

The

Communicator



MARCH/APRIL 2021

VIRTUAL LEARNING

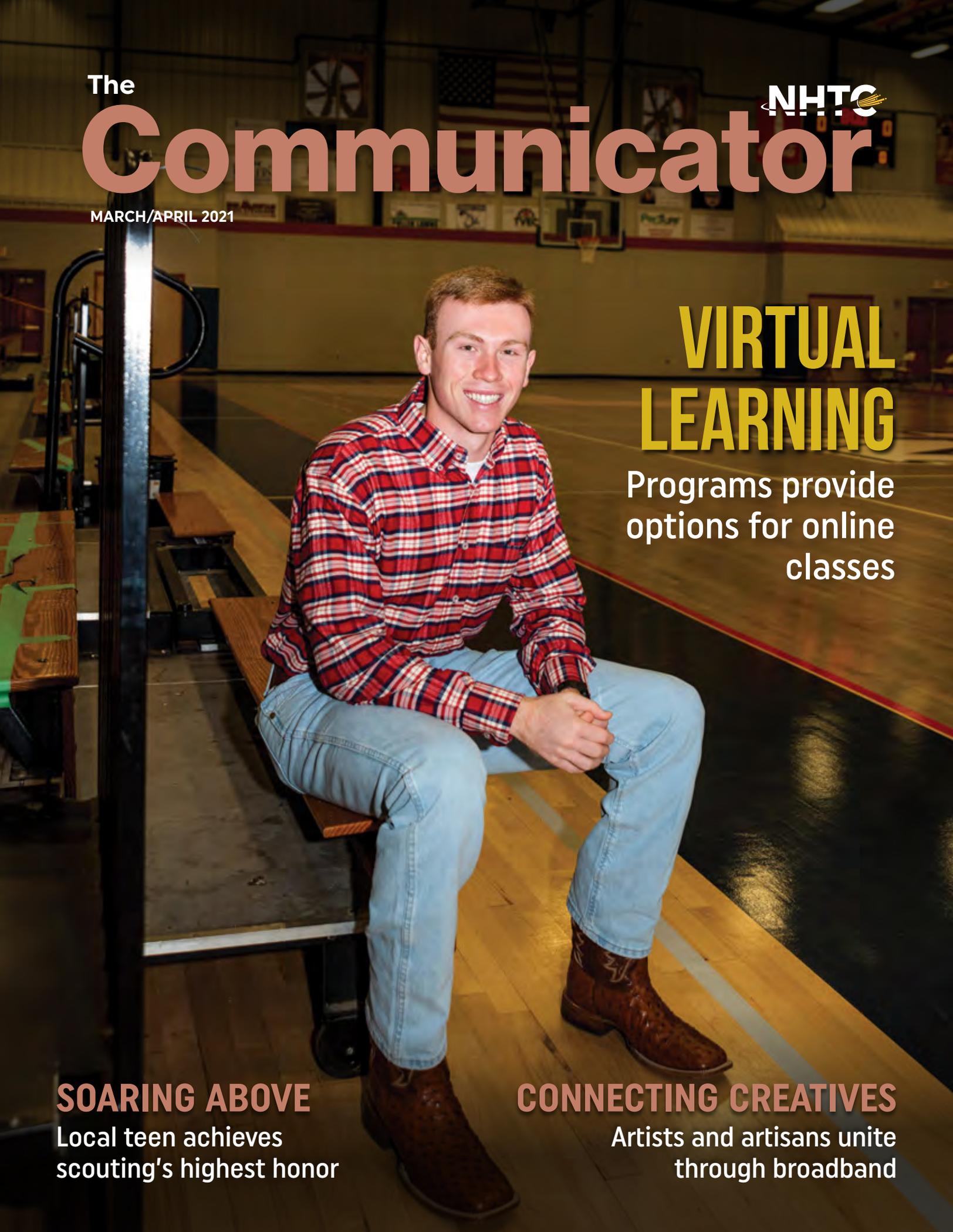
Programs provide options for online classes

