

The

Communicator

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

BROADBAND:
GAMING EDITION

PROTECTING PAWS

Rescue center addressing
adoption demand

A PLACE IN HISTORY

New Hope native recalls
days at Butler Brothers

READY, SET, PLAY

Broadband gives gamers
a competitive edge





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

We need better mapping data

Several states have adopted loan and grant programs to help extend service to those areas of rural America still lacking a reliable broadband connection. Beyond its traditional programs, the federal government continues looking for ways to invest in this critical infrastructure.

A challenge associated with deciding where to invest these dollars is identifying where service is or is not already available. The FCC's broadband maps are the determining resource.

The FCC issued an order over the summer that will move away from the overly broad use of census blocks for reporting broadband coverage, instead requiring providers to submit "shapefiles" showing where they actually offer broadband service.

I had the opportunity to appear before a Congressional committee in September, where I shared a few key steps to move us toward more accurate mapping.

First, we need standardized reporting. It is also important to have a back-end validation process.

Finally, a robust challenge process is needed to allow providers and policy-makers to do one last "sanity check" on the accuracy of the maps before decisions are reached.

Providers like yours are making great progress in connecting rural America. But if we hope for a future where everyone has broadband access, we must have better mapping data. 📶



Celebrate rural health on Nov. 21

Despite the challenges of serving rural America, health care professionals are delivering quality care, embracing technology and finding creative ways to encourage wellness among their rural patients. On Nov. 21, rural health offices will honor these providers — along with the partners and communities who support them — by sponsoring National Rural Health Day.

How can you celebrate National Rural Health Day?

Find free, downloadable resources for many of the activities below by visiting www.powerofrural.org/nrhd-toolkit.



PARENTS: Prepare a healthy meal for dinner, and talk with your kids about the blessings — and the challenges — of living in rural America. Mention the health care providers who service your rural community.



PATIENTS: Write a note to your health care team, thanking them for their help and their commitment to serving a rural population.



PHYSICIANS: Display National Rural Health Day posters in your office. Provide a staff appreciation lunch. Visit www.WalkWithADoc.org and consider starting this fun, active outreach in your community.



FACEBOOK USERS: Share a story about your doctor, a nurse or other health care provider who has made a positive impact on your life.



TEACHERS: Give your students coloring book pages. Sponsor a rural health-themed poster contest. Invite physicians or nurses from local hospitals and clinics to speak to students.



BROADBAND USERS: Search for health information over your broadband connection. Ask your physician if there are telehealth resources that could help you maintain or improve your health.



SMALL BUSINESSES: Show appreciation to your local rural health professionals by providing them with discounts or special offers.



YOU!: Make healthy eating choices. Take a walk. Avoid tobacco products. Schedule an appointment to have your cholesterol and blood pressure checked.

Share your experiences across social media using the hashtags **#powerofrural** and **#nationalruralhealthday**.

Gaming generation

Millennials — the first lifelong gamers

The U.S. launch of the Nintendo Entertainment System in late 1985 helped create an entertainment revolution. The oldest millennials at the time were about 4 years old, and that generation would be the first to make gaming a common pastime.

Members of this group, also known as Generation Y, are closely tracked by experts such as The Nielsen Company to monitor entertainment and technology trends, because the habits of millennials shape those industries.

Today, millennial gamers are finding new ways to play. There are mobile games and online, community-based games. Some people compete, and others enjoy the movielike experiences of modern games. And for millennial gamers, the male-to-female ratio is roughly even.

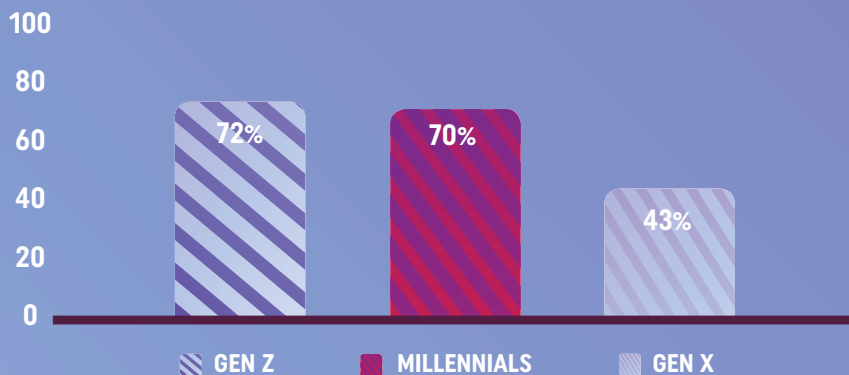
Thanks to games that emphasize social features, about 70% of millennial gamers and the generation following, often known as Gen Z, turn to multiplayer gaming for the social component.

