

The

Communicator

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

Local librarian
shares her love
for reading

HIGH-SPEED HOME

Local family takes full
advantage of the gig

GADGETS TO GIVE

Your guide to the hottest
tech for the holidays



RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Cybersecurity is everyone's duty

Now that November has rolled around, the time for scary movies, spooky costumes and Halloween parties is over. At NTCA, we also just finished a month-long focus dealing with something just as scary — the cybersecurity threats facing our country.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security declared October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month and November as Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Month. The two designations draw awareness to the danger cyber criminals pose to institutions, businesses and individuals, and it underscores the responsibilities of actively protecting our internet-connected systems.

Today, everything from traffic lights to banks to pharmacies relies on the internet to function, and it is crucial we work to keep these systems secure. One vulnerable computer is enough to leave an organization open to cyberattack.

While online criminals are nothing new, they also show no signs of going away. Cybersecurity is a top issue for NTCA, and I know your telco is working hard every day to ensure your network stays safe and secure. From talking with experts around the industry, here are some things consumers can do to help stop cyberthreats:

- Download and install new updates to your computers and mobile devices.
- Create complex passwords and keep them secure.
- Do not download “free” content or programs from non-reputable sites as they often contain dangerous malware.
- Consider a career in cybersecurity. Federal agencies and private firms are constantly hiring in this expanding field. ☑



BY DREW WOOLLEY

Before Hurricane Harvey even made landfall, telephone cooperatives throughout Texas were deciding how to support each other. Lines of communication opened directly between telcos, and the Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative Inc. (TSTCI) helped companies along the coast plan for sharing manpower, equipment and generators.

That spirit of camaraderie is part of the cooperative mission, but it also extends beyond the cooperatives themselves. When YK Communications received a phone call from Matagorda County officials at 4 a.m. the morning of Aug. 28 asking for help setting up an emergency operations center, the telco was quick to offer their own offices as a headquarters.

“The fact that those relationships exist is pretty impressive for YK, but that’s also the kind of story you could have heard anywhere in Texas,” says Weldon Gray, CEO of TSTCI.

There are few organizations that understand the importance of giving a helping hand more than Star Communications in North Carolina. When Hurricane Matthew struck in 2016, Star’s main offices were flooded, along with the majority of its nearly 1,500-square-mile coverage area.

VP of Sales and Business Operations Kyle Randleman recalls wading through septic water in the cooperative’s offices to recover thousands of paper records. But he also remembers how Atlantic Telephone Membership Cooperative stepped up to provide generators and extra technicians to help Star get back on its feet.

“We’ll never forget that,” Randleman says. “I think independent telcos sometimes think of themselves as islands, but one of the things I learned is that sometimes you need to not be afraid to let your guard down and ask for help.”

Throughout the Harvey recovery, TSTCI has received offers from cooperatives as far away as Iowa for donations of surplus copper cable, and associate members like CoBank have begun setting up disaster funds throughout the state. ☑



Colorado Valley Telephone Cooperative and Brazoria Telephone Company have also set up accounts for donations to help employees and others in their service areas who lost their homes and possessions in the storm.

Checks for Colorado Valley can be made out to CVTC Employee Charity Fund and mailed to CVTC Employee Charity Fund, Attn: Finance Department, P.O. Box 130, La Grange, TX 78945. PayPal donations can also be made directly to cvtcharveyrelief@coloradovalley.com.

Anyone who wants to support the Brazoria Telephone fund can donate to the “BTCL Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund” at youcaring.com.



BY DREW WOOLLEY

Anyone using technology in the last few years has heard about the importance of cloud computing, but it can sometimes be difficult for people to put their finger on what exactly it is.

Think of it this way: In the past, people had to download applications directly onto their computer or device to use them. With the cloud, those same programs are accessed through the internet.

If you check and send emails from your phone, that's using the cloud. Even posting photos and messages to social media like Facebook takes advantage of cloud technology. Your information is saved somewhere other than your computer, meaning it can be accessed from any other device as long as you have an internet connection.

That flexibility makes cloud technology a game-changer for individuals and businesses. For growing companies that aren't sure what their exact bandwidth needs are, it provides flexibility. For that friend who lost their phone with all the great vacation photos, it acts as a

convenient backup. The cloud can even help people across the globe collaborate on projects in nearly real time.

