

The

# Communicator

NHTC

MAY/JUNE 2020

**BROADBAND:**  
HELPING YOU WORK



## BLISSFUL BRIDES

Farm converted to wedding venue in Hampton Cove

## CELEBRATING 170 YEARS

Changes through the years at Cave Spring Baptist Church

## MAKING A CONNECTION

Broadband links home and work to the world



— By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO —  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Staying well, staying connected

It's late March as I work on my thoughts for this issue. Knowing that the magazine won't reach your mailbox for another four weeks, I asked myself, "What will the world look like in late April to early May?" So much has changed in just the past two weeks, it's hard to imagine what the immediate future holds.

There are, however, a few things I know with great certainty. In this time of crisis, community-based broadband providers across America have stepped up their already deep commitments to keeping you connected. As Americans are increasingly compelled to work or study from home, use telemedicine, and lean on virtual tools to connect with loved ones, the work of your local broadband company has become more essential than ever — for you and for the national economy.

Working with one voice through NTCA, these providers have been on top of national issues such as adopting the FCC's "Keep Americans Connected" pledge, communicating with Congress on the importance of the "Keeping Critical Connections Act," and advocating for support to help small broadband providers ensure internet connectivity when it's extremely critical.

Locally, providers like yours are balancing employee safety with their commitment to keeping networks functioning. In times of crisis, we see more strongly than ever that these providers' investment in building resilient networks — and in the people who operate them — is foundational to our society.

Stay well, stay healthy and stay connected. We will get through this together. 

# WE WERE HERE

when our communities needed a modern,  
reliable communications network.



# WE ARE HERE

to help you stay connected during this  
time of national crisis.



# WE WILL BE HERE

supporting the recovery through a  
broadband network that builds businesses,  
creates jobs and drives the economy.

**PROUD TO BE YOUR  
COMMUNITY-BASED  
BROADBAND PROVIDER**

# Unlocking the potential of rural businesses

Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

By turning to digital technologies, more than half of small businesses in rural areas expanded their customer base not only locally but also throughout their state, and about one-third grew their market in neighboring states. In fact, about 16% of rural businesses even used digital resources to expand into international markets.

Those were only a few findings from a study Amazon commissioned from the U.S. Chamber Technology Engagement Center that showed how broadband has the potential to further benefit the economy in rural communities and the nation as a whole.

What's the possible upside of improving access to digital tools such as broadband? Rural small businesses have the potential to be critical blocks in the foundation needed to strengthen the nation's economy.

Increasing the number of businesses adopting online tools and digital services could support thousands of jobs. Businesses with revenue of less than \$100,000 have the greatest potential to benefit.

Increased adoption of technology could be responsible for generating billions of dollars of revenue, and Southern states have the most room to grow.

Results of the study released in 2019 were compiled from a survey sent to more than 5,000 rural small businesses across the country. And the report made three policy recommendations that could help make the projections a reality.

## CONNECTIVITY

Selling online depends on internet and mobile phone service. About 27% of rural residents lack access to high-speed internet, compared with 92% of all Americans who can access faster services. The private and public sectors should continue to identify opportunities to expand connectivity through initiatives such as the creation of new infrastructure.

## NEW POLICIES COULD EASE CONCERNS OF RURAL SMALL BUSINESSES

**66%** of rural small businesses say poor internet or cell-phone connectivity negatively impacts their business.

**38%** of rural small businesses say they can't hire the talent with the right digital skills in their area.

Nearly **41%** of rural small businesses agree that policy-makers should create incentive programs that make it easier for rural small businesses to incorporate digital technology into their daily operations.

## TRAINING

There should be a goal of increasing the talent pipeline of candidates trained in digital skills, such as the use of cloud computing and digital marketing. Such a workforce could offset the existing shortage of IT professionals in rural areas.

