



Mountain Telephone

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024

CONNECTION



SpreeTV

Watch more, spend less

2-GIG
IS HERE!

ONE-POT WONDERS



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

Supporting the Universal Service Fund

For more than 100 years, America has embraced the belief that everyone should have reliable access to reasonably priced communications services. Today, the federal Universal Service Fund, known as the USF, continues its vital role in this mission. The fund helps rural consumers access services comparable in price and quality to those in urban areas, making services more affordable for low-income families. It also supports critical connections important to schools, libraries, health care and businesses.

As we work with NTCA members daily, we see the good the USF does for rural America. We proudly support the continuation of the USF even as new broadband programs expand access to unserved areas. Simply, it makes a practical difference.

Consider, for example, the economic value of broadband, which exceeds \$1.5 trillion annually. It sustains hundreds of thousands of jobs and adds billions of dollars to local economies. With the growing demand for broadband, the USF supports the advanced, sustainable services rural businesses need to compete globally.

Similarly, fast and reliable broadband access helps narrow health care disparities between rural and metropolitan communities. The USF expands the reach of medical services through telehealth and fosters improved patient communication as well as the adoption of electronic health records.

Join us in support of the USF and its essential mission to provide broadband access to all rural residents. I encourage you to learn more about the critical role of the USF by visiting ntca.org/universalservice. 📄



Help may be a click away

Thanks to telehealth services, a trip to a physician’s office isn’t always necessary, and when you’re fighting a winter bug, that convenience counts. Here are a few tips to make your telehealth visit as productive and easy as possible:

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPOT: Find a quiet, well-lit space for your telehealth session. It’s not a Broadway audition, but good lighting helps your doctor see you better. Eliminate background noise as much as possible — you don’t want the family pet stealing the spotlight during your appointment!

HAVE YOUR INFO READY: Make a mini cheat sheet with your symptoms, questions and any medications you take. It’s easy to forget things during a virtual visit. Plus, it makes you look like a pro patient!

DRESS APPROPRIATELY: Pajamas might be comfy, but consider saving them for bedtime. Dressing appropriately can not only help your doctor assess your physical condition but also put you in the right mindset for a serious health chat.

BE HONEST AND OPEN: Telehealth works best when you’re open about your symptoms and concerns. Don’t be shy. Doctors can only help if they know the whole story. 📄

Illustration by A.barks/Adobe Stock



Tugging at your purse strings

Online romance scams can break more than just your heart

Falling in love can make anyone vulnerable. Shady cybercriminals know this and are all too eager to steal hearts and much more.


According to the FBI, a romance scam occurs when someone creates a fake online profile and fakes romantic interest to gain trust to steal the victim's money or personal information. Also known as "catfishing," romance scams can be devastating, both financially and emotionally.

Nearly 70,000 people reported being the victim of catfishing in 2022, and losses hit a staggering \$1.3 billion, according to Federal Trade Commission statistics. But actual losses are likely much higher — romance fraud is grossly underreported due to its sensitive nature.

Romance scammers often prey on older people, who may be divorced or widowed. Online dating apps are just one place they lurk. They also reach out through popular social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. They target victims' insecurities and work to develop intimacy as quickly as possible — a practice known as "love bombing." Scammers attempt to make the victim feel special or like they're the "only one who gets" the culprit.

Sometimes a scammer will ask for a short-term loan to get out of a bad situation and start a new life with the victim. Or, they'll say access to a credit card would smooth the way to a relationship. Other gifts include asking for money to cover the customs charges for an expensive gift, or a crypto investor who wants to help the victim cash in on the trend.

Despite the warning signs, victims are often too lovestruck to realize it's a swindle.

Romance scam victims can be male or female, young or old. Their only common denominator is that they believe in true love, and they feel they have found it. 

Follow your head, not your heart

- Allow relationships to develop slowly and naturally.
- Set up a video chat to verify the identity of the person you are messaging.
- Research the person you are messaging.
- Conduct a reverse image search to make sure the person you are talking to is really the person in the photo.

If you've been scammed

Falling victim to a scammer can happen to anyone. Talking about your experience can lessen feelings of shame and help protect others from being victimized.

- Immediately contact your bank or financial institution.
- Report it as soon as possible to the FTC at reportfraud.ftc.gov.
- Alert the FBI's fraud division — the Internet Crime Complaint Center — at ic3.gov. Be prepared to share any records of your communication with the scammer.
- Contact the platform where the scammer first contacted you, so it can prevent others from being victimized.

