

The

Communicator

JULY/AUGUST 2019

BROADBAND:
MAKERS EDITION

NHTC ANNUAL MEETING

All-fiber certification and
more cap a great year

PROTECT AND SERVE

High-speed updates for
Owens Cross Roads

HONORING MAKERS

Broadband empowers creativity



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Celebrating 65 years

This spring telco leaders from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C. We met with regulators and elected officials to not only champion the success of rural broadband providers who are expanding their reach with the support of good public policies, but also to advocate for all the good work our member companies do.

We also celebrated our strong legacy of success and commitment to rural America through service excellence, kicking off a number of activities that led up to our big day: On June 1, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association celebrated its 65th anniversary.

While the early rural telephone program was born out of the rural electrification program in the mid-1940s, local providers began to realize that a national organization was needed to represent the unique needs of those new companies (many of them cooperatives) that were borrowing federal dollars to build critical communications services to rural parts of the nation. On June 1, 1954, NTCA was born.

We have seen many changes in the ensuing 65 years. Membership in NTCA has grown considerably, with cooperative and independent telcos serving an ever-expanding portion of the population. Regulations and funding mechanisms that impact how communications services are deployed have changed considerably. And, of course, the technology and ways people connect have gone from party lines to broadband.

As a member of NTCA, your telco is part of a large family that connects homes and businesses, farms and small towns, country roads and growing cities across rural America. And that's a reason to celebrate! 📶

Precision agriculture

Rural broadband creates opportunities



BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

The difference between success and failure for those who work in agriculture is, as it has ever been, small and frequently dependent on unpredictable factors: Too much rain. Not enough rain. Fickle prices. And more.

The goal is to manage the challenges in the best way possible, maximizing opportunity and limiting risk. Increasingly, internet-based technology can better balance the margin between losses and gains.

A recent report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture made the case for further extending broadband internet services to rural areas by highlighting the benefits of fast internet for agribusiness.

The report "Insights on Rural Broadband Infrastructure and Next Generation Precision Agriculture Technologies" offered a broad look at the possibilities for broadband to make use of data-driven tools to improve results.

Farmers and ranchers can follow the path of other modern businesses by using digital tools across the production cycle, according to the report. These new tools can support decision-making with integrated data. Automation can increase efficiency. Real-time insight can improve productivity. And entering into global markets becomes more attainable.

The trend can benefit farmers, ranchers and others in agriculture while also supporting technology companies leveraging these new or expanded markets. In fact, they have an opportunity to capture a portion of a global digital agriculture market projected to be between \$254 billion and \$340 billion.

New tools are needed to help farmers and ranchers better estimate the potential profit and economic risks associated with growing one particular crop over another. They may help with decisions about which fertilizer is best for current soil conditions or provide guidance on the best applications for pesticides. There are opportunities to create better water management strategies and to provide ways to use sensors to monitor animal health and nutrition.

"Connected devices equip farmers with a clear picture of their operations at any moment, making it possible to prioritize tasks more effectively and to triage the most pressing issues," according to the report.

Rural broadband capable of supporting these data-intensive tools makes it all possible, and the financial potential of the market emphasizes the need to continue to expand broadband networks throughout the nation. If fully realized, fast internet services paired with new "precision agriculture" technologies have the potential to add \$47-\$65 billion annually to the U.S. economy. 📶



**LIFELINE IS A FEDERAL PROGRAM TO
HELP LOW-INCOME AMERICANS PAY
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FAQ:

How much will Lifeline save me?

Eligible customers will get at least \$9.25 toward their bill.

What services are covered by this credit?

You have the choice (where applicable) of applying your benefit to one of three types of service offerings:

- Fixed or mobile broadband
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NOTE: Lifeline can only be used for one source of communication from the list above.

Can I receive more than one Lifeline credit?

No, consumers are allowed only one Lifeline program benefit per household.

How do I qualify?

You are eligible for Lifeline benefits if you qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- The Veteran's Pension or Survivor's Pension benefit

Additionally, consumers at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines will continue to be eligible for a Lifeline program benefit. (State determinations of income will no longer be accepted.) There are no changes to the eligibility criteria for Tribal programs.

NOTE: Some states have additional qualifying programs, allowances and stipulations. Check with your local telecommunications provider for information about benefits that may be available in your state.

How do I enroll in the Lifeline program and start receiving this benefit?

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit www.lifelinesupport.org or call your local telecommunications provider.

NOTE: Your telephone company is not responsible for determining who qualifies for these programs or who receives assistance. Consumers must meet specific criteria in order to obtain assistance with their local telephone or broadband service, and qualifying is dependent upon government-established guidelines.

DO YOU QUALIFY?

**Stay connected with a
Lifeline discount.**

Apply today!



