



# CONNECTIONS

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## Save with Energy-Efficient Holiday Gifts and Tips

Before you purchase all of the latest and greatest gadgets for your friends and family this holiday season, take some time to consider gifts that deliver the best “bang for the buck” when it comes to energy savings! Here are some of our top picks for gifts that keep on giving, as well as a few tips to save energy around the house:

**Cordless Power Tools** — Cordless screwdrivers, drills and saws, as well as yard tools like lawn mowers, and leaf blowers equipped with ENERGY STAR battery chargers, use about 30 percent less energy than their corded counterparts.

**Programmable Thermostat** — A programmable thermostat can save nearly \$200 per year in energy costs. Some can even “learn” your family’s schedule to provide more personalization. Perhaps best of all, many smart thermostats now allow you to adjust your climate controls, remotely, from a smart phone.

**Motion-Sensor Power Strips** — A power strip may seem like a boring gift, but you can now purchase models that switch on and off as you enter or leave the room. This keeps electronics from wasting energy when not in use and eliminates the need to hit the red power button all the time.

**Pressure Cookers** — Pressure cookers are, by far, the most energy-efficient way to cook. Not only do they heat up faster, they can cut energy by as much as 70 percent.

### Energy-Saving Tips:

- Plug holiday decorations into a programmable timer. You can avoid forgetting to turn them off and using unnecessary power.
- Switch to LED light strands. They use about 80 percent less energy than conventional strands and last much longer.
- Don’t be afraid to place more than one dish in the oven at a time. Just be sure to leave room around each one for heat to circulate.

For more energy saving tips, visit [www.ouc.com/conservation](http://www.ouc.com/conservation).



## Manage Your Account — Even On The Go

**MyOUC** is a mobile-friendly way to manage your OUC account quickly, even from your smartphone. To sign-up, just go to [www.ouc.com](http://www.ouc.com) and click the Register Now button to set up your profile. You’ll need your OUC account number and the PIN located at the top left of your paper bill to get started. Once you’ve created your username, password, and picked your security questions, you’ll have access to all of our online features. It’s really that simple!

## Convenient Places To Pay

OUC works with several businesses around town to make paying your bill quick and easy. These partners include Amscot along with convenience and grocery stores throughout Central Florida like Walmart, Publix and Winn Dixie. The best part is you don't have to wait for the payment to post to your account. It is credited immediately.

To find a convenient payment center near you, visit [www.ouc.com/paymentcenters](http://www.ouc.com/paymentcenters). Please note that vendors charge a small fee for these transactions, but OUC does not receive any portion of that fee.



## Earned Income Tax Credit

This year, Central Floridians may qualify for a tax refund of up to \$6,242 through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). If you worked for at least one day during the past year, you may be eligible. The EITC credit is easy to claim.

**Heart of Florida United Way** has partnered with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program to offer free tax preparation sites for qualified residents. VITA staff will help you apply for the EITC, file your taxes and get you 100 percent of your refund—for free!

To qualify for EITC, you must meet the following requirements:

- Have worked during the past year and earned income;
- Have a valid Social Security number, U.S. citizenship, or resident alien status all year, or you are a non-resident alien married to a U.S. citizen, or a resident alien filing a joint tax return;
- You earned less than \$54,000 in 2015.

If you did not claim the EITC during the past three years, that could result in a more than \$20,000 tax refund to you. To find out if you qualify for EITC and to locate a free tax preparation site near you, call **2-1-1**, visit [HFUW.org](http://HFUW.org), or text **898-211** and type My Money in the message. If you prefer to file your own taxes online, go to [MyFreeTaxes.com](http://MyFreeTaxes.com) to get FREE assistance.

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