

The

# Communicator

MARCH/APRIL 2020

**BROADBAND:**  
HELPING YOU LEARN



## EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

The CARE Center  
makes a difference

### FUN AND ENRICHMENT

Refurbished Grant playground  
makes a comeback

### UNLIMITED LEARNING

Broadband creates  
education opportunities





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Let's 'build once' under RDOF

As an organization representing rural broadband providers, we are excited about the FCC's plans to invest \$20.4 billion to bring affordable high-speed broadband to rural Americans. While the agency's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) is a terrific opportunity for unserved and underserved communities, it is important that as a nation we are investing in networks that can meet broadband needs for the foreseeable future.

Services delivered in high-cost rural areas using RDOF funds should be reasonably comparable to those in urban areas — both now and over at least the term of support distribution, if not longer. We believe it is far more efficient to have policies that encourage providers to “build once,” deploying rural networks that are scalable and will offer services at speeds that are still relevant to customers another decade from now.

NTCA was one of the biggest and earliest supporters of a program that will promote sustainable networks capable of delivering the best possible broadband access for many years to come. After months of advocacy by our members and staff, including securing bipartisan letters signed by dozens of members of Congress, the FCC announced in January that it will consider rules to fund sustainable and forward-looking networks.

This will help strike a terrific balance by looking to reach as many rural Americans as possible while ensuring that the FCC is funding the best possible networks for the available budget. I am energized by the role that NTCA members can play in being a key part of the solution in bridging the digital divide. 🗨️



Once a decade, the United States counts its citizens. This results in a treasure trove of data relevant to politics, businesses, schools and much more. For example, federal agencies use census results to distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds annually.

Similarly, states use census data to draw congressional district boundaries. The numbers can even determine how many congressional representatives a state sends to Washington, D.C. Locally, many counties, cities and towns lean on census statistics when planning infrastructure such as roads, schools and emergency services. Businesses also factor census data into calculations that determine the locations of new stores, hotels and more.

As you can see, the census is an important program and one in which you'll be asked to participate. For the first time, everyone can complete the census online, as well as by phone or by mail. You will still receive a census form by mail, but you will have the option of visiting [respond.census.gov/acs](https://respond.census.gov/acs) to complete your duty to respond to the census.

Census Day is April 1, and census takers will visit households that have not already replied to census questionnaires online, by phone or through the mail. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau hired thousands of temporary workers to help implement the 2020 census.

The bureau also understands the unique challenges of counting people in rural areas. Some rural homes do not have typical mailing addresses, using instead post office boxes in nearby community centers. However, census questionnaires are not mailed to P.O. boxes. In these remote areas, census takers will deliver paper questionnaires to each home and offer guidance on how to respond by phone or online. If there's no response, expect an in-person follow-up.

By law, the Census Bureau must keep your information confidential, using the details to produce statistics. The bureau may not publicly release responses in any way that might identify an individual. 🗨️

# Maybe it's not so smart

Streaming boxes can add a layer of TV security

Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY



**I**s your TV watching you? Could it be a backdoor to your private information? Those are questions recently posed by the FBI. For people who rely on a smart TV, the answer might be, “Yes.”

A smart TV can connect directly to the internet, allowing access to services and applications that provide movies, TV shows, music, videoconferencing, photo streaming and more. It's all right there in one consolidated interface.

But convenience comes with tradeoff. Some smart TVs include microphones and cameras. These features allow voice commands and the potential of using facial recognition to customize content to an individual viewer.

Those innovations, however, raise the possibility of TV manufacturers eavesdropping. Similarly, an unsecured TV has the potential to be used by a hacker as a backdoor into your other Wi-Fi-connected devices.

The FBI suggests a range of strategies to ensure a TV protects your security. Do internet research on your specific TV model to check the status of updates and reports of security breaches. Also, if possible, change passwords. Then, learn how to turn off microphones, cameras and the ability of the TV manufacturer to collect personal information. Even placing tape over the camera lens is an option.

There's another strategy, too — do not directly connect your TV to the internet. Instead, consider a third-party device to create a bridge between your television and streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and more. 🗨️

## HERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS TO CONSIDER:



**Roku:** Many devices that allow TVs to connect to online streaming services are sold by companies that also offer TV content. As a result, not all services are available on every device. If that's a concern, consider a Roku, which can generally connect to all content providers. Rokus typically range in price from \$30 to \$99.



**Apple TV:** Prices for an Apple TV device range from \$149 to \$199, with the more expensive options having more storage capacity and the ability to play 4K video. The device will connect to most streaming services, and currently the purchase of a new Apple TV comes with a one-year subscription to the Apple TV+ streaming service.

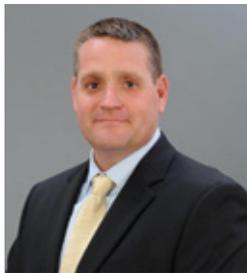


**Amazon Fire TV Cube or Fire Stick:** Amazon's Fire streaming devices cost from about \$30 to nearly \$200, based on capacity and the ability to offer 4K content. Look for frequent sales to find a bargain. The interface is clean and useful. Fans of Amazon Prime can have easy access to that service's streaming options. While most streaming services may be available, that has changed from time to time.



**Google Chromecast:** Google offers its twist on the streaming boxes with a small, hockey-puck-shaped device that allows content to be “cast” from a computer, tablet or phone to the television. Most streaming services are supported, and viewers with a Google Home smart speaker can control programming with voice commands.

# The 2020 census matters for rural America



**DANIEL MARTIN**  
General Manager

**H**ow important is the 2020 census? For rural areas like ours, \$675 billion is at stake.

In mid-March the U.S. Census Bureau will send postcards to most addresses in Alabama and across the country. That is one of the more important pieces of mail you will receive in 2020. Why does the census matter to your broadband and telephone provider, and why am I using this space to encourage you to participate?

Simply put, our part of Alabama has a lot to gain from accurate census numbers — and a lot to lose if we aren't all counted.