Also, the pastime remains a critical entertainment choice even when the competition ends. About 70% of gamers turn to YouTube or Twitch to watch online videos about gaming. On average, this form of viewing totals nearly six hours weekly. Millennial gamers are willing to pay those who create the content they enjoy, either through subscriptions or by donating directly.

A Nielsen report concluded that millennials will not quickly outgrow this form of entertainment, and they will become the first generation of lifelong gamers. 🎮

Games have become a social activity for millennials

Thanks to social features that let connected gamers chat and play with each other, a large share of millennials and Gen Zers play multiplayer games to virtually hang out with their friends and families. Members of Gen X and up are, in contrast, far less likely to play multiplayer titles.



Millennial gamers are a wide-ranging demographic group

54% with full-time employment	76% pay for a movie/TV streaming service
43% with a bachelor's degree or higher	38% pay for a music streaming service
46% with children	\$58,000 average household income

Like Nintendo, we go beyond technology

At first glance, NHTC and Nintendo don't have a lot in common. Nintendo is a video game giant based in Japan, and we are a small broadband provider in rural Alabama.



DANIEL MARTIN
General Manager

But a quote I ran across recently made me realize we may have more in common than you'd think.

In the pages of this issue, you'll see a focus on gamers. And though I'm not much of a gamer myself, I know there are hundreds or even thousands of our members who enjoy playing video games on our network. As I hope you'll read, gaming has certainly become mainstream — to the point where there are college scholarships for team gamers.

For decades now, one brand has been synonymous with gaming: Nintendo. It's a company with an interesting history. Like NHTC, it evolved over the years to meet customer demand. In fact, many people don't know that Nintendo started off in 1889 as a small manufacturer of playing cards. Nearly a century and a half later, it's

changed the world with its electronic gaming systems, handhelds and characters like Mario.

Similar to the way Nintendo developed, we've evolved from party line phone systems to lightning-fast broadband. But a quote from former Nintendo President Satoru Iwata drove home another similarity our two companies share.

In discussing his company's success, the late Mr. Iwata stated that in order to be successful, Nintendo had to look beyond the hardware and software it developed. "Please understand, I am not saying that technology is unimportant," he told an interviewer. "But if we are just focusing on technology ... we will not succeed."

In order to succeed, Nintendo had to focus not on the processors, electronics and equipment driving its games but instead on what the games did for people. Similarly at NHTC, we constantly remind ourselves that the technology our business provides is only part of the equation. What matters most is how our members use that technology and the ways their lives are improved because of it.

Maybe it's when a young adult can enroll in distance learning classes because of our network. Maybe it's when an entrepreneur connects to markets around the world through our services. Or maybe it's simply when a customer gets to play a video game online with friends.

Just like with Nintendo, the bits and bytes of our business are secondary. Our primary focus is on the difference that technology can make for you. 📺

The Communicator

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

VOL. 18, NO. 6

The Communicator is a bimonthly magazine published by New Hope Telephone Cooperative, © 2019. 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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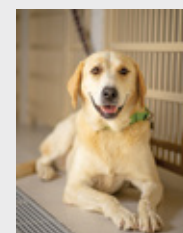
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On the Cover:



Felines & Canines
Hunter Stephenson
Rescue Center in Owens
Cross Roads finds
homes in other regions
for pets.
See story Page 12.

GET IN THE SPIRIT WITH COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS PARADES

The New Hope Christmas parade is at 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14. The lineup starts at New Hope High School at 5 p.m. Refreshments and a visit by Santa will follow at the New Hope City Hall.

The Grant Christmas parade is at 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, along Main Street. The lineup begins at 12 p.m.

A salute to veterans!

NHTC would like to honor everyone who has served in our nation's armed forces. You have helped to keep our nation safe and protect the freedoms we hold dear.

"Our debt to the heroic men and women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices."

— President Harry S. Truman

Happy holidays!

The NHTC office will close during the holidays so employees can enjoy the season with their families:
Thanksgiving: Nov. 28-29
Christmas: Dec. 24-25

THANK YOU!

NHTC would like to thank all members for choosing to rely on the cooperative's services. NHTC is dedicated to honoring that choice now and in the future.

Merry Christmas and a have a happy New Year!

History comes alive

NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM HONORS SOLDIERS THROUGH THE YEARS

The birth of the U.S. Army Airborne units came about in 1940 with the aid of a batch of borrowed Riddell football helmets from the United States Military Academy at West Point. The helmets, which were used to protect the heads of aspiring paratroopers, came with instructions, however. The team needed them back when football season returned.

With that bit of information, visitors can enter the Airborne & Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Situated just a few miles from Fort Bragg, the museum honors the sacrifices of all airborne and special operations units with an extensive collection of memorabilia and military equipment dating from World War II to the present day.

