

THE EFFICIENT HOME

EVERY
NEIGHBOR
HAS A

Story

Get inspired by how they save
and spend energy



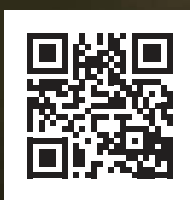
7 Habits to Help Simplify
Your Life and Save



Relics belong in a museum, not your home.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



IT'S GOOD TO HAVE GOOD NEIGHBORS

Somewhere between last year's issue and this one, I started thinking about my neighbors.

The couple down the street who swapped out their old clunker for an EV and haven't been to a gas station in eight months. The renter on the corner who made her apartment dramatically more comfortable without touching a single thing that belonged to the property owner. The guy two doors down who will not stop talking about his robot lawn mower and honestly, fair enough.

There's something about learning how the people around you live that makes the whole idea of living better feel less abstract. Seeing these real-world changes right outside our windows reminds us that sustainable living isn't a distant luxury, but a collection of small, everyday choices. It stops being a checklist and starts being a conversation. That's the spirit we tried to bring to this issue.

Last year, we introduced *The Efficient Home* with a simple idea: Let's get people from good to better. Not perfect. Just better.

That idea held up pretty well, so we're keeping it.

This year, we're simply paying a little more attention to the people next door.

Chicago turns out to be a pretty interesting place to have this conversation. It's a place full of people who take real pride in where they live, whether they own it or not. The road to a more efficient life is less expressway and more neighborhood street. Say you want a cozier living space; there is a path forward that fits your budget and lifestyle. What works for the couple down the block might not work for you. And that's OK.

We just hope these pages give you a reason to look around and find your own version of better. Enjoy, and don't be afraid to share it with your neighbors.

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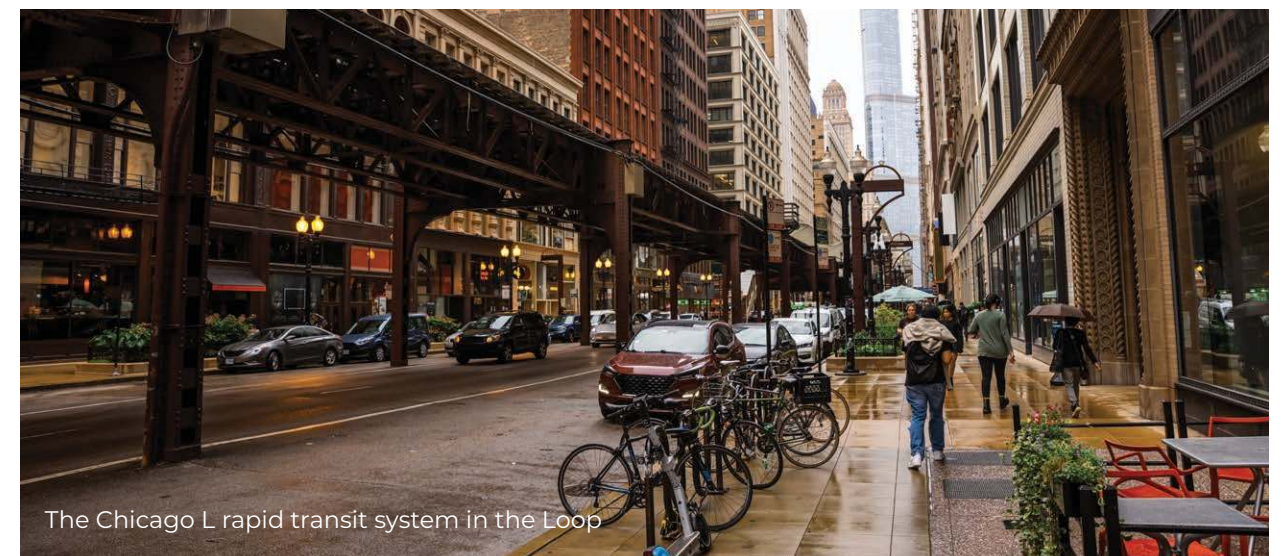
Giulian loves helping others become the best version of themselves. And golf. He started as an intern at ComEd and worked his way through several roles before taking on his current position. He also enjoys saving energy by washing his clothes in cold water. His efficiency advice? With the right energy-efficient appliances, you can save energy without even thinking about it.



KARA SCHWER

**MANAGER,
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Known to her neighbors as "ComEd Kara," our energetic manager is always on the go. Driven by a healthy mix of people, purpose and city life, she loves batch cooking to save time and energy. By cooking in batches, she only uses the oven once and has a healthy, prepped meal waiting for her after enjoying the outdoors, getting fresh air or fitting in a quick workout.