These risks and benefits come in three main areas dependent on census data: government funding, political representation and statistics for economic growth.

According to the Census Bureau, census data determines the spending of more than \$675 billion in federal funds. That can mean anything from schools, roads and equipment for first responders to grants for expanding our broadband network or programs that help those in need. Many of those projects seek to do the most good for the most people — and if we don't help to create an accurate count of all of our people, that funding may go elsewhere.

As you may have heard if you follow political news, the census data is used to draw and redraw districts for state and federal lawmakers. The number of congressmen and congresswomen we have representing Alabama is dependent on our population. If we don't count all of our state's residents, we would show a lower population and run the risk of losing representation in Congress to a bigger state that may have different interests than ours.

The same thing is true on a more local level in the state legislature. If the counties in our region come up short on the population count, we could lose a legislator and have a more difficult time making our area's concerns heard in Montgomery.

Lastly, our area's population is a key factor in almost all of the statistics businesses look at when considering a market to build. Whether it's a fast-food restaurant or an industrial plant, corporate managers are looking at our population when it comes to customer base, workforce and market potential. Showing a lower population on the census because many people weren't counted would make us less appealing for businesses to locate here.

If you want to know more, visit [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

I know everyone is busy, and that little postcard later this month may seem like just adding one more thing to your to-do list. But from what I've read, the Census Bureau is making things simple, quick and easy for everyone to be counted.

As someone who cares deeply about our rural area, I hope you'll take those few minutes of time to make sure you and your family participate in the census.

Our communities are counting on you.

**“Simply put, our part of Alabama has a lot to gain from accurate census numbers — and a lot to lose if we aren't all counted.”**

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Produced for NHTC by:



**On the Cover:**



Aneisha Nolen serves as director of career development and adult education services at The CARE Center. See story Page 8.

# Attention high school seniors!

NHTC wants to help two local graduating high school seniors with college expenses. One student each from the Kate Duncan Smith DAR School and New Hope High School will receive a \$1,500 scholarship from NHTC.

**To be eligible to participate in this program, applicants must:**

- Be a graduating high school senior from either DAR or NHHS
- Have at least an overall B average
- Have a parent or guardian with active NHTC service
- Complete the application process

Scholarships go to students who exemplify academic achievement and community involvement. Applications are available at [nhtc.coop](http://nhtc.coop), from school guidance counselor's offices and from NHTC's business office at 5415 Main Drive, New Hope.

Don't miss out on this opportunity! The deadline to submit an application is April 10.

*Save the date!*

**PLAN TO ATTEND THE  
2020 NHTC  
ANNUAL MEETING!**

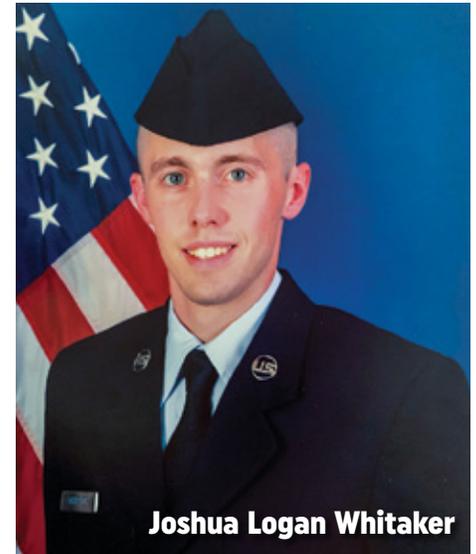
**Tuesday, May 19  
New Hope Middle School gym**

Voting starts at 5 p.m. The business meeting follows at 7:30 p.m.

Be sure to bring a valid photo ID to vote in the board election!

Door prizes | Refreshments | Entertainment

*See you there!*



## Three local residents graduate from basic military training

Three local men graduated from basic military training at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Air Force Base.

The airmen completed an intensive, eight-and-a-half-week program that included training in military discipline and studies, Air Force core values, physical fitness, and basic warfare principles and skills.

U.S. Air Force Airman Santana C. Enciso graduated from basic military training on Aug. 23, 2019. He is the son of Jose and Tonya Enciso of Owens Cross Roads and the grandson of Grady Brinkley of Athens and Jose Luis Enciso, Maya and Guillermina Romero Jaramillo of Guerrero, Mexico. He is also the brother of Talia Enciso, Bethany McBay and Tiffany Middlebrooks.

U.S. Air Force Airman Connor J. Hosak graduated from basic military training on Oct. 18, 2019. He is the son of Megan and

Joseph Hosak of New Hope and the grandson of Lana and Rodney McGehee of New Hope and Cleo and Joseph Compeau of Gladewater, Texas. He is also the brother of Bailee Hosak.