WHY FAYETTEVILLE?

Now-retired Gen. James Lindsay led a push for the museum. He served as the first commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, which is located on

Fort Bragg and oversees various unconventional warfare units. The Army post also serves as headquarters for the XVIII Airborne Corps, which has long presided over some of the most storied Army units in the nation's history, including the 101st Airborne and the 82nd Airborne All American Division, which is still located on Fort Bragg. "But our museum represents more than the 82nd," says Jim Bartlinski, museum director. "We represent all U.S. Army Airborne troops and Special Operations. So we tell those histories here."

FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The exterior design of the museum features soaring metal beams that play on the looks of the jump towers paratroopers use to practice. An imposing Iron Mike statue greets entering visitors. Various monuments commemorating American soldiers bear the nickname. This Iron Mike details the look of a World War II-era paratrooper, but it represents all paratroopers and special operations soldiers, Bartlinski says.

Inside the museum, visitors get a chronological look at the world of paratroopers and special forces soldiers — from their first test jump in Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1940 to today's missions in Afghanistan.



A U.S. Army Airborne & Special Operations Museum display re-creates a temporary post in Afghanistan.

There is a special emphasis on World War II, which saw not only the beginning of the Airborne but also the most concentrated use of airborne operations. During that time, paratroopers dropped behind enemy lines to work with groups resisting the Nazi invasion of their countries. They also landed in Normandy just before the D-Day invasion of Europe.

Displays include artifacts, true-to-life dioramas, the various types of aircraft used for missions, specialized Jeeps and other equipment used for airborne drops and specialized missions behind enemy lines. One glass-encased display shows a card with an early version of the special forces' red arrowhead insignia. The cards sometimes turned up conspicuously on the uniforms of dead Nazis as a chilling warning.



One of the Vietnam War-era museum displays re-creates soldiers on a rescue mission jumping out of a helicopter.

Hooah!

The Airborne & Special Operations Museum is at 100 Bragg Blvd., about 8 miles from Fort Bragg, in the heart of historic downtown Fayetteville, North Carolina. It is within walking distance of the North Carolina Veterans Park, a variety of local shops and restaurants, and the new baseball stadium of the Houston Astros' minor league farm team, the Fayetteville Woodpeckers. For more information, including hours of operation, visit the museum's website at asomf.org or its Facebook page.



Interactive displays are also scattered throughout the museum, including one that gives visitors a chance to sit in the hard, metal seats of a C-47 fuselage and then experience a simulation of jumping out of the cargo carrier. In addition, the museum's theater shows movies several times a day, and a 25-seat simulator room offers virtual reality experiences that mimic those of paratroopers.

The museum offers visitors a chance to refresh their history knowledge and see it in the context of the ongoing military operations of the times. But it also gives them a chance to better understand history from the eyes of a soldier, Bartlinski says. "What we do here commemorates the service of all these paratroopers," he says. "It points out all their sacrifices in the past and the ways they've continued to make sacrifices. It's important to remember that our troops are still out there in harm's way." 📱

VISIT A MILITARY MUSEUM THIS VETERANS DAY

Military museums continue to fill visitors with respect and appreciation for the men and women of the U.S. armed forces. But today's military museums feature dazzling interactive activities, exciting simulations and realistic visual displays that bring history to life and educate visitors about the people who fought. Looking for an inspiring military museum in the Southeast? **Here are just a few of the greats:**

NATIONAL NAVAL AVIATION MUSEUM

Pensacola, Florida

The National Naval Aviation Museum is the world's largest Naval aviation museum. It explores the rich history of Naval aviation with more than 150 beautifully restored aircraft representing Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviation. These historic and one-of-a-kind aircraft are displayed both inside the museum's nearly 350,000 square feet of exhibit space and outside on its 37-acre grounds. For more information, visit navalaviationmuseum.org.

NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM & SOLDIER CENTER

Fort Benning, Georgia

With thousands of artifacts, monuments, interactive exhibits and video presentations on display, the National Infantry Museum is one of the nation's leading military history destinations. Visitors of all ages can experience firsthand the American infantryman's journey to defeat tyranny around the globe. For more information, visit nationalinfantrymuseum.org.

U.S. ARMY AVIATION MUSEUM

Fort Rucker, Alabama

Life-sized dioramas of aircraft and personnel capture the rich heritage of Army aviation, which started during the U.S. Civil War with hydrogen-filled balloons that directed artillery fire. About 50 different aircraft fill this cavernous museum and tell the wild and uplifting stories of U.S. Army pilots. For more information, visit armyaviationmuseum.org.