Research from software company Druva indicates that as businesses learn more about how cloud technology works, they trust its security over their own ability to back up important information. In a survey, 82 percent of people cited the ability to recover from a disastrous loss of data as one of the primary reasons to move their information to the cloud.

It's no wonder, then, that cloud technology has been on the rise and is a focal point for some of the world's biggest companies. Amazon and Microsoft both offer cloud computing services. Also, providers such as a telco in Tennessee have created services like NowCloud. In 2018 and beyond, the cloud is expected to reach even greater heights. ☁

30% The portion of Microsoft's revenue expected to be generated by cloud-based software in 2018. (Forbes)

83% The percentage of work conducted in the cloud by small- and medium-sized businesses. (RightScale)

68% Year-over-year growth for Amazon cloud services in 2017. (Forbes)

6X The rate at which cloud computing spending is expected to outpace all other IT spending from 2015 to 2020. (IDC)

\$180 BILLION Global spending on cloud technology in 2015. (Bain & Company)

\$390 BILLION Forecasted global spending on cloud technology in 2020. (Bain & Company)

89% The share of Amazon's operating income generated by Amazon Web Services in the first quarter of 2017. (Amazon)

Survey says: Rural telcos are overcoming challenges to serve you

Despite plenty of obstacles, telcos like NHTC are winning the battle to bring broadband to rural America according to a recent survey — and we're doing it through our commitment to serve you.



JIM COOK
General Manager

Unlike our giant corporate counterparts who selectively build in lucrative areas to please their investors, we build the networks for you.

"NTCA members are the proven broadband-solutions providers for their communities, living in the communities they serve and providing critically important broadband service to community anchor institutions," says NTCA Manager of Economic Research and Analysis Rick Schadelbauer. "In so doing, they make significant contributions to the safety, health and overall well-being of their customers. Their service helps facilitate the overall viability of rural America."

Schadelbauer authored the "NTCA 2016 Broadband/Internet Availability Survey Report," which is full of interesting information. For instance, customers demand faster broadband speeds, and telcos like

NHTC invest millions of dollars into meeting those demands.

One particular line item from the survey is worth highlighting because I think it explains why we do what we do. According to the data, the median telco responding to the survey serves four public service entities; three primary or secondary schools; one public library; one hospital or medical clinic; as well as 911 call centers, post offices and city halls.

When people think of our communities, these are institutions that give us our identity and that residents count on daily. Serving them is a pleasure for us, but also a duty stemming from our commitment to improving our community.

But, as the survey results make clear, it's not easy.

The results underscore some of the challenges we're so familiar with here at NHTC. Almost nine out of 10 telcos surveyed said the high cost of construction and materials is a significant barrier to improving their networks with more fiber. Other barriers identified on the survey included regulations and regulatory uncertainty, delays in receiving orders of fiber optic cable, and the long distances the network has to cover to reach rural residents.

The rural nature of our service area has always been a major challenge. While I've seen numbers suggesting urban and suburban telcos serve more than 120 customers per square mile, most of the NTCA survey respondents reported serving areas with only 1 to 5 customers per square mile.

As you might imagine from those numbers, urban telcos can collect much more money by running fiber to cover a square mile and serving 120 customers, compared with rural telcos only serving one to five customers from the same investment in fiber.

Reading those numbers, some would ask the obvious question: Why build such an expensive network in such a hard-to-serve area?

To answer that, I would refer to that first item I mentioned. You have to look at who we serve: schools, hospitals, fire departments and law enforcement. The institutions you count on all count on us to keep them connected. Without the hard work borne from our decades-long commitment to you, these pillars of our community might not have the connectivity they need to serve our communities.

I'm pleased with the insights the NTCA survey provides, and I'm willing to predict the results of the next such survey: Despite the expense, despite the risks and despite the uncertainty from regulation, telcos like NHTC will still be there serving our communities. Thank you for counting on us. ☺

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On the Cover:



Librarian Dona Thompson inspires the students at Owens Cross Roads Elementary to love books by making reading fun for all. See story Page 8.

WELCOME THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE NHTC FAMILY



Brayden Lee McDonald

- **Parents:** Thomas James "T.J." McCrary and Courtney Leigh Ann Murphy
- **Date:** June 3, 2017
- **Weight:** 6 pounds, 14 ounces
- **Length:** 20.75 inches



William James White

- **Parents:** William Hunter White and Tara Gail White
- **Date:** July 3, 2017
- **Weight:** 7 pounds, 5 ounces
- **Length:** 19.5 inches



Lincoln James Hohn

- **Parents:** Wesley Hohn and Jessica Hohn
- **Date:** July 26, 2017
- **Weight:** 7 pounds, 4 ounces
- **Length:** 20 inches



Ring in the holidays with **local Christmas parades**

The **New Hope Christmas parade is Saturday, Dec. 9**, at 6 p.m. 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.

