

# The Communicator

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014

Published for  
customers of

**New  
Hope**  
Telephone  
Cooperative  
*Your Broadband Connection*

## INTO THE WILD

Sharing the love of hunting  
with the next generation

## PICTURE PERFECT

Photographer turns hobby  
into booming business

## O HOLY NIGHT

Christmas light displays  
around the South





## B2B Marketing

Business leaders are looking at your social media channels before deciding to buy

When you think of the Internet's role in commerce, you probably think of consumers with credit cards in hand making purchases directly from a website. But a recent study of business leaders found that social media is also an important research tool for companies who make purchases from other companies.

The Social Buying Study from International Data Corporation (IDC) found that 75 percent of business-to-business (B2B) buyers and 84 percent of C-level/vice president executives use social media to support purchase decisions.

For business owners, this study highlights the importance of using social media tools to establish credibility online. In the final stage of the purchasing process, when stakes are highest, online professional networks have become an important source of information for companies looking to purchase goods and services from other businesses.

"As the use of social networks expands, the gap between companies that use social networks for buying and selling and those that do not will widen, creating a significant disadvantage for companies that lag behind," says Michael Fauscette, who leads IDC's Software Business Solutions Group.



### WHAT TO DO: Your business customers are looking beyond your website when deciding to buy from you. To help position your company to earn their business:

- 1. Create or revisit your profile on LinkedIn.com.** Make sure it contains details on your qualifications and your company's offerings.
- 2. Invite former and existing customers to join your LinkedIn network.** Ask them to submit recommendations.
- 3. Create or revisit your Business Page on Facebook.** Provide details about your company.
- 4. Create or revisit your business Twitter account.** Write a short bio that accurately reflects what you do.
- 5. Develop a plan to regularly share informative articles, helpful tips and news about your industry on each of these social media channels.** Create your own content, but also share links to articles on the Internet that your customers will find helpful. This provides opportunities for prospects to engage with your company, and portrays you as an expert in your field.
- 6. To drive this online activity, turn to your local telecommunications provider for fast, reliable broadband service and dependable, local support.** 📞

# How do you >>>>>>>? **BROADBAND?**

**A**cross rural America, people are putting the power of broadband to work in smart, inspiring and creative ways. They are connecting with groups who share hobbies and passions. They are supporting causes and making a difference. They are learning new skills and going places they've never been.

We want to hear your story. What exciting ways are you using broadband to make life richer, fuller or more convenient? Visit [www.HowDoYouBroadband.com](http://www.HowDoYouBroadband.com) and tell us how you're harnessing the power of broadband for yourself, your family and your community. You could be featured on the website, or even in a story for this magazine.

## >> YOUR STORY COULD WIN YOU A PRIZE!

An independent panel will select the best stories submitted to the website between now and the end of the year. You could win a gift card, or even an iPad mini!

**Visit [www.HowDoYouBroadband.com](http://www.HowDoYouBroadband.com) and share your story today!**



## Rural economies grow when citizens adopt broadband

**Having a robust broadband network is important for rural communities, but a new study shows that the real impact comes when citizens learn how to put the power of broadband to work in their homes and businesses.**

Brian Whitacre, an associate professor of agricultural economics at Oklahoma State University, led the study, which was funded by the National Agricultural and Rural Development Policy Center. "We found that rural counties that did a good job of adopting broadband had higher rates of income growth and lower rates of unemployment growth," he says.

For example, counties with a high level of broadband adoption — those in which 60 percent or more of the households had a wired high-speed Internet connection — experienced higher income growth and saw a smaller increase in unemployment rates than did counties that did not reach the 60 percent threshold.

The findings are among the first to show broadband's impact specifically on rural U.S. economies.

*Source: National Agricultural and Rural Development Policy Center*



## Lifeline Service

*When you need help paying for telephone service*

Is your annual household income at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines for a household of its size? Do you or someone in your household participate in any of the following low-income government assistance programs? If so, you may qualify for Lifeline Service.

- Medicaid
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Section 8 Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, customers must fill out standard forms, available at your local telephone company's office, as mandated by the Federal and/or State government. Your telephone company is not responsible for determining who qualifies for these programs or who receives assistance. Customers must meet specific criteria in order to obtain assistance with their local telephone service, and qualifying is dependent upon government-established guidelines. To qualify for Lifeline credit, each customer must apply and provide proof that he/she, or a household member for whom he/she is financially responsible, participates in at least one of the programs listed above or that the customer meets the income-based requirements. Additional eligibility requirements may also apply. Customers must choose to apply the Lifeline discount to a landline or a wireless number, not both.