The Chicago L rapid transit system in the Loop

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TIME, ENERGY *(and sanity)* SAVING RECIPES

You have errands to run and dogs to walk. Batteries to buy and split ends to unsplit. With an ever-growing to-do list, time is one thing you can't afford to waste, especially on four-course meals featuring a tasting menu and made-from-scratch desserts. That's why small appliances can be a game changer. They can help you prepare everyday meals more efficiently while using less energy than your stove.



Sun-Dried Tomato and Herb Baked Eggs

Perfect for breakfast, a time when you rarely have a lot of time, these delicious eggs will upgrade your cooking game. You'll need a toaster oven and one ramekin per person. The instructions here are for making two eggs in two ramekins for easy math if you need to make more.

Ingredients

- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup sun-dried tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh parsley

Instructions

Step 1. Preheat toaster oven to 350°F.

Step 2. Coat each ramekin with olive oil.

Step 3. Line the bottom of each ramekin with sun-dried tomatoes and break an egg in each. Sprinkle with fresh herbs, salt and pepper.

Step 4. Bake uncovered for 15–20 minutes until egg whites are firm. Serve immediately.

Buffalo Chicken Wings

You can't go wrong with wings. They're crispy, they're delicious and they require no utensils to enjoy. So, embrace your carnivore messiness and dig into these crowd pleasers. You don't need football season or a tailgate, just an air fryer and an appetite.

Ingredients

- 2 pounds chicken wings
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Black pepper to taste
- Kosher salt to taste
- 1/2 cup hot sauce
- Ranch or blue cheese dressing, for serving

Instructions

Step 1. Wash, then pat the chicken wings dry and sprinkle generously with salt and pepper. Place the wings in the air fryer basket so they are not touching.

Step 2. Set the air fryer to 360°F and cook for 12 minutes, then flip the wings with tongs and cook for 12 minutes more.

Step 3. Melt the butter in a microwave-safe bowl for 1 minute. Whisk in the hot sauce.

Step 4. Toss the wings with the sauce in a large bowl. Serve with dressing on the side.



Chopped Chicken Salad

Let's be honest: Usually, when someone says they're "craving a salad," what they actually mean is they're craving a socially acceptable vehicle for cheese, croutons and a really good dressing. But a certain Chicago eatery cracked the code decades ago. They realized that if you chop everything down to the exact same microscopic size, every single forkful becomes the perfect bite. Normally, you'd have to run out and wait in line for something this delicious. Here's how to make it at home instead.

Ingredients

- 1 cup uncooked ditalini pasta
- 1 pound bacon
- 3 cups chopped romaine lettuce
- 2 cups chopped iceberg lettuce
- 2 cups chopped red cabbage
- 1 cup grape tomatoes, quartered

- 4 green onions, thinly sliced
- 1 cup crumbled gorgonzola cheese
- 2 cups cooked chicken, cooled and diced
- Sweet Italian dressing to taste

Instructions

Step 1. Cook ditalini pasta according to package instructions. Make sure you salt the pasta water while cooking to give it some flavor. Drain and cool. Set aside.

Step 2. Cook bacon in a skillet until done. Let bacon cool, then crumble it.

Step 3. Combine romaine, iceberg, red cabbage, tomatoes and green onions in large salad bowl.

Step 4. Add cooled pasta, chicken, bacon and gorgonzola cheese to salad.

Step 5. Add dressing right before serving.



Cooking that's as
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Induction cooktops heat the pan directly, keeping the surface cooler while using up to 18% less energy than traditional electric models.

With a **\$100 rebate** on select induction cooktop models, we make it easy to bring this energy-saving innovation to your kitchen.



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GO ELECTRIC ON ANY BUDGET



E-Bike + GPS Lock

The city of Chicago was designed for this with the grid layout, the lakefront path and the relatively flat terrain. The area is all set up for a two-wheeled commute, and an e-bike just makes all of it better. The pedal assist handles the headwind off the lake without making you feel like you earned a nap, and most models easily cover a cross-city round trip. Pair it with a GPS-enabled smart lock that tracks your bike in real time and alerts your phone if anyone tampers with it. And biking allows you to keep that killer parking spot the whole block has had their collective eyes on.

The commute upgrade that also doubles as a pretty good excuse to skip the gym.



Robot Lawn Mower

It maps your yard, avoids your dog, cuts your grass, then docks itself to charge when it's done, all while you do literally anything else. It starts every time without a pull cord, a prayer or a trip to the small engine repair shop that's somehow always backed up. It handles the whole job quietly, which your neighbors on both sides will appreciate more than they'll ever admit.

