, a native of West Point, Neb., wanted to start a distillery and hooked him up with Jim Brozek of Norfolk, Neb. Throener combined his 20 years of experience in the restaurant and bar industry with Brozek’s engineering background.

“It was a good match,” Throener said. “Brozek spent some time in the Appalachian Mountains and learned the spirit craft from folks there.”

Brozek decided to retire in 2013 so Throener bought out his interest in the distillery. He kept his friendship with Brozek and still touches base with him often. Throener gives a lot of the credit to Brozek because he helped start the business on the right path.

Throener lives on an acreage near West Point, Neb., which is also home to the distillery. It is served electrically by Cuming County Public Power District.

From conception to opening took two and a half years. The process is sort of backwards, Throener said.

“In order to get a federal permit you need to set up a “pilot” distillery for approval,” he pointed out. “Once the plans are approved at the federal

Please turn to page 8
One bottle at a time
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level, you can get a license.”
A distillery is different than a winery or brewery. It doesn’t require refrigeration, which is a cost savings. Throener said the downside of a distillery is that it takes a long time to see any sort of return on investment.

Cooper’s Chase was the first distillery business in Nebraska. There are others now operating in the state, however, there were a lot of hurdles to jump through because it was new, he said. He worked with the State of Nebraska and federal government to get the company up and running and now generates revenue on a monthly basis.

Cooper’s Chase Distillery is a David and Goliath story, he said.
The challenge is getting his name and product out there in the market. He encourages customers to do a blind taste test.
“Our vodka is top shelf quality at a mid-level price,” Throener said. “That’s my selling point. Do you want to buy a more expensive vodka made in France or one that’s less expensive and made right here in Nebraska?”

Grain arrives in bags to be used in making vodka at the distillery. Wood barrels are used for making whiskey.

He has built a loyal following in six years, he said. But it hasn’t been easy.
“It’s a struggle to get people to give us a chance,” he said. “But once they do, they really love us. They like that we’re a product made here in Nebraska.”

The vodka he makes is from corn. The grain arrives in bags from all over the Midwest and is run through a small mill before being mixed with water and mash bill, which is the recipe. The goal is to get the starches out, he said.

The mix is cooked and then cooled back down to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Yeast is added and works into an active ferment in three to five days. Two things happen as a result -

Carbon Dioxide and alcohol are created. The wash is run through a stripping still to remove the alcohol, which is then run through a spirit still until the alcohol reaches a set quality level.

“The hardest part is getting a consistent taste, bottle after bottle, but I think we do a pretty good job,” Throener said.
He is producing four sizes including a 750mL and 1.75 Liter. The bottles are filled one at a time, with air fed equipment built by Throener and Brozek. It measures the precise amount of alcohol into each bottle. He bottles on nights and weekends and can usually produce around 450 bottles in a run.

Another example of their homemade equipment is a one hundred gallon still, which Throener calls a “hybrid”, because it has the look of a pot still, but can function equally as well as a column still. A pot still is generally used to produce whiskey, brandy, and bourbons that must retain much of the original mash flavor. A column still is used to produce grain spirits, such as vodka and gin, where a higher percentage of alcohol is required during distillation.

There are four major distributors and several smaller ones in Nebraska. Throener started with a small distributor and moved to a large distributor over time. His distributor is Republic National, which has two divisions - Eagle and Falcon. His vodka is part of the Falcon division that represents
2,500 products and has 50 sales people. He has to compete with companies like Sky, Grey Goose and other high-end vodka makers. He puts himself in the category of a top shelf vodka.

“There is a lot of competition for micro-distillery vodka,” he said. “It’s a battle for retail shelf space with similar products.”

He holds two or three tastings a week in retail stores across the state. His vodka has been placed in more than 400 accounts.

Throener has started making whiskey but it will be three years before he has any to sell. It is aging in wood barrels. We are tying a lot of capital into something you don’t know if it’s going to taste good. The goal is to put out a quality whiskey.