**For more details about Lifeline Service and to apply for assistance, please contact your local telephone company.**

## Focused on doing the right thing

As a community-based telecommunications provider, our focus is on meeting the needs of those we serve. To us, that means being ready to do the right thing every day for the communities we serve, no matter what challenges may come along.



As we prepare to celebrate Veterans Day, I am reminded of a story that serves as a powerful illustration of that ideal. It was Feb. 19, 1945, when American forces landed on Iwo Jima, a Pacific island some 750 miles south of the Japanese mainland. The island was a strategic stronghold for the Empire of Japan. If the U.S. could secure the island, it could stop the Japanese from interfering with bombing raids on Tokyo and ultimately use Iwo Jima's airstrips to launch an invasion of the mainland.

After four days of intense battle, during which hundreds were wounded or killed, U.S. forces took control of Mount Suribachi, a 554-foot-high mountain on the southwest tip of the island. Marines scaled to the top and planted an American flag. The Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, wanted that flag as a souvenir, so a second flag was brought up to erect.

What happened next changed history.

Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal was not present for the first flag raising, and almost missed the second one as he was piling up rocks to stand on for a better vantage point for a photo. When he saw the five Marines and one Navy corpsman beginning to raise the flag, he grabbed his camera from where he had set it on the ground and took the shot without even looking through the viewfinder.

It wasn't until later that Rosenthal knew what he had captured. And neither he nor anyone in the photograph could have imagined the impact that single image would have on the overall war. The photo became an icon, a symbol of American victory. To a country growing weary of a world war, the sacrifices on the homefront and the loss of sons and husbands, the photo served as an inspiring confirmation that good would prevail.

It also became the central image of the Seventh War Bond campaign, which would raise billions of dollars to help fund the successful end of World War II. Rosenthal and the flag raisers were serving their country and doing what was right in the midst of incredible challenges. And the impact of their work will be felt for generations.

Though what we face today pales by comparison to the sacrifices of that generation, rural telecommunications providers like us have our own set of challenges. Industry changes, market forces and regulatory action are putting pressures on us unlike anything this industry has ever seen. But we are committed to doing the right thing, to serving you to the best of our ability. And we know that if we remain focused on the task at hand, good things will happen — for your telco, for your community, for all of us.

This holiday season, I encourage us all to take a few minutes to thank a veteran for his or her service, to count our blessings as Americans, to cherish the time we have with our families and to recommit ourselves to being ready to do what is right for our community and those around us. I wish you and your family many blessings this holiday season. 📞

**JIM COOK**

General Manager

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:



John Whitaker is sharing his love of hunting with his daughters Ella, Olivia and Ava.  
See story Page 12.



# CABLE RATES INCREASE

Subscribers to NHTC's television service New Hope Vision were notified last month of a rate increase that will take effect with the Nov. 1 statement.

As your cooperative, NHTC strives to provide its members with the highest quality service possible at a fair price. While we never like implementing rate increases, rate hikes from content providers have left us little choice — either we meet their new increased fees or we no longer air their networks. Neither is a good choice, since many of the big conglomerates have multiple networks. Giants like Disney also own ESPN, ABC and the SEC Network. Viacom owns MTV, CMT, Nickelodeon and Comedy Central. If we want to air one of those networks, the conglomerates force us to carry all of their channels — and pay the associated fees. It's an all-or-nothing proposition.

When we take a look at what's been happening across the nation, NHTC isn't the only company affected by rising rates from the channel providers. Most of us watched the fight play out between Viacom and DirecTV. Viacom tried to increase their per-subscriber rate by a whopping 60 percent. DirecTV initially refused to pay and dropped their channels, but consumer demand forced them back to the bargaining table. On top of dramatic increases every few years as contracts are renegotiated, annual rate increases are being built into the contracts making it even more difficult to control costs.

To help manage all of this, NHTC is a member of the National Cable Television Cooperative (NCTC). Alone, small providers



like NHTC have dramatically less leverage at the bargaining table than big providers like DirecTV and Comcast, and therefore would be charged even higher rates by the networks. By banding together with other cooperatives through NCTC, we are able to get better rates as part of a larger cooperative than we could on our own.

“We have worked hard to avoid raising the rate we charge our members,” says Jim Cook, NHTC's general manager. “Unfortunately, we have reached the point where we can no longer absorb these increases and must pass part of the increase on to our TV subscribers. However, you can rest assured that we are doing everything we can to control all fixed costs to keep rates as low as possible.” ☎

**NHTC does not control what networks choose to air**

As your local provider of television service, we strive to bring the best value to our members. However, NHTC has no control over what programmers choose to air or not to air on their network. If your favorite show has been pulled or moved to a new time slot and you want to let someone know, it's best to contact the network directly.



