

# The Communicator

JULY/AUGUST 2017

## 2017 GIG-CERTIFIED

NHTC continues  
to make history  
with a new fiber  
optic network





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Lessons from our Founding Fathers

As we celebrate Independence Day, I reflect on the patriots who helped start America. We are indebted to these Founding Fathers who fought for and forged the beginnings of our nation.

I was fortunate to have two experiences this spring that put the Founding Fathers on my mind early this year — and reminded me of the important work NTCA does to represent our member telcos and the people they serve.

The first lesson came in April when I attended a seminar at the Washington Library in Mount Vernon. We can learn many things from our first president, but what struck me is how Washington made so many decisions with people's long-term interests in mind. He knew that the choices he made would have implications for decades, and he wisely considered their impact.

The second lesson came in May when I was able to attend the musical "Hamilton." The show tells the story of our first secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton. One of the songs in "Hamilton," "In The Room Where It Happens," discusses the importance of being at the table when decisions are made.

The lessons from these Founding Fathers reminded me of the duty we have at NTCA to represent rural America. We deal with policy matters that have long-lasting implications for millions of Americans, and we have to make sure policymakers keep that in mind. In order to do that, it's important for NTCA to represent you and your telco in the rooms where decisions are made. ☑



## Don't let your business get held hostage

Imagine arriving at work one morning to find everything on your computer locked, accompanied by a message that if you want to regain access, you'll have to pay money to the people who locked it.

This is what happens when a computer is infected with a type of virus called ransomware, and in recent months, computer systems across the globe have been taken hostage.

The virus known as WannaCry or WannaCrypt gains access to computers using a security hole in Windows' server software. Small businesses are especially vulnerable to these attacks because they often can't dedicate as many resources to cybersecurity as larger companies.

Fortunately, the Federal Trade Commission recommends an easy way to protect your business from this threat: Make sure your system software is up to date.

Like any real-world thieves, hackers are always looking to exploit holes in a system's security, while software companies race to find and close them first. Many computers download and install these security updates automatically; however, if your business uses an older, unsupported version of Windows, you may need to visit Microsoft's website to download the latest update.

The Commission also suggests protecting against ransomware attacks by backing up important files.

Businesses save many important documents on computers and mobile devices, from tax forms to planning documents. Get into the habit of backing up those files in the cloud or to a hard drive. Log out of the cloud when you're finished, and unplug any external hard drives afterward so that hackers cannot use ransomware to lock them.

Avoid unfamiliar links, attachments and apps as well. The most common source of ransomware is phishing emails. You should never click on a link, download an attachment or follow an ad from a source you don't know and trust.

Because small businesses are a vital part of the economy and are often targeted by scammers, the Commission has launched a website dedicated to helping those businesses protect themselves. For more information on defending against ransomware, data breaches and other cybersecurity threats, visit [ftc.gov/SmallBusiness](http://ftc.gov/SmallBusiness). ☑





# Travel tips for the digital family

Vacations were not something we took when I was growing up. Between our family's tight budget and my dad's work schedule, it was just too hard to get away. Now as a working mom, I am trying to do my best to take my boys on at least one trip each summer. Some years, we are only able

to do short weekend trips, but I am trying to organize bigger vacations as my boys get older. Regardless of the types of trips we take, I want to make them as affordable and stress-free as possible. Here are some apps I use and activities I plan to help make each trip a success.

## MY TRAVEL APPS

► **TripAdvisor:** This is a well-known and commonly used app to get reviews on hotels, tourist attractions, restaurants and more. I use this very frequently when traveling.

► **Yelp:** If you need a great local restaurant, try looking at Yelp. There you can read reviews from customers and find the best places to eat.

► **GasBuddy:** Find the cheapest gas near your location.

► **Waze:** Get crowdsourced travel information and directions. Be one of the first to know of traffic jams, accidents, road conditions or road construction. You can contribute to and access real-time information.

► **iExit:** Find out if the next interstate exit has helpful resources such as a gas station, a campground, a restaurant or a hotel.

family while traveling. It allows you to treasure hunt in a fun, affordable way. Geocaching uses GPS to find little hidden treasures all across the country. Many of these treasures are nothing more than a little metal container (often half the size of a finger or smaller) containing a rolled-up piece of paper that you can sign and date to show you found the item. Sometimes there are little treasure boxes where you can remove an item and replace it with something else. Download a GPS app and get out and explore. You can learn more by going to [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com).

► **Digital Scrapbooking:** Any time you travel, have your kids contribute to the memories by letting them use a camera or video recorder. Sometimes the pictures they take and the videos they make are some of your most treasured. Then, take those videos and pictures and make a digital scrapbook or video using websites or apps such as Shutterfly or Animoto.