“That’s the problem with whiskey,” he said. “I won’t be sure I did it right the first time until I open the barrel and tastes it.”

Throener said he can’t sell directly to stores or customers. In Nebraska the law requires a supplier to sell to a distributor, which then sells to retail locations that then sell to customers. A distributor can’t own a distillery, he said.

He worked at getting into stores first, now getting into bars and restaurants. His vodka has made it into Anthony’s Steakhouse, a steak house icon in Omaha, which is quite a feat, he said.

He is doing the majority of business in grocery and liquor stores in Omaha and Lincoln but is moving into smaller towns around the state. Mom and Pop stores are the heart and soul of his business, he said. He’s looking to expand to those rural retail markets.

“You can’t call the guy that makes Grey Goose,” he said. “You can get in touch with me. I’m accessible to everyone.”

He changed the company logo last year to include a steer skull, which is a nod to his full-time job in agribusiness. He currently works for GSC Livestock in West Point, handling the accounting for cattle.

He said he couldn’t have kept the distillery going without his day job because there is not enough volume at this point.

Most of the distillery business is done at night and on weekends since he has a day job, he said.

He has done a lot of advertising on radio, newspaper and apparel. He uses social media on Twitter, Facebook and a website to reach customers. The best form of advertising is doing hands-on with customers, he noted.

“You have to constantly put yourself out there, wherever you can,” he said.

Most of the work is done by family members who give their time to the business. Throener’s father-in-law, Keith Renter, lends a hand along with Throener’s wife, Karla, and their children, Riley, Reese and Hayden.

“They all play a role in the business, even if it’s just moral support,” he said. “Keith has helped since day one and has been instrumental in the success of the business. Karla gives me marketing ideas and a better understanding of the female perspective because a large percent of buyers are female. I take to heart what she’s telling me.”

It is the type of business he could hand down to his kids if they want to continue. He is still planting the seeds and has yet to see a profit. It takes a long time to gain name recognition but he’s confident that will be done by the time his kids want to take over. He’s proud to say his business is family owned.

Throener was born and raised in rural Cum ing County. He attended Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Neb. and received an electrical degree before getting into the restaurant and bar business.

He is a former director at Cum ing County Public Power District. His father, Ron, used to work for the district as a metering technician.
here is no doubt about it; the cold weather is on its way. Not only is it important to make sure that your heating unit is working properly, but you should check your home to make sure that none of that heat is escaping.

When the weather turns colder, drafts around windows and doors are constantly letting in cool air. Most people will immediately want to raise their thermostat even higher; however, that will cause you to use more energy when you don’t necessarily need to. The best solution is to weather strip your home. This is typically an easy fix that will eliminate energy waste and help you save on your monthly electric bill.

Sometimes drafts are obvious, and other times the openings are much smaller. If you pass by a window or door and feel a change in temperature, something is wrong. Some folks think it means they need new windows, and that could be the case. But for most, spending a few minutes and a few dollars to seal a home adds up to big savings.

Here are two quick ways to find out if heat is escaping from your home. For doors, look for daylight between the door and its frame, if you see even a hint of light in between the two, you need to weather strip that area. For windows, place a piece of paper between the sash and the seal then close it. If you can remove the piece of paper from the window without ripping it, you need to weather strip that area as well.

Here are two quick ways to find out if heat is escaping from your home. For doors, look for daylight between the door and its frame, if you see even a hint of light in between the two, you need to weather strip that area. For windows, place a piece of paper between the sash and the seal then close it. If you can remove the piece of paper from the window without ripping it, you need to weather strip that area as well.

The great thing about all of this is that weather stripping is easy! There is an assortment of materials available to you (like rubber, foam, metal, etc.) and they are all inexpensive. Once you have purchased what you need, keep the following in mind before you begin weather stripping: be sure the surface is dry and clean, measure the area more than once for best accuracy, and apply so that strips compress both sides of the window or door.