# GADGET-GIVING GIFT GUIDE

BY MATT LEDGER

**R**emember the spellbinding childhood experience of thumbing through the toy pages of the old Sears and Roebuck Wish Book catalog? As well organized as that was, kids nowadays are tapping on an iPad to check product availability of Princess Elsa's Castle Playset even before the TV commercial is finished. For parents looking for gifts for "kids" of any age, or anyone trying to give that perfect present this season, here's a guide to the latest tech toys.



## STREAMING TV PLAYER

Amazon Fire offers a streaming player comparable to the Apple TV or Roku, with some Amazon-only options. The popularity of streaming TV shows and movies at your convenience led several manufacturers to develop streaming devices. While Apple's and Amazon's boxes have some unique features, the Roku 3 offers the most features for the price. Send the Xbox One — and your kids — to their bedrooms after you install this device in the living room to reclaim your recliner.

## GOPRO HERO4

The camcorder seems destined for the same fate as the VCR, relegated to our memories of how challenging it once was to make home movies during the holidays. The technological ease of cell phone video clips and this mind-blowing minuscule HD recorder have revolutionized and simplified the process of digitally documenting our lives. Released last month, the GoPro Hero4 has a wide-angle fixed lens capable of capturing sprawling landscapes or extreme close-up selfies with a 13 megapixel sensor.





## NETATMO JUNE BRACELET

Tan lines and toes in the sand are mere fantasies this time of year, but that doesn't stop us from dreaming about sunny days and splashing in the pool. Netatmo has created a bracelet that helps ladies know when they have had enough sun. Consistent use of the stylish device, which pairs with a smartphone app, will help reduce the risk of sunburns, premature aging of the skin and long-term damage from lengthy exposure to UV rays.

## WI-FI CAMERA CARD



To share and protect your photos from Christmas morning, Eye-Fi has developed Wi-Fi camera cards that allow amateur

and professional photographers to connect certain cameras to other devices. Pairing the quality photos of your camera with the connectivity of your phone, the cards eliminate the time-consuming process of downloading photos. Quicker than the development of a Polaroid picture, the Wi-Fi camera card wirelessly transmits the images to your computer, tablet or phone for storage or sharing via social media.



## ORAL B SMARTSERIES BLUETOOTH TOOTHBRUSH

You may want to give this gift a bit early since there are many reasons to smile this season and you're destined to be in a few photos. Your teeth could be gleaming for a white Christmas with the Oral-B SmartSeries Bluetooth Toothbrush. The high-tech toothbrush cleans your teeth, warns you of bad brushing habits and even sends reports back to your dentist wirelessly.

## WEMO LIGHT SWITCH

No one has ever written a carol about getting a light switch for Christmas, but this little upgrade will certainly come in handy with shorter days and extra travel this winter. The WeMo light switch offers the same basic function as a timer, but neatly replaces the wall switch and lets you control it from your smartphone from anywhere. Maybe you're arriving home later than anticipated — simply switch those exterior lights on to safely arrive at your front door. A quick entry of your zip code and the device will turn on at sunset and off at sunrise. You could also install it to replace the ceiling fan remote that the dog ate or fire up that hot tub at the weekend cabin.



## LEAPPAD 3

Digital devices are now being used at younger ages, with school systems making the leap to interactive smartboards and iPad labs. Leap Frog's LeapPad3's protective screen and shock-absorbing frame are designed to endure whatever a preschooler or first grader can throw at it. The LeapPad3 is a colorful tablet device that offers a Wi-Fi enabled library of educational games to jumpstart their learning at home or while riding in the car. Parents can manage the security controls and the device features a peer-to-peer mode for competitions with classmates or siblings.



Fitbit Flex

Withings Pulse O2

Jawbone UP24

## FITNESS BANDS

To counter the tiered towers of Christmas confections, clever new wristbands aim to motivate you to be more active throughout the day. The fitness bands use an accelerometer sensor to track activity with apps to configure daily goals and online competitions with active friends. The Fitbit Flex is a highly popular version that is reasonably priced. The Withings Pulse O2 and Jawbone UP24 offer a few more features, but for a higher price.





▲ Phase I of the playground at New Hope Elementary is complete, and Phase II is now underway.

# IT TAKES A TRIBE

BY KERRY SCOTT

It's amazing what can be accomplished when a community comes together. That is evident by the addition of new playground equipment at New Hope Elementary School. When the PTO met with school officials two years ago to determine what projects to take on, it was determined that the playground was in dire need of an upgrade.

The 30-plus-year-old playground equipment kids were using then was the same equipment their parents and even grandparents played on in elementary school. Not only that, but much of the equipment was unsafe.

"Proration and cutbacks left little money in the budget to replace the outdated equipment," says Sandra Thomas, PTO secretary.