A communications network built for today and tomorrow

When Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative committed to bringing a fast, reliable internet network to our community, we understood the work would be equal parts challenging and rewarding. Also, it would require a significant investment. However, our decisions are always guided by fiscal responsibility, and we've built with an eye on today's needs while planning for tomorrow's innovations.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

When it comes to technology, nothing is truly futureproof. Eventually something better will come along. But the systems and infrastructure that make our internet-based services possible are as close to futureproof as possible.

The start of 2024 is an opportunity to appreciate all the work that's gotten us this far. It's also a time to look at the exciting possibilities ahead, knowing Mountain is ready for a future we are only beginning to imagine.

First, let's look at some of today's less visible, but vital, uses of fast internet service. Consider medical records. Generally, these files have been digitized, making it possible to securely store information while allowing physicians locally and nationally to share the details needed for a modern medical system. The perfor-

mance of our internet network is the link needed to give local health care providers a quick, reliable way to share information.

Businesses often exchange large files or rely on videoconferencing to keep teams connected, meet with clients and collaborate. Even an industry such as agriculture — which at first seems far removed from the digital world — relies on the internet and connected devices to troubleshoot machinery problems, monitor weather conditions and more.

These are just a few of the ways services like those provided by Mountain are woven into the background of businesses, government services, education — all the fundamental parts of our lives.

But that's just the beginning. Our homes are increasingly tied to the digital world. Streaming music and video services are popular options. Countless songs, TV shows, movies, short films and more are just a click away.

Many new appliances can connect to the internet, and it's often very handy. Keep watch on a slow cooker simmering away while you're at work, thanks to a home Wi-Fi connection and smartphone app. Also, internet-connected security systems let you keep an eye on your world, even if you're away for a few days.

Gaming — including the use of virtual reality devices offering elaborate, immersive communities — is extremely popular. The key to the best performance and most enjoyable experience? A fast, reliable internet connection just like the one available to you from Mountain.

As the number of connected devices expands and cloud-based tools become even more important, experts forecast an ever-growing need for internet services capable of moving greater amounts of information even faster.

The network created by Mountain — one many major cities would envy — is capable and prepared to serve you in 2024 and beyond. Thank you for being part of Mountain. 📺

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2024. It is distributed without charge to all member/owners of the cooperative.



Mountain Telephone

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc., is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to providing communications technology to the people of Elliott, Menifee, Morgan, Wolfe and a section of Bath counties. The company covers 1,048 square miles and supplies service to nearly 11,500 members.

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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



From left, Lee, Julie and Nick Picklesimer, of Hazel Green, talk about how SpreeTV works for their family. See story Page 12.

Photo by William LeMaster

MOUNTAINS OF MONEY FOR SCHOOL!

Scholarship applications now being accepted

Mountain Telephone is proud to invest in our community by offering several ways for students to earn money for school. This year, we are excited to offer even more scholarships to help local students build bright and prosperous futures.

► Mountain Telephone and Morehead State University scholarships

- Multiple \$3,000 scholarships will be awarded.
- Scholarships are available to residents of Elliott, Wolfe, Morgan, Menifee and Bath counties who are attending Morehead State University.
- Application deadline is March 15.
- To find out more, visit the Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative Facebook page, or call Lisa Fannin at 606-743-3121.

► Mountain Telephone and Maysville Community & Technical College

- Multiple \$1,500 scholarships will be awarded.
- Scholarships are available to residents of Elliott, Wolfe, Morgan, Menifee and Bath counties who are attending Maysville Community & Technical College.
- Application deadline is April 15.
- To find out more, visit kctcs.edu or contact your high school guidance counselor.

► Foundation for Rural Service scholarship

- Multiple \$2,500 scholarships awarded to students all over the country by FRS, a national nonprofit organization that advocates for rural telecommunications providers.
- If a scholarship recipient from Mountain Telephone's territory wins, Mountain provides a portion of the scholarship money to FRS.
- For more information, visit frs.org or email foundation@frs.org.
- To find out more or to apply, visit frs.org. Under the Programs tab, click on Scholarships.



“The biggest mistake that students and their families make is they feel they wouldn't qualify – they opt out.”

— James Lewis, president and co-founder of the National Society of High School Scholars

Need help paying for services?

Lifeline assistance may be an option for you!