SOARING ABOVE

Local teen achieves scouting's highest honor

CONNECTING CREATIVES

Artists and artisans unite through broadband





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO

NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

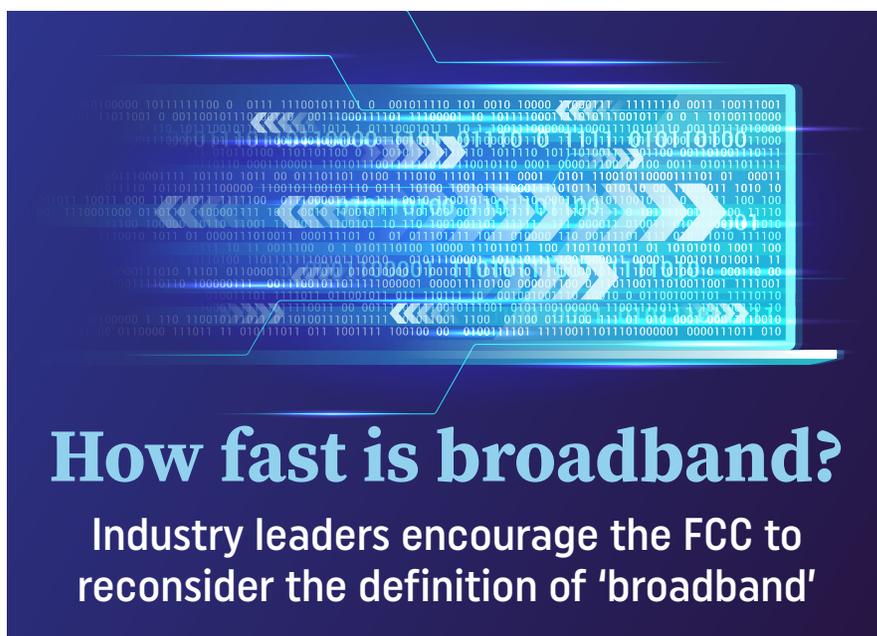
Here's to hope in 2021

The pandemic has made it clear that every American needs broadband to thrive. We need it for work, for school, for health. And we need it for accessing government services, for growing businesses and for building communities. If there is a silver lining to 2020, which was a hard year for so many, it's that more people are now acutely aware of the essential nature of broadband services.

The new year brought new challenges, many of them playing out at our Capitol, a building I've had the honor of visiting many times to talk to members of Congress about the need to support broadband for all of America. But I choose to have hope that better angels of our nature will guide us to rebuild, and I believe NTCA and our members have an opportunity to help that rebuild with the work that we do supporting broadband connectivity and other critical services for rural communities.

The hard-working members of NTCA have made so much progress in the past decade toward solving the rural broadband challenge. There is much work yet to do, but I have hope in the progress they are making. Through federal and state funding programs, coupled with local investments by providers themselves, we are on our way as a country to connecting everyone.

There is a day in our future when we can say that everyone who needs or wants a broadband connection has access. That day is coming, sooner than later. I have hope. 📶



By STEPHEN V. SMITH

We as a nation need to rethink what is considered true broadband connection speeds. That's the message telecom industry leaders recently sent to the Federal Communications Commission.

NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association joined with the Fiber Broadband Association in sending a letter to the FCC in December addressing the definition of broadband. The letter came as the FCC prepares its next report to Congress on the state of broadband deployment in America.

For the past five years, the FCC has considered any connection speeds of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload to be the benchmark for broadband.

“By any measure, this benchmark does not reflect what American consumers need today, let alone tomorrow,” wrote NTCA CEO Shirley Bloomfield and Fiber Broadband Association President and CEO Gary Bolton.

In urging the FCC to redefine what speeds are considered broadband, Bloomfield and Bolton wrote that “while all Americans would be best

served by the Commission adopting a gigabit symmetric benchmark ... it should at least raise the minimum broadband performance benchmark for the Sixteenth Broadband Deployment Report to 100/100 Mbps.”

Raising the definition, a benchmark that impacts funding decisions and technology choices, would put the country on a path toward ensuring all Americans have broadband access that actually meets their needs, the letter states. With millions of people using broadband at home to work, participate in school and attend doctor appointments, broadband has become essential to everyday life.

Bloomfield and Bolton further concluded that redefining broadband would allow the FCC to “keep pace with broadband service that Americans both need and want,” while providing “a benchmark the Commission can then use to ensure that we build our networks right the first time by driving investment in future-proof broadband infrastructure.” 📶



To hear an interview with Gary Bolton on this and related topics, visit www.RuralBroadbandToday.com, or search for “Rural Broadband Today” on your favorite podcast app, Spotify or Amazon Music.

The price of entertainment

Consumers can tap into a rushing stream of content delivered across devices ranging from TVs to smartphones. Sports, news, movies, comedies, dramas, music — the list of options is seemingly endless.

But there is a cost. And for many consumers that price increases each spring. If you have it handy, take a moment to review a bill for your TV programming from three years ago. Compare it to today, and in most cases the difference is obvious — television programming is pricier.

The increases are not limited to traditional cable TV providers either. Streaming services have seen prices spike, too. When Google launched YouTube TV, the monthly price was about \$35. Now, it's \$65.

In cases such as Google, as well as other providers, adding new, desirable content channels helps drive the increases. For traditional networks, investment in higher-quality programming has become essential to compete with streaming services like Netflix, Amazon and HBO Max. Those costs are then passed on to cable providers and their customers.

But more content is not always the root

cause of the higher prices. In fact, for many providers, such as the rural communications companies serving much of America, the increasing cost of content is an annual struggle to hold prices down. It's not a push to increase profits, and their efforts to control prices illustrate the give and take behind what you see on your bill.

For these companies, only a small portion of a monthly television subscription fee goes to personnel costs, equipment upgrades and tasks such as equipment maintenance. So, where does all the money go?

Much of the cost is wrapped up in agreements allowing TV providers to bring content to you. Networks like ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox regularly renegotiate these agreements. In many cases, these are annual negotiations.