So the New Hope PTO worked with school administrators to come up with a solution. After missing out on a grant, they decided to reach out to the community for help to make the dream of a safer, more modern playground a reality.

The work was divided into three phases. Phase I cost \$42,000 and was completed

in time for the 2014-15 school year. The large play system has stations for balance, climbing, strength and coordination for up to 45 children. The playground is open for use by the community during non-school hours.

Work has now begun on Phase II of the project, which is projected to cost \$30,000. It will consist of new swings and a walking track. District 3 Commissioner Eddie Sisk has assigned county employees to help with some of the work.

The final phase will include the placement of adult exercise apparatuses, a covered outdoor classroom, benches and landscaping.

In order to complete the last phases of the project, the PTO needs help. They are asking the community to show their school spirit and community pride by making at least a \$10 donation for the upgrades through their "Ten for the Tribe" fundraiser. "It takes a tribe, but together we can do this," says Thomas. ☎

## TEN FOR THE TRIBE

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Donation amount \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Cash ☐ Check ☐ Credit Card (accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover and American Express)

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Donations can be dropped off at the school office marked "Attention: NHPTO" or sent with your child to school, or mailed to:  
**NHPTO • P.O. Box 283 • New Hope, AL 35760**



# PICTURE THIS!

BY KERRY SCOTT

As a child, Jessica Sparks says, she was known as the girl with the camera. She would carry it with her everywhere. As an adult, her love of photography has evolved into a part-time business for the busy med student.

Things really began to take off for her when she was a student at Auburn University. She purchased her first professional-grade camera and began taking photos of family and friends which she later posted on her Facebook page. People began to take notice of her work and she was soon receiving requests to take pictures of children, families and weddings.

"This would be virtually impossible without social media," says Sparks. Word of mouth and the images she posts online are her greatest referrals.

Creating special moments for her customers is important for Sparks. "I try to tailor sessions to the client and do a shoot at a location that's important to them, rather than doing cookie-cutter shoots in one location," she says.



For Sparks, there is only one thing she dislikes about her job. "Having to say no to people is really hard," she says. "I would love to say yes to everyone, but time is so limited, especially with school. Sometimes I stretch myself a little too thin."

But by the same token, photography is a job that has worked well with her sometimes crazy schedule. "I couldn't do that with any other job," says Sparks, who will soon begin her residency.

Once Sparks has finished with a photo session and all the images are processed and edited to correct color and any minor imperfections, she shares the photos with her clients through an online gallery. "It's so much faster than the old way of mailing a CD or USB drive," she says. "There's nothing to get lost in the mail, and it's much faster." Her clients can order images directly from the site, and they are professionally printed and shipped to the client.

Sparks says she learned many tricks of the trade online. "I've never taken any classes, but I have watched countless how-to videos and researched everything from advanced techniques to my favorite professional photographers," she explains.

Besides being an excellent resource for educating herself on photography, the Internet is also a great tool for shopping. "When I first got started, I bought used equipment," she says. "After I became familiar with things and how they worked, and as I began to make a little more money, I would purchase some new equipment as I could afford it. I love Amazon!" 📞

◀ Jessica Sparks says photography was a fun hobby that turned into a part-time business while in medical school.



## TAKE BETTER PHOTOS

- Learn your camera. Read the book that comes with it and learn what each of the buttons do.
- YouTube has a wealth of information and tutorials to help the novice photographer.
- When taking a photo indoors, open the curtains and blinds. Know how to use your flash, but get as much natural light as possible.
- Get familiar with some good photo editing software. It doesn't have to be expensive, but being able to make minor edits like removing red-eye can save a photo.

LEARN  
MORE...

JESSICA SPARKS PHOTOGRAPHY

ONLINE: [jessicasparksp photography.com](http://jessicasparksp photography.com)

FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/JessicaSparksPhotography](https://facebook.com/JessicaSparksPhotography)

Photos courtesy of Jessica Sparks



# I'm dreaming of a BRIGHT CHRISTMAS

BY MATT LEDGER



Festival of Lights, Grand Rivers, Ky.

If you're planning a very Griswold Christmas and feel compelled to have the best light display in the neighborhood, then it's already time to get out the ladder and start stringing lights. Or, you could just leave it to the professionals and make a trip to one of ten dazzling destinations of Christmas cheer.

## **GALAXY OF LIGHTS • Huntsville, Ala.**

256-830-4447 • [www.hsvbg.org](http://www.hsvbg.org)

The always-impressive Huntsville Botanical Gardens features a seasonal tour that allows visitors the choice of driving or walking the grounds on certain nights, including two designated for people with dogs. The festival, which lasts from Nov. 14 to Jan. 3, features a panoramic view of Santa soaring above the winter village and other scenes that celebrate characters from nursery rhymes. A Galaxy of Lights 5K Run and Fun Run — routed through twinkling snowflakes and the icicle forest — are also scheduled for December.