The robot vacuum for your yard, except it actually works on the first try.



Electric Pizza Oven

Chicago has opinions about pizza. So, hear us out. The new generation of electric outdoor pizza ovens reaches 850 degrees, cooks a pie in about 60 seconds and plugs into a standard household outlet. No propane tank, no open flame on the deck, just a rotating stone floor, convection heating elements above and below, and a finished crust that holds its own in any deep-dish-versus-thin-crust debate.

The only appliance that makes you look like a professional without any of the culinary school debt.



Charge At Home, Get Paid Back

Most EV owners charge overnight at home—you wake up full, no pump, no detours. A Level 2 charger makes that even better, and the ComEd Residential EV Charger and Installation Rebate Program helps cover the cost.

- » **Up to \$750** back on purchase and installation for qualifying ComEd residential customers.
- » **Up to \$2,500** for customers who are low income or live in a Low Income Community or Equity Investment Eligible Community.
- » Installation must be completed by a ComEd-approved Electric Vehicle Service Provider.
- » You'll need to enroll in a time-variant rate such as ComEd's Hourly Pricing, ComEd's Delivery Time-of-Day, or a time-variable rate from an alternative retail electric supplier, for a minimum of three years.



ComEd.com/Electric

Electric Vehicle

Today's EVs accelerate fast, handle northern Illinois winters better than they get credit for and cost a fraction of the price per mile compared to gas. And right now, the timing is interesting. The federal EV tax credit ended last year, sending prices down as automakers scrambled to move inventory—some models dropped nearly \$10,000. The used market followed. For anyone who's been on the fence, the math is worth a fresh look.

The most exciting upgrade in your garage has four wheels and zero tailpipes.



Electric Snowblower

Nobody is missing the pull cord, the gas can in the garage or wrestling a machine to life at 6 a.m. in February while the lake wind does what it does. A modern, battery-powered snowblower handles your driveway on a single charge, starts with a button and runs quietly. Which gives you time to think about what you're going to do with all the time you just got back from not fussing with a gas engine.

The machine that starts the first time. Every time. In February. That's the whole pitch.



Wake up to a **full tank** every morning.



Stop planning your life around the gas station and start charging while you sleep. See how an electric vehicle can fit into your home.



Learn more at ComEd.com/EVLife

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5 Ways to Rent Smart

TREND WATCH

Vampires, Hacks and Why You Should Talk to Your Property Owner

As a renter, you may have experienced sharing a wall with a neighbor who “dabbles” in playing the trumpet at 11 at night. Also, as a renter, you’ve experienced the pure, unadulterated joy of never having to spend a Saturday morning at a hardware store debating the structural integrity of a sump pump.

But money-wise, you should forget the outdated myths about renting. In fact, there’s a certain financial brilliance to the lease. Studies show that if you’re planning to stay for less than three years, renting isn’t just a choice—it’s the wiser fiscal move.

Now that we’ve shot down the misconception about renting, let’s aim our sights at another myth—the belief that energy efficiency is a “homeowner thing.” Just because you don’t own the studs in the walls or the HVAC system, it doesn’t mean you’re destined to settle for drafty windows and massive energy use.

Here’s the truth: You don’t need a mortgage to have a high-performance home.

So, take pride in your place, your finances and your energy. Whether you’re in a light-filled loft in the West Loop or a garden apartment in Glenview, efficiency isn’t just about infrastructure—it’s about lifestyle. With insights from the U.S. Department of Energy, here are a few tips that will help you leverage your rental for maximum comfort and minimum cost.

01 The Low-Hanging Fruit

Energy efficiency can start with a single trip to the hardware store.

The “vampire” hunt: Your home office and entertainment center are full of vampire loads—devices that pull power even when turned off. Use smart power strips to kill the vampire power and keep your money in your pocket.

A filter habit: When you change your filters regularly, it reduces the strain on your HVAC and lowers your bill. And if you change your own filter, you’ll look like a rock star renter. Then ask your property owner to reimburse you.

02 The Climate Master

You might not be able to replace the HVAC system, but you can control how to preserve it.

Windows as insulation: In the summer, keep your blinds closed on the sunny side of the apartment to block the “greenhouse effect.” In the winter, let the sun in during the day, but shut those curtains the moment the sun dips to trap the heat inside.

The 1-degree shift: Every degree you lower your thermostat in the winter (or raise in the summer) can save you up to 3% a month on your energy bill. It’s a change you won’t feel in your bones, but you will see in your bank account.