Butler Brothers *remembered*

M.L. Wilhelm has fond memories of the iconic business

BY LISA SAVAGE

In his first job out of high school, M.L. Wilhelm counted horseshoe nails at Butler Brothers. “It took 32 nails for one horse,” the 94-year-old Wilhelm recalls.

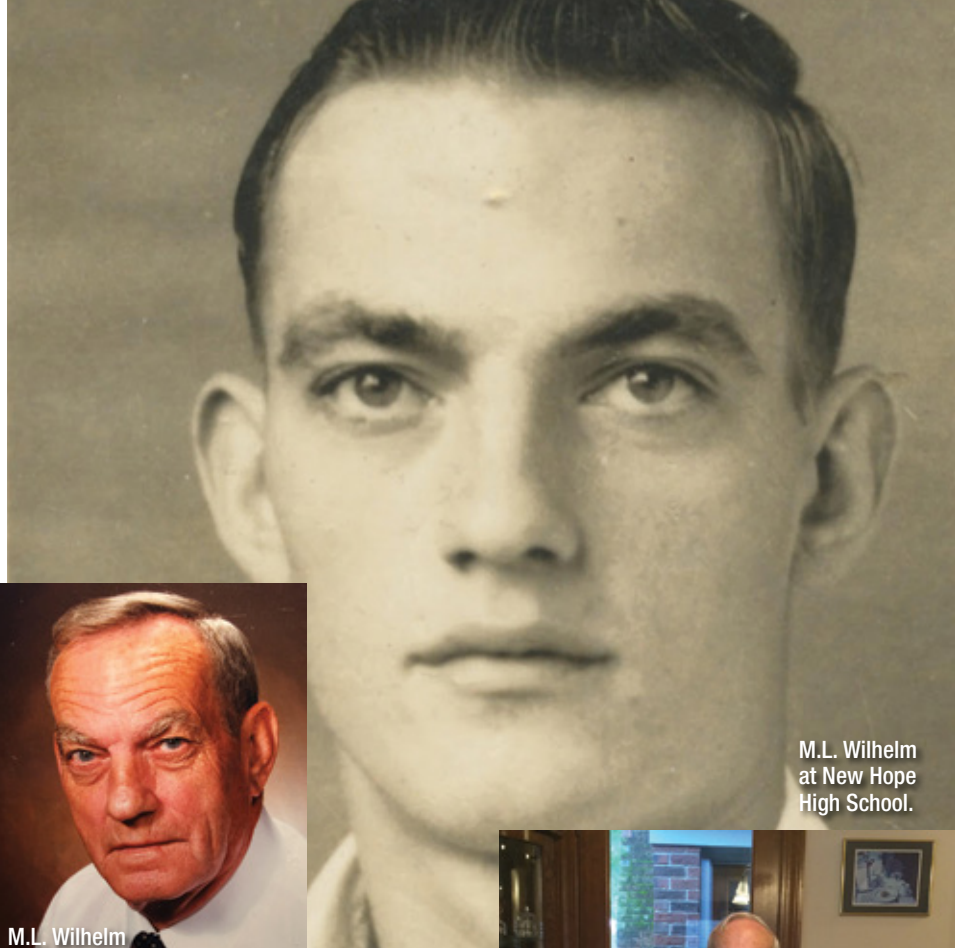
Community members in New Hope believe Wilhelm is the only former Butler Brothers employee still living.

From service as a cotton gin and farm supplier to a hardware and dry goods store to a funeral home and ambulance service, among other things, the iconic Butler Brothers enterprise operated in its row of three buildings in downtown New Hope for more than a century. It closed in the mid-1970s.

“I finished high school on the 11th day of May 1945,” Wilhelm says. He looked for work in Huntsville but had no luck. He returned to his hometown of New Hope and got a job at Butler Brothers. During the 16 years he worked there, he did a little bit of everything.

MARRYING HIS SWEETHEART

Butler Brothers had a telephone, but most of its customers didn’t. So, when the father of Ruby Maples, a girl he knew from high school, asked Wilhelm to save him two pairs of overalls, he wrote Ruby a letter to ask her to let her father know a shipment had come in. “Her mother told her, ‘You better not let him get away,’” Wilhelm chuckles. The couple married on July 20, 1946, and Wilhelm worked at Butler Brothers 15 more years.



M.L. Wilhelm
at New Hope
High School.