Also, catch the **Grant Christmas parade on Saturday, Dec. 9**, starting at 1 p.m. along Main Street.



Happy holidays!

So NHTC employees may enjoy the holidays with their families, the NHTC office will be closed the following days:

- **Thanksgiving: November 23-24**
- **Christmas: December 25-26**

Thank you!

NHTC would like to express a heartfelt thank-you to 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 Happy New Year!



TREE TRADITIONS

Bluebird
Christmas
Tree Farm

Choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms make family memories

There's nothing quite like a freshly cut Christmas tree, including the aroma of pine, whimsical decorations on its branches and presents beneath its boughs. While the tree lasts just a few short weeks, it can help create lifelong memories.

Searching for the perfect tree, cutting it down and bringing it home is old-fashioned family fun. Here are some farms around the South that allow you to cut your own tree, plus some farms that do a little extra to celebrate the Christmas season.

Bluebird Christmas Tree Farm

985 Brushy Valley Road, Heiskell, Tennessee

Customers have returned for more than 20 years to this 7-acre farm in a scenic mountain valley on the edge of the Cumberland Plateau. "It's certainly a family tradition," says owner Joseph Collins, who adds that each holiday season also brings first-time visitors.

The farm does not allow chain saws but provides hand saws if you don't bring your own. And if cutting your tree is too difficult, folks on the farm will do the job for you. Most people prefer cutting a tree themselves, Collins says.

Bluebird's gift shop features locally made items, such as jams, butters and honey. Also, the store offers wreaths, garlands, handmade toys and ornaments. A historic log cabin provides a look back in history.

▲ **Trees for cutting:** Norway spruce, Leyland cypress and Virginia pine

▲ **Prices:** You can buy a "Charlie Brown" tree for \$10. Other prices range up to \$200, depending on tree type and size.

▲ **Information:** 865-457-5682 or online at bluebirdtrees.com

Old Dairy Christmas Tree Farm

3273 McClain Circle, Gadsden, Alabama

Mark and Lisa Stephenson are opening Old Dairy Christmas Tree Farm for the first time this year. "We sold a few to family and friends last year, and they plan to come back this year," Lisa Stephenson says. "I have watched a family sit down around a tree

and sing carols. That's one of the reasons I wanted to start the tree farm."

And while you search for a perfect tree on the farm, sip on a cup of hot chocolate that the Stephensons offer to ward off winter's chill. They also sell fresh wreaths. Call ahead to place your order.

Chain saws are not allowed. Hand saws are provided, or your tree can be cut for you at no charge.

- ▲ **Trees for cutting:** Leyland cypress, Murray cypress and Carolina sapphire
- ▲ **Prices:** Start at \$35
- ▲ **Information:** 256-504-8658 or on Facebook



Hollow Creek Tree Farm

Hollow Creek Tree Farm

228 Windmill Road, Gilbert, South Carolina

A day at Hollow Creek Tree Farm is all about family, including the family dog. "We're a dog-friendly farm," says owner Mike McCartha, whose dad, J.W. McCartha, started selling trees in the late 1970s to supplement his income after retiring from the Merchant Marine.

In the beginning, J.W. McCartha brought in trees from his brother's nearby farm. Now, 15 of the farm's 36 acres are planted with trees ranging in height from 4 feet to more than 20 feet.

Bow saws are provided — no chain saws allowed — or Mike McCartha will do the cutting for you.

Weekends on the farm feature free hay rides. You can also stop by the gift shop and sip on free coffee or hot chocolate while you shop for a fresh wreath for your door, handmade bows for your gifts or a stand for your tree.

- ▲ **Trees for cutting:** Leyland cypress, Murray cypress, Carolina sapphire, blue ice cypress, Virginia pine, white pine,

Burkii cedar, Deodar cedar, Thuja green giant, Hollow Creek slims

- ▲ **Prices:** \$7-\$13 per foot, depending on size and variety
- ▲ **Information:** 803-892-3662 or www.hollowcreektreefarm.com



Plantation Pines

Plantation Pines Christmas Tree Farm

10098 County Road 429, Tyler, Texas

This is the first year running the Christmas tree business for Burren and Heather Reed, but it's nothing new for them. She grew up in the business with her parents, Nick and Nancy Wiggins.