03 Go Electric

Efficiency doesn’t stop at your front door. If you’re a renter, you may have chosen your location for its proximity to work or play. You could consider Chicagoland’s growing EV charging infrastructure or electric public transit options. Reducing your transportation energy is the final piece of *The Efficient Home* puzzle.



04 The ComEd Advantage

Home Energy Savings: This is the perfect hack for energy savings. If you qualify, ComEd will send an Energy Advisor to your rental to identify where you may be losing energy. The best part? They may provide and install energy-saving items—like pipe insulation, efficient-flow showerheads and faucet aerators—at no additional cost to you.

HVAC Tune-ups: Even if you don't own the unit, a struggling AC or furnace can spike your bill. It would be worth your while to get an HVAC tune-up to ensure the system is running at peak efficiency, keeping your costs predictable and your home comfortable. Talking to your property manager about this will make things go smoothly and you'll earn some points by being proactive and caring about the property.

Dehumidifier rebates: Chicagoland summers are notoriously humid. A dehumidifier lowers the moisture in the air to prevent mold and mildew. Purchase an ENERGY STAR® dehumidifier and apply for a ComEd rebate.

Also check [ComEd.com/RenterRebates](https://www.comed.com/renterrebates) for rebates on a variety of ENERGY STAR® appliances.



05 The Conversation

Don't forget that this whole energy efficiency thing is a two-way street. Many property managers aren't aware of the opportunities available to them.

For example, if you live in a building with three units or more, tell them to go to [ComEd.com/MFES](https://www.comed.com/MFES). They may be eligible to receive a free Multi-Family Energy Savings assessment on the building, which includes the installation of energy-saving products at no additional cost.

You can also mention the ComEd Energy Efficiency Program. The program provides offerings like rebates on new high-efficiency appliances that don't just lower your bills—they increase property value and decrease maintenance calls for the owner.

The Bottom Line

You pay for the energy you use. You deserve to get the most out of every kilowatt. By making small, smart adjustments today, you're not just renting—you're investing in your own quality of life. Find more tips at [ComEd.com/Advantage](https://www.comed.com/advantage).



FEATURE

EVERY NEIGHBOR HAS A Story

The people in and around Chicagoland come from remarkably diverse backgrounds, viewpoints and heritage.

Let's get to know a few of your neighbors. These profiles give you a glimpse into their lives, their homes and the energy that powers their hobbies, passions and pursuits. You'll also learn about the steps they've taken to use energy more efficiently for greater comfort, savings and peace of mind—all done with their individual flair.

MEET Vinh



Vinh's story began with a great deal of uncertainty before becoming a classic American dream. His family left Vietnam while his mother was pregnant with him, eventually settling in Chicago. Growing up, his family always rented their homes, making Vinh the first person in his family to achieve homeownership.

"We moved from an apartment into a little townhouse where we all lived together. Eventually, my brother got married and started having kids, so my mom moved in with him to help raise them. My sister moved out around the same time, and shortly after that my girlfriend moved in. We stayed there for a few years."

It was after their first son was born that Vinh's wife decided their rented townhouse had become too small. They needed more space, so they moved to the northwest suburbs and bought the home they still live in today—just in time for the arrival of their second son.

Becoming a first-time homeowner felt intimidating at first.

"It was nerve-racking. I'm going to be honest with you. No one in my family had ever owned a house before. I had a friend who knew the real estate game, and I had her dad come with me to the closing because I really didn't know anything or what to expect. I was only 24 years old when I bought the place. So, I was very nervous at that time."

Once you buy a home, you want to make it your own. One of Vinh's improvements was sparked by a ComEd offer for a smart thermostat. "So, I went, bought and installed it."

“ Growing up, we were always big on making sure you turn the lights off.”

"And that made everything very, very nice. Convenient. Like sometimes I'm lying in bed and think 'Ah, it's too hot.' But I just lower the temperature from the app on my smartphone."

He initially just saw it as a good deal but discovered it was so much more than a bargain.

"I wasn't really thinking about it before. I had this really old, old junky thermostat. It was like this rectangular device that looked very outdated. And then I could get something that looks a little more modern and everything. So, I'm like, 'Oh, let's just do *that*.'"

In the life of a busy dad, every moment counts, so the convenience of Vinh's smart thermostat allowed him to focus a little bit more on his two very active sons.

"My kids, they play soccer. They also do jiu-jitsu. They play the piano."

They both speak Spanish fluently. They learned it in school. Obviously, I don't understand what they're saying. So, I feel like sometimes if they're speaking Spanish to each other, it's like they might be talking about me."

