

The

# Communicator

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015



## SECURING YOUR HOME

New technology offers  
peace of mind

### MUSICAL JOURNEY

The Southern cities that  
crafted genres of genius

### DISTANCE LEARNING

Attending college from the  
convenience of home





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA—THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

## You are part of a nationwide rural family

In my role at NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, I work with your telecommunications provider and nearly 900 others like it all across the country. Every day I am reminded of their dedication to building connections that support strong communities. When basic telephone service was what everyone needed, they were there. As broadband has become a vitally important resource for economic development, education, health care and more, they have focused their energies on building the best networks available.

And they do not stand alone. These rural providers understand that to serve you best they must stay on top of what is taking place in Congress and at the Federal Communications Commission. To do that, they stand together on issues of common concern, speaking with one voice to make sure our nation's leaders understand the needs of rural America.

This publication is another great example of that spirit of collaboration. By working together, telcos across several states are sharing important information about their companies and keeping you updated on news that impacts rural America.

A few weeks ago I had the honor of being invited to the White House, along with several leaders of rural telecommunications companies. We met with the White House Rural Council to talk about what rural telcos just like yours are doing to support community development. It was



Shirley Bloomfield (right) commenting at the White House Rural Council meeting. Listening to her presentation is Doug McKalip, senior advisor for rural affairs in the White House Domestic Policy Council.

another great example of us all working together to shine a spotlight on the good work being done by your provider and hundreds of others like it.

From success stories on health care, education and public safety to efficient energy management, rural telcos have shown time and time again that they are not only the brains behind the networks they deploy, but also proven solution providers with a track record for adapting to and embracing change, and most importantly, responding to the needs of their communities.

Because of that cooperation, you as a customer or member of your local telco are part of an even bigger family that stretches across every region of this country. In the months ahead, I look forward to sharing stories with you about what these telcos are doing at the national level to ensure rural America stays connected. 📞



## WHAT TO DO when calls don't come through

Rural call completion continues to be a challenge, as people experience failed connections and poor call quality when making long-distance or wireless calls to rural landlines. While the FCC and Congress have taken steps toward a solution, there is still something you can do to help.

If someone has trouble completing a call to you from a long-distance or wireless telephone service provider:

- 1 Encourage them to report the issue to their provider. They will need the date and time the call was attempted, plus the calling and called telephone numbers.
- 2 Encourage them to report the problem to the FCC by calling 888-225-5322 or visiting [consumercomplaints.fcc.gov](http://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov). They will need the date and time the call was attempted, the calling and called telephone numbers and the name of their long-distance or wireless telephone service provider.
- 3 Call your local phone company and provide the same information so they may work with the long distance or wireless provider to isolate the problem.

### POPULARITY OF ONLINE VIDEO IS GROWING

Online video is bringing consumers greater entertainment choices, making broadband even more important. A recent study by networking company Ciena predicts that average household bandwidth requirements will increase by 31 percent annually over the next five years, as viewers connect their smart TVs and devices (Roku, Apple TV, Chromecast, etc.) to watch Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Go, Hulu and more.

Do you enjoy online video? Share your story at [www.HowDoYouBroadband.com](http://www.HowDoYouBroadband.com)

# What is your favorite part of this magazine?

If you enjoy the stories, recipes and information we share in each issue of this magazine, please spend just five minutes taking our brief survey. Your answers will help us understand what parts of the magazine you most enjoy, and how you are using the information in these pages.

**To say "thank you" for sharing your thoughts with us, each respondent will be entered into a drawing for one of several \$25 Amazon gift cards. One lucky winner will receive the grand prize: a Kindle Fire HD!**

► To take the brief survey on your computer, enter this address into your Web browser:  
[www.surveymonkey.com/r/telcomagazine](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/telcomagazine)

► To take the survey on your smartphone, scan this code with any QR code reader app:



**TAKE THE SURVEY  
AND YOU COULD WIN A PRIZE!**



## Secure Your Future Today:

Do the paperwork and planning now to protect your small business from cyber threats long term

BY MICHAEL RAMAGE

It is easy to be consumed with the immediate needs and concerns of cyber security. These are important, but a small business should also plan ahead to secure its future by creating cyber security policies, plans and strategies that will reduce the risks posed by the bad guys of cyberspace.

In the first two parts of this series, we looked at the cyber security threats facing small businesses and practical steps to protect against those threats. In this final article, we'll look at longer-term strategies for small businesses to address their security needs well into the future.

• **Policy Development** – Security policy development is often overlooked but is very important to organizations. This will likely include a number of separate policies that provide the guiding strategy for all security activities within the company. Suggested policies include general Internet usage, computer security, physical

security and even social media usage. Templates for these policies and others are available from the Sans Institute at [www.sans.org/security-resources/policies](http://www.sans.org/security-resources/policies).

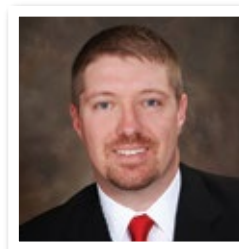
• **Asset Identification** – Any security planning process should include asset identification. Consider what you have that needs to be protected (customer information, personally identifiable information, banking information, corporate secrets, etc.). Also, consider what would impact your business the most (Internet outage, building collapse, server failure, etc.). Asking these questions will help you realize your true assets.