A 2019 analysis of cable TV rates by Consumer Reports found that while advertised rates generally increased by 3% to 4% annually, fees for the major networks and channels airing live sports climbed between 8% and 10% each of the previous four years.

How are those rates determined? Essentially, the TV provider must pay

networks a fixed fee for each subscriber of the service. But each year there are fewer traditional TV subscribers to carry that load. In 2020 alone, about 6.3 million people dropped their cable or satellite TV service, according to investment research firm Moffett Nathanson.

Without an expanding subscriber base to offset these increasing costs, TV providers often pass the expense on to consumers in the form of fees added to advertised prices, according to the FCC's 18th Annual Video Competition Report.

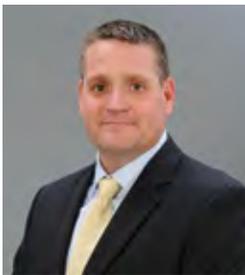
When it comes to these hidden costs, there is one bright spot for consumers. The Television Viewer Protection Act passed at the end of 2019 requires cable and satellite companies to disclose the total monthly price of subscribers' TV bills, including all individual fees and charges, when they sign up.

That transparency won't make your bill any lower. But it will give you an accurate picture of the full cost of your monthly TV bill. 🗨



Excessive fee increases force NHTC to discontinue video service

For years, NHTC has fought on behalf of our customers against fee increases imposed by content providers. Unfortunately, due to unrelenting price increases from these providers, NHTC has been forced to discontinue our TV service, effective June 30, 2021.



DANIEL MARTIN
General Manager

NHTC has always been transparent with our customers regarding the struggle of negotiating network agreements. Network providers have tremendous leverage when structuring deals with companies like NHTC — requiring the purchase of a bundle of channels, even demanding that these channels be included in specific packages — for the rights to broadcast the few popular channels they offer. Essentially, these providers tell us what we must pay per subscriber, and if we choose not to pay their excessive fees, then we cannot carry their networks.

Some years, NHTC absorbed the fee increases. In other years, the increases were so excessive, we were forced to pass them on to you, our customer. Since 2013, average retransmission fees have spiked more than 791%, from just under \$3 per NHTC subscriber to more than \$25 per subscriber in 2021 — and that is for local programming alone. Because this upward trend in content costs does not appear to be going away in the near future, NHTC board and management members decided that TV service is no longer in the financial best interest of our cooperative or our customers.

Please understand that this decision was not taken lightly. Much thought was put into what this would mean for our customers. We understand your frustration when we are forced to increase the rates for our television packages, and we would have once again been forced to increase rates had the decision not been made to discontinue the service. Also, there are many other, more affordable options available for programming. We believe this is the best decision for all.

We wanted to make sure that our customers had another option for their programming, so we are excited to let you know that we are partnering with DISH Network and Sling TV. This partnership allows our customers to continue enjoying their favorite programming through DISH satellite or Sling TV over our dependable broadband network.

Please visit the TV tab on our website — nhtc.coop — for more information. 

The Communicator is a bimonthly magazine published by NHTC, © 2021. It is distributed without charge to all cooperative members/owners.



is a member-owned corporation dedicated to providing communications technology to the residents and businesses of New Hope, Grant and Owens Cross Roads.

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On the Cover:



Junior Hudson Hill studied virtually at New Hope High School during this school year. See story Page 12.

SAVE THE DATE!

It will be **BUSINESS UNUSUAL** this year for the
NHTC Drive Thru Annual Meeting!

Members can still vote by secret ballot for board members and register for door prizes at the NHTC Annual Meeting.

Don't miss it — **May 17-21, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

Stay tuned for more details!



NHTC wants to help two local graduating high school seniors with college expenses. One student each from the Kate Duncan Smith DAR School and New Hope High School will receive a \$1,500 scholarship from NHTC.

To be eligible to participate in this program, applicants must:

- Be a graduating high school senior from either DAR or NHHS.
- Have at least an overall B average.
- Have a parent or guardian with active NHTC service.
- Complete the application process.

Scholarships go to students who exemplify academic achievement and community involvement. Applications are available at nhtc.coop, from school guidance counselors and from NHTC's business office at 5415 Main Drive, New Hope.

Don't miss out on this opportunity! The deadline to submit an application is **April 9**.

SPRING FORWARD!

Don't forget to set your clocks ahead! Daylight saving time starts at 2 a.m. on March 14.



A rider navigates the Tunnel Trail in Sumter National Forest.

TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR RIDE

How to safely blaze the ATV trails

Story by ANNE P. BRALY

In coming weeks, ATVs and other off-road vehicles will come out of hibernation, and riders will be hitting the trails more than any other time of year. There's something about early spring that makes for great riding — cool mornings, mild afternoons, pleasant evenings, new growth appearing all around you. They all come together to make an ideal day as you ride trails through the forests of the South.

"I think the best part about riding is getting to see so much of the forest and so many different habitats in a short period of time," says David Baldwin with the U.S. Forest Service at South Carolina's Francis Marion National Forest. There's one main thoroughfare, the Wambaw Cycle Trail, that's 40 miles long with two different loops — one north and the other south.