Lifeline is a government assistance program that can help pay a portion of your telephone, mobile phone or internet bill each month. Consumers are allowed only one Lifeline program benefit per household.

Building communities locally and globally



JIM COOK
General Manager

The internet has changed the way we define community.

Sure, we'll always have the community where we live. Many of us have a community of faith through our church or a school community with our kids.

But one of the things people discovered early on with the internet was the amazing ability to connect people with similar interests into an online community. If no one else in your town was into quilting or vintage motorcycles or jewelry-making, there were thousands of enthusiasts online who shared those hobbies.

Unique, long-distance relationships formed during those early days of group email lists, message boards and online forums.

Whatever our hobbies or interests, many of us have benefited from sharing ideas, swapping stories and soliciting advice with fellow enthusiasts.

As you'll read in the pages of this magazine, creative folks like artists, bakers, photographers, carpenters, seamstresses and metalworkers all use broadband to enhance their skills or to even turn their passions into moneymakers.

Even if your hobbies don't involve creating anything tangible, your broadband connection from NHTC has likely helped you find joy in your interests.

There are hundreds of active online communities for gaming, hunting, hiking, gardening, music, genealogy, sports and more just waiting for new members to plug in. Many of these are global groups that would be impossible to assemble if not for the reach of broadband networks like ours.

Personally, I'm gratified to know that artisans and craftspeople from our region have a chance to share work that celebrates our local culture. Through their skill, they hopefully earn money to support themselves, as well as export our culture to the rest of the country to help ensure our way of life thrives.

There is more good news for anyone wanting to learn those old ways — or something new. Whether it's refinishing furniture, replacing a headlight, or learning to play the trombone, there are probably videos from experts on YouTube to walk you through the learning process step by step. This is the kind of skills library that has never before been available. Thanks to broadband, it's right at our fingertips.

While I normally use this space to tout the big-picture societal benefits of broadband — such as economic development, educational opportunities or telemedicine — I think it's important to remember the hundreds of small ways a broadband connection makes our lives a little better.

Whether you're learning a new skill or sharing community with fellow enthusiasts, we're proud to be the company in the middle that helps you make those connections. 📶

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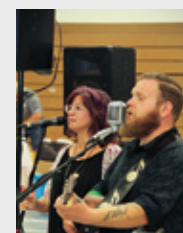
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On the Cover:



Josh and Judy Allison sang a number of classics and contemporary hits for the NHTC members who attended the annual meeting. See story Page 12.

I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that this will be my final general manager column. After 45 years in the telecommunications industry, I have decided to retire. I am very proud of what we have achieved at NHTC over the last seven years, and I want to sincerely thank all of our employees, board members and you, our cooperative members, for allowing me the privilege to serve as your general manager. You have a great company, a great network and a bright future.

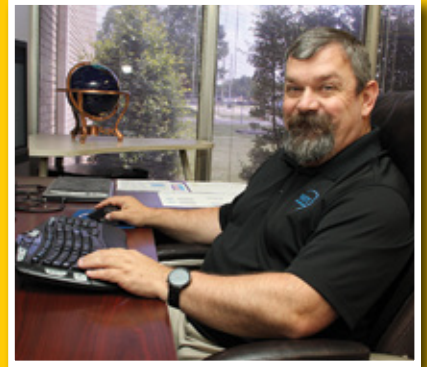
Congratulations!

Scholarship winners chosen

OLIVIA WHITAKER, a New Hope High School graduate, received a \$1,500 college scholarship from NHTC. She plans to attend The University of Alabama in Huntsville to study biological sciences. Whitaker's extracurricular activities included varsity soccer and volleyball, Art Club, Leo Club and Anchor Club. She served as senior class historian and Anchor Club treasurer. Whitaker achieved a 4.073 GPA and was a member of the National Honor Society. She is an artist, winning first place in the Hispanic Heritage Art competition in 2016, and she most recently had her work chosen to represent Madison County schools in the State Superintendent's Visual Art Exhibit. Whitaker served the community as a volunteer for Special Olympics and at the New Hope High School Fall Festival to raise money for the school's Parent Teacher Organization. She also helped her fellow students in class and by tutoring fourth-grade students. During her high school years, she earned a total of 140 volunteer hours.



HUNTER DARLING, a Kate Duncan Smith DAR High School graduate, received a \$1,500 college scholarship from NHTC. He plans to study at Northeast Alabama Community College with a focus on computer science, then attend The University of Alabama in Huntsville to major in cybersecurity. Helping his father work on computers and Wi-Fi routers when he was younger inspired Darling to follow this career path, along with his passion for "ensuring the online safety of our populace." Darling was a member of the National Honor Society, Historical Society, Fellowship of Christian Athletes and LADS to Leaders, a biblically based leadership program, where he received awards for outstanding leadership and volunteer services. Darling was involved in sports, including varsity baseball, indoor and outdoor track, and football, which brought him All-County Linebacker and Most Valuable Outside Linebacker honors. He was a page for DAR Lady Graduation and Dedication Day, and he has served the community by visiting nursing homes and volunteering for Grant Cleanup and canned food drives. Darling also works as a tour guide at Cathedral Caverns State Park.