• **Security Assessment** – Once a small business takes the initial steps to secure its network, it should consider undergoing an assessment to see where vulnerabilities and challenges still exist. The primary goal of a security assessment is to help you learn where the challenges lie in securing your business. Many assessments

are conducted by external partners to ensure a thorough and unbiased review.

There are many free resources available online to help with your company's cyber security planning efforts. Two are the FCC Cyber for Small Biz ([www.fcc.gov/cyberforsmallbiz](http://www.fcc.gov/cyberforsmallbiz)) and the SANS Institute ([www.sans.org](http://www.sans.org)). Consideration of federal requirements should also be included throughout the entire planning process.

Cyber security is the responsibility of everyone in your small business. Cyber security should not be an afterthought. Security matters! ☒



*Michael Ramage is the Associate Director of the Center for Telecommunications Systems Management at Murray State University.*

# Helping you build the life you want

**W**hy do you live in rural America? Maybe it's family connections. Maybe it's the close sense of community and the importance of tradition. Maybe it's because you enjoy a quality of life in this area that would be difficult to find in a metro region.



**JIM COOK**  
General Manager

Whatever your reasons, the people who work at New Hope Telephone Cooperative understand that we play an important role in helping you build the life you want here. As your local telecommunications provider, we know you depend on us to supply the technology you need to stay connected. And that is becoming more important as our world grows increasingly dependent on broadband connections and Internet-based solutions.


Some might think that living in a rural area means sacrificing access to technology. We are proud that, as a member of NHTC, you do not have to sacrifice at all. In fact, because of our focus on building a state-of-the-art network, you have access to Internet speeds higher than those available to some people living in larger cities.

Of course, we still have many challenges. While just over 19 percent of the U.S. population lives in a rural region, almost half of Americans who are not connected to the Internet are rural. That means there are still millions of rural Americans who are missing opportunities made possible by a broadband connection. From education and jobs to health care and family connections, they have yet to discover what so many of their neighbors have already learned — that a broadband connection can help them build a better life.

That is one of our biggest challenges as your technology leader. Building a broadband network is only the first step; we must also help you understand how to use it. The magazine you are reading now plays an important role in those efforts. We choose the stories for this magazine very carefully. We include subjects that appeal to a broad range of readers with a variety of interests. We can almost guarantee that during the course of a year you will be drawn to something in these pages, no matter what your interests may be. And whether it's a profile on a local person with a unique hobby or business, a story on how someone is using technology, or a feature on a road trip, these have the mission of helping you learn to put our services to practical use in your life.

Speaking of the magazine, please look again at the top of Page 3 and spend just a few minutes taking our reader survey. Your answers will help us understand what you love best and find most helpful about your magazine.

I also want to call your attention to the Rural Connections article on Page 2. Shirley Bloomfield leads our national trade group, NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, and does an incredible job keeping us connected on issues in Washington, D.C., that impact us right here in Alabama. It is more important than ever that independent telecommunications companies work together on matters that impact us all; we are proud to welcome Shirley as a contributor to our magazine as she shares with you some of the work we are all doing together.

When you think about family and community, living in rural America really is all about being connected. At NHTC we are proud to provide the technology that makes many of those connections possible. 

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### On the Cover:



NHTC's Security Solutions team can help protect your home or business with state-of-the-art security services. See story Page 8.

# NHTC WI-FI CONNECTION

## Is your home connected?

How to set up a Wi-Fi network to share your broadband Internet connection among your computers, gaming systems, smartphones and other new devices

**S**anta may have delivered those long-awaited tech gifts, like a tablet, game system or new computer. Maybe you were really good and are now streaming Netflix on a 4K flat-screen TV. But perhaps Mr. Claus was too busy to set up your wireless network and connect the growing number of devices. By following a few simple tips, you can set up your own Wi-Fi network and get the most out of your new gadgets and your New Hope Telephone Cooperative Internet connection.

### WHY WI-FI?

Wireless networks have always been convenient for laptop users, but now more and more products are designed to access the Internet through Wi-Fi. These include televisions and printers, of course, but also less obvious devices such as bathroom scales and toy helicopters. Once you set up your home network, you can enjoy the full functionality of all your Wi-Fi enabled devices — along with whatever new gadgets are coming next.

Imagine doing Internet research and printing documents using your laptop — all from the comfort of your couch. What about playing video games online with friends across the state or around the world? A wireless network, coupled with the power of an NHTC broadband connection, will even allow you to stream music, movies and television programming on your tablets, televisions, iPods and more.

### BUILD YOUR NETWORK

Wi-Fi networks essentially have two pieces: the modem and the router. The modem is the gateway to the Internet, and the router is where your devices connect to access that gateway.