To weather strip windows:
- Place the stripping between the frame and the sash.
- Be sure that it compresses the window when shut.
- Check to make sure that the stripping does not interfere with the moving of the window.

To weather strip doors:
- Choose the proper sweeps and thresholds for your door.
- Weather-strip the entire door jamb.
- Make sure the stripping meets tightly at both corners.
- Use a thickness that allows for a tight press between the door and the ground, but one that does not make the door difficult to shut.

More money saving tips:
- If your home uses single pane windows, consider adding storm windows to the exterior as added insulation.
- Replace old cracked caulking. Make sure you use caulking designed for the application. There are different types of caulk for exterior, interior, and bathroom applications; don’t use bathroom caulk on the outside of your home. Also, make sure the caulk can be painted if you want it to blend in with the rest of your home.
- Use insulated curtains to prevent further heat loss.
- Remove window air conditioning units when summer ends.
- Sealing your home can even turn into a fun activity. Have each member of the family explore the house and identify problem areas. Whoever finds the most areas to fix gets to be the foreman while the rest of the family fixes the problems. It’s a fun and simple way to get the entire family engaged as you work together to seal your home and your wallet!

Roughly half of the energy that your home uses comes from heating and cooling. So the next time you feel an uncomfortable draft in your home, do not immediately crank up the heat. Check to find out where the draft is coming from and properly weather strip the area. This will ultimately save you more energy and more money in the end.

Source: National Rural Electric
Electricity theft poses safety and financial concerns

Theft involving electricity and related materials is a problem all electric utilities face—and it’s a problem for electricity customers, too. Since Nebraska is served by public power, electricity theft could end up costing you money. Compensating for electricity theft drives up prices for everyone involved.

Theft of electricity also puts your personal safety at risk. Tampering with an electric meter can make it unsafe and unstable. When people steal electricity, they put themselves, their neighbors, family and pets all at risk for electric shocks, power surges, sparks and fire from exposed voltage. Stealing electrical related materials can also pose a significant risk to the culprit, resulting in injury or even death from exposure to live electricity.

Electricity theft isn’t isolated to rural areas or to big cities. It’s a problem utilities encounter from agricultural operations to housing complexes to business offices from coast to coast. Although electricity can be easily acquired through a utility, some people are still willing to risk physical damage or loss of life just for the sake of some free kilowatt hours. Others may not realize the serious legal and potential health implications. Stealing electricity is illegal under Nebraska law and violates electrical codes.

Keeping power safe and affordable is a priority for Nebraska’s public power districts and electric cooperatives. That is why we routinely inspect meters and equipment, to ensure we’re doing our best to protect you from the risks of electricity theft. We take a proactive approach to this serious problem, eliminating theft and reducing related costs.

You can also play a role in this process, by immediately notifying us if you suspect someone is gaining access to our power supply without paying their fair share of the costs or by tampering with equipment. If you have information related to electricity or materials theft, please call your local rural electric utility. Rest assured, we’ll keep your name anonymous. When people steal from the rural electric utility, they’re stealing from you, too!
At a time when prices on everything seem to be climbing, public power remains a great value. Ten cents won’t get you much in this world, but when it comes to the electricity that we depend on every day, 10 cents can do a lot.

Ten cents will buy you 1,000 watt hours of electricity in Nebraska. That’s enough electricity to run 16 60-watt incandescent light bulbs for one hour. Or it can run 100 similar LED light bulbs for the same amount of time.

Electricity is present in every aspect of our lives, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Nebraska, we enjoy some of the lowest electric rates in the nation. In fact, we consistently rank in the top ten states for lowest residential electric rates, even with recent increases.

Infrastructure upgrades, increased fuel prices, and federal regulation are all driving forces in increasing electric rates. To keep rates as low as possible, rural public power providers have had to work diligently to keep overhead costs at a minimum. In fact, Nebraska’s rural electric systems only employ one individual for every 239 customers, and nearly 70 percent of your electric bill is the cost of wholesale power to rural power districts. This means the delivery of electricity and all of the work necessary to keep your lights on only makes up about 30 percent of your monthly charges.