"Within a 19-mile section of the north section, you'll witness Carolina Bay trees, hardwood ponds, longleaf pine stands and a variation in terrain that is rare in the low country," Baldwin says.

But if you're new to the sport, how do you know which all-terrain vehicle is best for you? Alice Riddle, an outdoor recreation planner at Sumter National Forest, says it's important to ride vehicles that are age- and size-appropriate. One size does

not fit all. ATVs come with a warning label, clearly stating the minimum age of the rider. Not sure where to look? The label is affixed so riders can easily read it when seated in the proper operating position.

If you're new to the sport, talk with local shops and other riders, and do your homework ahead of time. The internet is a good resource, Riddle says. There are also training courses for both ATV and dirt bike riding. Check with your local bike shop.

It may seem as though the sounds of motorized vehicles are incongruous with

the peaceful sounds of nature, but it's all part of the plan the Forest Service offered when the trails first went in, says Riddle. "National forest lands provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities," she says. "Motorized trails are one of these opportunities. There are many hiking trails or general forest areas that one can go to in order to find a peaceful hike or solitary experience. Motorized trail bikes are only allowed on designated trails for motorized use on National Forest Lands. With national forests encompassing many thousands of acres, there are opportunities for all to enjoy." 🗨️



Choosing an ATV properly fitted to you is a key for safety.



TOP TRAILS

There are two national forests in South Carolina open to the public with well-maintained trails: Sumter National Forest in the Piedmont region offers a gently sloping topography with elevations up to 400 feet, and Francis Marion National Forest in South Carolina's low country — a flat sandy environment with many bogs that the trails skirt. Both offer trails for different levels of ability.

- **Cedar Springs Trail at Sumter** is 11 miles long and offers moderately challenging trail loops.
- **Parsons Mountain Trail** at Sumter is 10.3 miles long and easy — a good one for beginners.
- **Francis Marion has one main trail** — the 40-mile Wambaw Cycle Trail — with two loops. The north loop has more technicality in terrain and is best for more advanced riders than the south loop. On each of the loops, riders will approach signage where the trail forks and have the ability to choose to continue on or head back to the trail head.

MAP IT



One of the primary rules for off-road safety is carrying a trail map with you.

You'll find maps for Sumter and Francis Marion National Forests online at fs.usda.gov.



Volunteers groom trails by pulling a cluster of tires to flatten the path.

SAFETY FIRST

On nice days, trailheads can fill up quickly, says David Baldwin with the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service maintains the trails in South Carolina's two national forests. And since there are different loops and trails that riders can take, they do not get terribly congested, he adds.

Keep in mind, though, the trails are not race tracks. "Riders need to be aware there could be hazards that occur along the trail, and they need to be ready to stop on a moment's notice," warns Alice Riddle, an outdoor recreation planner at Sumter National Forest. "Riders must be in control of their bikes at all times. They are responsible for their safety and others. All trails have passing areas, so wait for those opportunities and don't create new impacts to the trail. If it's your first visit to a trail, start off with the loops closer to the parking area until you become familiar with the trail system."

Here are some additional rules of safety and etiquette to be considered when riding the trails.

- Keep in mind that there are going to be riders of all different skill levels around you. So, whether you are a seasoned professional who is training for your next race or a first-time rider who is learning to ride, everyone shares the trail.
- Do not ride above your ability. This practice prevents you from getting injured and keeps other riders safe, as well.
- There are spots on the trails where other riders may pass if they need to, so slow down, let them pass, or pull over if need be. This safety rule keeps the trail flowing nicely during busier days.

FLYING HIGH

Local Scout attains highest achievement

Story by LISA SAVAGE

Zeke Kennemer worked hard to achieve the prestigious rank of Eagle Scout last year, and it's an honor that makes him proud.

"It takes a lot of patience, and it takes a lot of effort," the 18-year-old says. He began Scouting 10 years ago and joined New Hope Scout Troop 7073 seven years ago.

For Kennemer's Eagle Scout Service Project, he added a fence for Kennemer Cemetery Perpetual Care. The cemetery purchased an adjoining property and needed a fence to keep the area well defined from the farm fields surrounding it. The fence provides the desired border and keeps animals from entering and destroying the grounds.



Zeke Kennemer chose to build a fence at the Kennemer Cemetery Perpetual Care.



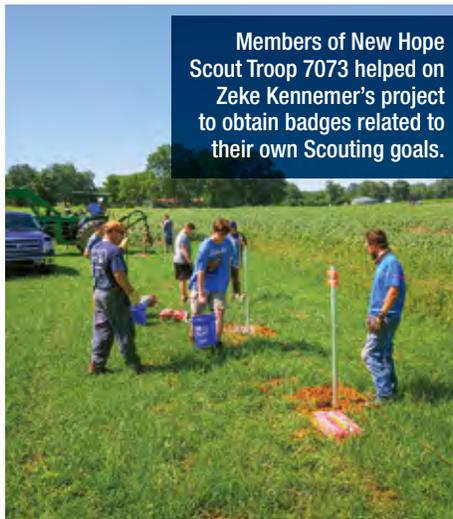
Zeke Kennemer achieves Eagle Scout.