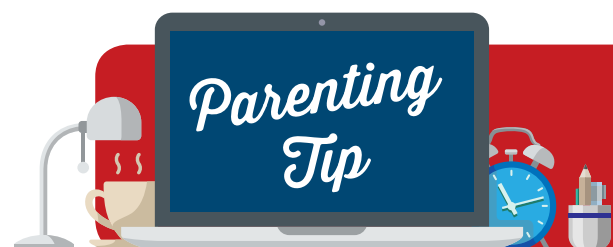
Whether you are planning a weekend camping trip or a two-week beach vacation, it helps to be prepared so everyone can have fun and enjoy the trip. Happy traveling! 📱



**CARISSA SWENSON**  
IS A TRAINING  
AND EDUCATION  
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➡ **Also, don't forget to add to your vacation fun with activities or projects.**

► **Geocaching:** Geocaching is one of my favorite activities to do with my



A movie, audiobook or podcast can help time in the car pass quickly — for children or grown-ups. To save on mobile data, download these using your home Wi-Fi network before hitting the road.

# United to improve infrastructure

In this day of harsh political divisions, few issues have widespread support in both parties. But one topic finds consensus on both sides of the aisle in Congress — and telcos like NHTC play a major role in this discussion.



**JIM COOK**  
General Manager

Investing in infrastructure, everything from roads and bridges to schools and waterlines, was a leading issue during the 2016 presidential campaign for many candidates. Putting money into infrastructure, it was argued, would not only improve assets such as airports, hospitals and tunnels, but would also create new jobs for Americans.

Since the election, this emphasis has continued, with both parties putting forth plans that would improve the systems that make our society work. Like most Americans, I agree that improving our infrastructure is important. I'm eager to see improved roads and upgraded transportation options. But NHTC and our partners around the state and country want to make sure these plans include broadband for rural America.

In 2010, the FCC summed it up nicely when the commission released its National Broadband Plan. "Broadband is the great infrastructure challenge of the early 21st century," the FCC report states in its opening line. "Like electricity a century ago, broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life. It is enabling entire new industries and unlocking vast new possibilities for existing ones. It is changing how we educate children, deliver health care, manage energy, ensure public safety, engage government, and access, organize and disseminate knowledge."

Improving broadband connectivity is a key to our nation's strength and security. While there are sure to be arguments over the amount of federal funding, how incentives are delivered, and which regulations may be relaxed, most experts believe we're in for a period of investment and building not seen in several decades.

As we celebrate Independence Day, Americans should be proud to see such a massive effort to rebuild and modernize the roads, water systems, power grids and communication networks that have made progress possible in our nation.

And as a customer of NHTC, you can be proud to know that your telecommunications provider has a voice in shaping these national policies, thanks to our work with NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. Some 850 telcos like ours across the nation are unified through NTCA in our efforts to make sure our story — your story — is heard by the policymakers who are shaping America's infrastructure decisions.

Shirley Bloomfield, the chief executive officer of NTCA, said it best: "Small, hometown broadband providers have led and are continuing to lead the way in deploying high-speed, sustainable broadband that responds to the needs of consumers and businesses in rural America." We face many challenges in continuing that good work, but we remain committed to keeping your needs at the forefront as elected officials make choices in the coming months about where to invest your tax dollars in order to improve America's infrastructure.

With so much attention from both political parties on investing in our communities, the time is right to share our story with all who will listen. Will you join us? Visit [www.buildbroadbandwithus.com](http://www.buildbroadbandwithus.com) and sign up to become an advocate to help spread awareness of the critical need for rural broadband infrastructure.

It's a rare moment when there is consensus among our leaders. Help shape our tomorrow by joining the broadband movement today. [☞](#)

## The Communicator

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New Hope Telephone Cooperative  
P.O. Box 452  
New Hope, AL 35760  
256-723-4211  
[www.nhtc.coop](http://www.nhtc.coop)

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### On the Cover:



New Hope Telephone Cooperative is now a gig-capable provider, a milestone for the cooperative's completion of a fiber optic network. See story Page 12.



*Hannah Hill*

## CONGRATULATIONS, scholarship winners!

**HANNAH HILL**, a New Hope High School graduate, was awarded a \$500 college scholarship by NHTC. She plans to attend Calhoun Community College to study nursing. Hill's extracurricular activities included Anchor Club, Heritage Panel, TVSCA, National Honor Society, varsity softball, FFA, homecoming court, SGA and Indian Ambassador. She also served on the yearbook staff for two years, the second as editor. As a member of New Hope Saddle Club, Hill was honored as a Senior Miss Ardmore Rodeo Queen. She rescues and rehomes

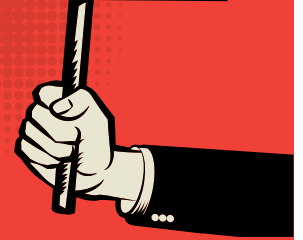
abused horses and has worked as a barn attendant, exercising and training horses for western pleasure competitions. Along with taking AP courses in school and her impressive list of clubs and activities, Hill also served the community as a Special Olympics volunteer.