Welcome!

Chris Ballard joins NHTC as the new network engineer.



MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND NHTC'S CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY.

Mark your calendars to join NHTC employees for a day of food and fun at Customer Appreciation Day on Friday, Oct. 25, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!

The NHTC offices will be closed Thursday, July 4 and Friday, July 5 to celebrate Independence Day. Have a safe and happy holiday!

Beat the heat

Slip and slide through summer

BY ANNE P. BRALY

The start of summer means travelers will be flocking to beaches and lakefronts in droves. When it comes to enjoying the purity of a dip in the water, there's no better way to do it than by taking the plunge at a water park that sparkles with fun. So grab a towel — don't forget the kids — and slip-slide your way to a day of excitement.

And they all come to play at Kentucky Splash, a water park that includes an 18,000-square-foot wave pool, a lazy river and a tower with three slides that will take your breath away as you plunge down one of two tube slides or body surf your way down 40 feet to the water below.

The Aquatwist is a water ride that is totally enclosed. You twist and turn your way along its 180-foot length from a 30-foot-high starting point, and you'll get a thrill as it drops you into the water in 10 seconds — or less.

Small children have their own place to splash around out of the way of the big kids at play. Tadpole Island features a Caribbean-themed playhouse with kid-sized slides and lots of bells and whistles to entertain the little ones. And, of course, mom and dad will enjoy taking it easy on the lazy river.

"There's lots to do, but the park isn't so big that it's hard to keep up with everyone," says manager Diane Bruers.



Families enjoy the water slides at Wilderness at the Smokies, including the Cyclone Racer.

Kentucky Splash opened in May 2001, so this marks its 18th year of providing aquatic fun for kids of all ages. One thing that sets Kentucky Splash apart from other water parks around the state is price, Bruers says. Tickets are \$10 per person, and children 2 and under are admitted free. Prices have not changed in almost 10 years.

Like many small towns, Williamsburg, Kentucky, faced a dilemma when it came to deciding what to do with an aging municipal swimming pool that had provided summer fun for families for decades. The choices were to demolish it or transform it into a facility that would attract people from all around. The answer: a water park now named Kentucky Splash that brings visitors from across Kentucky. And because Williamsburg is just 11 miles from the Tennessee line, it attracts folks from the Volunteer State, too.

A number of familiar chain hotels are located nearby, along with some that are independently owned. The water park itself has a campground, offering 25 RV sites with full hookups — water, sewer, electricity, Wi-Fi internet and cable TV — along with a fire pit and picnic table. Six tent sites are available for primitive camping, each with a fire pit and picnic table, and there's a bathhouse on-site. During busy months, reservations are recommended.

No outside food or drink may be brought into the park, but there are two full concession stands and several food booths selling burgers, hot dogs, chicken strips, pizza, nachos, cheese fries and more. Online: www.williamsburgky.com (click on the Kentucky Splash link). 📱



Families enjoy the numerous water slides at Wilderness at the Smokies.

WILDERNESS AT THE SMOKIES

Sevierville, Tennessee

www.wildernessatthesmokies.com

This state-of-the-art water park offers year-round fun under a glass dome that makes you feel like you're in the great outdoors. Even during less-than-perfect weather, you can enjoy 66,000 square feet of fun under the dome. Water features include a hair-raising ride on the Storm Chaser — a 55-foot plummet down a dark tunnel before a zero-gravity fall into an oscillating funnel, which gives way to a pool below. Runaway Canyon is a five-story raft ride that rockets you through water curtains, huge tunnels, explosive turns and loops before a 60-foot drop. Wilderness at the Smokies is one thrill after another.

Tickets: \$49 per person (must be purchased online). Overnight guests at the resort's hotel receive complimentary admission.

ALABAMA SPLASH ADVENTURE

Bessemer, Alabama

www.alabamasplash.com

Upsurge takes you up, up, then drops you down 216 feet through twists and turns. To take a break from the excitement, tube the lazy river or ride the waves in the 800,000-gallon wave pool. Splash Adventure is an 89-acre water park that operates from May to July, and then on weekends during August and early September.

Tickets: \$27-\$32 (day passes). Season tickets available.