Nebraska’s public power model has served us well, and the value of public power is apparent in every small town across the state. Your public power district’s or electric cooperative not focused on turning a profit. Instead, they’re helping to make power affordable for you and your neighbor.

On a national average, public power rates are lower than those of other investor-owned utility companies. That’s because local, not-for-profit utilities have the power to put their neighbors first. Keeping energy costs affordable serves every community’s long-term needs, and that’s what public power is all about. Locally owned utilities achieve affordability by setting their rates using citizen-controlled boards that hold public meetings.

Leading the Industry
In looking out for their members, public power districts and electric co-ops lead the utility industry in implementing energy efficiency programs and supplying power from renewable energy and other technologies still in development.

“Rural utilities are on the cutting edge when it comes to testing and deploying new technologies, such as carbon capture and storage, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, and advanced meter reading devices,” notes Troy Bredenkamp, Nebraska Rural Electric Association general manager. “They are also recognized

Visit the website at: www.workingfornebraska.org
industry leaders in promoting energy efficiency to help consumers reduce electricity consumption and save money."

There is no simple, single solution to tackling our nation’s energy challenge, and even exciting new technologies like renewable energy resources aren’t a silver bullet. For example, to fully utilize the potential of renewable energy, at least 30,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines (230 kV and greater) will need to be constructed to move energy generated at remote wind farms and other facilities to urban load centers. This will cost billions alone.

Siting and erecting transmission towers has long been a struggle. Planning and permitting approvals take many years and run a gauntlet of not only federal, state, and local governments but also citizen and environmental activists.

**Nebraska’s rates are cost-based**

Today, we are fortunate our existing generating resources produce some of the cheapest electricity in the country. Gerald Gentleman Station, Nebraska Public Power District’s largest power plant located near Sutherland, Neb., meets all environmental requirements and has some of the lowest input costs in the country.

Nebraska’s utilities will continue to invest in new wind generation over time and if the price is right.

But adding and/or removing power plants isn’t like buying or selling vehicles. A variety of strategic factors must be taken into account when considering the proper time to add to or replace these multi-million dollar, iron-in-the-ground facilities.

Why? Because as a public power entity, it’s our main goal to keep electric rates as reliable and affordable for customers as possible. Our rates are cost-based, there are no profits built into your electric bill. There are no shareholders making decisions about the rates you will pay for electricity. Our focus is simply delivering an affordable and reliable product to you, period.

When you consider customers in Nebraska can get a full day’s worth of electricity to power all of their new mobile devices, appliances, heat and cool their home, etc., for less than the cost of a dozen donuts, it seems as though public power is doing a good job.

Affordable electricity is a great benefit to rural economic development. The lower the energy bill, the more a company can invest in their business and employees.
The latest energy gizmo is a battery, about as big as a medium-size flat-screen TV that looks good enough to hang on a wall in your home. It could supply backup electricity during a power outage. Or, if you’re the kind of person with photovoltaic cells on your roof, you could charge it up from the sun during the day, then run your home at night on stored solar energy.

While this battery will be too expensive for most of us to want in our homes anytime soon, it could lead to innovations in the electricity industry.

“It’s one of the first really major steps of modernizing energy storage systems,” says Andrew Cotter, program manager for renewable and distributed energy research at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

The battery is being made by Tesla Motors, which has formed Tesla Energy to adapt the battery used in its high-end electric cars. Production was scheduled to begin by this fall.

In announcing the Powerwall battery in April, Tesla CEO Elon Musk said, “It looks like a beautiful sculpture on the wall. You don’t have to have a room filled with nasty batteries.”

In fact, appearance and convenience are among the Powerwall’s main advances.

“This is not a scientific or research breakthrough,” says NRECA’s Cotter, who wrote a technology analysis of the Powerwall with technical consultant Doug Danley.