## DIGITAL TOOLS

Increasing the adoption of digital training and digital tools by rural small businesses will allow them to better scale their operations. This study highlights two points: the positive benefits for rural small businesses effectively utilizing digital tools to sell online and the potential for businesses currently underutilizing those digital tools to grow. ☑

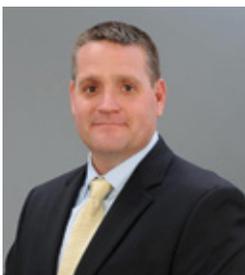


Source: Unlocking the Digital Potential of Rural America, A U.S. Chamber Technology Engagement Center study commissioned by Amazon.



# Essential services? Look at broadband

Early in 2020, we didn't necessarily have any reason to consider what the "essential" goods and services were in our lives. As we know, that all changed this spring when many "nonessential" workers were sent home and we were urged to only leave home for "essential" trips.



**DANIEL MARTIN**  
General Manager

Amidst this strange season we're in, two things have become crystal clear for me:

1. Broadband and communications services are essential for our community and,
2. When our community counts on our team at NHTC, our employees shine.

I'd like to use some of this space to say how proud I am of our employees. These men and women helped navigate this unprecedented time for our cooperative, communicated changes with our members and made sure our network did its job connecting all of you.

I'm also proud of our community and would like to sincerely thank the medical personnel, grocery store and local restaurant workers, first responders, civic leaders and others who are still working tirelessly to

keep our community running. Additionally, I would like for everyone affected by the economic impact of the virus to know we have joined the FCC's "Keep Americans Connected Pledge" to ensure our members can stay connected during this COVID-19 crisis.

## ESSENTIAL CONNECTION

Part of the reason our team continues to work so hard is we realize what a broadband connection means to members of our community.

Very early on in the coronavirus crisis, we saw government officials, school administrators, pastors and even entertainers embrace digital content.

Some of that information was critical to help students continue learning and keep people safe. In other instances, it may have been purely for entertainment. But I believe that when we were asked to remain in our homes, having access to all of the quality entertainment options broadband provides was a blessing.

The industry statistics I've seen certainly indicate people are putting communication networks to work. National carriers reported seeing a 25% increase in voice phone call activity and a 15% rise in call duration during the first couple of weeks after leaders began encouraging people to stay home. At that same time, estimates indicate web traffic grew between 13% and 40%.

At your home, that increase may have been children taking virtual field trips or accessing school resources. Worshippers all across our region went online on Sunday mornings to stream church services. Many people worked from home over their broadband connection — teleconferencing platforms saw a 300% increase in traffic, according to reports in Wired Magazine. Maybe you called a friend or family member to catch up, instead of visiting in person.

From an entertainment standpoint, networks like ours also saw a surge. Nielsen, the company famous for its TV ratings, said that people staying home leads to an almost 60% increase in the amount of TV we watch. Traffic to Netflix reportedly increased by between 54% and 75%, and online gaming sites reported a 400% increase in traffic.

I don't bring all of this up to bore you with statistics, but I wish to underscore a point. The communication network we provide is an essential service both when times are dark and in the brighter days I know are coming soon. 📺

The Communicator is a bimonthly magazine published by NHTC, © 2020. It is distributed without charge to all cooperative members/owners.



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

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**On the Cover:**



The Hampton Cove Wedding Venue opened in 2013, providing a peaceful rural setting with all the conveniences. See story Page 8.

*The comforts of home!*

**End the hassle of leaving home to pay your monthly bill!**

## **NHTC MAKES IT EASY TO PAY YOUR BILL ONLINE**

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*Holiday  
closing*

NHTC will close May 25 for  
Memorial Day in remembrance of  
the American heroes who lost their  
lives serving our country!

# Rest, relax and rejuvenate

A vacation does not necessarily require a plane ticket, hotel room or even a tank of gas. In fact, whether you're on a budget or just looking for a way to unplug from the stresses of day-to-day life, there are plenty of relaxing options if you never leave home.

After all, any break is a good break, so here are a few resources, suggestions and tips for those interested in unwinding without heading out.