CAROLINA HARBOR WATER PARK

Fort Mill, South Carolina

www.carowinds.com

Located on the grounds of Carowinds Amusement Park, Carolina Harbor is the largest of all noncoastal water parks in the state. There are more than 20 waterslides, two wave pools and a 1,000-foot-long lazy river that takes riders across the state line into North Carolina. Blackbeard gets his revenge on a six-story waterslide that features death-defying twists and turns, along with exhilarating slides. The kids have their own play area, featuring Kiddy Hawk Cove and Myrtle Turtle Beach. It's all part of your ticket to Carowinds, a park that also features the world's tallest giga coaster just steps outside the water park. Private cabanas, providing shade and a place to relax, are available for rent.

Tickets: \$33-\$45 (depending on time of day). Discounts available for seniors and military.



The Hal Rogers Family Entertainment Center is home to the Kentucky Splash Water Park.

Still standing

Restoration efforts underway for Poplar Ridge School

BY LISA SAVAGE

Nancy Hicks loved hearing about Poplar Ridge School from her friend Doris McGee, who attended the one-room school built in 1878. But even without the stories that mesmerized her, Hicks' devotion to restoring the school remains strong.

McGee, now deceased, worked with Poplar Ridge Homemakers to place a historical marker at the school in 2003. Her passion and that of others from those years inspired the formation of Friends of Poplar Ridge School to continue preservation efforts.

While the building needs work to make it safe, it's important to protect what is believed to be the only one-room school still standing in its original location in Madison County, Hicks says. "There is so much history, and it's a big part of the roots of this community," she says.

Grants from the Alabama Bicentennial Commission and the Alabama Historical Society, along with donations from bake sales and other fundraising activities, helped toward the goal of raising \$25,000 for preservation work.

The structure, which leans, needs costly repairs to meet code requirements for a public building. After completion of those improvements, Hicks hopes community volunteers will provide the remaining work.

THE SCHOOL'S HISTORY

The original log building stood on land that sold for \$1 in 1850 specifically for a public school, Hicks says.



Preservation efforts continue for Poplar Ridge School, believed to be the only one-room school still standing in its original location in Madison County.

"It was considered one of the better schools back in those days," Hicks says. She says the Friends of Poplar Ridge School group hopes to restore the building for community events, family reunions, school field trips, quilting bees and similar functions.

"What fun it would be for kids to be able to pretend they were attending school in the 1800s," Hicks says. "This would be a great educational resource."

There's also a need for public restrooms on the property in a separate building. Hicks says membership dues for Friends of Poplar Ridge School go to the building fund, and the organization is seeking more members to help with the endeavor. The fundraising theme, "This Building Matters," sums up the group's efforts. "This building is such a treasure," Hicks says. "It just doesn't need to go away."



FRIENDS OF POPLAR RIDGE SCHOOL

760 Poplar Ridge Road, New Hope

Annual membership dues for Friends of Poplar Ridge School are \$25 for individuals and \$40 for families. The organization accepts other donations which are tax deductible. To make a donation or join, mail payment to Friends of Poplar Ridge School, P.O. Box 642, New Hope, AL 35760. For more information, contact Nancy Hicks at 256-509-6750.



Town on the move

Owens Cross Roads upgrades police vehicles and internet

BY LISA SAVAGE

An Owens Cross Roads police officer working a late shift and driving one of six new patrol vehicles can use a smartphone to remotely check in on the town hall security system.

The new vehicles and a connection to a fiber optic internet network are some of the ways the police and other departments in Owens Cross Roads are using technology to provide the best service possible. The town purchased six new Chevrolet Tahoes after local officials deemed an aging fleet unsafe and unreliable. The police-package Tahoes have a basic interior but include such specialized features as protective screens separating the front seat from the rear, mounts for laptops, auxiliary power adapters for additional equipment and more.

"We were having a difficult time just keeping the old vehicles running," Mayor Tony Craig says. The town chose to donate one of the former police vehicles, a Dodge Charger, to the Owens Cross Roads Volunteer Fire Department and kept one for town business. The other Chargers were sold through govdeals.com, a website where government agencies can sell surplus equipment.



The town of Owens Cross Roads replaced an aging fleet of police vehicles with six Chevrolet Tahoes.



Owens Cross Roads Mayor Tony Craig makes calls from his desk at town hall.



Police Chief Jason Dobbins searches a criminal history database from a desktop at the office.

FASTER INTERNET

The town's updated fiber internet through NHTC also improves police operations and other functions, Craig says. The police officers, town clerk, assistant clerk and others benefit from the upgraded phone and security systems.

Owens Cross Roads has NHTC phone service through the internet. There are cameras throughout the town hall that interact with the alarm system. Officers and other town officials can access the security system from smartphones and desktop computers.

Police-related calls can now easily go to an officer's cellphone, Craig says. The security system is particularly useful after town hall business hours. An officer can access the security system to monitor the town hall and have a better idea of what's going on when patrolling in another part of town.