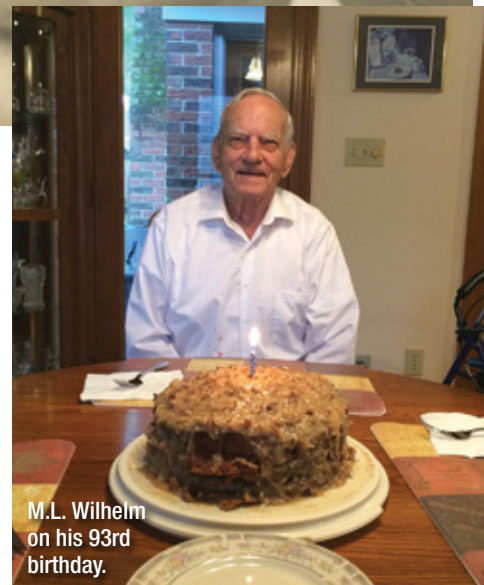
M.L. Wilhelm

Wilhelm has many memories from his days there, including one that stands out about the store telephone. Jim Ed Butler lived nearby and also had a phone at his home. “He would call on the telephone every morning at 6 o’clock to see if everybody was at work,” Wilhelm says.

As Huntsville’s growth continued and farm-related business dropped, Wilhelm says he saw sales decline at Butler Brothers, and he sought another job. He went to work as a contractor at Thiokol Chemical Corp. on Redstone Arsenal. He later moved to a job at Boeing and worked there in 1969 during the Apollo 11 moon landing. He rounded out his career at GTE, retiring at 62 years old.

He and his wife had two children and lived in New Hope 68 years before moving to Louisville, Kentucky, to be closer to their son, Mickey Wilhelm. Their daughter, Debra Bliss, lives in Texas.

Ruby Wilhelm passed away in 2016. The couple had been married 70 years. M.L. Wilhelm still lives in Louisville, close to his son, and he says he has had a blessed life. His words of wisdom for success could apply to anyone. “Stay out of trouble, and be honest,” he says.



M.L. Wilhelm
on his 93rd
birthday.

BUTLER BROTHERS' HISTORY

M.L. Wilhelm will always have a place in the history of Butler Brothers and its three historic commercial buildings known as Butlers’ Store, which made the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 and still stand downtown. One of the buildings housed City Hall until a new facility went up in 2017. Now, only the public library remains in one of the three buildings, still known by many as the “old” Butler Brothers.

“Butler Brothers will always be a big part of New Hope,” Wilhelm says. “For over 100 years, it was New Hope.”



Candy Apple Boutique owner Karen Trammell, left, and store manager Heather Hill help customers with any style questions.

A passion for fashion

Candy Apple Boutique celebrates four years

BY LISA SAVAGE

Almost four years ago, Karen Trammell and her co-workers at Redstone Arsenal were talking about fashion and styles, and the conversation led to discussions about the need for more shopping options. Trammell mentioned she had a dream of opening her own business, so with the support of her co-workers — which included choosing the store name from the label of a bottle of lotion on someone's desk — a clothing boutique was born.

Candy Apple Boutique first only opened on Saturdays in a Florida room inside Trammell's Owens Cross Roads home. "I started with just a few items," she says. After a few months, she mentioned to her husband that she thought she could make a go of it if she expanded to a separate storage building in their yard.

"I came home the next day, and he had bought a small storage building," she says. He did much of the renovations, she decorated, and the boutique opened a few weeks later. Trammell soon realized she needed a larger space, and Candy Apple Boutique moved to the main highway. She bought a 14-by-40 building, renting a space for it next to Little Lots in Owens Cross Roads, and stayed there about a year.

SUCCESSFUL AND GROWING

In April, the store celebrates four years in business and one year at its newest location at a storefront on U.S. Highway 431 in New Hope. The store has been more successful than Trammell ever thought possible.

"I believe it's because I try to keep my prices affordable," she says.

Trammell retired partially from Redstone and splits her time between there and the store. She added tanning beds at the store over the summer and expects a busy holiday shopping season because of monogramming and specialty items. She credits the store's manager, Heather Hill, who does all the personalization work, with much of the growth and success. "She's 90% of the reason the monogramming has been so successful," Trammell says.

"Most of the time, we can provide a two-day turnaround on monogramming," she says. Large orders take more time. For the holidays, Trammell suggests placing orders in advance.

READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Open house is set for Dec. 6-8. She is also planning for special deals the first week in April as the store celebrates its four-year anniversary. Customers can see specials on the store's Facebook page.

"This is a dream for me," she says. "I've always had a passion for this. God has blessed me so much." 📱

Candy Apple Boutique

Location: 10042-C U.S. Highway 431 S., New Hope

Hours: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday and Tuesday

9 a.m.-7 p.m. Wednesday through Friday

9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday

Noon-5 p.m. Sundays between Thanksgiving and Christmas

For more information: Visit Candy Apple Boutique on Facebook or call 256-723-4106.



Esports go mainstream

High-speed connections create winners

BY JOHN CLAYTON

A dozen gaming computers provide an ethereal green glow along the stage at Lander University's Abney Cultural Center in Greenwood, South Carolina, as esports competitors prepare for an early round at the 2019 Peach Belt Conference League of Legends Championship tournament.