Cotter credits several improvements over other batteries that could help the Powerwall catch on with consumers. Those include the design that makes it easier to place in a home, large-scale manufacturing plans and a higher battery voltage. That higher voltage, says the NRECA analysis, “could be a game changer” because of the resulting increases in efficiency and lower costs.

The announced prices for the Powerwall are $3,000 for a seven kiloWatt-hour model designed to run small home appliances as part of a regular daily routine. A 10 kiloWatt-hour model is designed for providing backup in case of a power outage, and goes for $3,500.

A customer would actually end up paying at least twice those amounts after adding necessary costs like installation and an inverter to change the deep cycle (DC) battery current to household alternating current (AC) electricity.

Those costs for the Powerwall, Cotter says, would move home batteries from “outrageously expensive to just really expensive.”

Cotter adds, “This is the first product, not the last, for making an affordable solar energy system for the home.” He predicts the most immediate use will be by “the guys and gals who like to play with toys. They’ll have a lot of fun hooking up
their photovoltaic system to the battery and seeing how little power they can use.”

Those hobbyists could help bring about other changes in how energy is used, such as the more widespread availability of what are called “time of use” electric rates. Some states and utilities allow lower rates when people are using less electricity, like the middle of the night.

As more options develop for large uses of electricity that aren’t needed immediately, like charging electric cars or home batteries, utilities and state utility commissions could begin making those kind of rates more available. Those different rate structures could also help utilities by spreading demand more evenly through the day.

As the NRECA technical report said, the Powerwall could “accelerate the move towards residential time-of-use and demand-based rates.”

Another reason it will take a while for the Powerwall to catch on, says Cotter, is its limited capacity. The new battery can power small but important electric loads like a computer, refrigerator or medical equipment, but not high-users like central heat or air conditioning.

Cotter says the Powerwall could be used in other utility applications, like adding reliability to sensitive industrial processes, or powering remote or seasonal electricity needs like crop drying.

Because of its cost and limited abilities, Cotter says the Powerwall is still “a luxury good.” But as the NRECA technical analysis says, “The Tesla offering has the usual sizzle associated with the brand, but it also has meat ... We expect Tesla’s high voltage battery will create a market dynamic that will reduce costs and sizes for battery systems, and drive adoption.”

Paul Wesslund writes on cooperative issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation’s 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit public power districts and electric cooperatives.
Take time for an electrical home safety check

With cooler weather here, more time will be spent indoors, and with the comforts of today’s modern home, now is a good time to create a home electrical safety checklist to help ensure a safe winter of indoor activities for you and your family. While some of the benefits include energy efficiency, the most important is family safety.

Helping to make sure our homes are up to the task, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission offers these suggestions, not only to prevent electrical injuries, but to eliminate some of the 140,000 fires in the US annually that are attributed to electricity.

On your home safety checklist, focus on switches and receptacles where contact is greatest. Make sure all switches and outlets are cool to the touch and working properly. Unusually warm switches could indicate a problem and they should be serviced by a qualified electrician. Check to see that plugs fit snugly into outlets. Loose plugs can cause overheating and fires. Ensure that all three pronged adapters in the house are being properly used, with the wire or metal tab on the adapter connected to the center screw of the outlet. Confirm that all outlets have faceplates to reduce the danger of electrical shocks by accidentally sticking a finger or another object into the socket. And place safety covers on all outlets if there are small children in the house.

Check the bathroom to make sure appliances are not plugged in when unattended and that they are in good working condition. Install Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) in appropriate locations like kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms, and garages. Install Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCIs) in appropriate locations elsewhere around the house, and always use a qualified electrician for jobs like these. Make sure that all kitchen countertop appliances are unplugged when not in use and that all cords are clear of hot surfaces like stoves and toasters. Also make sure those appliances are located away from sinks.