WORKING TOGETHER

After Kennemer's proposal received necessary approval, he started working on donations for the project and coordinating crews to assist. Most of those who helped were Scouts working on badges.

"It was my responsibility to make sure they had the breaks they needed and stayed hydrated, as well as coordinating the jobs each person had," Kennemer says.

The most challenging aspect of the Eagle project was making sure the chain-link fence was straight and tight. "The ground wasn't level, which made the fence look like a roller coaster if I followed the ground," he says.



Members of New Hope Scout Troop 7073 helped on Zeke Kennemer's project to obtain badges related to their own Scouting goals.

Kennemer corrected the situation by running a line from the top of one corner post to the other corner post and digging out the high spots for the 4-foot fence. He also made adjustments to install a gate after all the other posts were set in the ground. "We measured out the gate gap and adjusted the fence post to the gap," he says.

APPROVAL

An Eagle Scout project starts as a proposal submitted to the district Scouting commissioner, and it must be deemed beneficial to the community.

Once the commissioner approves the project, the Scout can proceed with permissions from the beneficiary of the project. Then, the Scout must also write a summary of the project for the Eagle Scout board of review.

The Eagle Scout accomplishment has been the highest rank in Scouting since 1912. It's an achievement earned with an investment of years of hard work. Eagle Scouts choose to follow the Scout oath and law in their everyday lives. "It's an honor very few ever achieve, and it takes a lot of hard work," Kennemer says. "I'm proud to have been able to achieve this accomplishment." [📄](#)

A changing world

Phillip Cooper set to retire Story by LISA SAVAGE

A young Phillip Cooper first worked as a cashier in the business office at NHTC. As soon as a position opened up in the warehouse, though, he changed jobs.

He soon found himself working in repair service — now called the Network Operations Center — and has been there ever since. His duties changed over the years to accommodate the industry’s changing technology, and after more than 30 years, he’s retiring May 1. “I’ve been so fortunate to work with a group of people that’s like family,” he says.



CHANGING TECHNOLOGY

In Cooper's early days, the cooperative provided telephone and cable TV. Eventually, NHTC introduced dial-up internet, and things began to change with lightning speed. NHTC invested in a state-of-the-art fiber network and now offers broadband speeds up to 1 Gig to all customers.

“I remember back in the '90s when we started with DSL,” he says. “Now, with fiber internet, things have changed so much, and it’s been great to be a part of bringing the technology to our customers.”

Another recent change was NHTC’s introduction of a plan that doesn’t require a phone line for internet service. “During my time with NHTC, I have seen a shift from phone service being a necessity for customers to broadband,” Cooper says.

Cooper loves helping customers and making a difference for them, understanding and addressing their needs. In his role in the Network Operations Center, he has often talked to callers he has never met. “I’d know them by name, and they’d know me by name, but I never met them,” he says. “We only talked over the phone.”



Part of NHTC’s draw is its focus on people. “I love that we’re not like a big corporation,” Cooper says. “We know our customers, and our customers know us. That’s the wonderful thing about being part of a cooperative in a rural community. It’s been a great job that’s close to home, and I couldn’t have asked for anything better.”

SERVING OTHERS

After retirement, Cooper plans to continue to support his community of Grant, which is where he grew up and still resides. He and his wife, Sandy, have a daughter, Tanya Cooper, who now lives in Sevierville, Tennessee. He attends Hebron Church of Christ.

Cooper is known as the “voice of Patriot football” at Kate Duncan Smith DAR School. “I have been announcing the games ever since they established a football program,” he says. He also helps out as an assistant basketball coach — he first volunteered as a coach for basketball and softball when their daughter was in school — and he plans to stay active in the community.

“I always wanted to be a teacher and coach, and it didn’t work out, so this is a way for me to still be involved and make a difference in the lives of the kids in the community,” he says. “DAR is a special place to us, and I look forward to being able to do a lot for my community.” 📞

CREATIVE SPACES

Artists and craftspeople find community online

Story by DREW WOOLLEY



Jessica Sanders, left, and Addie Moore keep ETX Creatives running along with Lisa Horlander, who is not pictured.



The online community is home to 350 artists and creatives.



ETX Creatives welcomes artists and visitors at in-person events.

Addie Moore just wanted to know a schedule for local art shows. A mixed media artist and art teacher at Chapel Hill High School, she and her friends knew there was a need for better communication among creatives in Tyler, Texas, and beyond.

“I heard it enough times that eventually I realized, ‘OK, I guess I have to do it,’” she says of her commitment in 2018. “Our first meeting we just went out for a beer and decided to make a Facebook group.”

That group became ETX Creatives, an online community of artists and artisans throughout East Texas. Today, the curated Facebook group is home to 350 creatives who use the space to share their work, offer inspiration and encouragement, or share news about upcoming exhibitions.

“We’re a largely rural area, so you have your friends from high school, church or that you’ve met over time. But it tends to happen in pockets,” says Moore. “There aren’t a lot of public spaces, so the internet provided a space for us to connect, express what we’re doing artistically and to let people know you’re not alone in Edom or your small town. You have a community.”