**PAYTON ANDERTON**, a KDS DAR High School graduate, was awarded a \$500 college scholarship by NHTC. She plans to attend Wallace State Community College with the goal of becoming a physical therapist assistant. Anderton was inspired to enter the physical therapy field after seeing the care provided when her grandmother was sick and needed physical therapy. Anderton was a member of the Beta Club, Leo Club and FBLA. She has received multiple awards as part of the Church of Christ Lads to Leaders program. She was a National Honor Society member and president of the Leo Club, and she was voted senior class favorite. She has served the community at blood drives, Big Spring cleanup and nursing home visits. She has also participated in community service activities through Leo Club, Beta Club and FBLA.



*Payton Anderton*

**SAVE  
THE DATE**



### Don't miss NHTC's Customer Appreciation Day

Mark your calendars to join NHTC employees for a day of food and fun at our Customer Appreciation Day on Friday, Oct. 27, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## Bids for LAWN MAINTENANCE

NHTC is currently accepting bids for lawn maintenance.

Please call  
**256-723-4211** for  
more information.





# *Even 5 isn't too young to be a* **NATIONAL PARK RANGER**

A long-running program offers adventure and education



A ranger leads a bird program at Congaree National Park in South Carolina.

**T**ired of the beach and had enough of movie theaters and playgrounds? This summer, get the kids off the couch and have them head in a new direction as Junior Rangers.

And they have fun.

Interested youth complete a series of activities during a park visit, share their answers with a park ranger, and receive an official Junior Ranger patch and certificate. Parks are open daily except on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Junior Ranger programs are free with park admission and offered all year.

Junior Rangers help preserve outdoor treasures as the National Park Service's representatives to their friends, families and schoolmates back home. They share their knowledge about parks and continue to use good environmental practices.

Junior Ranger programs are offered in national parks across the South. Here are a few favorites:

## **Little River Canyon National Preserve,** Fort Payne, Alabama

Learn what it takes to keep Little River Canyon National Preserve in pristine condition, find out what can be discovered in the park, and discover how to do these activities safely. Those things and more fill an activity book for kids found in the park's visitors center.

Those who complete the book will take an oath and receive a badge and certificate before heading out to experience firsthand what they've learned while exploring the more than 15,000 acres of land atop Lookout Mountain.

The park is Alabama's only national preserve, home to several native endangered species, such as the green pitcher plant, Kral's water plantain and tiny blue shiner minnows. Take a dip in the Little River. Or pack a picnic and take a hike to Mushroom Rock, one of many natural sculptures forged by millions of years of water pouring through the canyon. There's much to see, do and learn in this wonderland of nature.

🌿 **Park admission:** Free (\$3 per vehicle to park in picnic area).

🌿 **Information:** 256-845-9605 or [www.nps.gov/liri](http://www.nps.gov/liri).

## Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park, Hodgenville, Kentucky

A lot of people don't realize our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, wasn't born in Illinois, The Land of Lincoln.

"He was born in a little cabin at Sinking Spring Farm here in Kentucky," says Stacy Humphreys, chief of interpretations and resource management at the park. "The Junior Ranger program helps kids learn about the park and the formative years of Abraham Lincoln."

Kids will enjoy discovering facts about the man and his family by touring the cabin and museum. They can track their steps through an activity book. There are different books for different ages, and once a book is completed, a ranger will check answers and issue a badge and certificate to the park's newest Junior Ranger.

"It's a wonderful program, and we get excellent response from parents who come asking if we have a Junior Ranger program," Humphreys says. "I've had a lot of children come in with Junior Ranger badges from other parks sewn onto hats, shirts and vests. The program inspires kids to visit other national parks."

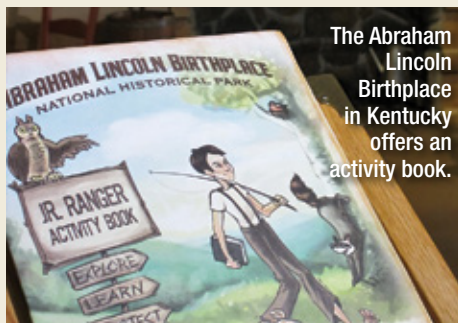
**#Park admission:** Free.

**#Information:** 270-358-3137 or [www.nps.gov/abli](http://www.nps.gov/abli).

## Congaree National Park, Hopkins, South Carolina

Walking deep into a forest surrounded by giant oaks, loblolly pines and acres of massive cypress is all part of the Junior Ranger program at this park founded in 1976. Congaree National Park preserves the last big chunk of old-growth bottomland forest found in the United States.

"We have the tallest trees in the Eastern



United States," says Scott Teodorski, chief of interpretations. "If you want to see trees in their natural, old primeval state, this is the place to do it."

The park's Junior Ranger program is geared toward learning about these trees and the park's history, its plants and animals. Pick up an activity book at the visitors center and wander through the park with your children on a self-guided tour. If you don't have a lot of time, the book can be completed at the center.

"We work with the kids to make sure they get their badge or patch — it's their choice — and certificate," Teodorski adds. "And then they're sworn in. This is one of the most memorable things we do as park rangers. The program is one of the best things going for the national park system. It's a piece of our future."