Most of the newer modems NHTC sells or rents have Wi-Fi routers built in. But even if your router and modem are separate devices, the installation is fairly easy. *Modems are not required for NHTC's fiber Internet service.*

### LOCK IT UP

The next step is setting up security to prevent unwanted users from logging onto your network. These freeloaders can slow down your connection speed by using up bandwidth or, worse, can use your network for illegal purposes.

Follow the instructions with your router's software to enable security features like password protection and encryption. Store your password in a safe place, because you will need it to connect



your devices to the wireless network.

As an extra precaution, be sure the firewalls are activated on any computer you plan to connect to your Wi-Fi network. The NHTC Internet Department uses and recommends AVG or Avast for anti-virus protection, which have free versions available. New Hope's tech experts also endorse paid versions of anti-virus software by Kaspersky and Trend Micro.

### CONNECT YOUR DEVICES

Once the network is up and secure, try connecting your devices. You will need to enter your security password on each device you want to connect. Most computers and smartphones have an easily-accessed network settings menu where the password can be entered.

Televisions, Blu-ray players and game systems have similar menus, but you will also need to open programs like Pandora or Netflix and follow a few more steps to link the apps with your account. Wireless-enabled printers can be a little tricky, so follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully to properly configure the settings.

### NEED MORE RANGE?

Wi-Fi extenders can expand your wireless network. The devices are easily installed in addition to your existing wireless area. They push signals to sections of your home or yard that the original router cannot reach, and are useful to extend Wi-Fi service to cover distant rooms in large homes.

A wireless network can greatly enhance the benefit you receive from your NHTC broadband Internet connection. New Hope Telephone Cooperative has customer-friendly Internet support available 24 hours a day and 365 days a year at 256-723-8940. ☎



Take a sweet-sounding Southern  
road trip from the blues to rock 'n' roll

# 368 MILES OF MUSIC

BY ROBERT THATCHER

**P**aul Simon hit the road in the early 1980s seeking inspiration. His drive from Louisiana to Memphis became the song “Graceland.”

This road trip may not give you a song, but it will surely inspire anyone who loves music. Hop in for a drive to four musical meccas.

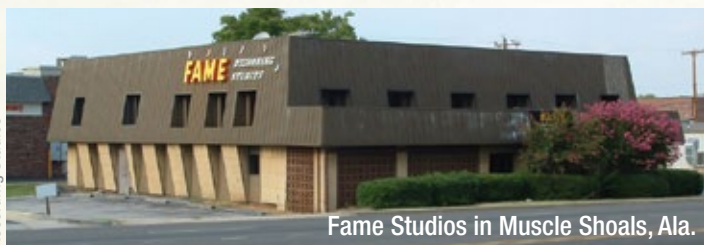


Photo courtesy of Fame Recording Studios

## ***“Now Muscle Shoals has got the Swampers”*** **Muscle Shoals, AL**

This river town is all about musical beginnings. So start at the W.C. Handy Home and Museum, the log-cabin birthplace of the “Father of the Blues” in Florence. Stand by the piano where he wrote “St. Louis Blues” — and the blues were born.

Muscle Shoals is also the humble birthplace of another sound that shaped modern music. Think “Brown Sugar,” “When a Man Loves a Woman” and “Free Bird.” It’s hard to believe these global standards and more were recorded in two small buildings here — Fame and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio.

Tour dim rooms where “the Swampers” mixed gritty R&B and country soul to create the “Muscle Shoals Sound.” Then record your own demo at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in nearby Tuscumbia.

All this music will leave you with a question. Why Muscle Shoals? Locals say the answer is at our last stop, Tom’s Wall, near the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Resident Tom Hendrix built this mile-long monument to his great-great-grandmother, a Yuchi tribe member. Forcibly removed during the Trail of Tears, she’s the only person to make the long walk back to Muscle Shoals. What motivated her?

She didn’t hear the river singing to her in Oklahoma. But she heard it here.

**On the Menu:** Dine with a view at Florence’s 360 Grille, Alabama’s only revolving restaurant, or under a rock at the Rattlesnake Saloon in Tuscumbia. Also, slurp down “The Harvey” milkshake at the Palace Ice Cream Shop in Tuscumbia.

## ***“Long-distance information give me Memphis, Tennessee”***

**Memphis, TN – 151 miles via Highway 72 West**

W.C. Handy’s musical road led to Memphis. So follow him to the street he made famous for the blues.

Whether you want authentic soul food or live music, Beale

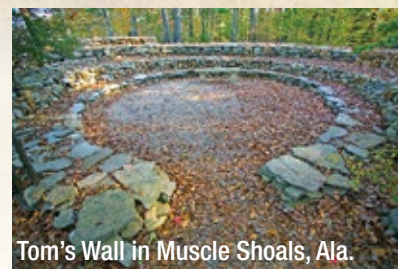


Photo courtesy of Florence/Lauderdale Tourism



## **TECH SAVVY TRAVELER**

Despite what Johnny Cash would have you believe, nobody has been everywhere, man. But thanks to websites and apps like Yelp and TripAdvisor, today’s travelers can learn from the experiences of people who have been there and done that. Yelp.com offers reviews on restaurants while tripadvisor.com ranks attractions, hotels, restaurants and more.