BREAKING THE BLOCK

Having a community of people who understand the struggles of the creative process has been especially important over the last year when artists and creatives have been hit hard by the economic challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.

“It’s a great place for us to say, ‘I’m having some creative block,’ or ‘How are you staying positive during this

time?’” says Moore. “I think having this creative community that knows what we’re going through and can give suggestions if we’re stuck or having trouble with a particular process has been a great support.”

ETX Creatives also hosts a blog on its website, etxcreatives.com, where visitors can find updates on the latest events and shows across East Texas. The site also allows promotion of items ranging from handmade ceramics and jewelry to clothing and one-of-a-kind paintings. The group also produces the “ETX Creatives Podcast” to showcase local artists and to delve into the creative process.

Before the pandemic, ETX Creatives hosted in-person exhibitions and workshops where hundreds of visitors from throughout the state could try their hand at printmaking or creating their own T-shirts. While those meet-ups have been put on pause, the group has continued to raise funds for local artistic projects.

And the best may be yet to come. Along with her ETX Creatives partners Jessica Sanders and Lisa Horlander, Moore is working to organize their informal group into an official non-profit. Once established, they can raise money for their own space, where they aim to continue hosting public events, have a permanent gallery and provide studio space for short-term artist residencies.

“My ultimate goal is to influence an economy among the creative community so people want to buy from local artists,” says Moore. “It can create appreciation and community support beyond just a space for us to talk to each other.” 

THE FUTURE OF ART

When it was founded in 1961, the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen promoted local creators with a traveling "Guild Train" that exhibited their work across the state. The Guild Train no longer runs, but the organization still brings artists, craftsmen, collectors, galleries and other interested parties together.

In recent years, the guild's transformation has seen it harness the power of the internet to build social media communities and host online collections, where visitors can view and purchase work from member artists. Greg Lakes, who joined the guild after he and his wife opened the Clover Bottom Bed and Breakfast in McKee, hopes organizations like the guild continue to see the value of online communities for their members.

"Those places are where you have to be now to be viable as a selling artist," he says. "We have a lot of great artists in the area who come to the guild, and I think the groups that are going to survive are the ones who develop their online presence."

For more information, visit kyguild.org.



CREATIVE VOICES

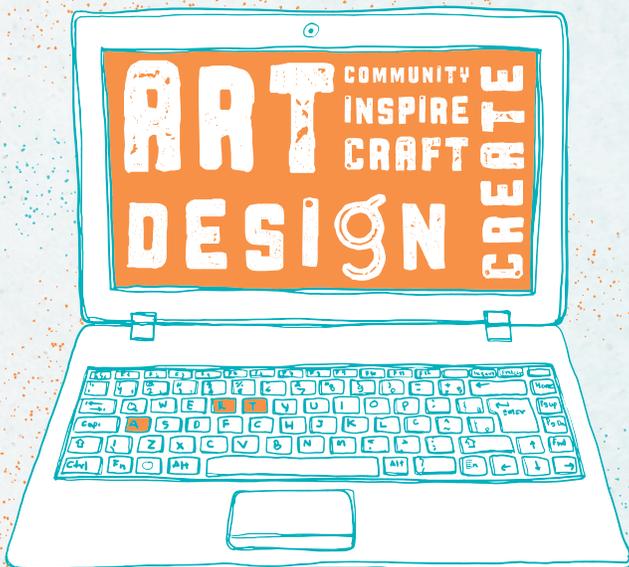
Access to fast internet services creates fresh opportunities for creators in rural communities throughout the nation.

"I've never had to advertise. I just use Facebook to let people know when the classes are, and people usually use that to save a spot."

— Tammie Franklin, owner and teacher at Tammie's Treasures Painting Classes in River, Kentucky

"It helps us stay connected, and we reach a larger audience. It's one of the best ways we have to spread the word about what we do."

— Debra Ruzinsky, director of the Appalachian Center for Craft in Smithville, Tennessee



CHANGES IN EDUCATION

Students choosing face-to-face or virtual classes

Story by LISA SAVAGE

Missing a lecture or labs for Advanced Placement chemistry posed an obstacle for Hudson Hill, but the New Hope High School junior adjusted well as he attended classes virtually this year.

"I've learned how to better manage my time," he says.

Hudson and his family determined virtual classes worked better for him when students had a choice about participating early on in the school year. He spends a lot of time with his grandmother, and he wanted to make sure he was doing everything he could to keep her healthy.

When schools canceled in-person classes last year because of the pandemic, students and staff struggled in the beginning. However, it became evident a plan would be necessary to help all students have the online access they needed.

Over the summer, teachers took part in professional development programs to

address how to best teach students in an online environment.

FACE-TO-FACE OR VIRTUAL LEARNING

When classes started in the fall, all were initially virtual. After several weeks, though, students had an option to choose face-to-face or virtual classes, says Amber Bryant, computer science and career prep teacher at New Hope High School.