**#Park admission:** Free (There are fees for camping in campgrounds).

**#Information:** 803-776-4396 or [www.nps.gov/cong](http://www.nps.gov/cong).

## Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, Oneida, Tennessee

The Junior Ranger program at Big South Fork takes kids on a ranger-led program around the park, followed by completion of an age-appropriate activity book. Once the work is finished, a ranger signs off, the book gets stamped and dated, and your child will be sworn in as an official Junior Ranger. But only after taking an oath:

"I (child's name) pledge to be a good Junior Ranger, to learn about Big South Fork National Recreation Area, and to protect the park from harm. I will help others have fun learning about the park and the Big South Fork River. I will do my part to follow rules of the park and always act in a safe manner."

The program, now in its fifth year, has become increasingly popular, says Chris Derman, chief of interpretations. "There are some kids who have a large collection of badges and want to add more," he says.

Big South Fork offers a wide range of recreational activities, including hiking, mountain biking, water sports and hunting. The park encompasses 125,000 acres, with sections in Tennessee and Kentucky. Youth can pick up Junior Ranger books at one of the visitors centers or download one at [www.nps.gov/biso](http://www.nps.gov/biso) and complete it prior to a visit. Booklets are available in English and Spanish.

**#Park admission:** Free (There are fees for pool use and camping).

**#Information:** 423-569-9778 or [www.nps.gov/biso](http://www.nps.gov/biso).

## Waco Mammoth National Monument, Waco, Texas

Young paleontologists will have fun becoming a Junior Ranger at Waco Mammoth National Monument. Go on a tour. Dig in a mock dig pit at the Excavation Station. Have a picnic. Participate in special programs and try the newest activity, "Bone-oculars," where you can decorate your own binoculars to take with you on the tour to see mammoth bones. It's all part of the park's Junior Ranger program and the only program in the national park system designed by a young person — an 11-year-old Girl Scout.

Just stop by the welcome center and ask for a free book or download it in advance on the park's website ([www.nps.gov/waco](http://www.nps.gov/waco)). Each book contains activities that help kids learn about the park and the amazing fossil resources.

"Waco Junior Rangers become park stewards and proudly wear their ranger badges to show others that they are our best and brightest park representatives," says Raegan King, monument site manager.

**#Park admission:** \$5 (adults), \$4 (seniors 60-plus, teachers, military and students seventh grade-college), \$3 (pre-kindergarten-sixth grade), free (age 3 and under).

**#Information:** 254-750-7946 or [www.nps.gov/waco](http://www.nps.gov/waco).



# Beyond the history books

## DAR teacher prepares students for life after high school

BY MELISSA SMITH

By 6 a.m., Glenda Baker pulls her car into the parking lot at Kate Duncan Smith DAR School, where a portrait of Gen. Robert E. Lee stoically watches over her classroom as she changes the inspirational quote on the board and prepares for her students to arrive.



“Be sure your legacy is worth leaving” is her favorite quote to share with students. “It’s one everyone can use to make their lives more meaningful,” she says.

Baker spent 16 years teaching at New Hope High School, and this is her 18th year of teaching American history to sophomores, juniors and seniors at DAR. She graduated from the University of Alabama, where she double majored in history and English and earned her doctorate.

As an American and a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Baker says patriotism is important. Her favorite subject to teach and study is Alabama history, and the Civil War is a



Dr. Glenda Baker instructs students working on a project about women's suffrage in America.

close second. “I encourage my students to know their roots,” she says.

Music is often incorporated into her lectures, and creative writing is encouraged. “I want my students to be great communicators,” she says. Students take detailed lecture notes, which Baker believes better prepares them for college. She believes those who will enter the workforce directly from high school also benefit from this skill. They are better able to write an essay explaining why they are the right person for the position when filling out a job application.

### MORE THAN HISTORY

While Baker wants her students to excel academically, she also encourages them to be well-rounded and aware of what’s going on in the world. “Our students already have a good foundation of community-over-self,” she says. “They are more than willing to help those in need and to care for their own.”

On several occasions, students started fundraising campaigns after learning a classmate or faculty member had been

struck by a hardship. Students once brought paper money — everything from \$1 bills to \$100 dollar bills — and taped it to the ceiling of Baker’s classroom for one of their drives. “It is truly an amazing thing to see,” Baker says.

Recently, students raised more than \$1,000 to give to a janitor who had a major plumbing leak in his home. “Isn’t it amazing our students have such a sense of kindness and giving?” she says. “It is a result of good parenting.”

Baker takes pride in preparing her students for life outside of high school. Students may see her crocheting, watercoloring, journaling or sewing at ballgames or during a break between classes.

“Being a good Southern belle role model for our students is important to me. I want them to see educators as more than one dimensional — that they have interests other than the curriculum taught in the classroom,” she says. “It is my hope that they will attempt a variety of skills in their lives, hone those that give them pleasure, and share their talents with others.” ☎





Charlie Furlough has been in the wrecker service for over 50 years.

"As the old saying goes in this business, 'You meet new customers by accident,'" Charlie Furlough says.



## A career of service

Charlie Furlough provides a helping hand when it's needed most

BY WILL GAINES

**I**n a career spanning more than 50 years, New Hope's Charlie Furlough has gotten to do what he most enjoys — helping people.