- Appliances that generate heat, such as clocks, televisions and computer monitors, should be given several inches of clearance all around for good air circulation and cooling. Do not drape clothes, toys or other items over warm appliances.
- Check extension and power cords for cracked insulation or fraying. Remove them from traffic paths, under rugs or carpeting and not wrapped tightly around any object. This is a good chance to make sure there aren’t any extension cords being used as permanent solutions.
- Inspect the fuse box to make sure fuses are the correct size for the circuit. Turn off and on the freezer, refrigerator, and air conditioner circuit breaker three times annually, to ensure they are not stuck and are in good working order.
- Make sure extension cords that are used outdoors are marked for outdoor use.
- Giving electric blankets the once over to check for any problems. Look for cracks or breaks in wiring, plugs, and connectors. Also look for dark, charred, or frayed spots on the blanket. Any of these conditions indicate a fire hazard and the blanket or pad should be discarded.

Source: Safe Electricity
MS 170 CHAIN SAW  $179.99

Lightweight saw for woodworking tasks around the home
IntelliCarb™ compensating carburetor maintains RPM level

MS 250 CHAIN SAW  $299.99

Reliable homeowner saw with great power-to-weight ratio

BG 55 BLOWER  $149.99

Proven handheld blower at an affordable price
Balancing temps in a two-story home

by James Dulley

Q: We have a new heat pump, but we have a problem keeping all of the rooms in our home comfortable. Someone is always too hot or too cool. What are some simple methods to even out the temperatures throughout the house?

A: The problem you are experiencing is common, particularly in a two-story home – even for the newest heat pump systems. Unless you install an expensive zone-control system with multiple thermostats, your heat pump can only respond to the temperature of the room where the wall thermostat is located.

Numerous factors determine how much heating or cooling is used, and therefore the temperature is affected. These factors can include the number and orientation of the windows, whether the room is located on the first or second floor, the activity level in the room and the length of the duct leading to it.

There also may be differences in the energy efficiency of various rooms, which cause the temperature difference. Leaky windows are a particular problem. When using an air-conditioning system, place an air deflector over the register to help distribute cool air throughout the room.

Check your home’s attic insulation, especially if it is the blown-in type. The insulation can shift during storms, and eventually, some rooms can have two feet of insulation while others only have two inches. This can have a major effect on the room temperature. Even out the insulation as much as possible.

The standard builder-installed sheet metal ductwork often has many leaky spots, so some of the heated or cooled air leaving the heat pump never makes it to the rooms in your home. The joints between the duct segments are the most common areas that leak. Use a high-quality duct tape, such as black Gorilla Tape, to wrap all of the joints. You may find this takes care of most of the problem.

Each room should have a return air register, particularly bedrooms where the doors may be closed at night. Return ducts usually run down between the wall studs inside interior walls, so adding them in problem rooms is not difficult for a contractor to do.

There are many innovative ways to install an additional return duct. For example, in my parent’s older two-story home, the contractor was able to run a return duct down through a never-used laundry chute to the basement.

Check the ducts near the heat pump. If you see short handles on each one, they are for control dampers inside the ducts. When the handle is parallel to the duct, the damper is fully open. Partially close the dampers in the duct leading to the rooms which are getting too much heating or cooling to force more to the problem rooms.

Don’t try closing the damper in the room’s floor or wall registers. First, they typically are leaky, so the air flow will not be reduced by much. Second, because the ducts inside the walls are probably leaky and you have no access to seal them, conditioned air is lost inside the exterior walls.

If these methods do not provide adequate temperature balancing, consider installing duct booster fans. These small fans mount in the ducts to the problem rooms and force more conditioned air to them.

These fans are sized to fit standard round and rectangular residential ducts and can be controlled in different ways. The simplest fans sense when the main blower turns on, and they automatically run at the same time. Others have built-in thermostats to determine when they run. It is best to hire an experienced contractor to handle the installation for you. The fan can be wired into your blower switch to turn on with the heat pump.