Find out how a smart thermostat can help you save.

Go to ComEd.com/SmartTherm to learn more, including how you can get rebates and discounts up to \$75 on eligible models.



MEET Brian

An engineer at work and a numbers cruncher at home, Brian loves to solve problems. As a homeowner, that certainly comes in handy since he finds inefficiency to be, well, painfully inefficient. Brian really wanted a home that could handle everything the volatile Illinois weather could throw at him. Spoiler alert: He found a way that involved a healthy number of spreadsheets.

"I'm way too analytical, and problem-solving involves about everything I do."

His family appreciates Brian's "engineer brain." For them, it's not something to be fixed or accepted but, instead, something to celebrate. That includes allowing him to tackle everything from the heating and cooling system to making sure they have the cleanest dishes in the neighborhood.

"I'm trying to solve and optimize and fix everything. Like when I load the dishwasher? I don't just load the dishwasher. I have to put everything in the right way. It's because I understand how it works and how the water is sprayed. So, what's the optimal option?"

Brian admits that having his brain in constant problem-solving mode can make it difficult to live in the moment. His way of thinking often requires some adjustments in social situations. He's learned that helping people can often involve a bit of timing and persuasion.



"You need to know your audience. You need to know the person you're talking to and what makes them tick—what motivates them."

And everybody, regardless of scientific awareness or anything like that, they're motivated by saving money."

He doesn't immediately tell people how to use their energy, but he's always on the lookout for people who are receptive to the idea. Once he finds a prospect, he'll start by telling his own story.

"I will share what I have done and why. I also talk return on investment."



“Everybody loves to save money. So that’s a great way to start.”

"Like solar panels for me were a massive no-brainer, just financially, if you have the upfront funds to do it. I put solar panels on to save money."

Brian also admits that he tends to overanalyze things a lot.

"We did the heat pump because I was able to gather enough information, analyze it and make a decision. My wife is different. She just wants to save money."

She wants it to be efficient. She wants it to be comfortable. But she doesn't want to analyze it. She doesn't care what the SEER rating is."

That's OK. Brian's wife isn't alone. Most don't know that SEER stands for Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio, which measures the cooling efficiency of an air conditioner or heat pump over a typical season. He understands that pooling their knowledge as a team is the best way to make a joint decision.

Find out how a heat pump can help you save.

Go to [ComEd.com/HeatPump](https://www.comed.com/HeatPump) to learn more, including how you can get rebates up to \$2,000 on eligible models.

MEET Arti & Shaun



“We get weekly emails and it tells us how much energy we’ve saved and that’s a really nice feature.”

A midwestern pair that met online, Arti was originally from Missouri but followed her family up to the Chicago area. Born and raised here, Shaun went away for college and was drawn back to the area after graduation. Now, Arti and Shaun are settled in the northern suburbs. And they love their proximity to Chicago.

There’s something for everybody, Shaun says, “Chicago is a big city. There’s a little bit of everything. You have all the concerts and sporting events—things like that. But we’re both into hiking and bird watching in the outdoors. So it offers the best of both worlds.”

“We love nature, we love nature a lot,” Arti adds. “I mean, I grew up in the sticks. So, I was basically outside every day, all day, just growing up.

Even before I met him, I would go camping with friends. We would go hiking—all the things outside. That’s pretty much been my motto.”

Their love of the environment easily led them to wanting to reduce their carbon footprint. They not only use an ENERGY STAR® clothes washer but recently upgraded to a smart thermostat.

“We have the new washer now. That was the first move and then we upgraded to a smart thermostat. The rebate on the washer had a little printout that said ‘make sure you go to ComEd.com’ since there’s a rebate program. And they told us about the program a little bit. We also got an email.”

The rare moments when they are inside, they focus on their energy consumption. The couple gets weekly emails that keep them up to date on saving opportunities. Some even tell them how much energy they’ve saved.

The washer led to their ENERGY STAR® smart thermostat purchase which automatically adjusts to their schedule, helping them use less energy without sacrificing comfort. So, while they’re out bird watching or enjoying the great outdoors, their AC won’t be working hard to cool an empty home.

They see the difference in their bill, too. That being said, they don’t really crank up the heat in winter, or the AC in the summer.

“We kind of try to be a little bit flexible,” Shaun adds. “Getting a break on our bill was nice,” he says. “But also, we both care about the environment and try to be environmentally conscious. So, it’s a great way to save money and still do something to help protect the environment.”

Find out how an ENERGY STAR® certified clothes washer can help you save.