Last year, the Reeds took over the business and are now prepared for the masses of shoppers who come to their farm in search of the perfect tree.

Visitors can take hayrides, sip hot chocolate, warm up around a campfire, make s'mores, shop in the gift shop and more.

"It seems that every year more and more families come to share in the experience, and I'm excited to see the next generation of families come through the farm as we transition into running it,"

Heather Reed says. "We love the family traditions — that's what we're all about!"

Chain saws are not allowed, but hand saws are provided.

- ▲ **Trees for cutting:** Virginia pines
- ▲ **Prices:** \$7-\$8 per foot
- ▲ **Information:** 903-595-2046 or www.plantationpinesfarms.com

Cathole Bend Christmas Tree Farm

1243 Cathole Bend Road, Lancaster, Kentucky

Steven McManus began planting evergreens in 2004 and is now one of a handful of farmers in Eastern Kentucky who open their fields during the holiday season.

In addition to cutting a tree, you can choose from balled and burlapped trees so that you can have a tree to plant after the holidays. If you do purchase a live tree, do not bring it inside until a day or two before Christmas. That's the best way to ensure its longevity.

If you want to cut your own — no chain saws allowed — McManus says he provides bow saws with high-quality European blades that cut through the wood with relative ease.

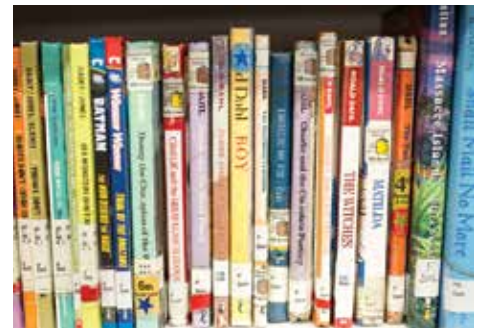
To ward off the day's chill, Cathole Farm offers free hot chocolate and coffee.

- ▲ **Trees for cutting:** Norway spruce, white spruce, black hills spruce, Canaan fir, Fraser fir, Meyer spruce and white pine
- ▲ **Prices:** Start at about \$40
- ▲ **Information:** 859-985-7044 📞



Old Dairy Christmas Tree Farm

Photos courtesy of the associated tree farms.



The happy librarian

Owens Cross Roads librarian inspires students through books and her positive spirit

BY LISA SAVAGE

Dona Thompson was a successful interior decorator when she started volunteering at her son's school. He was in first grade. Two years later when her daughter started school, she sold her business and went back to college to become an elementary school teacher. That was more than 20 years ago.

She loved teaching, but her heart was in children's literature. "I loved opening literature to the kids and encouraging them to go to the library and read, read, read," she says. "I loved getting kids interested in books."

So she went back to school again, on weekends and through online classes, to become a library media specialist. "This is the best job in the world. I'm doing what I wanted to do, putting books in kids'

hands," says Thompson. She has been the Owens Cross Roads Elementary librarian for six years.

It's not the job she dreamed of as a child. She grew up in New Mexico and went to New Mexico State University to study interior design, the same business as her aunt. Thompson was visiting in Huntsville when she was 28 and decided to stay and opened Twickenham Decor.

It was not until she spent time at her

children's school several years later that she knew what she was meant to do. Now she can't imagine doing anything else. "My favorite part of my job is getting books I think they will like into their hands," she says.

She had one student who did not like to read, but she encouraged him.

One day he told her he wanted to be locked in the library so he could always read. "When they become readers, their academics improve," she says.


Thompson works with First Book Marketplace to acquire as many new books as possible for the students. At Christmas, she got \$6,000 worth of books at a cost of \$200 with help from a grant.

"This job is really wonderful. It's a small school, and I have the opportunity to know all the kids," she says. "I try to be the happy librarian."

It's good medicine for Thompson, too. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012 and then fallopian tube cancer in 2013.

When she lost her hair during treatment, she wore different wigs to school every day. She had a Cher wig and a platinum blonde one. "It was like a game for the kids," she says. "They would ask, 'What's Ms. Thompson going to be wearing today?'"

Cancer returned for a third time last year in her femur. It was discovered after she broke her leg. She borrowed a wheelchair and came back to work. It's what she needed to help keep her spirits up while she underwent treatment. "It's not curable, but it's treatable," she says.