He owns Brown's Wrecker Service and Furlough Wrecker Service, and he's served people in all kinds of situations, at all times of the day, and in all kinds of weather. He enjoys all of it.

"As the old saying goes in this business, 'You meet new customers by accident,'" Furlough says. "We meet a lot of people, and they've all treated us really good over the years."

Furlough began in the wrecker business 54 years ago, and now at 74 years old, he's still going strong.

Last year, he and his employees were recognized for their dedication with the Towman Award from the American Towman Exposition. Furlough went to Baltimore to receive the award, and he says the event drew people from all over the world.

"The most special thing about that to me was your local fire department and rescue squads had to nominate you," Furlough says. "For them to nominate us was a big honor for me. I was really surprised. I've never won an award."

### AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

Furlough didn't plan to dedicate his life to wrecker services. He started out as a mechanic in the early 1960s and leased a garage from a local Amoco station. Then, he noticed a need for a good wrecker service and decided to give it a try.

"I had a garage, and I had a really hard time getting people to tow my cars, so I just decided to buy my own wrecker service," Furlough says. "I stayed with the service station for probably 25 years, and eventually, I just broke away from the mechanic work altogether."

Later, his longtime girlfriend, Nancy Brown, also decided she wanted to get into the wrecker business, so Furlough and Brown became partners and started Brown's Wrecker Service in Owens Cross Roads.

Brown passed away in 2012 after battling lung cancer. Furlough and Brown were together for 18 years, and he still thinks of her often. He became the sole owner of Brown's just before she died.

### BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

Today, both of Furlough's wrecker services have become very successful businesses. He has two wrecker trucks, four rollbacks and a larger truck that can tow vehicles like 18-wheelers and RVs.

He currently employs five drivers and two secretaries. Furlough still gets out and goes on calls, and he doesn't see himself slowing down anytime soon.

"As long as they need me, I'm going to keep doing it," he says. "I still enjoy it."

But it is a challenging life.

"This is a 24/7 job," Furlough says. "You don't get a lot of sleep, and you don't get regular meals. When people call us, they usually need help, and we always make sure that happens. That's special to us." 📞



# Through the LOOKING GLASS

The story  
behind  
revolutionary  
optical  
fibers

BY DREW WOOLLEY

**E**ric Parsons wore two hats when he worked as a sales manager for Corning Inc. in the 1970s. By day, he sold the manufacturing company's glass and ceramics products to industrial and scientific customers. In the evenings, he and others on the sales staff would help with products being developed in the lab.

Parsons still remembers the day a group working on a new communications technology appeared and told them to drop everything.

"One day they came in and said, 'Fellas, quit working on this altogether. This is dead,'" he recalls. "'Box all your information up and put it in the archives. There's a new technology called fiber optics.'"

Since that day in 1979, fiber has become a household term, and millions of miles of line have crisscrossed the globe, connecting people continents apart almost instantaneously, supporting high-definition video and enabling lightning-fast internet.

## COMMUNICATION IN A FLASH

With exposure to so much technology, we've grown used to the idea that

information can travel in many ways. Landline telephones convert the sound of a voice on one end of a call into electric signals transmitted across lengths of wire. Cellphones ditched the wires in favor of radio waves that travel through the air.

Corning scientists looked at those methods and took them a step further. "They said, 'Hey I've got an idea. What if we transmit light through glass and use that for telecommunications?'" says Pat Turner, the director of marketing operations for Corning Optical Communications.

Imagine you and a friend are on opposite ends of a long, straight tunnel and both have a flashlight. If you worked out a code, you could send signals with the flashlights that would reach the other person almost instantaneously.

But what if the tunnel curved and changed direction multiple times? To send messages back and forth, you would need mirrors to bounce the light around corners.

The same concept is at the heart of fiber optics. Each fiber strand is made up of a glass core thinner than a human hair. Light signals are transmitted through the