## **FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS • Grand Rivers, Ky.**

270-362-8844 • [www.pattis-settlement.com](http://www.pattis-settlement.com)

Any visit to Patti's Settlement is a feast for the senses, and the holidays are no exception. The 1880s-style village features two restaurants in historic buildings that were relocated to the property. Eight gift shops await those in search of that unique decoration or cherished collectible. Each dining room has a unique holiday theme, as diners tackle the house special, a legendary two-inch-thick 16 ounce pork chop. Starting Nov. 7, families can enjoy the free holiday spectacle of more than 500,000 lights.





## LIGHTS OF HOPE • Anderson, S.C.

864-940-9371 • [www.andersonlightsofhope.org](http://www.andersonlightsofhope.org)

Marching soldiers, a dancing ballerina and a nativity scene are among the many scenes at Lights of Hope in Darwin Wright Park. For 20 years it's been a holiday destination, all for the family-friendly price of \$8 per car. More than 49,000 vehicles drove through the grounds in 2013, enjoying more than 3.5 million lights and a magical Santa's Village that would even put Scrooge in the holiday spirit. Old Ebenezer would be aghast that the event proceeds are donated, with \$1.4 million dollars given to local charities since 2004.



## SOUTHERN LIGHTS Lexington, Ky.

859-255-5727 • [www.kyhorsepark.com/events/southern-lights-stroll](http://www.kyhorsepark.com/events/southern-lights-stroll)

The Kentucky Horse Park has hosted its annual light show for 20 years, adding new features along the way. From Nov. 21 to Dec. 31, visitors might mistakenly think they're in Kansas, as this year's featured display will include

Dorothy, Toto and the full cast of characters from "The Wizard of Oz." Guests can also visit with the live reindeer, except during the week of Christmas. That's a busy week for reindeer.

## LIGHTS UNDER LOUISVILLE • Louisville, Ky.

502-855-3580 • [www.louisvillemegacavern.com/attractions/5/lights-under-louisville](http://www.louisvillemegacavern.com/attractions/5/lights-under-louisville)

The bluegrass state is home to the MEGA Cavern, a unique underground cave that comes to life in holiday splendor for a 30-minute ride along 17 miles of passageways. More than 850 characters await the family, during a festive thrill ride unlike any other. Lights on the cave walls and ceiling allow the lights to completely surround guests in flashing stars and stockings hung with care. Families drive through the seasonally decorated sections of the subterranean trails, including one featuring children in the midst of a snowball fight, from Nov. 21 to Jan. 4.

## SMOKY MOUNTAIN WINTERFEST Pigeon Forge, Gatlinburg and Sevierville, Tenn.

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

These three towns offer more exciting events than the number of items on your kids' wish list. Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas features millions of lights and a Christmas parade, while Ober Gatlinburg creates a winter wonderland for sledding adventures. A trolley ride is a colorful and carefree way to view the lights along Pigeon Forge Parkway and spot vendors with seasonal concoctions. Gatlinburg's Festival of Trees features a festive man-made forest that benefits a rescue ministry. A Christmas arts and crafts show provides gift options from talented artisans.

## SANTA LAND • Lindale, Texas

903-882-1518 • [www.santalandtexas.com](http://www.santalandtexas.com)

Everything is bigger in Texas, or so it seems, with 2.5 million lights throughout the 24-acre adventure known as Santa Land. The unique drive-thru experience runs Nov. 1 to Jan. 4 with a one-of-a-kind display of characters that adds a bit of humor to the holidays, including handcrafted scenes of a bucking bronco, leaping frog and other animated animals.

## FANTASY OF LIGHTS • Sumter, S.C.

800-688-4748 • [www.sumtersc.gov/fantasy-of-lights.aspx](http://www.sumtersc.gov/fantasy-of-lights.aspx)

The picturesque Swan Lake Iris Gardens is illuminated with more than 1 million lights and 150 holiday characters. City of Sumter employees erect the custom creations each year, which is the largest free display in the state. A Poinsettia Festival will help provide decorations for the home, and the Santa Express will expedite those letters to Kris Kringle.

## SANTA'S WONDERLAND • College Station, Texas

979-690-7212 • [www.santas-wonderland.com](http://www.santas-wonderland.com)

Santa's Wonderland allows families to take a nostalgic trip down memory lane, by hayride or horse-drawn carriage, along the colorful Trail of Lights. For the fifteenth year, this charming Christmas experience blends those quintessential holiday figures with a wide-open Texas style and a lone star upon every tree. From Nov. 14 to Jan. 4, the event features live music performances and a cozy campfire for guests to roast hot dogs, and kids will marvel at the live reindeer.