Go to ComEd.com/Washer to learn more, including how you can get rebates up to \$40 on eligible models.

YOU HAVE 1,000 THINGS TO DO. HERE ARE 7 HABITS TO SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE AND SAVE.

According to a recent study, habits account for nearly 45% of our behaviors on any given day. So, in the spirit of making things better, let's jump in and cover several habits that will help you, your hectic schedule and your bank account.

TIME-**SAVING** HABITS

Create a cleaning schedule.

To prevent your cleaning tasks from feeling overwhelming, take one thing at a time. The best way to keep your cleaning from getting out of control is to create a schedule. When you assign a specific task to a specific day, things won't build up. This way, you'll jump on a quick job—like cleaning the bathrooms on Tuesdays—and you stay on schedule. This approach also prevents that feeling of dread on a Saturday morning when your entire place is a wreck, and you cower under the covers in fear of spending an entire day cleaning.



Automate household tasks.

Consider using automated devices like a smart doorbell, robotic vacuums and a smart thermostat to lighten your load. That's what technology should do: improve your life.



Optimize lawn and garden care.

Garden and lawn care can be very therapeutic. Studies have shown that gardening can help your mental and physical health. That being said, like anything, you can find a way to get a benefit beyond mental health.

One option is to shift from peonies and bugleweed to tomatoes and strawberries. Growing your own fruits and vegetables can be a great way to have a hobby that helps out with your bottom line. It's also a great way to spend time with your kids—if you have a few of those—and teach them about healthy living and eating. Also, side note: If your kid grows kale, they will eat kale. Another option that can be a real time saver is a smart lawn mower. Take the principle of a robot vacuum, except they look more like a lawn mower without a handle (if you squint) instead of an overgrown hockey puck.

ENERGY-**SAVING** HABITS

Use a smart thermostat.

What makes these clever devices so fantastic is their learning capability. You won't be constantly monitoring your thermostat because the thermostat is monitoring itself. You no longer need to program the thermostat to adjust temperatures when you're away or asleep. This will also greatly reduce the totally epic "Thermostat Wars" in your home. While battling over the home's temperature is fun, letting a thermostat take over will save you time and energy.

Learn more. Visit [ComEd.com/SmartTherm](https://www.comed.com/SmartTherm).



Switch to LED bulbs.

You'll be saving both energy and time again on this one. And when it comes to time, it's a pretty big deal. A good quality LED bulb can last three to five times longer than a compact fluorescent lamp and up to 30 times longer than an incandescent bulb. That means years, sometimes decades, depending on the usage, between the oh-so-fun activity of changing bulbs.

So, the next time you're buying a bulb, get one that will last. It'll save you time and energy and reduce trips up a rickety ladder to change another dead bulb.



Seal windows and doors.

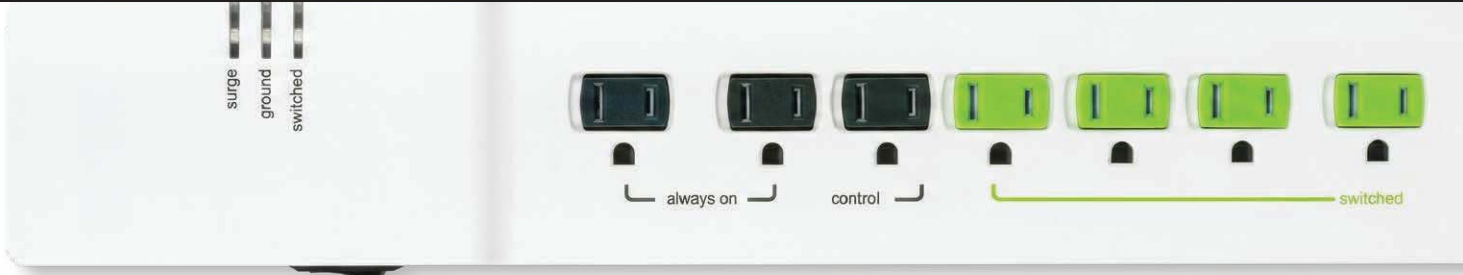
We know you hear the most cost-conscious of your relatives in your head complaining every time you open a door and let those outside temps sneak in, but that relative could be on to something. By preventing drafts, air leakage and improperly installed insulation, you could save on the energy used to heat or cool your home. Sealing gaps has

the added benefit of increasing the efficiency of your HVAC system, saving you the time and money it takes to purchase a replacement and the time it takes to frantically run around your home closing doors and windows, thinking every degree preserved can save the day.