"This job is a breath of sunshine," she says. "The kids come in, they love coming to the library, and they love for me to help them find books." 

We salute our veterans!

Veterans Day is a time to honor those who have served our country, and we appreciate the service of all our veterans. The sacrifices of those brave men and women and their families afford us the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. At NHTC, we would like to salute all our veterans and feature our employees who have served.

BOBBY G MORRISON JR., manager of accounting and billing

- **Military branch:** Navy, served eight years. Discharged as a petty officer 2nd class after serving as a torpedoman's mate technician.
- **What was the most interesting aspect of your military service?** I was stationed at Naval Submarine Torpedo Facility, Goose Creek, South Carolina. While there, I built and tested the MK 48 Advanced Capability Torpedo.
- **What is your most memorable experience in the military?** Seeing the torpedo, which I and about 25 others built, sink a decommissioned destroyer.
- **What did it mean to you to serve your country?** Both of my grandfathers served in World War I and World War II. A great-uncle was killed in World War II, and my father served during the Berlin crisis. It was an honor to serve my country and to carry on a family tradition.

MARK BEEM, central office technician

- **Military branch:** Navy, served six years. Discharged as electronics technician 2nd class.
- **What was the most interesting aspect of your military service?** Getting to travel and experience many different countries and cultures. It was an incredible learning experience that had both practical and personal rewards.
- **What is your most unforgettable experience in the military?** Watching Mt. Etna erupt on the island of Sicily; twice being awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal; visiting Jerusalem and Bethlehem during the port visit in



NHTC employees who have served in the United States military are pictured from left to right: Bobby Morrison, Mark Beem, Rusty Bright and Lee Glaser.

Israel; playing golf in Halifax; having tea with an elderly man in Turkey; exploring the labyrinthian streets of the medieval old town of Rhodes, Greece.

- **What did it mean to you to serve your country?** It was by far the most challenging and rewarding thing I've ever done. The places I visited, the things I experienced, and the people I met during those six years still have an impact on me.

RUSTY BRIGHT, network manager of TV and internet systems

- **Military branch:** Navy, served two years. Discharged as a hospital corpsman.
- **What was the most interesting aspect of your military service?** I served during peacetime and worked mostly in hospitals with retired Navy personnel and their families.
- **What is your most memorable experience in the military?** Getting to know

veterans who had served in combat.

- **What did it mean to you to serve your country?** It was a growing experience.

LEE GLASER, fiber installer

- **Military Branch:** Army, served eight years. Discharged as a sergeant.
- **What was the most interesting aspect of your military service?** I had nine total deployments: six to Afghanistan and three to Iraq with the 3rd Ranger Battalion. Nighttime direct action raids were exciting.
- **What is your most memorable experience in the military?** Working as a dog handler in the 3rd Ranger Battalion.
- **What did it mean to you to serve your country?** It sounds honorable to say that you fought for your country's freedoms, but in reality, it's all about your fellow soldiers. When you're overseas, all that matters is bringing everyone back. ☎

GADGET Gift Guide

BY LUIS CARRASCO

The holidays are a time to get together with family and friends and share joy and laughter and maybe a gift or two. There are few sweeter feelings than making someone happy by giving them what they've always wanted. Of course, you can also enjoy the time-honored tradition of hint-giving by leaving this magazine casually open to this page, maybe even draw — casually, casually — a giant red circle around your favorite gadget. Either way, get ready to enjoy a high-tech holiday with those you love.



'STAR WARS: JEDI CHALLENGES'

Remember that scene in the original "Star Wars" where Luke wears a helmet with its blast shield down and deflects lasers from a training drone? You'll look about as silly as he does but feel 10

times cooler as you wear this augmented reality headset and battle the likes of Darth Maul, Kylo Ren and Darth Vader himself. Along with lightsaber duels with your favorite bad guys, "Jedi Challenges" also lets you play a strategy game and even holochess. The kit comes with a lightsaber controller, an AR headset and a tracking beacon, but you still need a compatible Android or iOS smartphone to run the game app. **Available at Best Buy or Lenovo.com for \$199.99.**

AUTOMATIC PRO

Plug an Automatic Pro adapter into any car's standard diagnostics port to monitor everything from its location to engine diagnostics from your smartphone. The Automatic Pro app can tell you the problem behind that check engine light, keep an eye on your family's progress while they're on the road, and even call emergency services automatically if there's a crash. **Available at automatic.com and Amazon for \$129.95.**