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 Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension benefit
- Meet income requirements

DO YOU QUALIFY?

Apply today!

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, please visit lifelinesupport.org or call 800-234-9473.

NOTICE TO MOUNTAIN TELEPHONE CUSTOMERS ABOUT BATTERY BACKUP

The fiber telephone service in your home requires commercial power to operate. Therefore, at no additional cost to you, an eight-hour battery backup power supply was installed with your service to allow for emergency operation during power outages. This means that emergency phone service is anticipated to function for at least eight hours in an extended power outage.

The ability of the battery to power your phone service can be affected by many factors, including the age of your battery, improper home wire grounding, unprotected power surges, manufacturer defect, improper storage conditions or failure to keep the power pack plugged in. Our batteries do not power self-owned phone handsets that require separate power. You must have a phone capable of being plugged into a Mountain Telephone jack to use the backup battery.

If a longer backup battery operation is desired, we now have 24-hour battery packs available for an additional fee. Should longer operation be required, we suggest you look for commercially available backup power options, such as a generator. For additional information, please call us at 606-743-3121.

Cumberland Caverns
near McMinnville,
Tennessee

BEAUTY LIES BELOW

Area caverns contain
links to the past

Story by KATHY DENES

Bones and footprints of prehistoric jaguars and their prey are preserved within many caves across the Southeast, but that's just the beginning. There are also works of art, as well as artifacts and writings of indigenous peoples — from the ancients to those who would face a Trail of Tears. There are even tools left behind by those who mined saltpeter used in multiple wars.

There are colonies of bats, ever-growing stalactites and stalagmites, as well as flowing underground waters. Some caves are easily found, offering entry through a vast visible gash in a mountainside. Others remain hidden until their accidental discovery, perhaps by a passerby on a hot day who notices cool air seeping out through a wall of rock. They range in size from shallow squeezes to soaring cathedrals, and their passages can stretch for hundreds of miles.

KENTUCKY



Kentucky's Mammoth Cave is the world's longest known cave system, with over 400 miles of its corridors mapped and surveyed. Within a short drive of Mammoth are numerous other caves with their own claims to fame, making the Park City area one of the most popular cave tour destinations in the country. Popular neighboring attractions include Diamond Caverns, a World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve that has offered public tours for more than 160 years. A good resource for learning more about these and other notable caves across the state is worldofcaves.com/the-best-list-of-caves-in-kentucky.

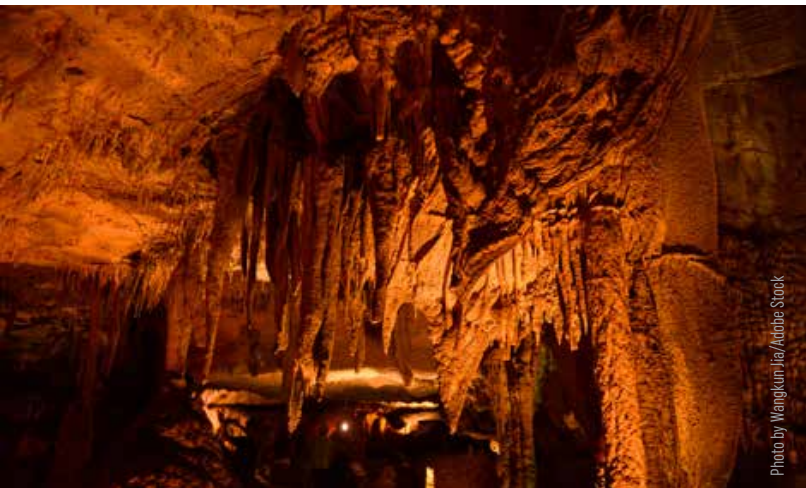


Photo by Wangkun Jia / Adobe Stock



Photo by K.A. / Adobe Stock

In Kentucky's Mammoth Cave, stalactites create a memorable natural spectacle.

The National Park Service manages Mammoth Cave.

TENNESSEE



Tennessee's caverns are spread far and wide. Near McMinnville are Cumberland Caverns, open daily year-round, and Big Bone Cave, named for the giant sloth bones found near where Civil War-era saltpeter vats remain. In the Chattanooga area, visitors can descend by elevator deep into Lookout Mountain to witness the beauty of Ruby Falls or can cross the interstate to visit Raccoon Mountain Caverns. A drive up I-75 brings visitors to Sweetwater, where boats glide across The Lost Sea in artifact-rich Craighead Caverns, open every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas. Continue toward the Great Smoky Mountains to find the Forbidden Caverns of Sevierville and impressive Tuckaleechee Caverns in Townsend. Read about some of these and more at explorationjunkie.com/caves-in-tennessee.