## Explore



- ▶ Are you a burgeoning birder? iBird, Peterson Birds of North America, the Audubon Society and others have created apps to help both the novice and experienced birder. Apps may include photos, artwork and birdsongs to help you identify birds where you live. You can even earn an online certificate from [birdercertification.org](http://birdercertification.org).
- ▶ [Arborday.org](http://Arborday.org) offers an online database for identifying trees across the U.S. along with its "What Tree Is That?" pocket field guide. Snap a photo of a leaf and the website will help identify it.

- ▶ Backyards are meant for play and family barbecues, but take a closer look. Grab a magnifying glass and learn what's out there beyond the grass. Create a nature trail for kids and learn about the plants, insects and animals living in your backyard.
- ▶ Geocaching is a good old-fashioned treasure hunt with a twist. Try the app from [Geocaching.com](http://Geocaching.com) and get out in nature to find "treasures" others have left. You'll also learn some handy navigation skills.



# Get playful



▶ Coloring isn't just for kids. It can help adults reduce stress and anxiety, improve vision and focus, and even sleep better! Best of all, coloring supplies are inexpensive and available at stores and online retailers everywhere.

▶ Pull the board games out of the closet and dust them off. It's time for a family-friendly faceoff. Traditionalists may prefer games like Monopoly, Life or Scrabble, but conservative estimates count tens of thousands of available board games.

▶ Discover your inner Monet with an online art class. A quick internet search for online art classes yields results of everything from basic drawing to comic book art to figure drawing and more!



▶ Piece together a pretty picture and flex your mental muscles at the same time. Family jigsaw puzzles use a combination of small, medium and large pieces so everyone can join in on the fun. Try [puzzlewarehouse.com](http://puzzlewarehouse.com) for a giant selection of puzzles for all ages.

# Books and music

▶ Did you know there's a free digital library of classic books? Project Gutenberg offers digital downloads of titles ranging from "Pride and Prejudice" to "Peter Pan." Just visit [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).

▶ For those who believe "all the world's a stage," [playbill.com](http://playbill.com) offers a range of resources, including guides to finding streaming videos of stage performances.

▶ Check with your local library about e-book selections using apps such as SimplyE and Libby.



▶ If you need help selecting a book to read, do a quick Google search for Time magazine's All-Time 100 novels. If mysteries are your thing, visit [theedgars.com](http://theedgars.com) for a list of the latest award winners. And for sci-fi fans, pop over to [nebulas.sfw.org](http://nebulas.sfw.org).



# Go virtual

▶ Consider a virtual tour, and begin with a visit to [google.com/earth](http://google.com/earth). Search for one of the 31 virtual visits to national parks such as Acadia, Everglades and Joshua Tree. They're fantastic.

▶ Check out [Virtualiteach.com](http://Virtualiteach.com) for a guide to online tours of places such as the Louvre, the National Museum of History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other popular venues across the world.

▶ Many zoos offer entertaining live webcams, particularly if the viewer catches the animals at just the right time. A great first stop is the San Diego Zoo: [zoo.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams](http://zoo.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams).

▶ And don't miss [artsandculture.google.com](http://artsandculture.google.com) for tours of The Modern Museum of Art, the CERN laboratory and much more. Seriously, this is a must-visit. ☑





# MAKING *dreams* COME TRUE

Wedding venue becomes family-owned business

Story by LISA SAVAGE

Long before Heather Morgan's wedding in August 2013, she and her mother, Carla Dorough, searched far and wide for the perfect venue. From online research to drives across northern Alabama, there weren't a lot of options, and none had the look and feel of Morgan's dreams.



Heather Morgan, left, and her mother, Carla Dorough, own the Hampton Cove Wedding Venue.

Photo courtesy of Rachel Ann Photos.

So, they came up with a plan: They would create their own venue and launch a wedding planning business.

They found a vacant horse farm for sale nestled on 23 acres at the foot of Keel Mountain. It's in the Hampton Cove area on Cherry Tree Road, only 500 feet from the Huntsville city limits. Their dream turned into the reality of Hampton Cove Wedding Venue.

"We had been praying about the perfect location," Dorough says. "When we first walked up and saw the property, we thought, 'This is it!'"