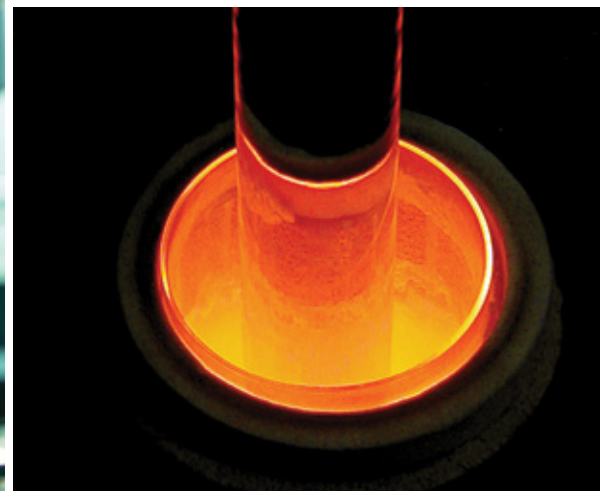
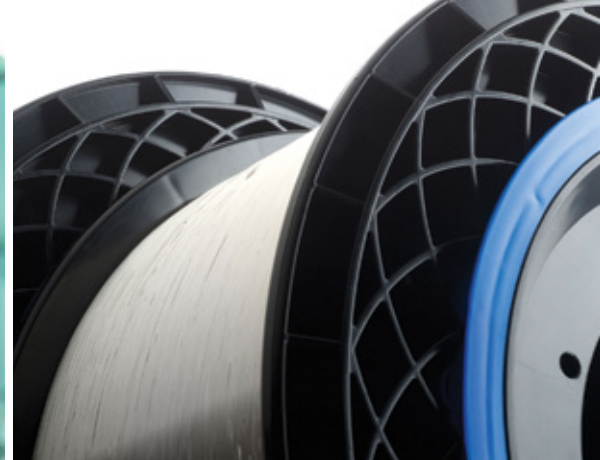
glass, just as you might send a signal down the tunnel. To keep the light from simply passing through the glass when it changes direction, the core is surrounded by a cladding that reflects light back into the glass. This works similarly to the mirrors in the tunnel, bouncing the signal from side to side until it reaches its endpoint.

Since each fiber is much thinner than a traditional copper wire, fiber optics make it possible to transmit large amounts of information simultaneously. And a single cable can bundle hundreds, or even thousands, of fiber strands.

## ACTUALLY, IT IS ROCKET SCIENCE

Despite being incredibly thin, fiber is far from brittle. A single strand is three times stronger than steel and more durable than copper, yet light and flexible. In addition, to prevent the light signal from degrading over long distances, the glass core has to be extremely pure. So pure, in fact, that if the ocean was made of the same glass, you could stand on the surface and clearly see the ocean floor miles below.





To most people, it would seem almost impossible that such a material exists, much less that it could be manufactured on a large scale. “Making fiber is rocket science,” says Parsons. “Precision is everything.”

He’s not exaggerating. The first step in manufacturing fiber requires mixing oxygen with liquid forms of silicon and germanium inside a glass tube. If that mixture isn’t just right, the resulting glass core might not be as durable or clear as necessary.

As these chemicals mix, the tube is heated to extreme temperatures. The ensuing chemical reaction leaves a white soot on the inside of the glass tube, which the heat fuses into what will become the glass core of the fiber. The tube itself will become the reflective cladding surrounding the core.

The process takes several hours to complete, with the tube eventually collapsing on itself to form a solid glass rod called a preform.

While the preform has the internal structure needed for an optical fiber, it’s too

thick and bulky to be useful across long distances. To stretch it out, the preform is hung from a drawing tower, where one end of the rod is heated in an oven to 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit. From there, gravity takes over.

As the tip of the rod softens, a glob falls slowly toward the ground, forming a long, thin thread not unlike honey stretching as it is poured from a spoon. But because of the strength of the glass, the fiber can become incredibly thin and stretch to great lengths without breaking. As it cools, the fiber is threaded through pulleys and receives a series of protective coatings before being wound onto a spool, ready to be tested and then used.

## ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Perhaps the only thing more impressive than the process behind fiber optics is the range of ways it’s being put to use. The convenience of blistering internet speeds or being able to carry on a crystal-clear phone conversation with someone on the other side of the world is apparent, but that’s just the start of how fiber is improving people’s

lives — especially in rural areas.

“The true value of fiber is what we can do from a human aspect,” says Turner. “The ability to do distance learning for people who wouldn’t otherwise have access to a university environment, or telemedicine, or allowing families to connect — that’s what is truly changing the landscape of the global community.”

Fiber optics are even being used to provide tiny lights for improved noninvasive surgery techniques and in the development of prosthetic limbs that can produce the sensation of feeling for the user. Almost five decades after its discovery, it still blows Turner’s mind to think scientists are uncovering new and innovative applications for fiber.

“If you think about how that concept started from nothing, to what we have today, it’s mind-boggling,” he says. “They had the vision to see the potential of fiber. Then they had the technical capacity to make it happen. I’m in awe of the reality of what we have today because of the changes fiber has created.” 🗨️



Over 500 members attended and voted at the 2017 NHTC annual meeting.

# THE GIG IS HERE!

## 2017 is a milestone for New Hope Telephone Cooperative

BY LISA SAVAGE

**M**ore than 500 members of the New Hope Telephone Cooperative recently gathered for the annual update about a company that first offered widespread telephone access more than 60 years ago.

The cooperative provided the rural community a connection to the world, which required an investment other companies weren't willing to make.

And this year, General Manager Jim Cook told the gathered membership about the completion of NHTC's latest project, which continues a commitment to provide the community the latest in communications technology.

The completion of a fiber-optic network allowing internet speeds rivaling those of major cities has earned the cooperative certification as a Gig-Capable Provider, making 2017 a significant milestone in its history.

The meeting came just days after the cooperative was named a certified Gig-Capable Provider by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, which represents

nearly 900 telecommunications companies in rural America. Only about 12 percent of eligible companies attain the certification, which requires confirmation that gigabit technology is available in at least 95 percent of a cooperative's service territory.