Street has it all. And for a full dose of blues, visit May 1-3 during the Beale Street Music Festival.

Rivers and railroads made Memphis a melting pot of musical styles. Blues mixed with country to form rockabilly. And it all combined with a rhythmic force named Elvis Presley to create rock 'n' roll.

Start where he started — Sun Studio. In 1953, an 18-year-old Elvis walked into this corner building with a cheap guitar and a dream. Stand where Sam Phillips helped make the dream come true for Elvis and other stars including Muddy Waters, Roy Orbison and Johnny Cash.

Then drive to where the dream ended. Tour Graceland's colonial mansion, visit the grave, view the airplanes — and pay tribute to a talent that left our world too soon.

If you arrive between Jan. 7-10, help Memphis blow out the candles for Elvis' 80th birthday celebration. And sing "Happy, Happy Birthday Baby!"

**On the Menu:** Rendezvous Ribs (If there's a wait, try TOPS, Central BBQ or Corky's.)

### ***"I'm goin' to Jackson, look out Jackson town"***

**Jackson, TN — 88 miles on I-40 East**

On the way to Nashville, stop by the International Rock-a-Billy Hall of Fame in Jackson.

The brainchild of Henry Harrison, this museum is aptly located in Carl Perkins' hometown, between Memphis (home of rock 'n' roll and blues) and Nashville (home of country and hillbilly music).

But Harrison is quick to point out that this tour is not about glittery memorabilia. It's about stories of the stars as ordinary people. These stories come firsthand. Harrison claims to be a childhood friend of Johnny Cash, classmate of Elvis and the man who once repossessed Jerry Lee Lewis' car.



Sun Studio in Memphis, Tenn.



Rock-A-Billy Hall of Fame in Jackson, Tenn.

"We don't tell you how many gold records Elvis had," Harrison says. "Everybody can look that up. But we do have a picture of Elvis playing touch football beside Humes High School when he was in the 11th grade, wearing Converse tennis shoes and a pullover top. And he was just one of us."



The Bluebird Cafe in Nashville, Tenn.

Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation

### ***"There's thirteen hundred and fifty-two guitar pickers in Nashville"***

**Nashville, TN — 129 miles on I-40 East**

It's fitting to end our musical drive at the dream destination for would-be stars.

But don't be fooled by this city's honky-tonk past. Bob Dylan's Nashville Skyline is now filled with skyscrapers. And the "Country Music Capital" is now a center for all kinds of music — bluegrass, blues, Americana, jazz, you name it.

Start with a stroll down Music Row and Broadway, the heart of Nashville's entertainment industry. Take in the record labels, browse Ernest Tubb's Record Shop and pause by publishing houses. Then tour historic RCA Studio B to sample the famous "Nashville Sound" from the '60s.

You'll also want to tour the historic Ryman Auditorium downtown. This former tabernacle was home of the Grand Ole Opry from 1943 to 1974, and it still hosts the "world's longest-running radio show" Nov. 1 to Feb. 4. Otherwise, head to the Grand Ole Opry House east of downtown.

Many come to Nashville with a guitar and a dream. So before you leave, catch a rising star at a "writer's night" — one of Nashville's small acoustic sets for songwriters to try out new material. Try the Listening Room Cafe or the Bluebird Cafe.

**On the menu:** Hattie B's Hot Chicken is a mouth-burning must. But you'll need a hearty breakfast to fuel your drive home. Try the Pancake Pantry, a Nashville tradition since 1961, or the Loveless Cafe. You never know when you might see a star enjoying a good flapjack, too. 🍳



The Ryman in Nashville, Tenn.

Photo courtesy of Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation





(from left) Kanita Medlen, Shawn Smith, Daniel Martin, Bart Hopkins and Nikki Dudley can help secure your home or business.

# New service offers peace of mind

BY MATT LEDGER

Another day begins in a flurry. Peaceful sleep interrupted by the alarm. Bright lights making eyes cringe as you wander through the morning maintenance routine that seems to run on autopilot. Most mornings it works well, but every now and then a step is skipped. How many times have you been miles from the driveway, only to question, “Did I really lock the front door? Is the garage door shut?”

Technology can play a role in that peace of mind as a safety net for faulty memories, establishing routines that are truly automatic.

Dave Tandy and his wife, Angie, moved to New Hope four years ago. He owns AG Optical, a business where he crafts high-end telescope systems for astrophotographers. While he monitors the constellations and shooting stars above, his personal and business properties are kept under close watch by NHTC Security, New Hope Telephone Cooperative’s brand-new, state-of-the-art security service. The Tandys became one of NHTC Security’s first customers last year.

“While I feel like we live in a safe area, and we really like New Hope, it’s just nice to have that extra sense of security that comes from having an alarm system,” Tandy says. “Having the ability to monitor and control the system through our smartphones is just super convenient.”

## FOR HOME OR BUSINESS

Upon moving to the area in 2010, the Tandys started Rooster Run Farm. Aside from his telescope business, Tandy operates AG Composites, which creates carbon fiber components for the outdoor sporting industry. In addition to securing their home, the Tandys found it beneficial to add protective measures around their businesses.