ECHO SHOW

The Amazon Echo launched in 2014 as slightly more than a glorified Bluetooth speaker. But it quickly added functions and partner apps that have made it the device to beat as the nerve center of a smart home or as a viable personal assistant. The Echo Show adds a 7-inch touchscreen, which means now — along with the Echo's ability to type up your emails, control your smart home devices, shop on Amazon, etc. — you can use YouTube, make a video call, look up a recipe or watch the news. **Available on Amazon for \$229.99 or a two-pack for \$360.**



LEGO BOOST CREATIVE TOOLBOX

This 840-piece set lets you build five progressively more challenging models and is basically a starter robotics kit. Although it's recommended for children ages 7 through 12, it's hard to imagine adults who won't have fun helping put together everything from a robot that dances and tells jokes

to an automated production line that builds smaller Lego models. The kit comes with Bluetooth connectivity; two motors; and tilt, color and distance sensors. A tablet is needed for instructions and to program your creations. **Available at Lego.com and most retailers for \$159.99.**



Kid-friendly streaming

A world of content and parental control



My kids will never know the agony of waiting until Saturday morning to watch their favorite cartoons. Nor will they ever need to adjust the “rabbit ears” to make the screen a little less snowy. Thanks to DVRs, streaming and high definition, my kids have access to their favorite shows every day of the week in crystal-clear quality.

For those of you who are curious, streaming has nothing to do with water in a creek. It’s all about watching videos over the internet. Some people prefer this method of TV, as it allows them to watch the shows they want when they want, without having to sit through lots of commercials. I must admit, I love that there are fewer commercials during kids shows as it reduces the amount of “Mom, I want THAT” I typically hear when the kids see their favorite shows. So how do you “stream”? There are three key things you need:

1 A high-speed internet connection, preferably a broadband connection for the best signal. If you want to stream on several devices at once, you’ll need a faster connection.

2 A device with streaming apps installed, such as a smartphone, tablet, computer, or a streaming stick attached to your TV such as Roku, Amazon Fire TV Stick or Apple TV.

3 A streaming app that has the content you want to view. There are several different streaming apps available, with Netflix being one of the most popular.

If you already subscribe to Netflix for your own viewing, you can set up profiles for different members of your household. You can assign a “teen,” “big kid” or “little kid” status to your children’s profile. This keeps them from viewing shows that may be inappropriate. However, if you are looking to just stream content for kids, there are many other free options out there that would be just as good, if not better than what Netflix offers for kids. ☎



CARISSA SWENSON
IS A TRAINING
AND EDUCATION
CONSULTANT
FOR CONSORTIA
CONSULTING.

Here are some streaming apps I recommend for kids:

- **YouTube Kids** – A good option for bigger kids who know how to search for the types of shows they enjoy.
- **WATCH Disney** or **WATCH Disney Junior** depending on the age of your kids – Includes episodes of all your kids’ favorite Disney Channel shows.
- **PBS Kids** – Has all your kids’ favorite PBS shows including “Sesame Street” and “Curious George.”
- **PlayKids** – A good option for entertaining preschool-aged children.

As I’ve mentioned before, screen time should just be a small part of your kid’s day. By choosing how your child watches their shows and how they access them, you maintain a little more control over what they are seeing and learning.

Parenting Tip

Need help setting limits for your kids’ screen time?

Healthychildren.org has an interactive Family Media Planner that can help you establish guidelines for when it’s OK and not OK for your children to use their electronics.

Let's talk GIG

One of the first gig customers keeps his family surfing, gaming, streaming and sharing

BY LISA SAVAGE

Mike Wilson and his wife, Brandy, have five kids, four Xbox 360s and a couple of smart TVs. They regularly stream movies and play online games.

But when they lived in Huntsville, internet speeds were slow, barely keeping pace. When the kids received new gaming systems for Christmas, their internet connection bogged down even more. "I didn't realize what internet hogs they were," Wilson says of the consoles.

Within two weeks of adding the new devices, the Wilsons passed their internet provider's bandwidth cap. They lived in a city, but the internet service could not keep pace with their needs.

Then, the family moved to Brandy Wilson's family home on 2 acres at the base of Green Mountain in Owens Cross Roads — where access to gigabit-speed internet has changed their digital lives.