Six months later, the first wedding ceremony went off without a hitch. Morgan's wedding was the third at the venue a month later. "We've continued to grow and learn since then," Dorough says. "We've worked to provide a beautiful setting that becomes more of an experience."

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

The Doroughs moved to the Huntsville area several years ago.

Dorough worked in dentistry for 30 years, and her daughter studied in the field, too. While in hygienist school and

before marriage, Morgan served as president of her class. She and her mother often hosted events, preparing food for about 200 people. They also hosted and planned parties for military events.

"It's something we always loved to do," Dorough says.

So, the decision to launch the wedding venue was an easy one. Dorough and her husband sold their home, moved to the existing house on the farm and began renovations of the barn and grounds. They turned the tack rooms into a bridal suite and a groom's room, and they transformed the barn's massive interior into an elegant hall.

The barn's rustic touches include metal fixtures and wooden walls and ceiling. The design incorporates the sparkle and elegance of crystal chandeliers, vintage lights and white drapes flowing from the barn's beams. "It's trendy, upscale and rustic, all at the same time," Dorough says. "It's an elegance that never goes out of style."

Morgan serves as manager of the wedding venue, and the mother and daughter have assistance from other family members as needed.

Photo courtesy of Twenty Oaks Photography.

Planning is key, Dorough says. That's why she and her daughter took online courses to become certified wedding planners. They also now offer an online course to teach others what they have learned.

They never book more than one wedding per day at the venue. "It's about the attention to detail," Dorough says. "We've learned the secrets that help make every wedding a success, and I think that's why we've been successful."

## A PERFECT VENUE

Choosing the perfect wedding venue can be tough with all the options and amenities available, Dorough says.

"We keep it simple and can include as little or as much as you need," she says. "You can bring your own vendors or hire from the list of vendors we have worked with. A lot of our brides have been DIYers and like adding their own touches."

The mother and daughter team now also offer their own catering for events. Wedding ceremony sites at Hampton Cove Wedding Venue are either outdoors next to the pond, which has a fountain and shade from a canopy of hardwoods, or inside the hay barn, which is open on both ends and provides shelter in inclement weather.

"We have both of these locations available without having to change out at the last minute," Dorough says. A golf cart can transport the bride and bridal party throughout the acreage as needed.

Off of the back of the barn, a patio added last year provides more outdoor area, complete with corn hole games. "It's all part of the experience," Morgan says.

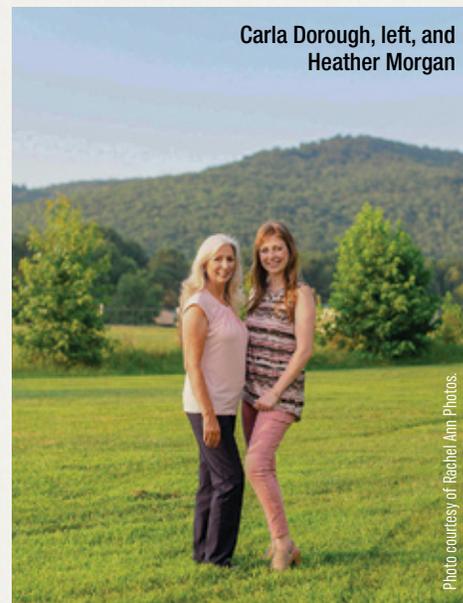
Even though the location feels isolated and remote, NHTC's high-speed internet means clients and their guests have access to Wi-Fi on the property. NHTC expanded service to that area in 2018. "We didn't have good, reliable service until we were able to connect to NHTC's fiber internet," Dorough says. "That's made a big difference."

The reception area is heated and cooled, with a kitchen area and modern restrooms. The venue is handicapped-accessible with ample parking. There are no hidden fees, and pricing is listed on its website.