► The Tandys were one of the first families to sign up with NHTC Security. Shown here (from left) Gabe, Angie, Ashley and Dave.



"I find them very responsive, and the installation went smoothly," Tandy says of NHTC's security team. "It's one of the advantages of being in a small town and belonging to a telephone cooperative." NHTC sent technicians to consult with Tandy as he had very specific requirements for their properties.

"Within two or three days, they were out here installing it," Tandy says. "The system is very easy to use, and we picked up how to do it really quick."

The family accidentally caused a false alarm, which inadvertently gave them reassurance in the new product. "The response time was very fast," he says. "I was pleased in that it tested the system. We've had other systems in the past at our previous homes and had the alarm go off. It seemed like a long time before they called. So this system is very reassuring now."

## NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR NHTC

Last year, NHTC's security installers received their level-two security system certifications from state officials.

Ever since the first phone line was installed in 1948, locals have turned to NHTC as a reliable partner for telecommunications and cable TV services. The new service features a two-tiered security system to help safeguard families. Homeowners can start with the traditional basic landline security system, consisting of a motion sensor and window contacts that interact wirelessly with a touch screen terminal. A glass breakage sensor can lessen the number of security devices in any room with numerous windows. The siren will alert owners in the event of an intruder, and the 24/7 monitoring will inform the proper authorities.

NHTC installers can customize the sys-



**LEFT:** The touch screen can conveniently display the five-day forecast.

**BELOW LEFT:** Customer Service Supervisor Kanita Medlen (back) with Billing Coordinator Nikki Dudley can help you decide which security features are right for you.

**BELOW RIGHT:** NHTC installer Bart Hopkins checks the security system's touch screen display.



tem to fit your home and future needs — including those of your four-legged family members.. The Tandys' dog, Kodiak, a Treeing Tennessee brindle, was the original security for the family. NHTC Security added a pet-immune motion detector that allows Kodiak to freely roam inside the home without causing any false alarms.

For those who have bought new systems with national security providers, NHTC can usually take over the monitoring of qualified equipment, at a lower monthly cost, once that contract has expired. All of the installed equipment can be covered under a lifetime warranty for a small fee and will belong to the homeowner upon completion of the three-year contract.

## EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES

NHTC Security customers can be upgraded to the TotalConnect package, which

the Tandys selected, adding cellular and Wi-Fi communicators to the system and giving them the mobility to use a smart-phone as a keypad access to the system.

When it becomes available later this year, the Tandys, and all other customers, will be able to add Wi-Fi surveillance cameras to remotely monitor their property and keep track of their kids' activities.

Another convenience to the NHTC system is the weather display from the control panel. A quick tap of the control panel will display a five-day forecast. "One other thing that is very convenient with us being in such a tornado-prone area is that our alarm system will automatically alert us of the warnings that come out," says Tandy. Within the first month of having the system, the Tandys experienced a late-night alarm that alerted them of a tornado warning. "That's a real nice feature that we've never had in the past," Tandy says. ☎



**NHTC SECURITY** can help customize a solution that is just right for your home and budget. Homeowners can save as much as 15 percent on their homeowners insurance rates with qualified security systems, making home security more affordable than you might think. Call 256-723-4211 and schedule a free consultation today!

# HEALTH & FITNESS

## What do readers find at your blog?

**Shelley Bowman:** Ramblings of someone who has managed not only to lose a large amount of weight — 100 pounds — but who is also keeping it off. This is a bigger victory to me than the initial weight loss. After all, hasn't just about everyone lost weight at one point, only to regain it?

## What are some tips for those interested in losing weight and becoming fit?

**SB:** Stop eating fast food. Stop getting your meals handed out a drive-thru window. Track your food on a daily basis. I used MyFitnessPal.com. Put it all in there: the good, the bad and the ugly. Go for a 15-minute walk to start. Move daily. All the things you hear, like parking farther away and taking the stairs, add up.



## How can someone new to running get started?

**SB:** Get fitted at a running store for a good pair of shoes. The right shoes can make or break you. Then go for a short walk, and at the end, try a slow run for 30 seconds. Gradually transition to running a little more each time; don't go crazy and try to run a mile if you've never run before because that's a good way to get shin splints; then you'll end up hurting and not wanting to run. Also, finding a friend to run with

makes a big difference for me. Knowing that you're going to meet someone to run helps to make sure you actually do it.

## How do you stay motivated?

**SB:** I feel so much better now that I'm not carrying 100 extra pounds. I have a different lifestyle, too. I'm much more active, and I like being able to run or walk without feeling like I'm going to die. Continuing to eat right most of the time keeps me in check; I honestly don't like how I feel when I overindulge.