In traditional sports, the PBC is a member of NCAA Division II and composed of small colleges and universities in the Carolinas and Georgia. But as esports begins to find a larger niche, this is something different and new. While the video game industry has been around for decades, esports continues to evolve with college and professional teams, increasingly stunning games and graphics, and more platforms on which to play.

"I grew up playing stick-and-ball sports, and I never saw the difference in intensity between those sports and esports," says J.T. Vandembree, associate college esports manager at Riot Games, the creator and distributor of the battle arena game League of Legends. "In esports, all the competitors play the same games, and they all have the same experiences. And they all get to chase the same dream."

Vandembree spoke during a forum on esports hosted by Lander University during the 2019 PBC tournament. Members of the forum's panel agreed that esports and video gaming are expected to continue to broaden their reach and market shares.

Georgia high schools are now involved in sanctioned esports leagues. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones bought a stake



Lander University esports competitors prepare for the Peach Belt Conference League of Legends tournament.

in professional esports team Complexity Gaming in 2017 and moved its training center to the Cowboys complex in Frisco, Texas. In 2017, 240 colleges and universities competed in esports. That number grew to 357 in 2019, and many of those schools offer scholarships to promising video gamers.

Despite the growing popularity of esports on college campuses and beyond, the NCAA has not sanctioned esports. Instead, the National Association of College Esports serves as its primary governing body, and the NCSA — Next College Student Athlete recruiting service — has added esports to its portfolio.

ESPN signed on as sponsor of the Collegiate Esports Championship and plans to

continue its support of the genre across its platforms, John Lasker, ESPN's vice president of digital programming, told Cheddar Esports during a regular show dedicated to gaming and esports.

"The conversion is happening right before our eyes," Lasker says. "Sports teams and franchises are evolving into esports franchises and esports teams. As that continues to happen, ESPN expects to continue to be there as we have been in other sports."

THE NEXT BIG THING

Gaming consoles such as Xbox and PlayStation have long incorporated internet connectivity into its gameplay, but Google is taking gaming one huge

Gaming old school in new ways



The Peach Belt Conference League of Legends Tournament took the big screen at Lander University's Abney Cultural Center.

step outside of the console.

Google was to introduce its much-anticipated Stadia online gaming platform — described as a sort of Netflix for gamers — in November. With the cloud-based Stadia, gamers will not even need a gaming console or PC to play. The cost is \$9.99 per month in the U.S.

“Google may have just unveiled the future of gaming,” wrote Tom Warren, a senior editor for TheVerge.com, following Google’s introduction of Stadia’s beta version at the Game Developers Conference in March.

The cloud-based technology, which relies on fast internet speeds, an array of servers placed around the world and special game controllers that relay commands quickly to the servers, puts more pressure on internet companies and cooperatives to deliver.

High-speed internet connections make it possible for gamers to compete, and the expansion of broadband services into rural areas makes it possible for more people to enjoy the games and to take advantage of the potential opportunities they offer.

In Kerrville, Texas, first-year Schreiner University esports coach Ryan Lucich says he often suffered through frustrating internet speeds and iffy connections while a student and esports competitor at Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas.

“Obviously, the biggest challenge in running a wide, multiplayer online game is the internet connection,” says Riot Games’ Vandenbree. “We have dozens of people at our company who work with telecommunications providers to try to figure out the best way to make our game packets work. Anything that makes our infrastructure stronger in our country, and any other country, is good for the game.”



UNC Pembroke's Crystian Amaya and teammates competed at the Peach Belt Conference League of Legends Tournament.

Using internet connections to play traditional games is an updated take on an old norm. “People used to play chess by mail or by messenger,” says Chris Bellinger, a Staunton, Virginia, resident and avid gamer. He participates in role-playing games with friends and family from across the miles thanks to internet connections and gaming platforms that allow real-time communication and play.

Bellinger says members of his groups, which total about eight people in each, are involved in Pathfinder, Dungeons & Dragons and Star Wars role-playing games. He participates in Pathfinder and D&D games with old friends and runs another D&D game with members of his family. Group members include people in Virginia, Florida, South Carolina and Iowa.

“We’re pretty spread out, so now it’s pretty cool,” Bellinger says. “It allows us to stay in touch. I don’t know that I would have much contact with my friends otherwise.”

One of the current games now played through the popular Roll 20 gaming platform originated from one that Bellinger and his friends started at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. “That game ran for about eight years with different people coming in or going out,” he says.

Roll 20 makes game play smooth and easy when coupled with a communications platform called Discord that allows for group chats and messaging.

