

# Holiday cheer is in full swing in the Driftless Region of Southwest Wisconsin



## Lathrops on a hunt for the perfect tree

OPPRIECHT'S TREE FARM was busy following Thanksgiving, with families out enjoying the warm weather and cutting their Christmas tree at Oppriecht's Christmas Tree Farm. The Lathrops were in on the fun too with, front from left, Cooper, Peggy, Jaime and Ben, and back, Quentin Lathrop all joining the hunt for the perfect tree.



## McCullick children speak with Santa

BEAU AND GRACIE McCullick, ages four and three, seemed pretty excited to tell Santa what presents they'd like to receive for Christmas. The two attended the Ferryville Tree Lighting on Monday night with their father, Dustin McCullick of Eastman.

## 'A Hill Country Christmas' warms the heart

A Hill Country Christmas by Michael Barr, Lynn Dean, Gail Kittleson, Gina Lister and Shannon McFarland. Wordsmith Publishing ISBN 979884226144 \$14.79

build a great nation. We share the plight of the plain but hardworking sister in "The Christmas Chivaree" by Lynn Dean. Dean's story, "The Made-Over Christmas", tells how a young widow makes the most of Christmas for her daughter and finds love in a most surprising place. "Lo Nuestro" by Gina Lister is told through the eyes of a young immigrant girl who masters both German and English and impresses a boy who taunts her. And "The Cedar Chopper's Christmas" reveals how a humble, young man changes a wealthy wom-

an forever. All the authors create characters who seem to step off the page. We feel their plight and make it our own. History buffs in particular will enjoy how the authors take from the time of the Alamo to the present day. It would be hard to find a more meaningful gift for the people on your Christmas list.

Michael Tidemann writes from Estherville, Iowa. His Facebook page is author Michael Tidemann.

By MICHAEL TIDEMANN  
If you're yearning for the way Christmas used to be, a Christmas when generations gathered around the dinner table and together unwrapped gifts from under the tree, you'll love A Hill Country Christmas by Gail Kittleson and four other authors.

Kittleson and her husband, a retired Army chaplain, live most of the summer in St. Ansgar, Iowa, and winter in Arizona's Mogollon Rim Country.

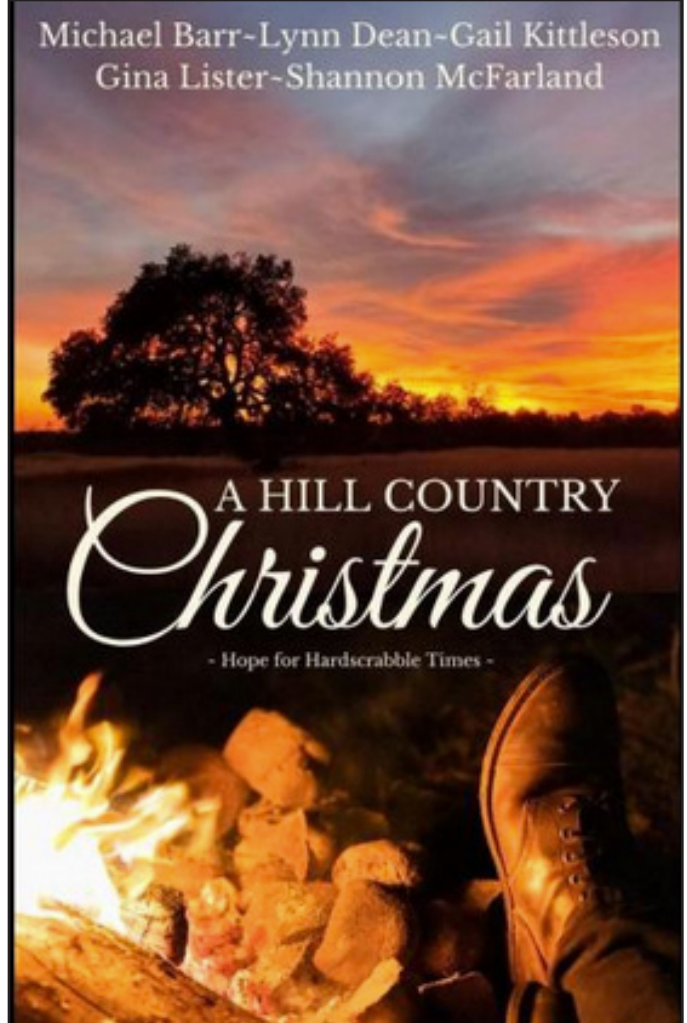
Kittleson wrote eight of the book's 18 selections, more than any of the other authors. Kittleson's description carries us to the heart of Texas Hill Country in her story, "Unto Us A Son Is Given".

A hazy prelude obscures tenuous light soon to peek over the jagged eastern hills surrounding our small settlement. Some believe a more fitting name must be adopted with all haste.

Junction City would serve us best, they say, and my Ezekiel agrees. After all, the North and South Llano Rivers intersect here, forming the Llano River Valley. This confluence played a part in drawing Ezekiel this far west, for in hardscrabble country, abundant water makes all the difference.