## What are some of your favorite healthy foods?

**SB:** You should have a few go-to meals where you can eat healthy without having to think about what you are preparing. For me, it's nonfat Greek yogurt (I love Fage), either fresh berries or Craisins, and some homemade granola. If I'm out of my granola, I like the Kind brand. For dinner, I like to make black bean tacos using corn tortillas, fresh pico de gallo and a little Parmesan cheese. Snacks range from watermelon or pineapple in the summer, to raw almonds and a little bit of dried cherries. And sometimes an apple and a tablespoon of peanut butter. I also drink a lot of water daily and try to have a glass right before I snack — it makes me fuller so I don't overdo it.

## Woman on a Journey

A Q&A with **SHELLEY BOWMAN**, a blogger from Texas who has been inspiring readers with her story of weight loss and fitness since 2008

Check out her blog...

[www.MyJourneyToFit.com](http://www.MyJourneyToFit.com)



## OTHER HEALTH AND FITNESS BLOGS YOU MIGHT LIKE:

- ▶ **[www.DashingDish.com](http://www.DashingDish.com)**  
Besides fitness ideas, this blog is "a place to find healthy alternatives to the food you crave."
- ▶ **[www.ComeBackMomma.com](http://www.ComeBackMomma.com)**  
This fitness coach shares her "continued journey to be the best woman, wife and mother that I can be."

## Why did you become a blogger, and how has blogging changed your life?

**SB:** I became a blogger when I started my last diet. I wanted to remember how hard I worked to get the weight off, so this time I would actually keep it off. I had no idea how much blogging would connect me with other like-minded people who were doing the same thing. The most important thing was finding a couple of bloggers who had lost over 100 pounds and were keeping the weight off. I was very overwhelmed in the beginning, but finding others who had succeeded gave me hope. And I hope I'm able to give that to the new person who is just starting their journey to weight loss and fitness. 📱

Whatever your interest, there is likely an online community of people who share that interest with you. Our "Featured Blogger" series introduces you to people who write online websites about a variety of topics. In the March/April issue, we'll focus on home/DIY projects.



# Staying connected to those NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

BY MATT LEDGER

It's that time of year again — New Year's resolutions. Some face them with dread, while others resolve to try a bit harder than last year.

Statistically, most resolutions revolve around cutting out the sweets, reinstating gym memberships or trying out another aspect of fitness, but there are many other ways to enhance our lives. Maybe less Facebook and more face time with those friends? You might even include them in your next selfie. It's easy to let technology distract you, but it can also be used as an incredible tool for time management, goal setting, fiscal planning and of course tracking exercise.



## ORGANIZATION — TRELLO

Don't you wish you could have that kitchen dry erase board in your pocket to remind you of that errand you just forgot or that key ingredient from the recipe? Sure, you could just write another Post-it note, but your smartphone can allow you to edit, sync, upload photos and even assign tasks to other family members. Trello is a cloud-based app that you can use to organize the tasks of a big project and/or the daily routine. Users create color-coded boards, with lists of prioritized tasks that are easily dragged to the completed column to track your weekly progress. Trello is used by tech clients at Google, PayPal and Kickstarter.



## BUDGET AND FINANCE — MINT.COM

Just about everyone could do a little better managing their money in 2015. To track those finances and budget your spending, Mint.com offers free tracking software to electronically monitor investments, purchases and income. Mint, from the makers of TurboTax, Quicken and QuickBooks, has encrypted security equal to your bank. Just like those major credit cards, the system will alert you of unusual account purchases, spending trends and if you exceed your budgets.



## FITNESS — MOBILE APPS

Speaking of investments, improving your overall health is an investment in your future. Being healthy helps parents stay active with their kids and pays many dividends later on during retirement. To get started, try the 7-minute workout app by

Johnson and Johnson, which coaches you through dozens of simple home exercises. Once that becomes routine, you can escape to the nearest park and use the RunKeeper or MapMyFitness apps to track how many miles you run or bike.



## VOLUNTEERISM — CREATETHEGOOD.ORG & HANDSONNETWORK.ORG

While the first three areas focus on yourself, many people make resolutions to help in their communities to make the spirit of the season last well beyond New Year's Day. The websites createthegood.org and handsonnetwork.org allow people to search for local volunteer programs. Some current projects are seeking volunteers for everything from youth tutors to repairs at homeless shelters to mentors to helping the elderly. Having your own budget or fitness in order is great, but nothing gives you that feeling of satisfaction quite like helping others. ☺





# Logging on to learn



Online classes enable a return to college

BY MATT LEDGER

Practicing what you preach is great advice for life, as is the case for a local educator who monitors students taking online courses by day, while spending her evenings in front of a computer in her own collegiate-level distance learning program. Jessica Farlow started as a special education aide for a year at New Hope High School in 2012. She has since monitored the computer lab, as students take online course work for credits, including foreign language classes.

After the school day's final bell, she spends hours on her own computer, completing her own assignments toward becoming a certified elementary and special education teacher. "The older you get, the more responsibility you already have," Farlow says. She will graduate in Spring 2016 and hopes for a teaching position in Madison County.

## TEACHERS WITH EXTRA HOMEWORK

Farlow attended Calhoun Community College in Huntsville from 2006 to 2009, receiving an associate degree in business. "I enjoyed going to campus, but online classes are much more convenient," she says. She began classes again in 2013 with online courses through Athens State University.