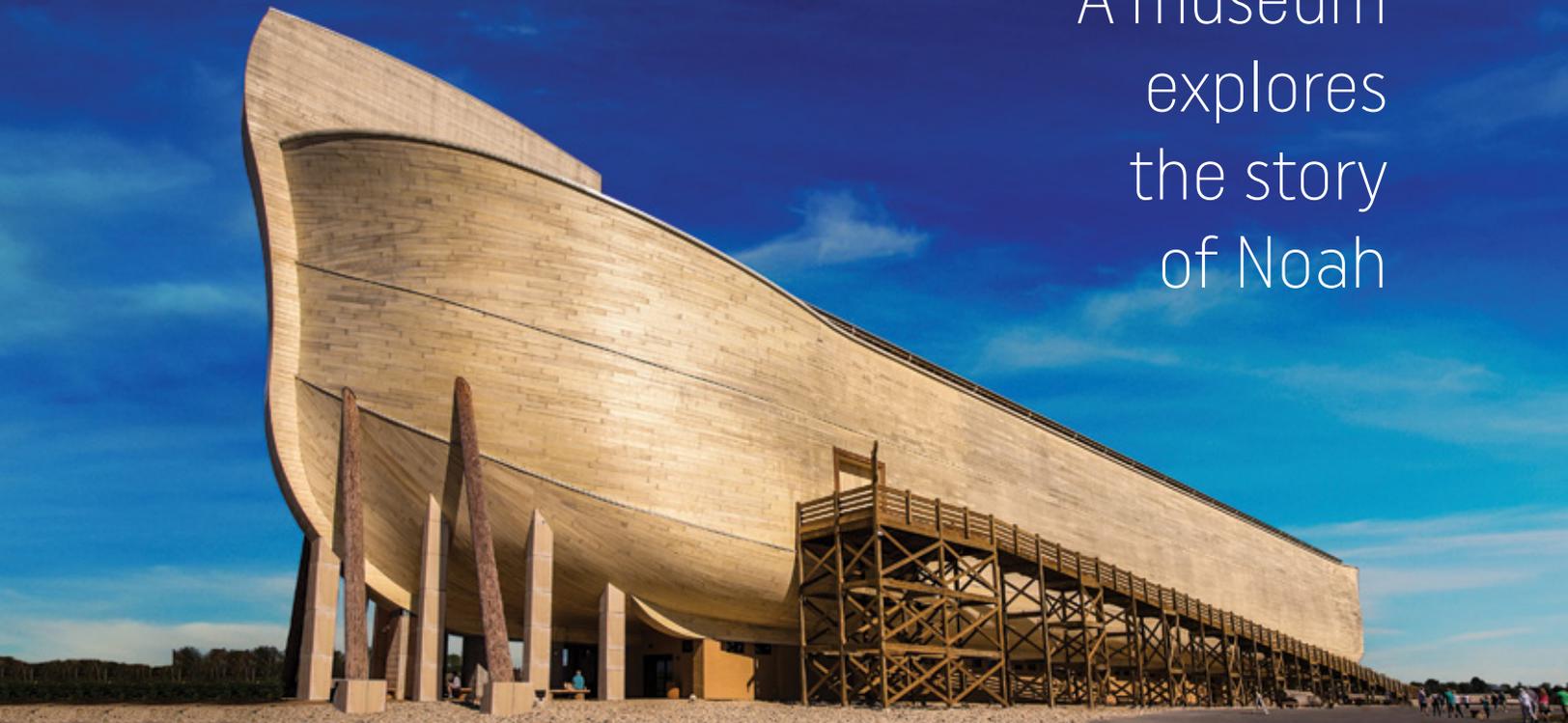
U.S. Air Force Airman Joshua Logan Whitaker graduated from basic military training on Nov. 29, 2019. He is the son of David and Katie Whitaker and Stacey and Juan Bishop of New Hope. He is the grandson of Roger and Sherry Whitaker of New Hope and Sammy and Margaret Hill of Owens Cross Roads. He is also the brother of Samantha Morgan Whitaker of Mobile.

Airmen who complete basic training also earn four credits toward an Associate in Applied Science degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

All three are New Hope High School graduates. Enciso and Hosak graduated in 2019, and Whitaker graduated in 2017.

# A biblical journey

A museum explores the story of Noah



Story by ANNE BRALY

**T**he heavens opened, and the rains came down — not in biblical proportions as they did in Noah’s day, but could there have been a better backdrop for a recent visit to the Ark Encounter?

This religious attraction in Kentucky opened just over three years ago on an 800-acre site. At a cost of \$100 million for Phase I, its primary feature is the massive ark, taller than a four-story building and built to the specifications God laid out for Noah. In keeping with measurements in the book of Genesis, converted from the Hebrew cubits specified in chapter 6, the three-deck ark is 510 feet long, 85 feet wide and 51 feet high.

Sitting in a beautifully landscaped area

just off Interstate 75 in the small town of Williamstown, Kentucky, the Ark Encounter draws more than 1 million visitors annually from around the world who come to learn more about Noah and his family, the animals aboard ship and the ancient flood that most Christians believe engulfed the earth. Ticket booths are located at the 4,000-spot parking lot, which has plenty of room for group buses, and guests take the free shuttle service from the lot to the ark grounds.

In addition to the ark, the attraction offers a zip line and the Ararat Ridge Zoo. And you won’t walk away hungry — a tremendous buffet replete with Asian, Cajun and American fare will satisfy your hunger, and there is seating for 1,500.

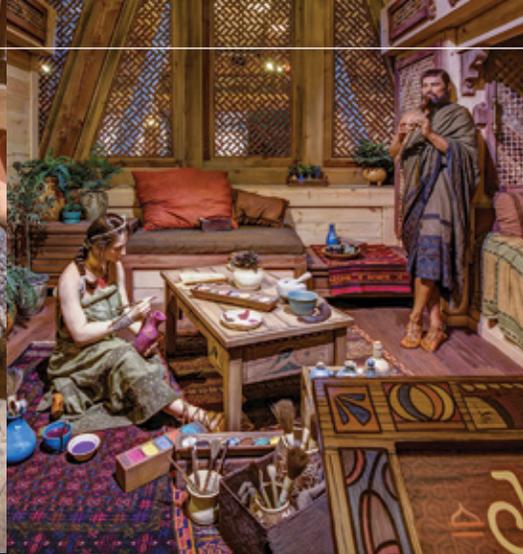
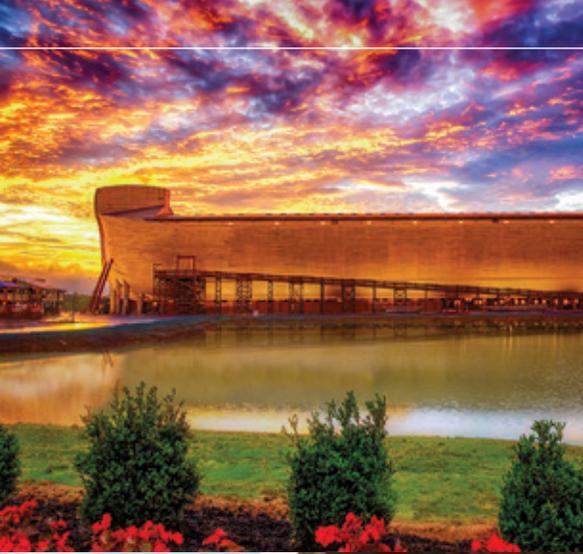
## THE SHIP

It took Noah 50 to 75 years to build his ark. It took a team of Amish builders and others just two years to build Kentucky’s

new ark, a project that was the dream of Australian Ken Ham, founder and CEO of the Answers in Genesis ministry, the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum in nearby Petersburg, Kentucky.