The majority of students chose face-to-face learning, but using platforms like Google Meet, all students have access to the same class assignments and other information. The setup works out because students who chose virtual classes don't miss as much, while the students who chose face-to-face instruction also learned how to work virtually.

Some teachers record their class instruction, which also helps students in face-to-face classes if they need to review, Bryant says.

As part of the virtual classes, every student in Madison County who needed a Chromebook could access one. And once students adjusted to the changes, they were able to keep up with assignments. "It's been a big adjustment because it's different from what we've always done," Bryant says.

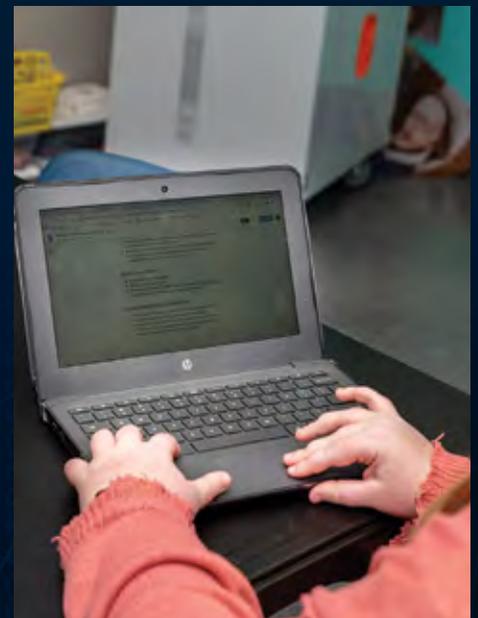
On the Google Meet platform, students use the same information. "It's been a good change," she says.

For freshman Maggie Dudley, choosing face-to-face instruction worked best. "For me, it's easier to learn face to face," she says. Students wear masks and social distance in classrooms while also having less social time during breaks.

"It was an adjustment in the classroom, too," Dudley says.

Now, with all students prepared for virtual learning if that setup becomes necessary, they don't have to miss classes because of weather.

Amber Bryant in the classroom at New Hope High School.



“We can just have an e-learning day,” Bryant says. “The teachers still post the assignments, and it works out that we don’t have to miss at all. Now, we’ll never have a snow day.”



Amber Bryant teaches at New Hope High School.



Hudson Hill, a junior at New Hope High School, takes virtual classes.



Maggie Dudley, a New Hope High School freshman, attends classes in person.

VIRTUAL ACADEMY

It's different than other virtual learning classes

When students had to decide whether to do face-to-face or virtual classes, the option had no impact on one group of Madison County students.

Students enrolled in Madison County Virtual Academy already take all their classes online. Now in its fifth year, the program offers flexibility and freedom to excel with virtual learning while providing the support that both nontraditional and traditional settings offer.

This school year, the program expanded to include third through 12th grades, says Tandy Shumate, administrator of Madison County Virtual Academy.

MCVA started five years ago with a pilot program of 35 students. It finished its second year with 105 students. Last year, more than 400 students were enrolled, and now the program has 15 teachers. Students who participate in the Virtual Academy program remain a part of the school system and can participate in their zoned school's athletic programs, band and Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Students Lilly Paige Brown and Natika Paschal say choosing to attend MCVA is the best decision they ever made. “It’s just tailor-made for Lily’s learning style,” her mother, Melissa Brown, says. “It’s the first time she’s been academically challenged.”

Lily and Natika both are band members at New Hope High School. Lily, a senior, also takes dual enrollment classes at Calhoun Community College.

Taking online classes through MCVA also works well for Natika, a junior. “The rigor of their curriculum is different than the students who are doing virtual learning,” says Gina Paschal, Natika’s mother.

It’s ideal for both girls to be connected to their schools and activities while also having a more rigorous curriculum in a different environment.

It would be impossible to participate in Virtual Academy without access to high-speed internet, Paschal says. “It makes a big difference in being able to stay connected virtually,” she says. “It makes all the difference in the world.”

To participate in the MCVA, students must reside in the Madison County School System zoned area where they live. There is no cost for students to attend MCVA.

“The students who have chosen the Virtual Academy truly enjoy what they’re doing and being involved in such an innovative approach to their education,” Shumate says. “It takes a different mindset. It’s not for every student, but for those students who excel in this environment, it’s ideal.”

For more information, search for Madison County Virtual Academy on the Madison County Schools’ website, www.mcsc12.org.



Lily Paige Brown



Natika Paschal



Sunny side up?

Mix it up in the morning

Ham and eggs just go together — you rarely think of one without picturing the other. And they are so often seen together on an Easter menu.

But what do you do once the Easter lunch is over and you're faced with leftover ham and lots of eggs?

For starters, make sure that you've handled all the food safely. With a lot of cooks in the kitchen prepping so much food, sometimes safe food handling practices fly out the window. Make sure you're preparing — and storing — food properly, so all of your guests leave with a full tummy and not a sick stomach.

While you're boiling eggs to dye for Easter, boil some extras, and make sure you keep them in the refrigerator until you're ready to use them.

Don't serve or eat any eggs that have been at room temperature for more than two hours.