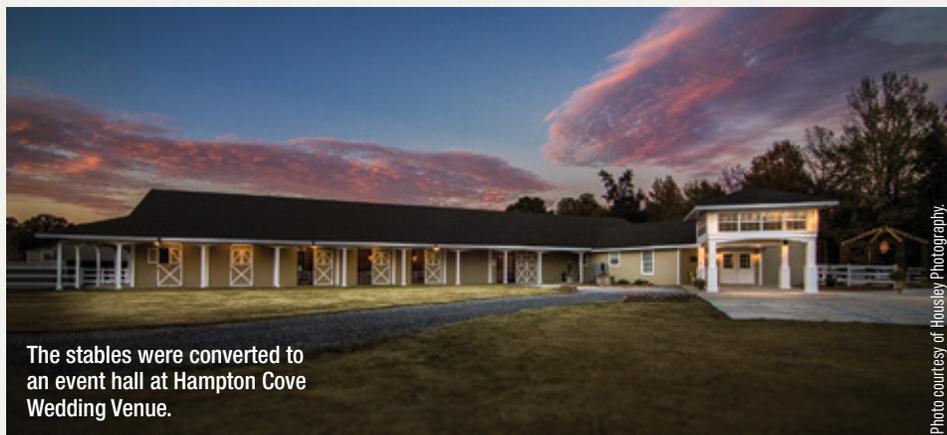
"We want to alleviate as much of the stress as possible," Dorough says. "It's one of the most trying times for a family, and it can be stressful. It works out great because I relate to the mothers, and Heather relates to the brides, and it works perfectly."

The Hampton Cove Wedding Venue's website and Facebook page are sources for much of its marketing. In addition to weddings, the venue can host corporate parties and other events. It's a short drive to the closest hotel.

"We've worked hard to create the perfect wedding venue," Dorough says. "Customer service is paramount, and we want to make sure everyone's experience is the best." 📩



Carla Dorough, left, and Heather Morgan



The stables were converted to an event hall at Hampton Cove Wedding Venue.



# A trusty solution

## Broadband creates a key resource

Access to fast internet service is an increasingly important resource, a realization playing out in large and small ways for rural communities across the nation. And state and local governments are striving to make it easier for residents to take advantage of new communications resources.

For many, the benefits created by access to broadband are deeply personal, and the choices made by one Tennessee family illustrate the possibilities.

Aaron and Becca West lived in Spring Hill, a Nashville suburb, when a national communications provider brought high-speed internet to their neighborhood. Aaron West took advantage, working from home and eliminating his 45-minute commute to a software company. Also, the new technology allowed him to grow his own business, an audio and visual consulting company serving churches.

When the family opted to relocate to the more rural area of Crossville, Tennessee, they did not leave behind the opportunities made possible through broadband. The local telephone cooperative, Ben Lomand Connect, provides 1 Gbps internet service

through a fiber optic network. And the couple took advantage.

“I’ve had the company for about nine years, but I couldn’t operate it the way I can operate it now,” West says. “The fiber was so huge for the contract work. It was so much easier to communicate. When we were looking for homes here, we immediately ruled them out if they didn’t have high-speed internet access.”

Broadband has also helped the career of Becca West, a teacher by training. She connected with a program called GoGoKid, allowing her to use the internet to teach English to Chinese students. The arrangement also made it easier for her to home-school the couple’s two daughters.

While fast internet access improves their connectivity to the world, the family also experiences its capacity to create a deeper connection with each other. “We’re all here together, and we’re very intentional about doing things together,” Aaron West says. “We’re able to go to parks and libraries. We’re freed up to focus on our family instead of it being career first and family second.”

### UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Stories such as that of the West family are only the beginning. The full potential of broadband remains untapped, and states nationwide can benefit as fast networks reach rural areas.

Last year the U.S. Chamber Technology Engagement Center released results of a study commissioned by Amazon that found Texas could add as many as 23,433 jobs in rural communities over three years.



Becca West teaches English to Chinese children via the internet.



Aaron West, a Tennessee resident, in his home office.

And hitting that mark could generate an additional \$6.6 billion in annual sales and \$963 million in annual wages.

While the Lone Star State leads all states in potential gain from broadband growth, both Ohio and Mississippi could also see significant gains. The study emphasized that achieving the potential growth would require investments such as an increase in rural broadband and cellphone access, as well as growth of the number of people with digital skills necessary for these jobs.