Patrick Kanewske, director of ministry and media relations for the Ark Encounter, says much of the ship matches accounts in Genesis, but “ark”-tistic license — imagination — fills in the blanks. Such license includes names of the women/wives onboard, the color of their skin, the placement of rooms and animal cages, and so on.

Look up from the first deck to the top of the ship, and it’s easy to see the scope of the Ark Encounter. Sixty-two trees, mostly Douglas firs from Utah that were standing dead timber, went into the frame structure. Throughout each deck are divided rooms, each with a different theme and exhibits — some interactive — telling stories of the ark, the flood and



Photos courtesy of the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum.

## If you go...

- **WHAT:** Ark Encounter
- **WHERE:** 1 Ark Encounter Drive, Williamstown, Kentucky
- **HOURS:** Times vary by season, so please check the website
- **TICKETS:** \$48 for adults 18-59, \$38 for seniors 60 and up, \$25 for youth 11-17, \$15 for children 5-10 and free for children 4 and under
- **PARKING:** \$10 for standard vehicles, \$15 for oversized vehicles
- **INFORMATION:** [arkencounter.com](http://arkencounter.com)

why it happened; what life was like before and after the flood; and the Christian belief that God created Earth in just six days. Movies on the second and third decks depict life then and now.

Plan on spending a good half-day at the Ark Encounter to experience all it has to offer. And when your day is through, Kanewske hopes people will walk away with the truth of God’s word and the gospel. “We proclaim that here,” he says. “That’s the bottom line. People will learn a lot about the flood account, Noah and his family and all that, but what we want them to take away is God’s word.”

### ALL ABOARD

How, one may wonder, did all of the animals fit on the ship? First — according to “Ark Signs That Teach a Flood of Answers,” a book that you can pick up in the Ark Encounter gift shop — you need to consider the term “animal kind,”

referring to a group of animals not related to any other animals. So at the most, Noah, who God only charged with bringing air-breathing animals on board, was responsible for fewer than 6,744 animals to house, feed and clean. “When you see the size of the ship, there’s every possibility that 6,000 to 7,000 animals could fit in a ship of its size without any problem,” Kanewske says.

Cages large and small line the walls and center of the lowest deck. Once again, ark-tistic license is used to show how Noah and his team might feed the animals and store grain. For a realistic experience, live animals come from the zoo onto the ship each day.

Jose Jimenez, a Naval chaplain from Rhode Island, recently brought his young family to experience the Ark Encounter. “It’s a great place for kids,” he says. “And it’s good for people who have questions. It doesn’t answer all of them, but a lot.”

### ARK ENCOUNTER PHASE II

Plans are in the works for major expansion of the Ark Encounter, and some of those plans have already been realized. April 2019 brought the opening of The Answers Center, with a snack bar, a gift shop and a 2,500-seat auditorium that hosts daily presentations, movies, special speakers, concerts and more.

A new playground has also opened and is designed to accommodate children of all abilities. And the summer of 2019 saw the opening of the zoo expansion, including the addition of more animals — lemurs, sloths, peccaries and a bearcat — and stages for zookeeper talks.

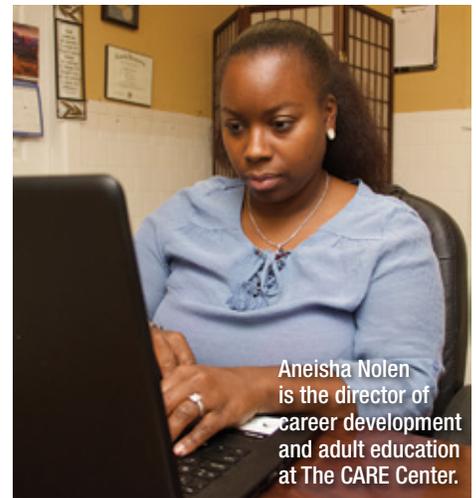
“We take things seriously here,” Kanewske says, “from our food to exhibits to how our employees are trained. It’s a world-class experience.”



# A FACE IN THE COMMUNITY

The CARE Center educates and changes lives

Story by LISA SAVAGE  
Photography by MATT LEDGER



Aneisha Nolen is the director of career development and adult education at The CARE Center.



Some of The CARE Center's staff, from left, are Aneisha Nolen, director of career development and adult education services; Renee Carlson, volunteer assistant; Quida Cobb, GED instructor; Cassie White, case manager; and Ashley Guadalupe, Ready to Work instructor.



Barbara Dickens, GED instructor, assists a student.

**T** Tyler Rush loves working at The CARE Center Thrift Store and knows it's a job he most likely wouldn't have had without the agency's educational assistance programs.

Rush earned his GED certificate through The CARE Center's career and adult education programs and also participated in Ready To Work classes and financial counseling. The thrift store hired him to work full time.

Now, he has a forklift driver certification and has gained much from the organization's programs. "I've loved meeting the people I work with and becoming part of The CARE Center family," he says.

He is a perfect example of how the adult education programs are changing lives, says Aneisha Nolen, director of career development and adult education at The CARE Center. The New Hope nonprofit operates the thrift store and offers a food pantry and other assistance to residents in need.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Nolen started at The CARE Center as the adult education coordinator in 2017, expanding programs like the GED classes the center already hosted. "With this program, we want to do everything we can to help our clients reach their potential, whether it be through GED classes or helping find resources that help make them self-sustaining," she says.