She's not the only teacher at New Hope with extra homework. English teacher Lydia Armstrong has taught at the school for five years. She studied online and received her Bachelor of Arts from Athens State in 2010, only attending two courses on campus.



Armstrong is now taking online courses, through The University of West Alabama, working toward her master's in English language arts for secondary education. She ultimately hopes to become a professor at a local college.

## STARTING ON CAMPUS, COMPLETING ONLINE

New Hope Telephone's Marketing Administrator Christy Nelson grew up hearing her mother's stories of hardworking days on the assembly line. While working at her own factory job, she began thinking about other career paths. "That was when I decided that I wanted to go back to school," Nelson says.

She began at Virginia College of Huntsville in 2004, seeking her associate degree in administrative office management. While pursuing her associate degree, she began working as a customer service representative for New Hope Telephone Cooperative.

Nelson continued toward a bachelor's, but she needed to take one course that was not offered on campus. Reluctantly, she had to try it through the school's well-known online program. "I was nervous about it, but I went ahead with it, and I actually loved it," Nelson says. "Initially, I never would have considered it, until I was put in the position where I had to do it to get the credit."

## CONNECTING TO CLASSES

It can be overwhelming that first semester, as online students must be disciplined enough to stay on schedule, Farlow cautioned. "I figured out quickly that I needed to write a weekly list of assignments," she says. "That way, I would try to set my own schedule, like I was actually going to classes."

Farlow, Armstrong and Nelson say self-motivation is key to thriving in an online program. Being computer savvy is also an important factor for those avoiding the classroom.

Distance was the biggest factor for Armstrong — facing a one-hour-and-45-minute drive each way meant more time in the car than she would spend in the classroom.

"I lived in Dutton, so driving to Athens for the classes was just an inconvenience," Armstrong says.

Taking classes from home meant hours that would have been spent in the car would become time for her to study, and money that would have gone for gas went to pay for tuition. The graduate-level online courses she is now taking provide new challenges. "It's a lot more intense, especially having a full-time job and trying to have a personal life," she says.

## DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS HELP FAMILY LIFE

Nelson's determination for a degree was met with new challenges once her sons, Kaleb and Kody arrived. "When I was going to the campus, I would work until 5 p.m., then I would go straight to school, and I was there until almost 10 p.m.," says Nelson, who made the one-hour roundtrip four nights each week while her boys

stayed with their grandparents. "Kaleb would be in bed by the time I got home, so I felt like I was losing out on time with him."

She met her husband, Jason Steelman, while on the Huntsville campus during a keyboarding class. Both quickly learned that the convenience of online studies helped bring balance to busy schedules and family time. "When you have kids, this is the way to go," Nelson says.

Nelson's third child, Celsea, arrived while she and her husband worked toward master's degrees in business administration. Christy became the NHTC marketing administrator in 2012, in part because her new degrees qualified her for the position. For the past two years, she and other NHTC staffers have helped community members through classes at NHTC's Digital Literacy Lab. "That was my dream as a child; I wanted my own office," Nelson says. "I absolutely love it now; there's never a dull moment, and it's a dream come true." 📞



LEFT: New Hope High School's Jessica Farlow helping a student during an online class.



BELOW: New Hope Telephone Cooperative's Christy Nelson advanced to marketing administrator upon completing her bachelor's and master's degrees through online courses.

# GAME TIME!

There are more tricks to cooking wild game than pulling a rabbit from a hat, and it takes a seasoned cook and avid hunter, such as Mike Page of New Hope, Alabama, to get it right.

Page, pitmaster of Bootlegg BBQ located in New Hope, and a longtime competitor on the wild game cook-off circuit, was the 2013 grand champion of the Alabama Wildlife Federation Wild Game Cook-Off held in Tuscumbia, Alabama. His dish, Elk Tex-Mex, was the best overall of 31 entries.

So it goes without saying ... he's wild about game.

"I was around 8 years old when my dad first started taking me hunting," he says. With that came an important lesson: "He taught me that if you kill an animal, you have to eat it."

So by the time he was a teenager, Page began cooking meat on his own. Early on, he learned the age-old, time-honored tricks of the trade: how to lessen the flavors of meats with heavy, gamey flavors; how to marinate tougher cuts; and which meats taste best grilled, smoked or fried. But the name of the game for most of Page's meats is low and slow: low heat and slow cooking.

"When I'm cooking wild game, most people will ask what it is," he says. "And they always like it when they try it, especially when I'm cooking more exotic meats, such as bear and gator. They really want to try that."

As for technique, Page readily admits that cooking wild game is a bit tougher than preparing farm-raised meats for the table.

"You have to pay attention to your dish," he says with a nod toward Mother Nature. "Wild game doesn't come in a package with instructions."

Most wild game meats require marinating, but what marinade is used depends on the type of meat. All wild game is different and has different textures, Page explains.

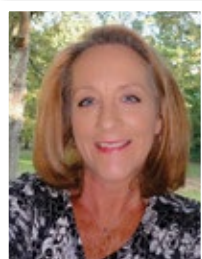


Mike Page demonstrates his grill skills with some mouth-watering gator roll-ups.