## SHADRACK'S CHRISTMAS WONDERLAND Asheville, N.C., Sevierville, Tenn. & Myrtle Beach, S.C.

888-321-7547 • [www.shadrackchristmas.com](http://www.shadrackchristmas.com)

Many holiday displays are held at parks, but Shadrack's Christmas Wonderland has used some unique locations over the years, starting in the shadow of a famous racetrack in Bristol, Tenn. Four extended family members followed their personal fascination with Christmas lights to create Shadrack Productions. Seeking a winter project for their boat dealerships, their concept continues to grow with massive custom-built display figures — such as 12 different types of drummers that measure 25' tall — and a rotation of precisely synchronized light shows, with Santa's Beach Party in Asheville and Santa's Mountain in Sevierville for 2014. ☎







Shawn Smith teaches his son, Austin, about the importance of safety when hunting.

# HUNTING IS A FAMILY TRADITION

By MATT LEDGER

Alabama offers exceptional diversity in wildlife for hunters, from white-tailed deer in Madison County to a record 1,011-pound gator caught this August in Camden.

Shawn Smith and John Whitaker are two of several New Hope Telephone Cooperative employees who just want to get in on the action.

Both of them have turned their love of the great outdoors into a family bonding experience. Smith enjoys hunting deer and dove, while Whitaker has a wider range of quarry, also hunting ducks, rabbits and squirrel. “A lot of people think you’re crazy, just sitting there out in the cold,” Smith says. “But I like it, just to get away from everything. I might sit there for six hours and not see anything, but it is just so peaceful.”

The sights and sounds of the wilderness are a sensory escape from the humdrum daily life, he says.

Whitaker appreciates the solitude now, even if he wasn’t patient enough for deer hunting earlier in his life. “When I was younger, I would just duck hunt because you can talk and move,” he says. “I finally have enough of an attention span and patience to sit there waiting for deer. It just gets your mind off everything and you really see what God has created for us to enjoy.”



John Whitaker enjoys the sport with his daughters (l to r) Olivia, Ava and Ella.

## PASSED DOWN TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Smith fished in bass tournaments every weekend for more than 15 years but now alternates fishing with hunting trips.

For the past four years, Smith has taken his 10-year-old son, Austin, along on hunting trips. “He really likes it,” the proud father says. “It’s a good time for the two of us to enjoy time



together. We'll just sit there and talk. He will ask me about things from the past, and I will tell him about the things he needs to be doing now and in the future."

As a parent and a little league coach, Smith preaches the importance of safety to children. Taking heed of those lessons becomes more important when they are climbing into a tree stand or handling a rifle.

Smith usually averages one prized deer each season. Over the years, he has mounted three of his best for display at home, ranging from eight- to ten-point antler racks. Austin has even nabbed a six-point buck on one occasion. "Even if I didn't kill another animal for the rest of my life, I would be happy as long as I am able to see my son do it," says Smith. "Just watching the expressions on his face, it just tickles me."

Whitaker's daughters — 13-year-old Olivia, 11-year-old Ella and 6-year-old Ava — have been fishing with their father many times, and he's taken the older ones hunting a time or two. "We are just now starting to hunt," says Whitaker. "Hunting takes more patience, so you have to wait until the kids get a little older."

Ava will take her first hunting trip with her father this season. "The last two or three years, I've also taken a few area kids duck hunting on youth days," says Whitaker, who believes that all youth should experience hunting at least once.

## GEARING UP

Hunting is an exhilarating and affordable hobby with a decent rifle and scope ranging from \$300-\$500.

Both men agree that avid sportsmen like their toys, and some invest a small fortune in the sport, purchasing expensive camouflage gear or building elaborate duck blinds. Add the expense of joining a hunt club, and the sport can become really expensive.

Smith has used the same Remington 270 for the past 20 years. It's the only one he has ever hunted with and will eventually be passed down to his son in a few years. Smith has his sights set on a bigger caliber rifle to allow larger game hunts,



Photo courtesy of John Whitaker.



Photo courtesy of Shawn Smith.

**Top: Thomas Butler (left) has been duck hunting with Whitaker for years. Bottom: Smith says he averages one prized deer each hunting season.**

like elk or moose in Northern states.

Whitaker and Smith are both fond of hunting in the New Hope area, which allows each frequent opportunities to enjoy their sport. Whitaker prefers hunting on his 400-acre family farm, seeking ducks in the mornings and switching to deer in the evenings. As a youngster, his father would only allow others to hunt on his property if they would take his son with them.

"My uncle Kylen Cloer was a police officer, and he taught me how to handle a

weapon and to be safe with it," Whitaker says. At age 11 he received a Western Field 12-gauge shotgun, that he still owns.