ALABAMA



Alabama is home to hundreds of caves stretching along the Appalachian foothills. Of those, six are touted by onlyinyourstate.com as among the very best and included in its Alabama Cave Trail. These renowned subterranean destinations include Russell Cave, Neversink Pit, Sauta Cave, Cathedral Caverns, Rickwood Caverns and Majestic Cave, formerly called DeSoto Caverns. Find information about these and other popular Alabama caves at enterthecaves.com/best-caves-in-alabama. 📍

DIG DEEPER

- » cavern.com/directory
- » worldofcaves.com/the-ultimate-list-of-caves-in-america
- » abackpackerstale.com/best-caves-in-the-united-states
- » Also, visit tripadvisor.com and search for "caves" to find options in your area and beyond.



TO SAVE A CAVE

Protecting the fragile ecosystems and histories of caves large and small is the mission of Southeastern Cave Conservancy Inc. The nonprofit has worked since 1991 to acquire and sustainably manage endangered caves. Through cave purchases and its EduBat and Project Underground programs, among others, SCCi has preserved historic Cherokee syllabary, written characters serving as an alphabet, found on cavern walls and created compelling curriculum and educator workshops. Check out the group's ongoing projects at saveyourcaves.org.



Photo courtesy of Cumberland Caverns

Cumberland Caverns near McMinnville, Tennessee, offers unique adventures, including a lantern tour.

2-GIG KINSHIP

West Liberty family keeps the connections strong

Story by JEN CALHOUN
Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

When Kayla Adkins first heard about Mountain Telephone's 2-Gig broadband service, she didn't hesitate. "We were like, 'Yep, that's for us,'" says the busy West Liberty-based project manager and mother of two. "Between my work, my husband's work and all the things our kids do, 2-Gig is just what we needed to operate in our family."

Mountain's 2-gigabit service is the company's highest-level internet plan. With Mountain's 2-Gig service, this section of Eastern Kentucky is privy to some of the fastest, most reliable broadband in the country. Kayla sees the benefits play out almost every single day.

"I work from home for an insurance company, which means I'm always in online meetings," she says. "My company has offices all over the world, so I work with people everywhere from India to Alabama and California. When it comes to internet reliability, I've had far less problems than other people I work with. And a lot of them are in big or midsized cities."

KEEPING UP WITH THE ADKINSES

Kayla's job is not the only reason the family sought out ultra-high-speed internet, however. Her husband, Brandan, a sales manager for Clayton Homes, often sends and receives documents from clients, while her children, Oliver, 13, and Ellie, 12, play games, socialize with friends and do homework online. "We just have so many devices that are technology based," Kayla says. "So, we figured this would work for us."

Despite their busy days, the Adkins family slows the pace



Ellie Adkins, 12, connects with her friends over Wi-Fi.



The Adkins family sits down to stream a movie.

“Between my work and my husband's work and all the things our kids do, 2-Gig is just what we needed to operate in our family.”

— Kayla Adkins, Mountain 2-Gig internet subscriber

in the evenings. "A typical evening is mostly electronics free," Kayla says. "Once the kids get home from school, we get work and homework done all at once. By 5 p.m., we've put our devices away. But we might watch a movie."

After they've all spent some quality time together, the kids get one hour to spend online. Ellie usually enjoys FaceTiming with her friends, while Oliver likes to play computer and video games.

POWERFUL CONNECTIONS

Kayla says they incorporated the routine initially as a way to help Oliver, who is autistic, improve his communication and social skills. "When he started getting older, he had a tendency to withdraw," Kayla says. "I understand that. After a long day at school, it can be tough for people on the spectrum. They want to retreat. But we have to push those boundaries. And when you have a kid on the spectrum, you look at things a little differently. There are things that not everybody would pay attention to, but I have to because it could affect his future."

As the new routine went on, however, she realized it was good for everybody. Turning off the outside noise allowed them to connect as a family, talk about their days and discuss any current events that may be confusing or unsettling to the children.

"These are just the times we live in," Kayla says. "Everybody wants their kid to be in everything all the time, and you don't always have that connectedness. But I don't want my kids to think that's how their life has to be — always on the go, always busy."