Programs like the center's Ignite Your Potential education services are making a difference and have seen more than 75% growth in two years, Nolen says. In the case of Rush, the adult services and education were key to his success. He needed his GED certification, but he faced obstacles. He needed transportation to go to Calhoun Community College for the GED testing, so the agency assisted with that. He then learned skills through Ignite Your Potential and financial counseling and eventually went to work at the thrift store. He now plans to pursue college courses.

The CARE Center offers the Ready To Work training program, in partnership with Calhoun, and provides classes for the Work Keys certification.

All high school graduates are required to have Work Keys certification, an employee certifiability program. It's offered to high school students who graduated after 2015. Those who graduated before 2015 need the certification to be competitive in the job market, Nolen says. It's offered through the Ready To Work program, also hosted by The CARE Center's adult services.

"No one has the same story, and we're here to help and address each one's individual needs," she says.

There's not a lot of funding to sustain the programs, which make partnerships invaluable, Nolen says. The GED program is an effort through Calhoun Community College, and the classes are hosted by The CARE Center.



Students study during a GED class at The CARE Center.



Student Marrah White confers with Ashley Guadalupe, one of the Ready to Work instructors at The CARE Center.

CenterState Bank provides financial counseling. “They meet one-on-one with our clients and help them learn to budget for real-life experiences,” Nolen says. “We couldn’t do any of this without partners.”

### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to a job is a huge barrier for a lot of clients, Nolen says. “We can help them find jobs, but they have to have reliable transportation,” she says.

With the growth of jobs in the Huntsville area, work is available, but getting over the mountain from New Hope is one of the biggest problems potential employees face. Lack of public transportation and often limited private options hamper their ability for success, Nolen says. “We’re working to come up with some plans and

alternatives for transportation,” she says. “We have people who qualify for many of these jobs. It’s just a matter of them being able to get there.”

### GED CLASSES

Barbara Dickens has taught GED classes through Calhoun Community College for several years as part of The CARE Center’s education programs.

In that time, she says, students preparing for the GED tests to receive their diplomas also have begun taking college courses at Calhoun toward degrees in their desired fields. Some have received their GED certificates, passed their military tests or entered the U.S. armed forces. Others have been able to keep their jobs because they received their GED or have obtained a better job.

Some graduates are the first members of their families in three generations to achieve a diploma, Dickens says.

To enroll in the GED classes, students take an online assessment in reading, math and language. The test results show which skills they need to review and understand, Dickens says. After students learn the skills they’ll need for the GED exam, they can take an online practice test that evaluates whether they are likely to pass the test. If the student passes the practice test, they take the actual test at Calhoun.

High-speed internet through NHTC makes the online assessments and practice tests possible and are a valuable tool for other educational programs. [📧](#)

## ABOUT THE GED PROGRAM:

GED classes took place in New Hope through Calhoun Community College for several years before they became part of The CARE Center’s educational programs. Since then, there has been a 100% graduation rate.

Ignite Your Potential served 59 clients in 2019. Seventeen students registered for college, and all but one started classes.

GED classes take place 6 to 9 p.m. Monday and Tuesday and 9 a.m. to noon Tuesday and Wednesday. Ready to Work classes are from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday and Friday.

Financial counseling is available by appointment from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays.

For information about the programs, contact Nolen at 256-723-2271, at The CARE Center, 5499 Main Drive, New Hope, or visit [thecare-center.org](http://thecare-center.org).

## ABOUT THE CARE CENTER:

In 2000, four area churches — Cove United Methodist, Rivertree Church, Big Cove Presbyterian and St. Columba Episcopal — came together to start The CARE Center after recognizing the unmet needs of residents in southeastern Madison County.

Initially the mission provided emergency food, toiletries, baby products, school supplies and financial assistance, serving 60 families a month.

By 2005, it began to develop and design opportunities for higher education, and the organization has grown significantly, impacting lives in the area and helping over 1,000 students and families.



# A class of their own

## Broadband brings education to students on their schedule

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In 2012, Aziza Zemrani was busily putting together an accelerated online program for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The curriculum would allow students to complete courses they need in just seven weeks from anywhere in the valley or beyond. But there was a lingering concern about handling presentations using the available online technology.

“I needed them to present so I could see their skills and competency in communication,” Zemrani says. “We use Blackboard Collaborate, which allows for face-to-face engagement and interaction. But my colleagues were worried about how it would work if we had a student with a disability.”

As if in answer to those concerns, the program’s first cohort group in 2013 included one deaf student, Phillip Robinson. When it came time for each student to present that June, the university’s Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology worked with the disability office to arrange for a sign language interpreter to present with him.

“He presented live with his classmate, and it was beautiful,” Zemrani says. “He was almost in tears telling me this was the first time he was able to present live like that in an academic setting.”

Robinson graduated in December, joining hundreds of other students who have

come through the accelerated online program of the university in Edinburg, Texas. While Zemrani originally expected the program to appeal primarily to students from outside the state or even the country, it has also been popular among local students in the valley looking to fast-track their education.

“Some of these students might be working two jobs, so they can’t fit traditional classes into their schedule,” she says. “With the online program, because of the course delivery and structure, students can take up to two more modules and finish in one year.”

### A PLACE TO START

Online courses like the ones offered at UTRGV are taking off across the country thanks to improved broadband access. But with so many online options available to students, it can be daunting to figure out which one is the best fit. That’s why the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system contracted with Distance Minnesota to act as a single point of contact for all online students in 2004.

Distance Minnesota was founded as a consortium of three local colleges that wanted to offer online courses. Today, the organization partners with 37 colleges and universities throughout





the state, answering any questions prospective or current students may have about their online options.

“We do chat, phone assistance and email assistance seven days a week,” says Distance Minnesota Executive Director Lisa Leahy. “In all, we handle approximately 25,000 student inquiries a year.”

But more than acting as a helpline for students, Distance Minnesota compiles data on the programs each school offers and the level of interest in each course. This makes the organization a resource for schools deciding which classes to offer online and for students looking to fulfill a specific course requirement. That help is particularly important for making online programs accessible to out-of-state or international students.