While those platforms are relatively new, Bellinger says traditional gamers have been taking advantage of internet connections since the introduction of the World Wide Web. And before that, players used text-based multiuser dungeons, or MUDs, to meet up online for a gaming experience once confined to table tops or living rooms. “So, there’s always been ways to game online,” Bellinger says.

REINVENTING RESCUE

Animal center finds homes in other regions

BY LISA SAVAGE



The first time Bethany Marbut rescued a dog, she knew it would not be the last. She and her husband soon began fostering golden retrievers. “It’s such a rewarding feeling,” she says. “To rescue a dog or a cat is like an addiction. Once you do it, you can’t walk away.”

Now, Marbut plays a role in rescuing dogs and cats at the Felines & Canines Hunter Stephenson Rescue Center in Owens Cross Roads. It’s a temporary home for animals moving from overcrowded shelters in North Alabama to adoption facilities in the Midwest every week. In its first year, the center rescued almost 3,000 dogs and cats, which new owners in the Midwest adopted.

The facility in Owens Cross Roads falls under the umbrella of Felines & Canines of Chicago, which sought a rescue center in a Southern state to help provide adoptable dogs and cats to the Midwest. The center is for relieving overcrowding and for rescuing animals who would be euthanized because of space limitations.

The Chicago-based group looked in the Huntsville area and discovered Friends of Rescue, for which Marbut volunteered at the time. Marbut knew she wanted to be involved in bringing the Felines & Canines project to Alabama, so she quit her job at Redstone Arsenal, and she and her husband sold their home and downsized. She became the executive director at the Hunter Stephenson Rescue Center.

Members of the nonprofit group found a suitable building on Hamer Road in Owens Cross Roads, centrally located for access from most North Alabama counties. They started raising money and opened in July 2018 as the Felines & Canines Hunter Stephenson Rescue Center, named for a 16-year-old Huntsville boy who died in 2004. Charlie and Candy Stephenson's generous donation in their son's memory helped put the center's fundraising efforts over the top. Candy Stephenson serves on the board of directors and is a volunteer. "She comes to the shelter at 5 a.m. and walks the dogs before they're going to be transported," Marbut says.

HOW IT WORKS

Each week, Marbut visits shelters across North Alabama with Adrienne Towry, director of operations, searching for dogs and cats suitable for the program. Animals must be friendly and cannot be aggressive. In most cases, these animals are in line for euthanasia. "We may find 10 animals that can be saved, and that opens up 10 kennels for more," Marbut says.

The visits include tests for temperament and adaptability to possibly live in areas with high-rise buildings, honking horns and other loud noises, Marbut says. "Most of these dogs have never even been on a leash before," she says.

The center provides temporary housing and medical and emotional care to dogs and cats in the program as they prepare them for relocation to adoption facilities in the Midwest, where there are more qualified adopters than there are friendly available dogs and cats. Most areas where the animals are headed also have more strict regulations for leashing and spaying and neutering, which results in fewer adoptable animals, Marbut says.

The animals are in their new Northern homes within days. "They have people lining up the next day after the animals arrive," Marbut says. "People are really looking to rescue."

The Alabama Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals transports between 50 and 70 dogs and cats each week to approved Midwest adoption facilities.

"Not only will thousands of dogs and cats be spared euthanasia, but they will be connected to loving families every year," Marbut says. "It's an affordable, efficient and effective life-saving model that just makes sense. It is something that we strive to replicate in areas of need throughout the South."

A DIGITAL ASSIST

The coordination of these efforts between the Hunter Stephenson Rescue Center and other locations requires an electronic database to record medical treatments and all documentation, including a transportation manifest, required for compliance. For the database to operate efficiently and without lag time, the rescue center has gig-speed fiber internet through NHTC. "All of the coordination must be done in a timely manner, and with the high-speed internet we have, we can do that," Marbut says. "It makes a big difference in the efficiency of our operations."

The Hunter Stephenson Rescue Center is a private animal-housing facility and not open to the public for adoptions or tours. "Our focus is solely on rescuing animals in need and relocating them to adoption facilities to find loving, permanent homes," Marbut says.

Marbut says they're often asked why the animals are not available locally. "All of the animals that we rescue are available for adoption through various intake facilities we support," she says. "We do exactly the same thing the public does — we walk through the facilities and meet the animals who are waiting to be adopted, and they've often been waiting for weeks or months.

"We don't turn around and place them for adoption locally because they've already been passed over by the public, and our goal is to unclog the system," Marbut says. "By relocating these animals to areas where adopters are waiting, we can keep the flow of rescue moving."

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
GO TO FCRESCUECENTER.ORG



Photos courtesy of Justin Battis.

A holiday delight

Baking Christmas cookies makes for a strong tradition

It's the most wonderful time of the year, when cooks around the country take to their kitchens to bake Christmas cookies.