Kayla Adkins, who works for an insurance company, needs Mountain's 2-Gig service to videoconference all over the country and the world.



Oliver Adkins, 13, loves to play video games seamlessly thanks to Mountain's 2-Gig service.

Ellie, Kayla admits, is a world-class joiner. She plays basketball and softball and has even played on time-intensive travel teams. Ellie's outgoing personality also keeps her busy with friends and other activities. "We still have to find a way to balance it all," Kayla says. "Before the game or after it, we're going to sit down and connect as a family and have a conversation. I want them to always feel like they can come to me with a problem."

FREEDOM IN WEST LIBERTY

Kayla says she's proud her community has an internet service provider like Mountain. The broadband opens up her own job opportunities, allowing her to raise her family in the same town she grew up in. "I love my little town," she says of West Liberty. "It's nice to work with talent from all over the world, but from the comfort of a small, safe little town where you know everybody. You don't worry about sending your kids to school, and you are up with everybody. It's perfect for me."

DOUBLE THE GIG!

Want the fastest internet service available? You're in luck. Mountain Telephone is one of the few internet service providers capable of offering multigig speeds through its cutting-edge fiber network. Do more, watch more and play more with Mountain's fastest, most reliable internet package yet. To find out more, call 606-743-3121 to speak with a Mountain representative.

GIGGING IT

Not every household needs 1- and 2-Gig internet speeds just yet. Those who do generally run several devices online, work from home, stream movies and TV shows or enjoy the edge that kind of speed gives them in gaming. Gig speeds also complement high-powered and cutting-edge digital devices, like the latest smart TVs and video gaming equipment.



Brandan Adkins, who works for Clayton Homes, uses the family's 2-Gig service to send contracts and other large files to clients.

IN THE GAME

Esports growth offers students community and opportunity

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

The Texas Wesleyan esports program started with a 2017 conversation that wasn't about video games at all. Eugene Friar, who was then working in student affairs and is now director of esports and gaming, approached the vice president of his division to talk about what the university could do to be a fun and exciting option for prospective students.

"I was hoping he'd give me some answers, but he flipped it on me and was like, 'Bring me some ideas, and we'll discuss it,'" Eugene says. "I wasn't thinking esports at all, even though I've been a gamer since the Commodore 64 days."

While brainstorming, Eugene came across fledgling esports programs at places like the University of California, Irvine, Missouri's Maryville University and Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania. Groups of students were coming together to compete in multiplayer games like Overwatch, Super Smash Bros. and League of Legends.

Today, the National Association of Collegiate Esports, or NACE, recognizes more than 240 schools with competitive esports teams. The experience not only opens doors in the gaming industry but can also help students develop skills for a variety of careers.

Texas Wesleyan's esports team evolved from a group focused primarily on competition to one that welcomes anyone from casual hobbyists to hardcore gamers. For Eugene, it's an important community that supports students who might not share other interests on campus. But it's also a

Trojan horse for helping them find their path through school and beyond.

"We tell our recruits early in the process my job is to trick you into learning," Eugene says. "If you want to try out for one of our teams, hopefully we'll go to the stadium and play. But what's your major? What are you going to do after you graduate? How is this going to help you get there?"

LEVELING UP

As access to high-speed internet expands from urban centers to rural areas, competitive gaming's popularity has soared. A study by Pew Research Center found that about 70% of college students say they play video games at least once in a while.

While the Texas Wesleyan Rams have teams for the squad-based shooter game Overwatch 2 and the fighting game Super Smash Bros., it's also important for Eugene to appeal to that larger audience. When the program was more focused on competitive gaming, he found that some students with a casual interest in gaming felt like they didn't belong. That's why the



The Texas Wesleyan University Overwatch team reviews video for a match.

Photo courtesy of Eugene Friar



ABOVE: University of Kentucky students enjoy competing in the school's new esports lounge.

RIGHT: Students try out the gaming lounge at the University of Kentucky's Latinx Open House.

club includes a team that creates, edits and streams content for platforms like Twitch and YouTube, as well as groups for fans of anime, Dungeons & Dragons and more casual gaming.

Eugene says overall participation increased by slightly deemphasizing competition and offering more ways to participate with casual gaming clubs, a social media team and an event team. "We went from having seven competitive teams to two, and the number of students in our program has actually gone up a little bit because there's more ways for people to get involved," he says.