During the meeting, Cook announced that everyone should be connected to the fiber network by late summer.

"We want to sincerely thank everyone for the support and patience throughout this project," Cook says. "NHTC members can proudly proclaim they have access to broadband internet speeds over 100 times faster than those currently available in most U.S. households and cities."

Cook says the completion of a fiber network gives the cooperative the ability to offer internet speeds of up to 1 Gbps, or 1,000 Mbps.

About 78 percent of residential customers subscribe to the minimum speed. In the early days of DSL, this meant a maximum download speed of up to 3 Mbps. As technology improved, download speeds also improved.

"Now that the fiber network is complete, we have recently announced that our most popular broadband speed tier has been increased up to 25 Mbps for both download and upload," Cook says. "And the best part of these service improvements is that they have come without any increase in cost to the customer."

The project to construct the fiber-to-the-home network to NHTC's 4,900 customers in Madison and Marshall counties began in 2009, and the cooperative has invested \$30 million.

Cook says the employees at NHTC designed, planned, promoted and built the network. "I'd like to thank our board of directors for leading our cooperative through this bold decision to build a world-class network in North Alabama," he says. "I think it's important to realize what





New Hope Telephone Cooperative General Manager Jim Cook talks to visitors at the gig launch during a speed test demonstration.



Local dignitaries attended the New Hope Telephone Cooperative gig launch in May. From left are NHTC General Manager Jim Cook, Marshall County Commissioner R.E. Martin, Madison County Commissioner Craig Hill and New Hope Mayor Butch Taylor.



Ventriloquist Leisha Campbell Everett entertains the crowd before the business portion of the 2017 annual meeting.

exactly has taken place here. We have not simply upgraded existing technology so that our network could meet today's demands. It's a brand-new fiber-optic network that replaces the copper network that has served our area for decades and that will serve our communities well into the future."

Cook says only 5 percent of Alabamians have access to fiber-optic service, and only about 3 percent have access to the kind of gigabit speeds the cooperative can now provide.

"I bring up these numbers not to boast or disparage other providers but to underscore the truly exceptional opportunities New Hope Telephone Cooperative has created for those we serve," he says. "We all know that it's not the infrastructure in the ground

or on the poles that truly matters — it's how that technology benefits those we serve."

New Hope Mayor Butch Taylor says the presence of a gigabit-capable service is important for economic growth, providing a lure for both businesses and individuals considering relocation. "That's a big advantage for us," he says. "Schools, businesses and a lot of families need high-speed internet. It's essential now in our operations here at City Hall."

A fast, reliable fiber connection means working parents can attend online courses to complete their education or learn new job skills.

"It goes without saying that in today's global economy, we have a need, now

more than ever, to be connected locally, regionally and even globally. NHTC is forward thinking in their approach to offer gig service to its members," says Madison County Commissioner Craig Hill, whose district covers New Hope and Owens Cross Roads. "Their foresight will open doors in telemedicine, economic development, greater educational attainment and an even better quality of life."

Marshall County Commissioner R.E. Martin, whose district covers Grant, says the students at DAR School will benefit from having gigabit-capable service and that the service will provide many opportunities for students. "I think it's a good thing," he says. "It's going to be important for the schools." 🗨️

## ENJOYING A SOLID FOUNDATION

General Manager Jim Cook updated members during the annual meeting on May 16 at the New Hope Middle School gym.

In 2016, New Hope Telephone Cooperative enjoyed solid financial performance, with assets totaling \$38 million.

Year-over-year operating revenues were down slightly, dropping to \$12.2 million from \$12.4 million, and operational expenses increased by 1.3 percent. Cook attributed the increase to the rising cost of video content and increases in employee benefits, primarily health care.

NHTC posted a net income of \$1.77 million for 2016.

## ELECTION RESULTS

### Place 2

Jim Duncan – 267 votes  
David Whitaker – 149 votes  
Tommy Bush – 120 votes

### Place 3

Jeff Cooper – 322 votes  
Marty Williams – 145 votes

*Incumbent Jim Duncan was re-elected to Place 2 and incumbent Jeff Cooper was re-elected to Place 3.*

*In search of the perfect summer treat?*

## DON'T MISS THE PAGELAND WATERMELON FESTIVAL

**Y**ou know it's summertime in South Carolina when watermelons are put on a pedestal and celebrated by hordes of visitors to the Pageland Watermelon Festival.

Now in its 66th year, what began as a small community affair to promote local melon growers has grown into a festival that lures visitors and competitors. Come see one of South Carolina's best parades on Saturday morning. Men and women, both young and old, test their spitting power in the annual seed-spitting contest — the record spit is 29 feet. And there are, of course, sweet watermelons. “We give away watermelon slices during several periods at the festival,” says festival director Darron Kirkley.

And if a slice of watermelon isn't enough to satisfy your craving, visit any one of dozens of vendors who get into the spirit of the festival by selling watermelon smoothies, watermelon ice cream and burgers with watermelon on the side.

Also, local farmers will be on hand

selling the sweet fruit, and there are so many ways to enjoy it once you get it home.