With so much potential at stake, local communities are incentivized to promote broadband-based jobs, even if that means updating local regulations, as one Wisconsin county has done in recent years.

### EMBRACING OPPORTUNITY

Once, home-based businesses in Wisconsin's Bayfield County were required to secure permits to operate. Now, the county takes a more common-sense approach as the description of a home-based worker evolves.

"We've recognized the direction of business in America today and around the

world," says Rob Schierman, director of planning and zoning for Bayfield County. "We created some breathing room for when a business would need a permit and when it doesn't. We're creating opportunity while still protecting the integrity of neighborhoods."

The area was one of the first to receive the state's Telecommuter Forward! Certification, one step in promoting work-from-home jobs and taking advantage of the internet network of Norvado, a telecommunications cooperative in Cable, Wisconsin.

"We're providing a means to try to stimulate some of that employment activity coming to Bayfield County and to take advantage of the fiber optics that we have here with Norvado," Schierman says.

The issue is personal for Schierman and his wife, Jennifer, who understand the benefits of telecommuting.

Her employer is based in Minneapolis, but she works from home. The need for high-speed internet connectivity is a necessity. "We connect via phone, and we hold meetings on Skype," she says. "It works. It's very slick."

Like other telecommuters, she enjoys the freedom to get up and move, to go walk the dog or to pitch in a load of laundry. "It definitely makes life easier," she says.

Rob Schierman says that freedom is part of the draw for telecommuters who live in Bayfield County or those considering relocating there. "The younger workforce doesn't like to be married to a desk or a location," he says. "They're a little bit more fluid in their lifestyle and like to be where they can hop on a bike trail or go fishing or go kayaking. They can take advantage of the resources in Bayfield County — we're uniquely situated along Lake Superior and close to a lot of undeveloped areas where recreation is still plentiful." 🗨️



Jennifer Schierman telecommutes to the city.



# A look back

## Cave Spring Baptist Church celebrates 170 years

Story by LISA SAVAGE

When Shirley Williams recalls her childhood, Cave Spring Baptist Church is at the center of her memories. She fondly remembers when it was a small church with a potbelly stove in the middle.

Growing up in Bessemer, she often visited her grandparents in Owens Cross Roads and attended services at the church with her aunt and uncle. On one of the visits when she was a teenager, she attended a revival service at Cave Spring Baptist Church and met the man she would later marry.

They eventually married in Bessemer and returned to Owens Cross Roads after a few years in Tuscaloosa. She's been here ever since.

Now, decades later, Cave Spring Baptist Church remains an integral part of her family's life. She knows the church's history as well as she knows her own.

### CELEBRATING MILESTONES

Williams chairs the Heritage committee, which is organizing a celebration to commemorate the church's 170th anniversary. The Madison Baptist Association records show the church, founded in May 1850, is the second oldest in Madison County. Between the association's records and the church minutes, they have an accurate historical account.

It's always been called Cave Spring Baptist Church, although the location has changed a few times.

The church's first building was near Herrin's Cave on Cherry Tree Road close to the intersection of Low Gap Road — about 2 miles from the current location. The cave has a spring running through it, and locals believe that is how the church name came to be, Williams says.





That church burned, and its congregation rebuilt in the same location. After a second fire, the church members voted to move the building to an area more central to its members. The new building went up across the road from the current location on Cave Spring Road. After fire destroyed the church a third time, the congregation rebuilt again in 1900 in its current location. The community school used the one-room church during the week.

Williams used ancestry.com to trace some of the original founders' history, and she learned a lot about the church. She is working with Samford University, which serves as a repository for the Alabama Baptist State Convention. One of its missions is to preserve, protect and provide access to the history of Alabama Baptists.

The church's old business meeting minutes will be digitized, Williams says. One copy will be kept at University Library at Samford, while another will go to the church for its library.