The story ends in tragedy, though, as the mother loses her son.

Subtitled Hope for Hardscrabble Times, the book does just that - shows how Texas Hill Country pioneers through sheer grit and gristle withstand the elements and



## Vernon County Energy District plan is judged to be "particularly innovative"

By AMBROSIA WOJAHN

The second segment of the Vernon County Energy District (VCED) 'Rural ReCharge' series was held in Viroqua on November 16.

The VCED is a nonprofit organization working to facilitate energy development, including local ownership and sustainable power solutions. The organization works within Vernon county to connect with individuals and stakeholders, promoting energy-related jobs and projects in the community.

The 'Rural ReCharge' is a speaker and discussion series in which board members and energy enthusiasts give information about the district and its power sources and consumption.

Community members filed into the Vernon County Museum to hear VCED board members present findings from their first year operating in the county.

VCED was born through a federally funded grant program with the Office of Energy Innovation. The speakers outlined the community outreach and implementation that was achieved through that funding.

The presenters gave recommendations on how to reduce usage of fossil fuels and to re-deposit energy expenditures into the community. VCED staff also emphasized the positive impacts of electric-resilient technology such as electric vehicles.

"Our country is rich with smart, inspired, and committed people," VCED president Alan Buss said. "I am more convinced than ever that energy independence and freedom from fossil fuels is completely within our reach."

Tom Nowakowski, a project manager from the Office of Energy Innovation, explained his office's mission and described its role

in funding VCED through a \$78,000 grant in 2021.

"Vernon County's program was particularly innovative," Nowakowski explained, "As far as I know, you are the first and only energy district in Wisconsin, which is a really cool look."

Another quality which sets VCED's program apart is its diversity in stakeholders. Utilities, businesses, and residents have all made contributions. This has boosted the effort by infusing a strong community interest.

This interest is due in large part to VCED's strong initiative to inform the public about sustainable energy.

As VCED program director Kayla Wilson explained, the organization's staff has traveled to community events to have conversations about energy with local citizens. VCED even has a youth outreach program, which travels to schools in the county to help inform students about sustainable energy.

Vernon County currently exports \$76,000,000 each year in energy costs alone. That averages out to around \$10,000 per household of four - a staggering amount for most families.

VCED is working to keep these dollars close to home through local ownership of electric generation.

"Our focus is more on the individual," Wilson stated. Transportation makes up a large portion of each individual's energy usage.

As of 2021, Vernon County had 33,828 registered ve-

hicles, only 47 of which were electric. It was surveyed that 77% of commuters drive alone to work.

This large-scale burning of fossil fuels, not to mention the cost of gasoline, could be greatly reduced by more carpooling and more electric vehicles. Driving an electric vehicle can save around \$310 per month on gasoline.

VCED offers four main services to target those individuals: monitoring, assessments, audits, and electric vehicle test drives, Alan Buss explained.

Energy monitors are devices provided to individuals which can measure the usage of energy in a home. Some 'smart' monitors can even pinpoint the devices that are using the most power.

This awareness is helpful for people looking to conserve power, and can be particularly beneficial for those running on solar power.

Buss used water heaters as an example, as they can use up large amounts of power in Wisconsin households. An alternative to gas water heaters, Buss offered, is a heat pump system. This pump heats the water by moving it around. Using a heat pump system saves enough power annually to power an electric vehicle for 10,000 miles.

Buss wrapped up the meeting with a few more recommendations for sustainable power, including developing a localized electrification guide, keeping a culture of mindfulness and education, and strengthening the pathway to clean energy careers.

**2022 - 2023 Updated U.S. Winter Outlook from CPC**  
December 2022 - February 2023 | 3rd consecutive winter with La Niña in the Pacific

**Seasonal Temperature Outlook**  
Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2022-23  
Issued: November 17, 2022

- Below normal temperatures favored for the upper Midwest
- Substantial early season snowpack across the Dakotas and western Rockies is expected to contribute to cooler than normal temperatures

**Seasonal Precipitation Outlook**  
Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2022-23  
Issued: November 17, 2022

- Trend slightly favors above normal precipitation for much of Minnesota and western Wisconsin
- An active storm track is possible with this trend

National Weather Service - Twin Cities | Weather.gov/TwinCities | Thursday, November 17, 2022 4:00 PM CST

**Ice and snow, ice and snow  
Frozen fields where e'er we go.  
Frozen fields and frozen lakes  
Frosted o'er like wedding cakes.  
Girls and boys leave your toys  
ome and taste cold-weather joys.  
Bring your sleds and bring your skates  
Hasten now while winter waits.  
'Winter Waits,' by Cobb**

Abnormally high feed costs, partly the result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, are ruining organic livestock producers and federal relief payments are vital to keep farmers in business, said organic trade groups and businesses. "A perfect storm of trade disruptions, international conflicts and acute drought conditions has created a situation no farmer could have planned for or foreseen," said the 13 groups in a letter to lawmakers released on Monday. *Fern's Ag Insider*

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