Learn more about discounts on weatherization products. Visit [ComEd.com/SmartHabit](https://www.comed.com/SmartHabit).

DID SOMEONE SAY FREE?

When it comes to improving efficiency and comfort, nothing beats a good Home Energy Savings assessment to help you find ways to save. As a qualifying single-family homeowner, your Energy Advisor will test your home's insulation and install FREE energy-saving products. Find out more at [ComEd.com/FreeStuff](https://www.comed.com/FreeStuff).



Grab a smart power strip.

The bad news? There's something called Vampire Power and it's when your many electronics go into standby mode, quietly sucking out your energy from your outlets, even when they're not being used. The good news? You can pick up a smart power strip that can detect standby mode and fully turn off your devices automatically. This can save you the time and discomfort of shimmying under your desk in your home office trying to unplug that printer you use once every

week to 10 business days to save money. Yes, you might've found that lucky pen you've been searching for under that desk, but in the long run, it's not worth your time. Get a pencil holder and a smart power strip. You don't have time for that mess.

So, get into the habit of saving time. Building a new habit is like building a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger you'll get. Try to get just a little better each day. It's the perfect way to build up a little habit momentum.

YOU'VE GOT THIS

THE ENERGY DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW

As an efficiency expert, ComEd's energy doctor Kara has made a career out of helping people. From leaking windows to drafty attics, she finds the best treatments for countless homes—and she's got some advice for yours.

How did all this start?

When the team asked me to be an energy doctor, I jumped at the opportunity because I felt like it would be really fulfilling for me to share some things that I've learned just working with the engineers and team here.

So you didn't go to energy medical school? You don't have an undergraduate degree in Energy Savings?

No. We go air quotes on the doctor. I do not have a PhD, I wish. So it's more of just a term that they came up with. I think it was all the engineers that made up the team and then it kind of expanded into my job as well.



“ I love helping customers make their homes more comfortable and energy efficient.”



What are some of the most common things you see that are causing energy efficiency issues?

The most common issue we find in the field during high bill complaint visits is that some equipment is running constantly without the customer knowing. This constant operation leads to high energy usage. Electric space heaters, furnace fans, sump pumps, well pumps, dehumidifiers, humidifiers and rooftop ice melters are often the common culprits.

For someone who is just starting out and wants to make their home more energy efficient, what are some of the first things that they should do?

The first thing I would recommend is visiting [ComEd.com/SaveAtHome](https://www.comed.com/saveathome) to find out about rebates and discounts that are available for energy efficiency improvements.

Start with the easy things and then you can move on to the more complex things, such as adding insulation or replacing windows and doors.

What do you think is the biggest barrier to homeowners making energy efficiency improvements?

I think the biggest barrier is definitely cost. Energy efficiency improvements can be expensive and many homeowners just don't have the money to make them. So that's why we offer a variety of programs and incentives to help homeowners make improvements to their homes. We offer rebates and discounts to help homeowners offset the cost of making improvements. We also offer free energy assessments to qualifying customers to help figure out what improvements they may need to make.

What's your favorite part of your job?

My favorite part is definitely seeing the difference that I make in people's lives. Whether it is giving them tips that show them small things they can do or sharing details about the ComEd Energy Efficiency Program offerings, I know I am doing my part to help them save.

Consult a ComEd Energy Doctor if you have concerns regarding a higher electric bill at [ComEd.com/EnergyDoc](https://www.comed.com/energydoc).

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

Omar Torres-Kortright of the Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center has a vision for the future.



SRBCC
SEGUNDO RUIZ BELVIS CULTURAL CENTER

As the executive director of the Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center, Omar Torres-Kortright carries the weight of the center's legacy with courage and conviction. Part responsibility, part opportunity, his job is to make the center survive and thrive during changing, challenging times.

We hear you have a story.

The Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center is 55 years old this year, making it the longest-standing Latine cultural center in Chicago. That's significant. The concept grew out of the activism of the civil rights movement.

There were many Latine organizations, but none really catered to the connection between Latin American and African cultural movements here in the Chicago area. Our founders wanted to create an organization that was arts focused while also being socially conscious and committed to strengthening that connection between Latinos and the African American community. That's why we've always emphasized artistic traditions with African roots, like bomba, plena, salsa and jazz.

Many of our performing arts programs continue that focus on Afro-Latine culture. Today, our work is divided into two main areas. One is investing in young creatives through our apprenticeship and internship programs.

Every third Friday of the month, experienced young musicians come together in Humboldt Park's California Clipper to perform with some of the best musicians in Chicago, including touring, Grammy-nominated and Grammy-winning artists. They've also traveled to Puerto Rico to perform at the Ventana al Jazz Festival.