At the end of the day, both men say it's not the gear or even the kill that makes the sport worthwhile. In some ways, a simple and old-fashioned hunt with family may be the most memorable.

"My grandpa was one of the best hunters I knew," Smith says. "He'd go out there in a red t-shirt and pair of blue jeans and wind up coming back with two or three deer." 🦌



Checking hunting dates and regulations is vital before heading to the woods. The state's website is a great resource and even has online applications for hunting and fishing licenses at [www.dcnr.state.al.us/hunting/](http://www.dcnr.state.al.us/hunting/).


# TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR SIDES

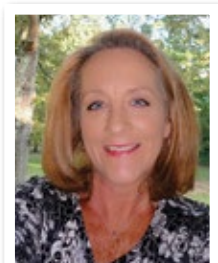
**L**ike a movie produced with no supporting actors, a holiday meal produced with no supporting sides would be left on the cutting-room floor.

“Sides are as important as the entrée, if not more so,” says Jason Evans, now in his 12th year as executive chef at Evins Mill, a 40-acre resort along the Cumberland Plateau in Smithville, Tennessee. “The side dishes can set the mood for the meal. A beautifully roasted turkey or ham can be part of an elegant, formal dinner or a comforting, traditional holiday feast, depending on what the sides are.”

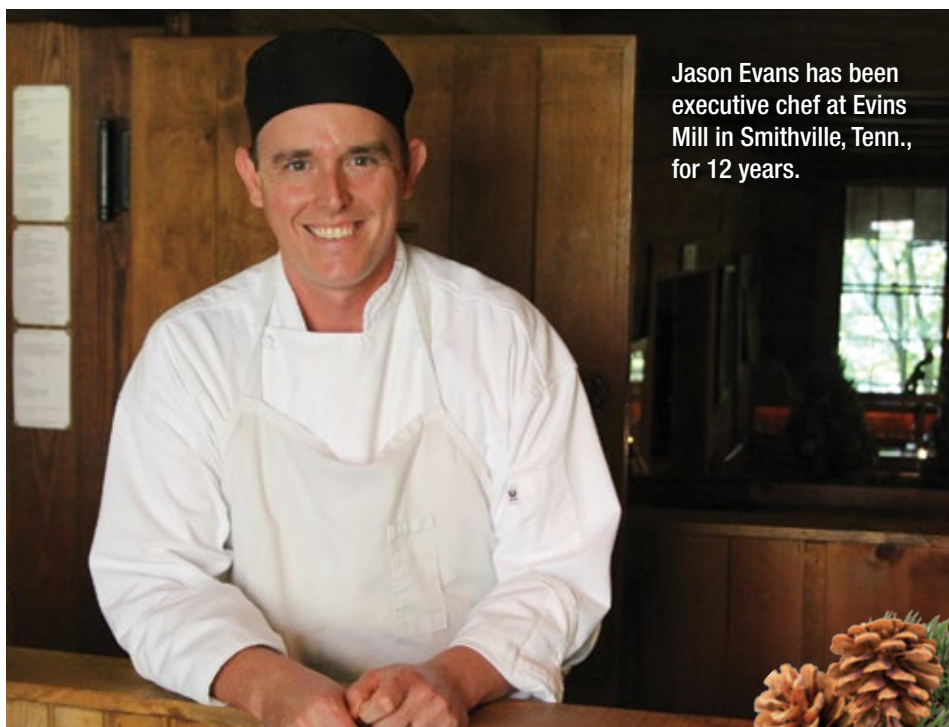
Evans can’t name a favorite side. It all depends on the season, he says. But for holiday meals, he admits to a traditional craving for mashed potatoes, fresh cranberry relish and deviled eggs — sides for many Thanksgiving and Yuletide feasts. “I try to avoid having all starches like potatoes, corn, and mac and cheese,” he says. “Make sure you have a nice variety with lots of colors.”

For example, go with mashed potatoes, cranberry relish and honey carrots. Or try corn pudding, roasted sweet potatoes and green beans.

Offer as many side dishes as you are comfortable preparing without making yourself too busy to enjoy the meal. Three sides is a good rule of thumb, Evans notes. And to make the meal a family event, ask guests to bring their favorite side dishes, while you prepare the turkey or roast. 



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



Jason Evans has been executive chef at Evins Mill in Smithville, Tenn., for 12 years.