A simple do-it-yourself option is to install a register booster fan. This small rectangular fan mounts over the register cover in the room and is plugged into a standard electrical wall outlet. The small fan uses only about 30 watts of electricity, and some models are adjustable to turn on only when more cooling or heating is needed in that particular room.

Send inquiries to James Dulley, Rural Electric Nebraskan, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit www.dulley.com.
Interested in saving energy? There’s an app for that. Home energy use often goes unnoticed because it is largely an intangible good. It isn’t until the monthly electric bill arrives that you get concrete feedback about your energy use. But, because of the delay between energy use and billing, people often can’t accurately account for how specific actions contribute to their overall energy use. This is akin to shopping at a grocery store where customers cannot see the prices of goods and are billed just one time per month in aggregate. However, this is starting to change as more consumers adopt and use home energy monitoring applications.

Calculating how much energy devices inside a home use is not a new concept. The first online tool designed specifically to reduce home energy use—the Home Energy Saver—was introduced in 1996 by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL). The Home Energy Saver and other early web-based tools for energy monitoring lacked automated collection, processing and presentation of energy data, and they were not widely used. Much has changed in today’s options.

Energy monitoring apps essentially come in two flavors. The easiest and least expensive apps, like Energy Tracker and Wiser Home, ask you to provide an inventory of all electricity consuming devices within your home. The information needed will include your home’s size, number of windows and an outlet-by-outlet assessment of everything plugged in. The more detailed and accurate you are, the more accurate the app will be in predicting your energy use and providing practical energy saving tips. Depending upon the size of your home and the dexterity of your fingers, it may be time consuming to input all of this information into your phone or tablet. But these apps can provide useful insight into your energy use. They also tend to be free or cost less than a couple of dollars.

Other apps and software, like TED (The Energy Detective), depend on data from your utility or from sensors installed inside of your home. People should be careful sharing utility account usernames and passwords with apps that are not provided by their utility. Sensors installed in the breaker box or in other areas of the home can provide accurate real time energy consumption information. These products will range in price and may not be right for someone uncomfortable opening their breaker box. Some apps may provide a remote control capability over some devices, such as thermostats or table lamps.

The best source of information on your energy use actually is your local utility. Many offer apps or web services that can help you determine when, where and how energy is being used based on models and your account information. They can also provide energy saving tips and information specific to your area.

Saving energy is not always easy, but the right mix of tools can go a long way when it comes to making educated decisions on how to make an impact. Just be sure to read the fine print.

Thomas Kirk is a technical research analyst specializing in energy efficiency and renewable energy for the Cooperative Research Network (CRN), a service of the Arlington, Va.-based National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.
Party perfect carvings for Halloween

It’s that time of year – jack-o-melon carving time! Watermelon carvings are a fun and different way to show off your spookiest Halloween faces.

Throwing a Monster Mash has never been more fun, and this watermelon carving makes the ultimate centerpiece as the head of Frankenstein. Then round out your party menu with these kid-friendly Watermelon Glazed Meatballs and let the spooktacular celebrating begin.

Before you start carving, check out a few helpful carving tips and tricks:
- The whole watermelon should be at room temperate when you carve to make cutting and slicing easier. Then chill the watermelon after cutting and before serving.
- Cut a small, thin, flat piece from the bottom of the watermelon before carving. This will provide a flat base, making the watermelon more stable when carving.
- Draw the design on the watermelon rind with a fine/medium point waterproof marker or a sharp pencil before you cut.
- Use a sharp knife with a pointed tip – the sharper the knife, the easier and cleaner the cuts will be.

For more wicked watermelon carving inspiration, visit www.watermelon.org/Carvings.
Source: National Watermelon Promotion Board

Head of Frankenstein

Oblong shaped seedless or seeded watermelon
Large kitchen and paring knives
Melon baller
Honeydew
Green dry erase marker
Straight pins or toothpicks
Chocolate wafer cookies, large and mini sizes
Black edible sugar sheets or construction paper
Black licorice strings
Pair of chop sticks
Chocolate covered mini donuts
Spooky decorations

Wash watermelon under cool running water and pat dry. On cutting board, place watermelon on its side and cut 1/2 to 3/4 inch from each end, creating a sturdy base and top portion of carving. Stand watermelon upright.