“Throughout our nearly 20-year history with the school system, we’ve come to understand what each of the individual universities has to offer,” Leahy says. “Many of us have worked closely with the faculty and the administration on these campuses. So if a student has a specialized need for a certain class, we can tell them the best course is at this school, and often we’re able to put them in touch directly, whether they’re in Argentina, California or New York.”

### VIRTUAL HIGH

College coursework isn’t the only level at which online programs are giving students more flexibility. Connections Academy, a nationwide program that offers tuition-free online K-12 public schooling in 28 states, launched a new online academy last fall in Tennessee. Since it opened, the academy has grown from about 750 students to 1,300 enrolled.

The Tennessee Connections Academy is authorized by Robertson County Public Schools, though it is available to students throughout the state. The system was already using a virtual curriculum from Connections Academy’s parent company, Pearson, to offer online classes to approximately 50 students. So it was a natural partnership to work together to bring that same experience to students across the state.

“It’s a unique learning environment with certified teachers in all subject areas for the kids,” says Derek Sanborn, principal at Tennessee Connections Academy. “The students are able to interact with their teachers and other kids with live lessons throughout the week. They receive textbooks and other materials at each level, and it’s all at no cost to the parent.”

The online academy is held to the same standards as any public school in the state, and students are required to attend for six-and-a-half hours each day. The program has been a good fit for kids who may be homebound, live in remote areas, or even be on traveling sports teams, allowing students to complete their hours in the evening or on weekends.

“We also have students who may have been bullied in their school or didn’t feel safe. Maybe the traditional setting wasn’t motivating for them,” Sanborn says. “I think giving parents that choice is really important because they get to decide what’s best for their kids.”

### NEW ENGAGEMENT

Even with the increasing quality of online classes, there are still challenges educators work to overcome, including engaging students.

One way Tennessee Connections Academy attempts to address this issue is by scheduling in-person field trips, allowing families to meet and connect with their teachers and other students.

In her own classes, Zemrani has recorded live classroom sessions and used apps like Flipgrid to allow students to record short intro videos about themselves. While engagement continues to be a challenge for any online course, she believes finding new solutions is well worth the investment.

“We have students in the military who may be called to serve somewhere in the middle of their program,” Zemrani says. “The online course is a great opportunity for them to finish their program when they might not otherwise be able to. Broadband is so important to that.” 🗨️

# PERFECT VISION

## Kidtopia facelift for next generation

Story by JOHN CLAYTON  
Photography by MATT LEDGER

**K**idtopia was once the perfect solution for a notable void in Grant — the lack of playground facilities for the small town. Now, the re-formed Grant Playground & Recreation Association is working hard to ensure that the 12-year-old playground will provide fun and enrichment for another generation of children growing up in the area.

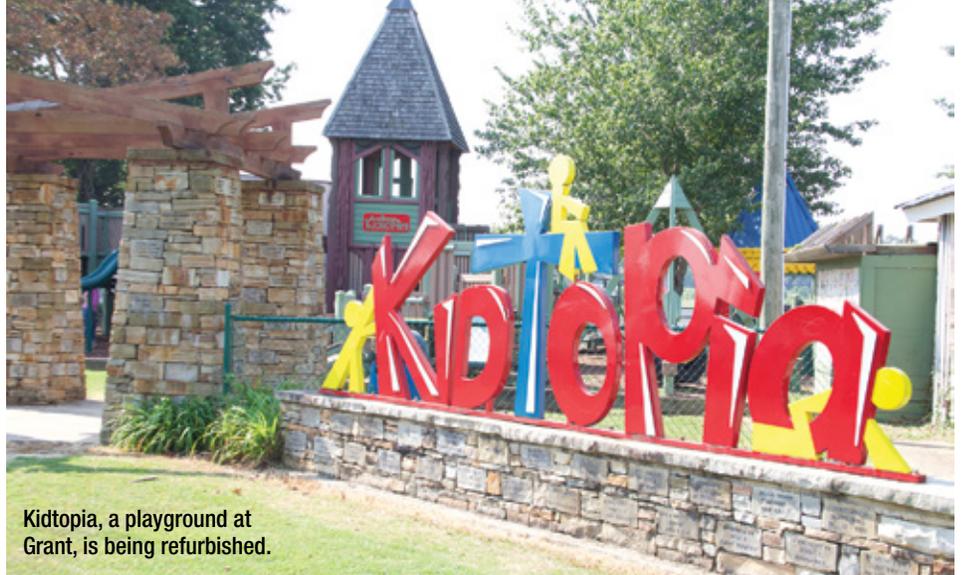
Kidtopia was the late Daniel Robinson's brainchild. He inspired friends and neighbors to create the playground in 2007 and 2008.

"Daniel's vision was that Grant needed a playground desperately, but they didn't have one," says Thames Robinson, Daniel Robinson's widow. "He was very involved in youth sports and that sort of thing because we have a bunch of kids ourselves."

Another group of women wanted to do something to honor Kristie Chandler, a beloved local mom who died in a freak golf cart accident in 2006, and the forces came together to create Kidtopia. "It was their vision of something to honor Kristie and then Daniel's vision of wanting to do something for the town that gave them so much impetus to be successful," says Thames Robinson.



Jason Hodges



Kidtopia, a playground at Grant, is being refurbished.

For nearly a decade, the playground lived up to its billing as a community gathering place for kids and their parents. But the small town was without a budget to help care for the property at the Grant Town Park. The nonprofit Grant Playground & Recreation Association had raised more than \$10,000 to build the playground and put together a volunteer force that included professional contractors and builders, but it was largely inactive after Kidtopia was constructed.

Jason Hodges, who created the Kidtopia logo and helped with the initial fundraisers as a teenager, came to the playground with his own children a decade after it was built to find it far from the place its creators intended it to be. The playground equipment was in disrepair, and upkeep for the area had been spotty at best.