The Wilsons are the envy of many of their friends back in Huntsville. "What we have now is super high-tech," says Mike

Wilson, a 30-year NASA employee.

When the family decided to move to Owens Cross Roads, Wilson did not realize all the members in the New Hope Telephone Cooperative service area would soon have access to high-speed internet. "I moved out here thinking we'd never get it," he says.

Then he heard that a fiber optic network would soon be available. He attended the cooperative's annual meeting in May to learn the details, and he signed up for service that day. "It was so nice to hear they don't have a limitation on how much you can use," he says.

Wilson wanted to get as much bang for his buck as possible. He rewired his house to accommodate the faster service. But there was a learning curve.

"Even if you have high-speed internet, you have to have adequate equipment and connections," he says. He researched to find the best equipment. He moved his access point to the living room. He added enterprise-grade router cables and server access points. "We have top-of-the-line connections," he says.

Their setup allows the kids, ages 15 to 26, to play games while he and his wife

stream a movie. He hooked up a projection TV with surround sound in the basement, and it's not uncommon for some of their kids' friends to bring their Xbox 360s for a marathon gaming session.

"If they're doing that, and Brandy and I want to stream a movie, we don't see any slow down on the internet," he says.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Connecting a home with gigabit-speed technology isn't as hard as many people might think. "At NHTC, we want to help you build a strong foundation in your home network that will carry you into this advancing technology," says Wesley Hohn, an NHTC central office technician.

Gigabit-speed internet is the next generation of broadband service, providing speeds up to 1,000 Mbps. "This means you can have an internet connection that is 100 times faster than today's average broadband service," Hohn says.

The increase in speed allows better access to new streaming services such as 4K UltraHD, which requires 20-30 Mbps per stream. That's just one example of the advancing technologies that require higher broadband speeds.



The Wilson family enjoys having high-speed internet even though they live in a rural area.

Gaming uses a lot of bandwidth, but the Wilson family has plenty to go around.




Any network is only as strong as the equipment. “If you do not invest in the proper hardware and cables, your service cannot work at its highest potential,” Hohn says.

Hard-wired switches and routers must also support 1 gigabit speeds.

“The more devices and concurrent sources of network traffic, the less likely for a router processor to be able to support maximum speed transfers over any one link,” Hohn says.

THE GIG IS HERE

The project to construct the fiber-to-the-home network for New Hope’s 4,900 customers in Madison and Marshall counties began in 2009, and the cooperative has invested \$30 million to see it through.

“Now that the fiber network is complete, we have recently announced that our most popular broadband speed tier has been increased to 25 Mbps for both download and upload,” General Manager Jim Cook says. “And the best part of these service improvements is that they have come without any increase in cost to the customer. We are continuing a commitment to keep the growing community at the forefront of communications.” 

How fast is 1 Gbps?



1 SECOND to download 25 songs



3 SECONDS to download your favorite TV show



36 SECONDS to download an online HD movie

Internet speeds are best-effort, up to stated speed. Actual speeds may vary due to several factors including, but not limited to: capability of devices connected to the internet, site traffic, site provider server limitations and network factors.



SPEED TESTING

Always use a hardwired connection to your desktop or laptop when testing internet speed. Wireless connections are slower, and most wireless devices do not support 1 gigabit speeds. To achieve maximum speeds during a test, ensure that all other programs and applications are closed.

Check speeds with NHTC’s speed test at <http://speedtest.nehp.net/>



HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS AND HELPFUL TIPS

A person usually cannot tell simply by looking at the device whether it supports 1 gigabit ethernet. Sometimes even the advertisements for the device can be deceiving, so here's a list of hardware requirements and helpful tips to ensure you are ready to go gig:

- Cat5e cabling or better from NHTC's fiber optic equipment at your home to your router or devices
- Cat5e jumper or better from the ethernet jack to your equipment
- Desktops or laptops need a Quad-Core Intel Core i7, solid state drive, 16 GB or more of RAM, and Windows 10 operating system or Mac OS 10.8 Mountain Lion or newer
- Desktops or laptops will need a 1 gigabit ethernet interface or network interface card

►► For more information or assistance in understanding the newest technology available and how to best utilize these services, please call 256-723-4211.

DESSERT

The best course of a holiday dinner

The holidays are one of the best times of the year for baking. And no one knows how to make a great seasonal dessert better than Lynn Cummins, who, with her husband, Mike, owns Whistle Stop Cafe in the tiny town of Glendale, Kentucky.