## SOME OF EVANS' FAVORITE PAIRINGS ARE:

- ▶ Serve sweet potatoes with pork. Try roasting the sweet potatoes in a little coconut oil for something different.
- ▶ For beef, Evans likes a side that contains cream or cheese, or a side with a smooth consistency. It makes for a nice combination in the mouth to serve as almost a sauce for the hearty steak or roast. Some suggestions are potato gratin, mashed cauliflower, cheese grits or fresh broccoli casserole.
- ▶ Evans says roasting a chicken makes him want to “kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. If you already have the oven on for roasting the bird, throw some winter root vegetables in the pan with it. Cooking in all those natural juices and fat from the chicken is heaven. Rutabaga, turnip, parsnip, carrot and onion make a delicious and hearty vegetable combination.”
- ▶ Casseroles are usually on the creamy, cheesy side, which is why Evans loves them. “I like contrast in my meals,” he says, “and this is a great time to have something sweet and sour, or a lightly sauteed vegetable medley on the side. Something simple so everyone can still gorge on the casserole, but a side that is going to have a different mouth feel in texture and flavor.”
- ▶ Keep in mind the importance of using the freshest of vegetables and other ingredients for your side dishes. Evans finds local foods to be the best and is committed to the farm-to-table movement, supporting nearby farmers and other food purveyors. “They’re harder to come by in the holiday season since the growing season is all but over for most items,” he says, “but we still try to get as much as we can. We still get local eggs in the winter. I can source local nuts, winter greens, some root veggies, and a few other odds and ends from our local farms. It is just as important for the holidays, just a little harder.”







# The holidays at EVINS MILL

All decked out in its holiday finery, Evins Mill welcomes guests from around the country looking for the perfect spot to relax and enjoy the sights and tastes of the season. Visitors to this Tennessee resort enjoy hiking trails, a 90-foot waterfall and a fishing pond, as well as the historic gristmill and lodge. If you want to go for dinner only, you're welcome as long as the proprietors know you are coming. Make reservations for dinner, as well as visits to the property, by calling 615-286-2090. The inn and its restaurant are open year-round.

The Thanksgiving menu, priced at \$60 per person, will feature such dishes as turkey with all the trimmings, along with

numerous side dishes — fresh asparagus, baked apples, sweet potato casserole, mashed Yukon gold potatoes, salads and made-from-scratch desserts.

The inn's restaurant will be closed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but will pull out all the stops and bring in the New Year in great taste. The New Year's Eve dinner, priced at \$60 per person, includes heavy hors d'oeuvres and a five-course dinner. Special drinks and champagne will be flowing and live music will fill the air. There will also be a New Year's brunch served on Jan. 1, with select dishes to start your new year off in delicious fashion. The brunch is \$35 per person.

► *For more information, log onto [www.evinsmill.com](http://www.evinsmill.com).*

## CRANBERRY RELISH

*This side dish is most often served with braised duck at Evins Mill, but works just as well with any of your holiday meals.*

- 1 bag fresh cranberries, washed (substitute with dried cranberries if out of season)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 Granny Smith apple, roughly chopped, with peel
- 1 fresh orange, roughly chopped, with peel

Combine all ingredients in food processor, pureeing until smooth. Refrigerate until chilled through. Makes about 1 quart.

## AU GRATIN POTATOES

*The perfect accompaniment to pork, beef, fish and chicken, and a standard favorite at Evins Mill.*

- 4 Idaho potatoes or sweet potatoes
- 2 1/2 cups heavy cream (if using sweet potatoes, reduce cream by 1/2 cup)
- 2 cups shredded Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons roasted garlic, chopped (optional)
- Salt and fresh cracked pepper, to taste

Wash potatoes and allow them to dry. Slice potatoes as thin as you can, enough to layer bottom of baking dish. Spray baking dish with non-stick spray. Layer the potatoes on the bottom of dish by shining. Season with salt and pepper and



1/4 of roasted garlic. Sprinkle with 1/4 of the Parmesan cheese. Pour 1/4 of cream over layer. Repeat process for the next three layers. Cover dish with foil. Bake at 325° for 1-1/2 hours or until tender all the way through when testing with knife. Uncover and return to oven to brown top for about 10-15 minutes. Makes 16 (1/2-cup) servings.

## STONE-GROUND CHEESE GRITS

*Stone-ground grits make the difference in this recipe. Use your favorite, or like they do at Evins Mill, use local grits, such as those ground at The Old Mill in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.*

- 4 cups 2 percent milk
- 1/4 cup butter (1/2 stick) or olive oil
- 1 cup stone-ground grits
- 1 cup grated cheese, preferably sharp cheddar
- Salt, fresh cracked pepper & crushed red pepper flakes, to taste

Bring milk, butter or oil, salt, pepper and crushed red pepper to boil. Add grits and reduce heat to a simmer. Stir often until grits are tender and thickening. This will take 30 to 40 minutes. Stir in cheese and enjoy with eggs at breakfast or steak at dinner. Makes 4-6 servings. ☎



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