We also support professional artists through our monthly artistic series, presenting performances that are either free or very accessible to the community. The series is multidisciplinary, featuring film, music, visual arts and many forms of performance. The space serves as an artist residence, a cultural hub and a place where both young people and professional artists can develop their craft.

When did you begin interacting with the center?

For me, it's very personal. Because I was one of those young people 26 years ago. I had just moved from Puerto Rico and I was looking to connect with the Puerto Rican community here and with the Latine community in general. And one of the things that I really wanted to do was to play the music to learn how to play percussion from the Caribbean.

I ended up being completely embraced because I was so enthusiastic and I was so passionate about it that I got hooked. I got completely hooked. I was a young man and enjoyed my first opportunities on stage and playing in festivals.

I did that for a little bit, but then I saw that my calling was less of being an artist on stage and more being a person that helps with the production. I became a person that helps connect people, that brings the resources that are needed for the projects. So, I made a big change in my career.

I was 23 when I started, I had been in the U.S. maybe a month or two. I've been connected to the organization for 24 years now, with the last 11 years as executive director. I live and breathe this, you know?

That's what everyone's after, right? To get paid for their passion?

Yeah. I do realize that in many ways I'm happy—and that it is historically a particularly difficult time for small arts organizations. We're moving

from the post-pandemic time, which was actually when we were very much appreciated and now it's basically the opposite and it happened all very quickly. So, it's all very difficult to digest and very difficult to survive in these times, for sure. So, it's just the reality, you know?

When did your energy efficiency become a priority?

I do manage the lighting and I'm now looking at stage lighting. Basically, we were operating with mostly incandescent bulbs and we had these big stadium-like lights that are not really very conducive for performances.

Now we have LED fixtures and dimmers, which have introduced a completely new way of looking at the space, but more than anything the efficiency, and the fact that you're doing something good for the planet too. You have to depend less and less on energy every day so that you can be contributing to the planet. And using as little energy as possible because everybody needs it. So, I'm very happy that we made that move, for sure.

Do you feel the money saved has empowered you a little bit?

Yeah, for sure. I know that the bills are less. We might be busier in certain months and it's hard to put an exact number at the moment to it. But I can tell you that yes, for sure as everything else is going up, the fact that we've been able to contain that has been very significant.





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How did ComEd step up and help?

It's interesting because I've been connected to ComEd in one way or another through their community programs. We've done work with them for a very long time, but what kind of reminded us was this company called Verde (a ComEd Energy Efficiency Service Provider).

They approached us and asked, "Hey, why aren't you taking advantage of these programs? This is a great opportunity." So, basically, that was the way that I was reminded because I've always been connected to ComEd through other programs.

How do you juggle being an artist and being an administrator?

I very much take very seriously the work that I do as an administrator and reserve some distance between the work of the artist and the work of the administrator. But I think, yes, I have a perspective of the artist because I've been in that situation. Right now, I'm working on a documentary, so that's obviously a creative process and it's a personal project of mine. And I think that for small arts organizations, if you give up immediately because everything is telling you to give up ... the roadblocks are like coming from left and right. I think that connecting with those struggles and understanding where the artist comes from is key. And when you decide to keep going regardless, it pays off. I think that's been the story of this organization for 55 years; if our ancestors had given up when they sent the cops because they were being too loud with their drums or they wanted to kick them out of the neighborhood, or when they experienced racism

and prejudice ... they kept going. So, I think it's that resilience that is very similar.

When your time comes, what legacy do you want to pass on to the next person?

Yeah. I think that just giving ... obviously the history is just so rich of this center. Ruiz Belvis. And the name is after an abolitionist, so that obviously means a lot. But this moment I think for small arts organizations it is just to continue their work in proper conditions. I think that there shouldn't be a reason why artists get paid less or they're underpaid. I don't think that there's a reason why teaching artists need to get underpaid because everybody's struggling and the economy is bad. I think that we have to hold that line and in my career that's what I've been trying to do is to bring the level and the standard as high as possible with the resources that we have. Even though we're very small and have very small budgets, we prefer not to go into a project if that means that the artists are not going to get paid what they should get paid.

So, I think that level of professionalism and understanding that everybody needs to make a living is the most important standard.

By upgrading the lighting, Omar was able to save significant expenses for his organization in an environment where every dollar counts. See how you can save with energy efficient upgrades to your business at [ComEd.com/BizUpgrades](https://www.comed.com/BizUpgrades).

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