"It could be to check in on someone coming to the town hall after hours to make a report," the mayor says. "It just helps the officer evaluate before he gets

there to know what might be going on and know what is going on when he's not there."

BETTER SERVICE

The fiber optic technology is also helping the town in developing an interactive website that will accept payments for sewer bills, court fines and traffic violations. The upgrades will allow customers to use credit or debit cards online. Currently, they can only submit cash or check payments in person or by mail.

"It will help us streamline all of our operations," Craig says. "It will help bring us into the 21st century and make services more convenient for the citizens of our town." 📞

Owens Cross Roads Town Hall
9032 U.S. Highway 431
Business hours are 8 a.m.-5 p.m.,
Monday-Friday



MAKING ART

and a living

How the internet helps creative people thrive

BY JEN CALHOUN

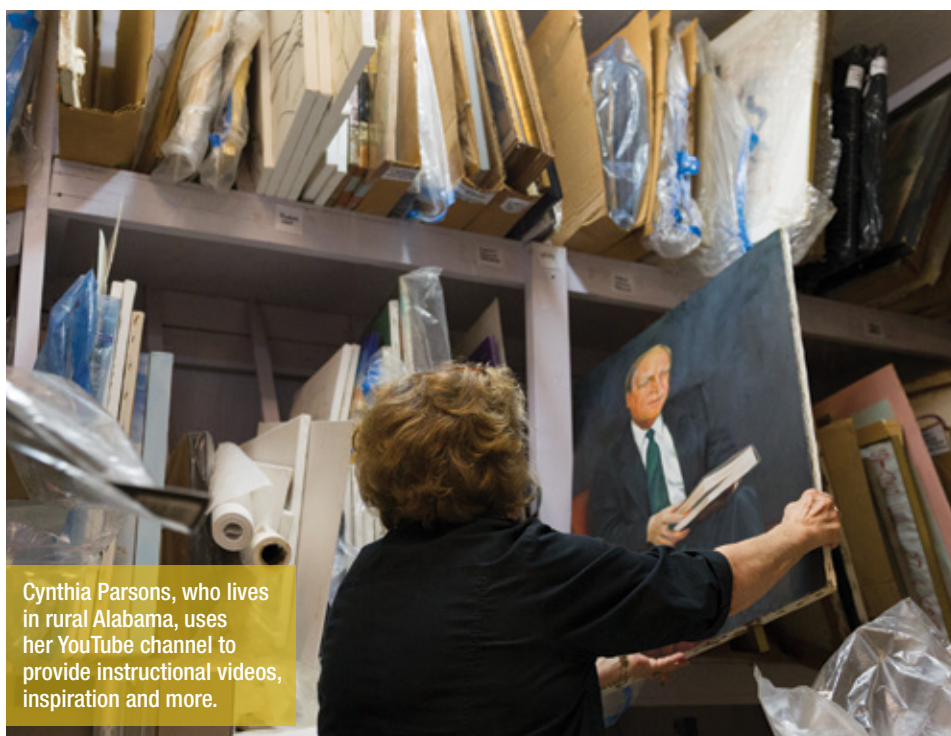
For centuries, artists gathered in big cities to share ideas, sell their art and connect with other creatives. But with greater access to faster internet, more and more creative people are choosing to live in rural areas where the cost of living is low and connectivity is just a click away.

Take John George Larson, for example. He, an accomplished sculptor and painter from rural Minnesota, chose to live with his family in a nearly century-old farmhouse about three hours east of Minneapolis. “Part of my process as a ceramic sculptor involves working with a kiln that uses wood as fuel,” Larson says. “These kilns are kind of dirty and large, and I can’t really do that in a residential area.”

INTERNET EQUALS OPPORTUNITY

Larson is one of a growing number of rural residents who use the internet to help fuel creative careers. From candlemakers to photographers to musicians, millions of people have found a way to share their talents and make a living online.

According to a recent article on the website The Motley Fool, Etsy, the online marketplace that offers artisans and crafters a place to sell their handmade items,



Cynthia Parsons, who lives in rural Alabama, uses her YouTube channel to provide instructional videos, inspiration and more.

continues to grow. Revenue in its fourth quarter of 2018 came in at \$200 million — an increase of more than \$63 million from the previous year’s fourth quarter. The company’s chief executive officer, Josh Silverman, expects more increases through 2019.

If it sounds unbelievable that artists are no longer mostly starving, think again, says Mark McGuinness, a poet, podcaster and creative coach. The internet has not only opened doors to creativity, but it’s also opened the doors for artists of all kinds. Period.