Scoop out a good amount of red fruit from top of watermelon with melon baller, also using a melon baller scoop a generous portion of honeydew to make fruit salad. Refill top portion of watermelon with balls of watermelon and honeydew.

From ends that were cut off, draw nose with dry erase marker and use paring knife to cut it out. Attach to watermelon using straight pins or toothpicks.

For eyes peel two large and two small chocolate wafer cookies in half. Using sturdy toothpicks or straight pins, attach large cookies with white icing facing out from watermelon and attach small black cookie portion to white icing to create Frankenstein's pupils.

Cut black edible sugar sheets or construction paper half length wise then make zig zag cuts to create hair; attach this to top of watermelon using straight pins.

Use straight pins to attach black licorice to create mouth and stitches randomly on face.

Three-quarters down watermelon on each side of face, insert a chopstick and attach a chocolate covered mini donut to each chopstick to resemble screws in Frankenstein's neck.

Complete carving with additional spooky decorations.
**Watermelon Glazed Meatballs**

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
36 frozen prepared mini meatballs  
1 cup watermelon puree  
(Instructions below)  
1 cup prepared barbecue sauce

Heat oil in large heavy saute pan over medium high heat or electric skillet set on 325°F. Saute meatballs until browned and hot. Reduce heat to low.

To make the watermelon puree, remove seeds from fresh watermelon and cut into large chunks. Place in a blender and process until smooth and well pureed.

Mix together barbecue sauce and watermelon puree. Pour over meatballs and simmer for a few minutes. Serve hot.

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**Crock Pot Enchiladas**

Place the following in crockpot (8-10 hours)

1 1/2 lbs. chicken breast (uncooked) then once cooked, use fork to tear apart  
1 can mild enchiladas sauce  
1 can chopped green chiles  
1 pkg. taco seasoning  
1 can original Rotel  
1 bunch green onions (prepare ahead)  
3 cloves garlic

With 1-2 hours left of cooking add:

1 can black beans (drained & rinsed)  
1 can corn drained

You can serve with rice and top with your choice of shredded cheese, avocados, shredded lettuce, tomatoes, black olives, or sour cream.

Maureen Wesseln, Norfolk, Nebraska

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**One Pot Dinner**

1/2 lb. ground beef  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 cup chopped celery  
3/4 cup chopped green pepper  
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce  
1/2 teaspoon dried basil  
1/4 teaspoon pepper  
2 cups uncooked medium egg noodles  
1 can (16 ounces) kidney beans, rinsed and drained  
1 can (14 1/2 ounces) stewed tomatoes  
3/4 cup water  
1 beef bouillon cube

In a large saucepan or skillet, cook meat until no longer pink, drain. Add onion, celery, and green pepper; cook for 5 minutes or until vegetables are crisp tender. Add Worcestershire sauce, basil and pepper. Stir noodles, beans, tomatoes, water and bouillon. Bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes or until noodles are tender, stirring occasionally. Yield: 5 servings.

Zora Sieck, Garland, Nebraska

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**Cherry Glazed Pork Roast**

1 (6 lb.) pork loin roast  
1 (12 oz.) jar cherry preserves  
1/4 cup red wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons light corn syrup  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg  
1/4 teaspoon cloves

Rub roast with salt and pepper. Place on rack in a shallow pan and bake, uncovered at 325 degrees for 3 hours. Combine remaining ingredients and simmer 2 minutes. Keep warm. After roast has baked 3 hours, spoon sauce over roast and continue roasting to 170 internal temperature, basting several times. Pour remaining sauce over, cut meat.

Marilyn Meier, Pierce, Nebraska
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