As for your ham, if it's ready to eat then, you simply have to warm it up. But if you have to roast it yourself, make sure the internal temperature reaches 145 F.



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

HAM AND EGG CASSEROLE

- 2 medium cooked potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 4 hard-boiled large eggs, chopped
- 1 cup diced fully cooked ham
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 large egg
- 1 1/2 cups sour cream
- 1/4 cup dry bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted

In a large bowl, combine the potatoes, eggs, ham, salt and pepper. Combine the raw egg and sour cream. Add to potato mixture and gently toss to coat. Transfer to a greased 11-by-7-inch baking dish.

Toss bread crumbs and butter. Sprinkle over casserole. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 20 minutes or until bubbly and cooked through.

CREAMED HAM AND EGGS

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 1/4 cups milk
- 1 cup diced cooked ham
- 4 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
- 4 biscuits

Melt butter in a large saucepan over low heat. Stir flour, mustard, salt and pepper into butter until mixture is smooth and bubbly. Remove from heat and add milk. Return to heat and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Boil until mixture thickens — about 1 minute.

Stir ham and eggs into milk mixture and cook until heated through. Spoon creamed ham and eggs onto biscuits and serve.

PUFFY HAM AND EGG QUICHE

- 1 (17 1/3 ounce) box frozen puff pastry
- 8 ounces ham, chopped
- 4 hard-boiled eggs, sliced
- 8 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1 beef bouillon cube
- 1/4 cup evaporated milk, warm
- 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 4 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated

Preheat the oven to 375 F. Roll one sheet of puff pastry into a pie dish. Sprinkle ham on the bottom of the pie. Add a layer of sliced hard-boiled eggs and a layer of the mozzarella cheese.

Dissolve the beef bouillon in the warm milk and mix with parsley, beaten eggs and Parmesan cheese. Pour over ham, eggs and cheese. Cover the pie with the second puff pastry. Bake for 45 minutes or until golden brown. Let it sit for 5 to 10 minutes before cutting and serving.



Hard boiled eggs benedict

- 4 hard-boiled eggs
- 2 English muffins (split half)
- 4 slices ham
- Chopped parsley (optional)

Hollandaise Sauce:

- 4 large egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 cup butter (very slightly softened, cut into 5 pieces)
- Pinch of salt
- Dash of cayenne pepper (optional)

Prepare hollandaise sauce by placing a heat-proof bowl over a pan of gently simmering water (about 1 1/2 inches of water). The bottom of the bowl should not be touching the water. Alternatively, a double boiler set can be used. Add egg yolks and lemon juice to the bowl and whisk vigorously until the mixture becomes shiny/glossy and thickens. Whisk in

one piece of butter until fully incorporated into mixture. Repeat with remaining pieces, one at a time.

Whisk in a pinch of salt and a dash of cayenne, if using. If mixture is too thick, whisk in a bit of warm water, a tablespoon at a time. Remove from heat and use immediately.

In a hot skillet, over medium heat, heat the ham. Toast the English muffins until lightly browned. Cut each hard-boiled egg into fourths. Assemble by placing an English muffin half on a plate (cut side up), topping with 1 slice of ham, 1 egg (cut into fourths), and drizzle with 1/4 of the hollandaise sauce. Topped with chopped parsley, if desired, and serve warm.

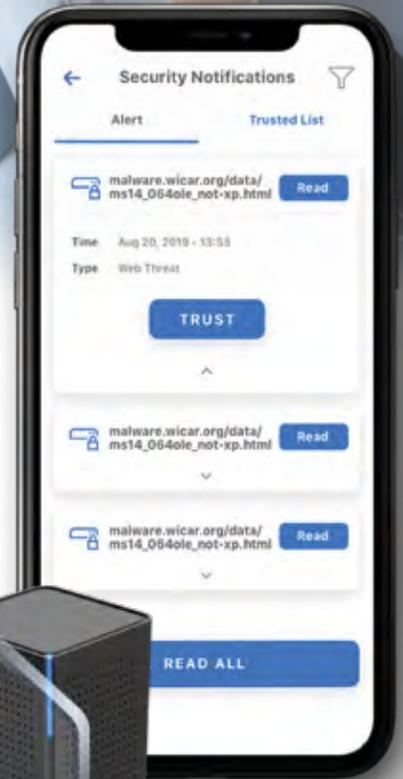
Alternately, to make this dish a little easier, buy an envelope of Knorr's hollandaise sauce mix and follow package directions.



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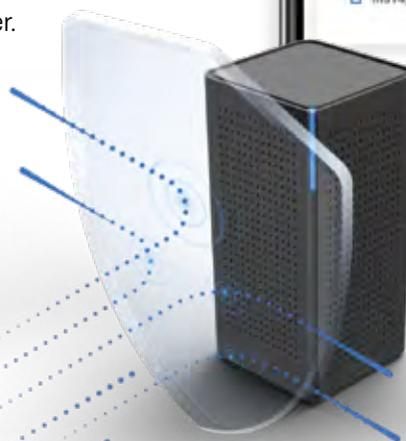
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