The cafe opened in 1975 in the town's former hardware store. Old wooden floors creak with age, and a bell on the door welcomes visitors. It's not uncommon to encounter a line of customers.

This place is known for its fried green tomatoes, hot browns, fried chicken and meatloaf. But take a look at the A-frame sign on the sidewalk out front: Try Our Famous Desserts.

The Cummins, the second owners, bought the restaurant 13 years ago. They added some of Lynn Cummins' favorite dishes, including an array of desserts all made from scratch on-site. The daily menu features seven different pies, two cakes and two fruit cobblers.

"I've always loved to cook and bake," she says. She worked in fast-food

management and in a school cafeteria, but she always wanted to use some of her own recipes.

"This was always one of our favorite restaurants," Mike Cummins says. "We used to come here on our way to where we lived in Indiana. So, jokingly, I told the owners, 'When y'all get ready to sell, let us know.'"

In March 2005, they took over one of the best places for desserts in Kentucky. "Even on cold, winter days, we get tables of people who have never been here before," Lynn Cummins says. "Seventy to 80 percent of our guests are not local. They come from as far away as California."

The secret to their desserts? For one thing, they use "good old lard," Mike Cummins says.

But there's also a trick to the mile-high meringue that floats atop many pies, Lynn Cummins says: "lots and lots of whipping." But just be careful not to overwhip the meringue, she warns, or the results may be grainy and dry.



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



Lynn Cummins' lemon meringue pie is one of the most popular items on the Whistle Stop Cafe menu, especially during the holidays.

Lynn Cummins' baking tips



- Always heat your oven before using, and use the middle shelf unless noted. Both of these steps will promote even baking and reduce the chance of burning or over-browning.



- If you don't have a toothpick to check for doneness on a cake, lightly press the middle. If it springs back, the cake is done.



- If you are frosting a cake that crumbles into the frosting, first spread a very thin layer of frosting. Then, frost as normal, spreading in only one direction.



- Never bake with whipped or tub margarine. Tub margarine contains the wrong amounts of water and fat for baking. Only use a good-quality stick margarine or butter, such as Land o' Lakes.

CHOCOLATE MERINGUE PIE

Crust:

- 2 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, slightly heaping
- 2/3 cup lard or shortening
- 1/3 cup cold water
- 1/4 teaspoon white vinegar

Pie:

- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 5 egg yolks (save egg whites)
- 1 teaspoon butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Meringue:

- 5 egg whites (from the pie filling eggs)
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar

For crust: Mix flour and salt. Cut in the lard until crumbly. Stir in water and vinegar. If dough seems dry, add 1 teaspoon cold water at a time until it forms a smooth, stiff crust. Refrigerate for a half-hour or longer before rolling out.

For pie: Place milk in a double boiler and heat until a skin starts to form. Combine sugar, flour, cocoa and salt; add to double boiler. Stir gently until filling begins to thicken; add egg yolks. Stirring occasionally, let cook for 30 minutes, or until consistency of thick pudding. Add butter and vanilla. Pour into blind-baked pie shells. Spread meringue on the top and bake at 300 degrees until meringue is golden brown.

For meringue: While pie filling is thickening, make meringue. In large bowl, whip egg whites with sugar, cornstarch and cream of tartar on low. After 2 minutes, increase speed to medium. When it gets frothy and just starts to thicken, turn on high. Whip until it forms peaks. Do not overwhip.



Red Velvet Cake

- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- 3/4 cup oil
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 ounces red food color
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Sauce:

- 3/4 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sugar

Stir the first four ingredients together. In another bowl, cream the oil, sugar, food color and eggs together. In a cup, stir the baking soda and buttermilk — it will bubble up. Alternate the dry and liquid into the cream mixture, beating thoroughly. Stir in vanilla. Divide into two greased and floured cake pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes or until cake tests done.

To create the sauce, bring 3/4 cup of milk and 1/2 cup of sugar to a boil. As soon as you take the cake layers out of the oven, evenly distribute the sauce over them. Let set for 15 minutes, then remove from pans to cool on a rack.

When the cake is cool, frost with cream cheese icing.

CREAM CHEESE ICING

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 pound butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 cups powdered sugar

Cream the cream cheese and butter in a bowl. Gradually add the sugar and beat until smooth. Add the vanilla. If it is too thick add a tablespoon of milk and beat well. 📺



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