“We are now living at a time of unprecedented opportunity for artists



While sculptor and painter John George Larson lives a rural lifestyle outside Minneapolis, the internet connects him to other creatives.

and creative professionals,” McGuinness writes in a blog post on his website, wishfulthinking.com. “Once upon a time, if you wanted to get your work in front of an audience, you had to submit it to an editor, agent, manager, curator, talent scout, whoever. A gatekeeper who had the power to open the gate and usher you through, or slam it in your face.”

The gateway shouldn’t close anytime soon, either. According to the 2018 Global Digital report, more than 4 billion people around the world now use the internet, making the possibility of sharing ideas and selling creative goods greater than ever before. Today, musicians from Texas can share music or give lessons to someone in Tanzania. Folk artists in Alabama can sell paintings to a collector in Albania.

COUNTRY IS COOL AGAIN

For Larson, a rural area offers other benefits. His work requires some solitude, not to mention the natural clay found in the area where he lives. “I don’t use that clay in all my work, but I try to incorporate it as much as possible,” he says. “That’s kind of a big reason why we chose to live in a rural area.”

But Larson, who studied ceramics at Utah State University and under the tutelage of a sculptor in Japan, is far from being isolated from other artists or even art buyers. Thanks to a fast fiber optic internet connection provided by a rural broadband company, he learns new things and explores new ideas every day through online articles. He also connects with others and showcases his craft through his Instagram account, @johngeorgelarson, and his website, johngeorgelarson.com.

“When we moved here, we didn’t realize this kind of high-speed internet was already offered at the house,” Larson says. “I don’t even think I realized how important it would be until after we started using it. Now, we use it every day, all the time. I use it for research for my own work or commission work that I do for other people and businesses. I read a lot of research articles about different topics, and it helps me develop a project or a design.”

While marketing his work used to tire him, Larson is finding ways to make art through apps. “I just started doing animation of my artwork on Instagram,” he says. “One of the things I’ve been thinking of lately is motion and movement in my work. Some of my pieces are made to be viewed from a variety of different angles. So, if you place them on a shelf one way, they’ll look different than if you place them another way. It’s an allegory for our lives and human experience because we can experience life from different perspectives.”

SPREADING THE WORD

Cynthia Parsons, an award-winning artist and painter who lives in a rural region of northern Alabama, says the internet has opened a whole world of connectivity and possibility.

On her YouTube channel, Open Art Studio of Cynthia Parsons, she offers videos of students working through challenges during class or clips of cotton fields at sunset so others can paint them. She might film a farmer harvesting his corn or make an instructional video about how to save old watercolor paint. She also records regular videos of her son, Elbert, as he recovers from an injury that nearly took his life years ago.

Parsons, who regularly sells her artwork and has taught classes everywhere from Birmingham, Alabama, to France, believes art is everywhere. “You can’t look through your eyes and not see art or the potential of some kind of creation,” she says. “It might be someone doing crafts and using popsicle sticks or carving a bar of soap. All those things are art, and all that creative energy we use when we do it resounds through the universe.”

Parsons finds joy in moving her work and the work of others through time, space and physical boundaries. “For me, the internet is about sharing,” she says. “That’s what it’s been able to do for me. It lets me share these moments of decision-making from my students. The videos of my students are about one minute or two minutes or maybe three. When I show

people what they’re dealing with, it lets others see how they might solve any problems they might be having with their work.” 🗨️

Get creative

Creative industries and people make jobs for Americans. Here are a few facts:

- The value of arts and cultural production in America in 2015 was \$763.6 billion, amounting to 4.2% of the gross domestic product. The arts contribute more to the national economy than do the construction, mining, utilities, insurance, and accommodation and food services industries.
- Artists are highly entrepreneurial. They are 3.5 times more likely than the total U.S. workforce to be self-employed.
- Arts and cultural goods and services drive industries primarily focused on producing copyrighted content, accounting for just over half of their combined \$1.17 billion value.
- 97% of U.S. employers say creativity is increasingly important to them. Of the employers looking to hire creatives, 85% say they are unable to find the applicants they seek.

Sources: National Endowment for the Arts, Artists and Arts Workers in the United States, 2011, The Conference Board, Ready to Innovate, 2008, National Endowment for the Arts, The Arts Contribute More Than \$760 Billion to the U.S. Economy, and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Value Added by Industry as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, 2017, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Data for 1998-2015, 2018

A successful year at NHTC

JIM COOK ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

BY LISA SAVAGE

NHTC expanded the fiber footprint in the Horse Cove and McMullen Road areas last year, and expansion continues in the Cherry Tree Road and Berkley communities. Such efforts to further enrich the cooperative's infrastructure and services represent only one part of the positive news members received during the annual meeting in May.