### BACK IN TIME

Rev. R.H. Talliaferro was Cave Spring's first preacher. "He was a traveling missionary preacher for several churches that could not support a pastor," Williams says. According to one edition of church minutes, he made \$200 per annum for service to all the churches, and Cave Spring Baptist Church added a love offering of \$1.82.

Well over 50 pastors have served at Cave Spring since the early days, and there's some interesting history about some of the former ministers and members.

There's documentation in the century-old minutes of one member being disciplined for the inappropriate behavior of dancing, along with other stories about church members. "These minutes are just full of history," Williams says.

Since the 1870s, the church has moved twice, undergone remodeling and had several additions. In 1956, the potbellied stove and center columns that Williams remembers so well came out of the auditorium, and hardwood floors and drywall went in.

Two rooms were built onto the front, and a few years after that, three more rooms joined the back portion in addition to indoor restrooms and a pastor's study.

The congregation decided to add a three-bedroom pastorium across the road in 1958. "They said it couldn't be done, but it was," Williams says. Later, more rooms were added to the pastorium.



For the construction of the two-story education building, church members voted to sell \$30,000 in bonds to finance the project. "We sold the bonds, completing the bond drive in one week," Williams says. The new building opened in 1964.

The church's first library came in the 1960s with leadership from Mary Stephens, the wife of Ralph Stephens, the pastor at the time. "She started it in a small room, and she was great. She wouldn't put anything in there that she hadn't read," Williams says.

The library had quite a collection of books through the years, and now, Williams and some other church members have worked to update it and computerize the checkout process. It reopened in March.

In 1970, a sanctuary remodeling project included the addition of a baptistry, a choir loft, carpet, new lights, central heat and air, and an organ. In 1988, the church members voted to build a new, larger 300-seat sanctuary and added a new wing connecting the sanctuary to the educational building. The new wing included a choir room, library, pastor's study, church office, workroom and new restrooms. A church van was purchased in 1992.

Land and a house next to the church were bought a few years later. The land provided more parking space, and the house was converted for youth activities. In more recent years, members built the Family Life Center. In 2002 acreage was purchased for investment purposes near the intersection of Cave Spring Road and U.S. Highway 431. A large digital church sign was erected.

"Throughout our history, members have always worked together to build up our church," Williams says. "We have a deep sense of serving in the community where we live." 



## Celebrating 170 years

A homecoming service is planned for Oct. 11. Mike Green, a former pastor, and Howard Martin, a former minister of music, will lead the celebration service. Dignitaries from the Madison County Baptist Association will also attend. All former pastors, past and present congregants, and community members are invited. Lunch will be served in the Family Life Center immediately following the celebration. Large monitors will display photo presentations of the varying events, congregations and buildings that Cave Spring Baptist Church has had over its 170 years.

# Farm Fresh

## LOCAL INGREDIENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



**F**arm-to-table dining isn't a flash in the pan. "It isn't a trend," says Tommy Hines, executive chef at Pursell Farms in Sylacauga, Alabama. "It's here to stay. I look forward to sourcing locally and cooking with the seasons."

When it comes to food philosophies, few are as straightforward as the farm-to-table movement. Simply, it's food sourced as close to home as possible — if not from a personal garden then from a farm close enough that whatever is harvested one day can be on your plate the next, if not sooner. In addition to being more healthful, with no added ingredients, the farm-to-table philosophy supports the local economy, so it's a win-win for food purveyors, cooks and diners.

Hines, a native of New Orleans, grew up and honed his culinary skills in a part of the country where farm-to-table is a way of life, with a warmer climate that allows for year-round produce and within easy reach of the fruits of the sea.

"We cook with the seasons, using foods that are out our back doors," he says. "We use Creole tomatoes when they're in season. We use Louisiana peaches when they're in season. And the fresh seafood in the Gulf and the foods that are at your back door. Everything that's available to you. That's just how I learned to cook, and



Tommy Hines, executive chef at Pursell Farms in Sylacauga, Alabama, finishes a plate of vegetables with boiled peanut hummus.

I think that's the best way to cook.