"I just noticed the kind of shape the park was getting in, and it was really becoming a hazard for the kids to play on it," Hodges says. "Splinters were sticking out, and things needed to be painted, and you had equipment with pieces and parts missing. It just needed some TLC. I wanted to make sure that because so much work went into creating it 11 years ago that it would be around for my kids to enjoy and for the next generation."

Amazingly, another of the original volunteers in the effort had kept the association's nonprofit status active, so Hodges quickly began a campaign to refurbish the playground with a series of fundraisers with a vision similar to that of Daniel Robinson and Kidtopia's original supporters. The volunteers sold T-shirts and Boston butts and hosted a 5K race, the inaugural



Sisters Isabella McBride, left, and Scarlett Kistler play on the slide at Kidtopia.



Dan Robinson Memorial 5K and Kids Color Run. They raised more than \$10,000 for new playground equipment and repairs in around six months.

While the vision of Kidtopia is largely the same this second time around, Hodges says his group wants to continue to raise funds for regular maintenance and improvements. "We want to continue to have funds coming in for the park," he says. "We want to have those funds available on an as-needed basis."

Those wishing to contribute can write checks to the Grant Park & Recreation Association and send them to 156 Lighthouse Lane, Grant, AL 35747. They can also contribute online through the association's Facebook page. [📄](#)

# Why TV subscription fees keep rising

## LEARN THE TRUTH

Providing TV service puts companies like NHTC in an unwanted struggle.

Each year, content providers and networks demand more money to carry their programming, making it more difficult to justify offering TV service. The most expensive networks charge \$5 to more than \$8 per customer each month. These fees might drop for less popular networks, but they still add up. Meanwhile, subscribers to TV services just want to enjoy their favorite shows on the stations they prefer without feeling as if they pay for rarely watched channels.

Currently, the content curators require companies like NHTC to buy a bundle of channels — even demanding that these channels be included in specific packages — for the rights to broadcast the two or three most popular channels a programmer offers.

That's the source of the struggle, and it's a challenge TV providers like NHTC work hard to resolve. Ever-increasing

demands from broadcast networks drive the rising prices, forcing providers like NHTC to pass the costs on to customers to keep from losing money. Almost all of a monthly television bill is allocated to fees NHTC must pay the networks, leaving only a tiny sliver for personnel costs and equipment maintenance.

The massive media corporations providing the programming have tremendous leverage when structuring deals with providers like NHTC. Some argue that it's an unfair game. The key to pricing is in the agreements that networks negotiate to allow companies like NHTC to retransmit their programming.

### LOCAL RETRANSMISSION CONSENT

While local broadcast networks are available free over the air, NHTC must pay in order to retransmit local networks to our customers. Although NHTC is part of a national consortium of cooperatives that leverages its buying power to provide

competitive prices to cooperative members for our national networks, we are responsible for negotiating our local broadcast network retransmission agreements. As you can imagine, representing roughly 2,000 subscribers — versus hundreds of thousands of subscribers — greatly reduces the negotiating power.

Since 2013, these local broadcast networks have imposed fee increases in excess of 400% — and that's for your local networks alone! These exorbitant fee increases do not appear to be going away anytime soon.

At NHTC, we are committed not only to controlling prices, but also to providing you the channel selections you want. There is a greater amount of quality television programming spread across more channels than ever before, which will continue to cause price increases as the cost for these channels goes up. We fight hard to try to keep costs as low as possible for our customers, but we must accept the increases if we want to keep these channels for our customers.

NHTC wants our customers to know there may be a time where we will have to “Go Dark,” or stop the retransmission of these channels in order to keep our customers' bills at a fair rate. This is not our favored position, but negotiations move slowly, and the rates move at an even slower pace. We are here to look out for our customers' best interests, and we continue to investigate newer technology that will assist in reducing operational expenses to help offset rising content costs. 📺

Since 2013 NHTC average retransmission fees have spiked more than 400%

- 2013 — \$2.89 per month per subscriber
- 2017 — \$10.50 per month per subscriber
- 2019 — \$14.75 per month per subscriber



# Mystery and intrigue

## High Point Restaurant chef shares secrets for a great steak

**H**igh Point Restaurant opened in January 2000, and Eric Gipson, executive chef, has been there since the second day of business. As a child growing up in Monteagle, Tennessee, he remembers the restaurant when it was a spooky old house — “the kind of run-down, ghost-infested mansion of campfire stories,” he says.

Legend has it that mobster Al Capone financed the 1929 home for his book-keeper/mistress and used it as a place to stop on his bootlegging travels between Chicago and Miami. This was well before Interstate 24 ran up and over Monteagle Mountain, so its hard-to-reach location made for the ideal hideaway. Supposedly, the floors had a lining of sand to muffle the sound of gunfire, and escape routes aided in getting the illegal hooch to its final destination during the days of Prohibition.

Today, it’s a place for an amazing meal along the road between Nashville and Chattanooga in a beautiful mountaintop location. But can you duplicate the restaurant’s wonderful steak at home?

It’s a familiar scenario: You take the family out to a fancy restaurant and order the steak, and there goes your budget for the week. It’s an amazing steak that sends your taste buds on a trip through culinary heaven — an experience you’re not likely to forget. So, you go home and try to reproduce it, and it’s an expensive disaster. It’s still less expensive than a night out at your favorite steakhouse, but the flavor is less than memorable.



Eric Gipson, executive chef of the High Point Restaurant, serves up great steaks and other dishes.

What went wrong? How do restaurants get their steaks so tender, so flavorful, so perfect? Gipson says making a great steak involves several keys. “I think it’s mostly attention to detail and knowledge of how best to prepare what you are given,” he says. “A truly good steak is first and foremost a good piece of meat. Proper seasoning and heat can turn it into something great.”