"I am pleased to report NHTC posted a very solid \$1.2 million in operating income margin in 2018," General Manager Jim Cook said. "In addition, we were able to increase our cash by approximately \$1 million."

Cook, who is retiring, addressed

the membership during a meeting that included staples of food, fellowship and entertainment, as well as innovations. For the first time, ballots for board member elections were tallied electronically. "The electronic voting helped speed up the process," he said.

BY THE NUMBERS

Cook noted the cooperative's strong financial performance during the past seven years, and he detailed highlights from the past year, with expansion of the gig-certified network being a point of emphasis.

The cooperative's assets totaled \$36.3 million, which included a \$1.8 million increased investment to the fiber-to-the-home network. Operating revenues totaled \$12.7 million, an increase of \$890,000 from 2017.

Operating expenses totaled \$11.4 million, compared to \$10.6 million in 2018. About half of the expense increases were related to higher cost of goods for nonregulated products due to customer growth. The remaining increases were tied to efforts to retire the legacy copper-based network, as well as investments to the television network.

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Cook and several board members attended the legislative and policy conference of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association in Washington, D.C. The organization represents more than 900 cooperatives like NHTC.

During the visit, discussions emphasized the proliferation of unwanted robocalls and the continued increases in video programming costs. "Stemming the volume of unwanted solicitation calls will require action on both the legislative front, to increase penalties for those companies illegally invading your privacy with unwanted messaging, and the regulatory front, to develop rules to ensure that the cost to implement new technology designed to block illegal calls does not unduly burden small rural providers," Cook said. "We are hopeful that effective solutions will be forthcoming sooner rather than later."

NHTC was awarded the "All-Fiber Certification" designation by the National Fiber Broadband Association. The award is available to association members who have demonstrated a high level of strategic commitment to fiber deployment, ensuring





The 2019 NHTC officers, seated, from left, are Secretary Jim Duncan, President Jeffrey Cantrell, Treasurer Calvin Bearden and Vice President Randy Morrison. Board members, back row, from left, are Jeff Cooper, Garland Elders, Mike Whitaker, General Manager Daniel Martin, Greg Glover, Barry Jones and Attorney Mac Martinson.

their customers get the fastest, most reliable broadband available.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

Attention to infrastructure, competitive products and community growth continue to provide NHTC a solid foundation for the future.

During the past year, the cooperative began the significant task of removing TV cable and copper cables from utility poles throughout the service territory. By removing about 25% of more than 10,000 pole attachments, the cooperative will save more than \$50,000 annually.

Meanwhile, robust new home construction resulted in a 4% increase in residential subscribers, and the broadband customer base saw a 6% increase in growth.

NHTC Security Solutions, which offers a complete line of customized home automation, security, CCTV and access control, similarly realized steady growth last year.

“As you can see, the past year has been a busy one for your NHTC team,” Cook said. “In addition to building on the success of our current products and services, we are committed to continuing to look for new service offerings that will bring value and enhance the lives of our cooperative members.”

Cook reflected on NHTC’s mission statement to describe the cooperative’s goals. “NHTC’s mission is to exceed customer expectations, improve the quality of life in the communities we serve and fulfill evolving communications needs



Outgoing General Manager Jim Cook, who announced his retirement, met with Daniel Martin who will assume the role July 1.

with advanced technology at the best value possible, backed by exceptional customer service,” Cook said.

Cook also announced his plans to retire after 45 years in the telecommunications industry. The NHTC board of directors selected Daniel Martin as the new general manager earlier in May. Martin, from Grant, previously worked at NHTC for 15 years and served five of those years as NHTC’s outside plant manager. He begins as general manager on July 1.

For Cook, the annual meeting was the last opportunity to address the membership as the general manager. “I am very proud of what we have achieved at NHTC over the last seven years, and I want to sincerely thank all of our employees, board members and you, our members, for allowing me the privilege to serve as your general manager,” he said. “You have a great company, a great network and a bright future.” ☑

Voting results:

Place 6 — Calvin Bearden
Place 7 — Jeffrey Cantrell
Place 9 — Garland Elders

Congratulations to all the prize winners at the 2019 NHTC annual meeting!

Claudette Pritchett won a 55-inch television.

Other prize winners include:

Betty & Billy Moore
Outher & Janell Stapler
Olene Osborne
Gary Scott
Flo Bearden
Vanessa Zerpa
Julene Raisler
Jerry T. Meeks
Mary Cameron
Leroy Meeks
Michael Byram
K. Cagle
Robbie Thomas
Randy Taylor
James Powell
Mark Cowan
K. Cooper
Stacey Thompson
Mark Poole
OCR Church of Christ
Dale Ballard
Joyce Goode
James Carlton Sutton

LOW AND SLOW

BBQ brings friends together

A spark ignited one summer afternoon almost 20 years ago when David “Hoss” Johnson and three friends decided to toss a coin and see where it landed on the field of competitive barbecuing.