▲ **GATOR, ANYONE?** — Dinner is definitely never boring when Mike Page is in charge of the menu. The pitmaster of Bootlegg BBQ is also a wild game cook-off grand champion.

"You have to marinate the meat, but be careful not to overdo it," Page warns. "I like to taste more of the natural flavors of the meat, and I've found that others do, too." 🗨️



Food Editor **Anne P. Braly** is a native of Chattanooga, Tenn. Prior to pursuing a freelance career, she spent 21 years as food editor and feature writer at a regional newspaper.

## MIKE PAGE'S SUGGESTIONS FOR MARINADES:

- ▶ Combine 3/4 cup apple juice, 1/3 cup oil, 1/4 cup cider vinegar, 2 tablespoons fresh sage and 1 teaspoon salt (good for bear, elk and venison).
- ▶ Mix the amount of Worcestershire sauce you need with some Montreal steak seasoning (good for elk, venison and duck).
- ▶ Red wine with crushed garlic (good for venison and elk).
- ▶ Mix together 1 can beer, 2 cups Worcestershire, 1/4 cup soy sauce, 2 teaspoons lemon juice, garlic salt and black pepper (good for almost any game meat).



# RECIPES ON THE WILD SIDE

## GATOR ROLL-UPS

*There are no exact amounts in this recipe. It all depends on how much gator tail you have.*

Bacon

Alligator tail pieces cut 1 inch wide and 4 inches long

Cream cheese

Prosciutto ham

Pepper Jack cheese

Barbecue sauce

Prepare smoker. Place a slice of bacon on cutting board or other clean surface. Place one piece of gator tail on bacon, then top with cream cheese, a thin slice of ham and a slice of cheese. Roll up and secure bacon with toothpick. Repeat with remaining gator pieces. Place roll-ups in smoker and smoke for 45 minutes at 300°. Serve with barbecue sauce.



*Gator Roll-ups*

## WILD TURKEY 101

Uncooked strips of wild turkey breast, cut into 6- by 1- by 4-inch strips  
Equal number strips of brown-sugar bacon  
Pepper Jack cheese slices  
Prosciutto ham slices

Place turkey strip on a slice of bacon. Cut a square slice of pepper jack into 3 strips; place two on top of turkey. Add 1 slice of ham and top with third cheese strip. Roll into a pinwheel and secure with toothpick. Season to taste with your favorite seasonings. Put three roll-ups on a kabob skewer. Grill on top of foil at 320° for 45 minutes, turning every 15 minutes. Remove from foil and cook over exposed fire or coals for a few minutes to caramelize.

## ELK QUESADILLAS

- 1 pound ground elk meat
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 1 can black beans
- Tortillas
- Cheddar cheese
- Garnishes: cilantro, salsa, sour cream, avocado, sliced jalapeno peppers

Preheat oven to 400°. Heat olive oil in pan and add onions, garlic and meat. Once meat is broken up, add spices. Saute peppers in a separate pan with a couple tablespoons of olive oil. Add beans after peppers are fork-tender. Place meat, peppers, beans and cheese onto half a tortilla. Fold in half and secure with a toothpick. Repeat with remaining tortillas. Place on a wire rack in the oven or the grill and cook for 4 to 5 minutes or until golden brown. Remove and garnish with desired toppings.

## VENISON CHILI

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 3 cups red wine
- 4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- Salt, to taste
- 4 tablespoons canola oil
- 10 slices cooked bacon, diced
- 2 pounds venison (deer) stew meat, ground or finely diced
- 2 cups kidney or black beans, cooked and drained

Melt the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Stir in the onion and garlic, and saute for 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the brown sugar and saute for 2 to 3 more minutes. Then stir in the red wine, vinegar, tomato paste, chicken stock, cumin, cayenne pepper, chili powder and salt. Simmer for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the mixture is reduced by about half. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Stir in the bacon and fry for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the bacon is browned. Move the bacon to one side of the skillet and add the venison to the empty side of the skillet. Season the meat with salt, to taste, and saute the meat for 15 minutes or until well browned. Stir in the beans and toss all together. Transfer this mixture to the simmering pot. Mix everything together thoroughly and let simmer for another half hour. Serve in bowls with garnishes, such as sliced green onions, shredded cheese and sour cream on the side. 🍴



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## SECURE YOUR HOME AND YOU COULD WIN AN IPAD MINI!



Home security is a worthwhile investment to protect our loved ones and safeguard our valuables. New customers to NHTC's Security Solutions program will have an extra incentive through February 27. Homeowners who sign up for the service\* and complete the word search puzzle will be entered into a drawing to win a new iPad Mini. *iPad Mini is a registered trademark of Apple Inc.*

Return the completed puzzle to our office or mail to NHTC, ATTN: Christy Nelson, P.O. Box 452, New Hope, AL 35760, or scan and email the entry to [communicator@nehp.net](mailto:communicator@nehp.net), or fax to 256-723-2800.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

## NHTC SECURITY WORD SEARCH

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