"It's a tradition in families," says Stephany Houston, baker and owner of WildFlour Bakehouse in Sevierville, Tennessee. "Ours was that we would go to my grandmother's house — all of us girls — and make cookies. Then we would have them for the whole week before Christmas."

Houston recalls her grandmother, Alva Dell, using an old pastry press to create beautiful shapes for her German spritz cookies. That press is now long gone, but a new "old" one has taken its place. A friend found it at an antiques auction and brought it to Houston so she could re-create that experience she fondly remembers in her grandmother's kitchen years ago.

Spritz cookies are just one confection filling bakery cases during the holiday season, tempting customers as they walk through the bake shop doors. This is only WildFlour's second year in business, but as word spreads, a



Baker Stephany Houston re-creates the experience of making cookies with her grandmother.

growing, loyal customer base has taken root.

"Most every neighborhood has their baking lady," Houston says. "That's what I am — the neighborhood baking lady, who also has a storefront." In a previous life, before opening WildFlour, Houston was a 911 operator and "had a lot of downtime," giving her the opportunity to watch YouTube videos about cookie decorating.

"I pretty much taught myself," she says.

Now, she teaches others at classes at the bakery and makes cookies for customers who bring in their own recipes. "Everybody has their own little cookie recipe they want to have in their homes over the holidays," she says.



Tips for GREAT COOKIES

Stephany Houston, owner of WildFlour Bakehouse, teaches baking classes, where she stresses important steps to take before getting started:

- ▶ Read the entire recipe before you begin. A lot of people don't, and they skip important steps.
- ▶ Always cream the butter and sugar together. That's very important. Then, mix the dry ingredients and incorporate the two together.
- ▶ Do not overmix the batter, which will result in tough, dry, crumbly cookies. Stop mixing when the ingredients are just mixed together.



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STEPHANY'S GINGERBREAD MEN

- 3/4 cup butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 3/4 cup molasses
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon Chinese five spice
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon cloves
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 3 3/4 cups all-purpose flour

In a saucepan over low heat, melt butter, then stir in brown sugar, molasses, salt and spices. Transfer the mixture to a medium-sized mixing bowl, let it cool to lukewarm, then beat in the egg.

Whisk the baking powder and soda into the flour, then stir into the molasses mixture. The dough will be very soft and sticky, but don't be tempted to add more flour. It will firm up once it's chilled.

Divide the dough in half and pat each half into a thick rectangle. Wrap well and refrigerate for 1 hour or longer. The dough may be sticky and hard to roll if not thoroughly chilled, so make sure it's chilled before continuing.

Heat oven to 350 F. Once the dough has chilled, take one piece of dough out of the refrigerator and flour a clean work surface. Roll the dough to a thickness of 1/8 to 1/4 inch. The thinner you roll the dough, the crispier the cookie. Flour both the top and bottom of the dough if it starts to stick.

Cut out shapes with a floured cookie cutter, cutting them as close to one another as possible to minimize waste. Transfer cookies to ungreased cookie sheets. Bake the cookies until slightly browned around the edges — 8 to 12 minutes — or until they feel firm. Let cookies cool on baking sheet for several minutes until set. Then, remove to a wire rack to cool completely. Repeat with remaining dough. Decorate cookies as desired.



ALVA DELL'S CHRISTMAS SPRITZ

As you can tell by reading, Alva wrote this recipe for her family.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 large egg
- 1/2 pound unsalted butter at room temperature, cut into small cubes
- Decorations of choice

Heat oven to 350 F. Whisk together the flour, sugar and salt in a large bowl, then sprinkle with vanilla and almond extracts. Crack the egg in the center of the bowl, then dot the flour mixture with the pieces of butter. Mix everything together with your clean hands until you get a dough. Try not to knead too much, as this makes tough cookies. You just want the dough to come together cohesively.

Press the dough through a cookie press to make traditional spritz. Put on the die of your choice — star and snowflake

patterns are good for the holidays. Then, load the press with the dough. Ratchet out the dough onto an ungreased cookie sheet. This takes practice, so be prepared to mess up at first. Just return the not-so-good ones to the dough ball and start again. Some people like larger cookies that require two or three cranks. Others like a more dainty cookie that requires just one crank of the cookie press. My mum sometimes twisted her wrist a little when making these to get a swirly pattern going on.

Bake the cookies at 350 F for 10-12 minutes. As they bake, get your decorations ready, because you'll need to act fast once they come out of the oven.

The cookies will not brown, so don't wait for that to happen. As soon as they come out of the oven, start decorating them. My favorite toppings are colored sugar and pieces of walnuts stuck in the center of the star pattern.

Cool the cookies on the sheet for 5 minutes, then carefully remove them to a rack. Let cool completely before putting them away. These cookies freeze well. 📦



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