The four men — Johnson, Jeff Chandler, Steve Hatfield and David Schmitt — were all born and raised in Huntsville, Alabama. Johnson played football at the University of Alabama under legendary coach Bear Bryant. Schmitt played football at the University of North Alabama. Hatfield was on the baseball team at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Columbia State in Tennessee.

Only one of the foursome, Chandler, knew anything about smoking meats and competing in the sport of barbecuing. But that’s all it took when he suggested they enter a competition — not on the amateur level, but as professionals. So, the men paid their entry fee for the WhistleStop Barbecue Festival and gave their team a name: Fork Down and Pork, a riff on the football term “fourth down and short.” They came home with a first-place award in the “anything goes” category for their butterflied scallops stuffed with shrimp, wrapped with bacon and drizzled with hollandaise sauce.

“The next day was for barbecue, and we didn’t do great,” Johnson says. “We came in about 35th out of 60, which wasn’t bad for a first time, but it wasn’t great. We did barbecued pork, ribs and chicken. And we did a brisket, too. But brisket is very hard to do. Just go to Texas if you want good brisket.

“I mean, it’s kind of like football. If you want good football, you come to the South. If you want good brisket, you go to Texas,” he says, sipping on a glass of water and recalling the days when the three men would cook all weekend and go back to their daytime jobs and families during the week.

Following graduation from Alabama, Johnson played offensive line for the St. Louis Cardinals under coach Gene Stallings and then for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He left the NFL to become athletic director for football operations for the City of Huntsville, Alabama. Johnson retired after 25 years and is now a missionary and national football direc-

tor for SCORE International, a position that takes him on mission trips and to football camps around the world. And in several countries — including Italy, Israel and Costa Rica — he’s fired up a smoker and treated those around him to a taste of the South, complete with barbecue, beans and coleslaw.

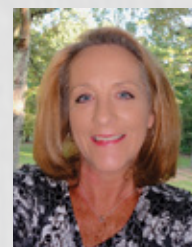
The Fork Down and Pork team quit the competition circuit in 2010. “We had families and kids. Some had grandkids, changed jobs. You know, life happens,” Johnson says. But he continues to cook not only for those in other countries, but also for friends at home, too. One thing he’s learned from all his years of smoking meats is a creed to which every good smoker adheres: low and slow, meaning to cook the meat at a low temperature and not rush things. Johnson says if he’s cooking meat that needs to stay in the smoker for up to 18 hours, he tries to keep a steady temperature of 185 degrees. For meats that need to cook no more than 12 hours, he keeps

the temperature around 250 degrees.

Different cuts of meat call for different woods added to the coals. Johnson likes hickory chunks for pork, mesquite for chicken and applewood chunks for ribs. Another trick he’s learned is not to add the injection liquid or rub to a pork butt until the meat has finished cooking and not to discard all the fat and juices that run off the meat. When the butt has finished cooking, let it sit in a covered pan for an hour or so. Then, remove the bone if there is one, and pull the pork apart. Mix the rub and injection sauce together, and massage it into the meat, adding any accumulated fat and juices back in as needed to make the meat moist. “There’s nothing worse than dry barbecue,” Johnson says.



Barbecue master
David “Hoss” Johnson.



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

SMOKED PORK



VINEGAR SAUCE FOR SMOKED PORK

- 1 cup white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Combine all ingredients, taste and add water to dilute, as necessary.

Note: David Johnson combines this sauce with enough of his barbecue rub to make a thin paste. Then, he massages as much as he needs into the smoked, pulled pork after it has been cooked and shredded. As for amounts needed, it's a judgment call. Taste as you go using your favorite rub.

COLESLAW

David Johnson says sugar is the key to this coleslaw. "You need to make sure it's sweet enough," he says.

- 1 head of cabbage, shredded
- 2-3 carrots, shredded

Dressing:

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup white or apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard

In a large bowl, toss together shredded cabbage and carrots. In separate bowl, mix together dressing ingredients, then add to cabbage mixture, combining thoroughly. Chill before serving. Makes 10-12 servings.

HOSS'S PORK AND BEANS

- 1 (28-ounce) can of baked beans (your favorite)
- 2 tablespoons Karo syrup
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 Vidalia or other sweet onion, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
- 6 tablespoons mustard
- 6-7 tablespoons ketchup
- 10 pieces of maple-smoked bacon, chopped
- 2 tablespoons bacon grease
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 cup pulled pork
- Dash of cayenne pepper, to taste (optional)

Combine all ingredients, mixing thoroughly, and place in greased baking dish. Bake, covered, for 45 minutes to an hour in a 300 F oven. 🍲



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