Cooking with watermelon is all about preparation, says Stephanie Barlow, senior communications director for the National Watermelon Promotion Board.

“Watermelon is 92 percent water, so it's quite watery,” she says. “If you want to try to make foods like grilled watermelon, we suggest taking your piece of watermelon and patting it between paper towels to remove the excess juice.”

Grilling is just one idea that takes watermelon beyond fruit salad.

“Nothing surprises me anymore with the creative uses for watermelon,” Barlow says. “But I am often wowed by what you can do with it. My favorites are recipes that use the whole melon, whether using

the rind as the serving vessel, slivering the rind for coleslaw, or juicing the scraps of watermelon for delicious healthy juice.”

One of the newest recipes entering the kitchens of the Watermelon Promotion Board is a watermelon stir fry. And for the upcoming tailgating season, there's watermelon fire and ice salsa. “I also use the salsa over blackened salmon or chicken and kick up the fire with some extra jalapeno pepper,” Barlow says.

There are more than 1,200 varieties of watermelons grown in 96 countries on the market. In South Carolina alone, there are seven main watermelon production areas; Chesterfield County, home to Pageland, is one of the strongest producers. The variety most often seen at the festival is Crimson Sweet.

Watermelons can have red, yellow and even orange flesh. And though most are large and oval, there have been square ones on the market. And don't forget about the wonderfully convenient miniwatermelons — all can be used interchangeably in any recipe, such as the following ones. They're the finest things you can do with a watermelon save cutting it open, slicing it up and eating it — a taste of summer in every sweet bite. 🍉



**WHAT:** Pageland Watermelon Festival (parade, rodeo, seed-spitting contest, watermelon-eating contest, car show, fireworks and more).

**WHEN:** July 21-22. Activities begin at 3 p.m. on Friday and at 9 a.m. on Saturday.

**WHERE:** Various locations around downtown Pageland, South Carolina, which claims to be the Watermelon Capital of the World.

**INFORMATION:** [pagelandwatermelonfestival.com](http://pagelandwatermelonfestival.com).



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



## Blue watermelon walnut salad

- 1 cup walnut pieces
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 2 cups balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 4 ounces fresh baby greens
- 2 seedless oranges, peeled and sectioned
- 4 cups seedless watermelon cubes
- 2 cups seedless grapes, halved
- 2 cups fresh, trimmed and sliced strawberries
- 1 cup crumbled blue cheese

Heat the walnuts in a seasoned wok or heavy nonstick saute pan over medium heat for a minute and stir in the sugar and soy sauce. Adjust heat to prevent burning while constantly stirring the nuts until the sugar melts. Continue to stir and cook until the nuts begin to stick and the mixture is getting sticky. Spread the nuts over a sheet of waxed or parchment paper and cool. Break apart into small pieces and crumble. Set aside. Heat the vinegar in a heavy noncorrosive saucepan over medium heat and stir in sugar. Continue to stir and adjust heat to bring the mixture to a simmer. Add the rosemary sprig to the pan. Continue to simmer until the contents of the pan reduce by 1/2 their original volume. Set aside. Divide the greens among 6-8 salad plates and arrange the orange sections, watermelon, grapes and strawberries over the greens. Drizzle the balsamic syrup over the fruit and the cheese crumbles over that. Top with the candied walnut pieces and serve. Makes 6-8 servings.

## Watermelon rind stir-fry

- 2 cups watermelon rind, julienned (white part only, from about 1/2 of a seedless watermelon)
- 1 cup julienned carrots
- 1 1-inch piece of ginger, minced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup chives, cut into 3-inch pieces
- 1 tablespoon honey



## Watermelon kiwi SMOOTHIES

- 2 cups seedless watermelon chunks
- 2 peeled and chopped kiwis
- 2 cups vanilla yogurt
- 1 cup ice
- 2 sprigs of fresh mint, for garnish

*Place watermelon, kiwi, yogurt and ice in a blender and puree until smooth. Pour into glasses and garnish with a sprig of fresh mint. Makes 2 servings.*

- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 1/2 cup fresh basil leaves, torn
- 1/4 cup mint leaves
- 1/4 cup cilantro leaves
- Crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

Heat sesame oil in a wok over high heat. Add the watermelon rind and carrots and stir-fry, stirring constantly, for 1-2 minutes. Let sit over high heat for 1 additional minute without stirring. Add the chives and stir to combine. In a small bowl, whisk together the honey, soy sauce, fish sauce, garlic and ginger. Pour the sauce over the watermelon rind and cook, stirring, 30 seconds to 1 minute until fragrant. Transfer to a serving dish. Add the basil,

cilantro and mint, tossing to combine. Sprinkle with red pepper flakes, if desired, and serve as a side dish with chicken, fish or steak. Makes 4 servings.

## Fire and ice salsa

- 3 cups chopped watermelon
- 1/2 cup chopped green bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped green onions
- 1 tablespoon chopped jalapeno pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients, mix well and serve with tortilla chips or over grilled chicken or fish. 🍴



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