It all begins at the grocery store, but customers don’t always go for the best. You may go for the bright red cuts. They look appealing, but they have little fat, and the end result will most likely be a dry, tough piece of meat. Gipson says to look for cuts that are a little paler in color and have fine lines of fat running through

them. “The ones with the faded, almost pink hue are more tender,” he advises. “That may just be optics, as I also look for a cut that has fine white lines of fat that may make it appear less than red.”

And there’s one more thing. “People I have spoken to have the misconception that putting salt on the outside of a steak will dry it out,” he adds.

Not true.

“When heat is applied, the salt on the outside causes the outer layer to tighten up, creating something of a moisture barrier,” he says. “This traps more of the juice inside, making for a more flavorful steak all around.”

The steaks at High Point are a main feature on the menu. With nine different

options, the most popular are those that feature filet mignon, including filet mignon with Burgundy mushroom sauce, High Point Oscar, Black and Bruised Steak, Steak and Lobster, Steak and Shrimp, and Steak Diane.

And people come from near and far to order them — Chattanooga, Huntsville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Tullahoma and everywhere in between, Gipson notes. Tennessee's partnerships with foreign corporations like Nissan and Volkswagen bring customers from around the world, and the nearby University of the South in Sewanee supplies guests from among its student body and their visiting families.

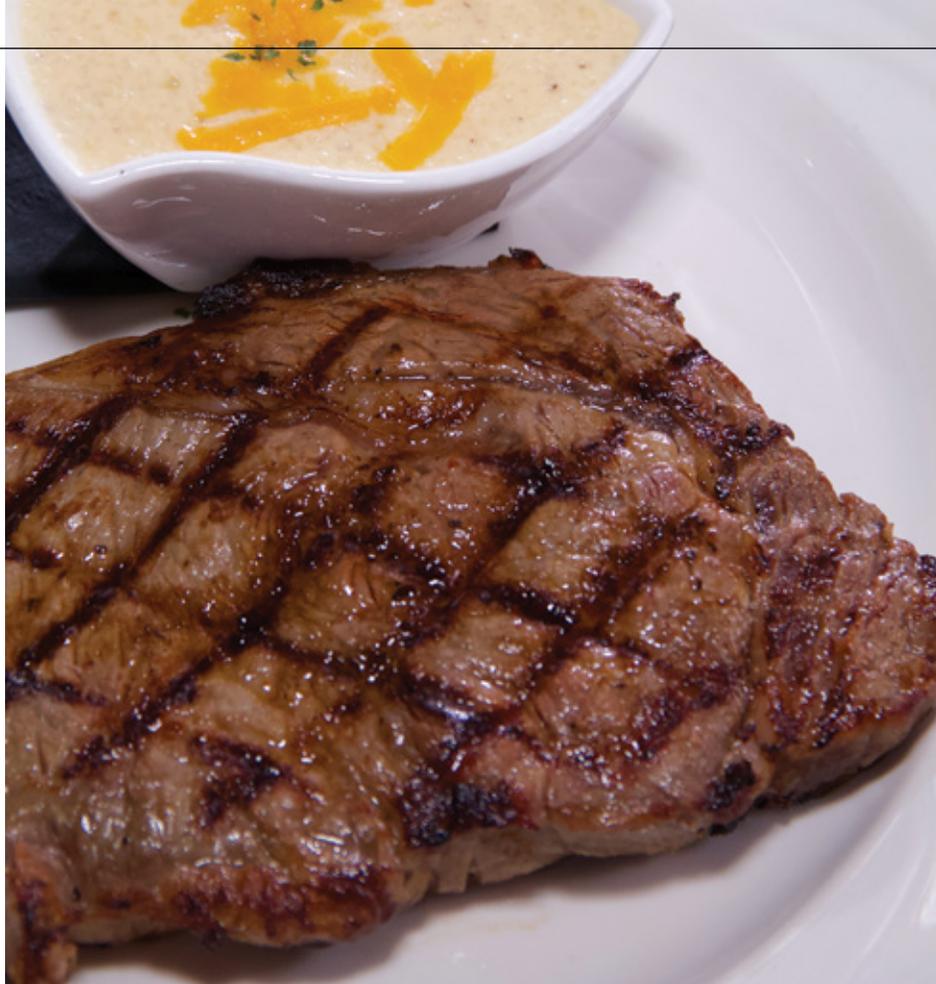
“We always strive to deliver an excellent meal at a reasonable price point. Also, our steak seasoning is unique to High Point,” Gipson says. “So the seasoning, combined with fine sauces and compound butters, add to an already excellent cut of meat.”

Gipson says grocery stores have improved on the cuts of meat they offer customers. “Of course, that is dependent on where you shop,” he says. “For years, most grocery stores sold only the cheaper USDA grades of beef or meat that wasn't graded at all.

“What we serve is USDA Choice,” Gipson says. “That means that it is closer to USDA Prime,” which is only around 2% of all beef sold. “However, all of our meat has been aged a minimum of 21 days, which makes for a more tender, flavorful steak. I'm sure that with the multitude of high-end grocery stores these days, a comparable steak can be found.”



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



## 'Steakhouse' Steaks

*This recipe is adapted from one by Food Network's Ina Garten.*

- 2 (8-ounce) filet mignons
- 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

Set the steaks out on the counter at least 30 minutes before you plan on cooking them to take the chill off.

Heat the oven to 400 F. Pat the steaks dry and then brush each steak with the oil. Mix the salt and pepper on a plate, then roll each steak in the salt-and-pepper mixture, liberally coating all sides.

Heat a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet over high heat — as high as your stove will go. Open your window and turn on your fan. This is a smoky process. Once the skillet is very hot, add the steaks to the pan. Sear them evenly on all sides, getting a nice brown crust all over. It should take about 2 minutes per side to get a good sear.

Remove the pan from heat, place a pat of butter on top of each steak, and then transfer the skillet to the oven. Bake the steaks until their internal temperature reaches your preferred doneness — 120 F for rare, 125 F for medium-rare and 135 F for medium.

Remove the steaks from the skillet and cover them tightly with aluminum foil. Allow them to rest at room temperature for 10 minutes before serving. 🗨



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