"Why cook something that's not from your area?" Hines says. "First of all, you're going to pay more money, but it's not as good quality. You know, you pick up a tomato in December, and it's nothing like those wonderful tomatoes you can get in July and August."

When Hines started at Pursell Farms in the fall of 2019, he began a relationship with farmers and other food producers in the Sylacauga area. And his menus at the resort's two dining venues, Old Tom's Pub and Arrington, reflect the partnership between chef and farmers with dishes that change according to the season.

In cooler months you may find crab au gratin, kale and brussels sprout salad, or chicken and sausage gumbo.

But when the weather warms, you'll find dishes featuring the bounty of summer, such as Hines' heirloom tomato and peach salad with olive crumble or the strawberry-rhubarb shortcake with whipped mascarpone.

Hines likes to think of farm-to-table eating as something that comes full circle — from the ground to the plate and, if you compost, back into the ground again. "I think people should be eating what they have the ability to grow or get from their local farmers markets," he says.



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

### Heirloom tomato and peach salad with olive crumble

- 4 large heirloom tomatoes (about 2 1/2 pounds)
- 2 medium yellow peaches
- Fleur de sel or kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup torn fresh basil leaves, plus whole leaves for garnish
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons chardonnay vinegar
- 4 (2 1/2 ounces each) rounds burrata cheese
- 2 tablespoons black olive crumble (instructions follow)

Cut the tomatoes and peaches into wedges and place them in a large bowl. Sprinkle them with fleur de sel and pepper, add the 1/4 cup basil and olive oil, and mix well. Let stand at room temperature 30 minutes to 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Place 1 burrata cheese round in the center of each plate. Fan the tomatoes and peaches around the cheese, dividing equally, and drizzle with the dressing left in the bowl. Garnish with olive crumble and whole basil leaves.

**To make olive crumble:** Place 1 cup pitted black olives on a wire rack with a tray underneath and roast in the oven at 175 F until dry, about 2 1/2 hours, or until semicrispy. Pulse in a food processor to a consistency of coarse crumbs.

# Strawberry-rhubarb shortcake with whipped mascarpone

## For the filling:

- 1 pound medium-size strawberries, hulled and quartered
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Grand Marnier
- 1 1/2 cups chopped fresh rhubarb (about 2 stalks)
- Pinch kosher salt

## Biscuits:

- 2 cups sifted all-purpose flour, plus extra for work surface
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon table salt
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- Freshly grated zest of 1 orange
- 1 cup heavy cream, plus extra for brushing biscuits
- Coarse or granulated sugar
- Unsalted butter (for baking sheet)

## Whipped mascarpone:

- 1 cup mascarpone
- 3 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream

**For the filling:** Mix berries with 1/4 cup sugar, vinegar and Grand Marnier in a medium-size bowl. Toss gently and set aside. In a small saucepan, combine rhubarb, remaining 1/2 cup sugar and salt. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until sugar melts and liquids are simmering nicely, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature. Rhubarb will soften as it sits. Add berries and stir. Set aside.

**For the biscuits:** Preheat oven to 400 F. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, sugar and orange zest. In the bowl of a standing mixer, whip cream until it forms firm peaks. Fold the whipped cream gently into the flour mixture until the dough begins to come together. (Add another 1 or 2 tablespoons of unwhipped cream, if needed.) Gently gather the dough into a ball and turn it out onto a floured surface. Press to form a disk about 3/4 inch thick. It will be slightly crumbly. Using a biscuit cutter 2 1/2 inches wide, cut out the biscuits and lay them on a baking sheet greased with unsalted butter. Brush them with extra cream and sprinkle on the coarse or granulated sugar. Bake until golden, 15 to 17 minutes. Cool on racks.

**For the whipped mascarpone:** Combine all ingredients in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Beat, starting on low speed and gradually increasing speed, until the mixture is light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Refrigerate in an airtight container until ready to use, up to 3 days.

**To plate:** Split each biscuit horizontally. Spoon berry-rhubarb mixture on the bottom half, top that with mascarpone and cover with the top half of the biscuit. Garnish with powdered sugar. 🍷



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