Bryce Edwards, a junior, received a scholarship to help run the esports program and became captain of the school's Smash Bros. team. He says the social and leadership skills he learned in that role will be invaluable as he pursues a career in marketing.

For Kelvin Coker, a senior criminal justice major and wrestler, it's been a new way to connect with people. "People need a place that allows them to be themselves and interact with people of different backgrounds so that they can develop the skills necessary to go through life," Kelvin says. "It was a different vibe than wrestling, which was extremely refreshing. It felt good to be among people who shared interests in things outside of sports."

Heath Price, associate vice president of partnerships at the University of Kentucky, found the same enthusiasm when he first met with an informal esports club on his campus in 2018. With school resources behind it, the UK Esports Club has grown to include hundreds of members who enjoy the university's recently completed gaming lounge, along with approximately 70 students who play competitively.

"What we've seen is that the idea of a gamer just being someone who might be interested in building games is kind of a misnomer," Heath says. "A lot of these

young people have varying interests. I think as much of a career builder as anything is giving people some of those opportunities for exposure and to do things in the community."

TAILOR MADE

Eugene takes a similar approach at

Texas Wesleyan. Whether it's a student who wants to start a clothing line designing the school's esports jersey or a mass communications major building the team's content roadmap for the year, he always looks for ways the program can help students pursue their larger goals.

"The content team isn't about making funny content. It's about project management," he says. "The student organizations aren't just about talking about the things you love. They're leading a meeting and organizing people."

With the gaming landscape constantly changing, that may even mean meeting students somewhere other than esports. Texas Wesleyan's teams currently compete in the second division of the NACE Starleague, the biggest collegiate esports league in North America.

The Rams had a national championship-winning team for the FIFA soccer game series. Today, that team doesn't exist because the game no longer exists. Earlier this year, Electronic Arts, publisher of the FIFA series of games, ended its branding partnership with global soccer organization FIFA. That left some competitive players out in the cold and highlights a unique challenge for esports.

"You don't win a national championship in football and a few years later it's like, 'Remember when we used to have a football team?' So when the publishers get involved it's tricky," Eugene says. "It wouldn't surprise me if the esports part of what we do goes away in time and you see the more content creation and pop culture things last. It's about meeting the students' needs and matching their interests in a really positive way."



The Texas Wesleyan University Super Smash Bros. team prepares for a competition.



The Picklesimers, Julie, Lee and their son, Nick, switched to Mountain's SpreeTV app so they could have cable television on multiple TVs for the price of one.

ENDLESS STREAM

MRTC's NEW SpreeTV app is a hit

Story by JEN CALHOUN
Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

Julie and Lee Picklesimer switched from their regular cable box to Mountain Telephone's SpreeTV for one reason — they simply wanted more bang for their buck. “We were talking to someone from Mountain during their Wolfe County Customer Appreciation Day last fall,” Julie says. “When he said we could have our cable programming on more than one TV for the same price, that was all it took.”

SpreeTV is an app that allows customers to stream their favorite local TV and cable channels without the need for the traditional set-top box. With a single Mountain Telephone SpreeTV subscription, users can connect multiple devices, including television sets, smartphones and tablets. They can watch shows and movies via their Wi-Fi, while still enjoying features such as digital channel guides, restart, catchup and DVR.

“It's very user-friendly, too,” Julie says. “You just call Mountain to get the app, sign in with a username and password, then watch TV. You don't have to wait for someone to come install it for you.”

MORE OPTIONS

Streaming TV simply means watching television through an internet connection rather than using a cable box or satellite dish. To stream SpreeTV, a customer needs a smart TV or regular TV connected to a streaming device using Android Play Store, Roku store or the Amazon store.

There are many streaming services available, and providers like



Nick, Julie and Lee love that SpreeTV gives them the ability to enjoy their favorite shows on their individual schedules.

Netflix, Hulu and Prime Video are some of the most well-known. SpreeTV is different in that it actually allows customers to watch the same cable channels they watched through a set-top box. And, like traditional cable, Mountain offers three different plans from which to choose.

Before SpreeTV, the Picklesimers had a single cable box connected to their living room TV. It could be fairly limiting, especially when Julie, her husband and their 15-year-old son, Nick, wanted to watch different things.

After work, Julie likes to flip on the local news while she gets


dinner started and does a little housework. At night, she might put on a Lifetime movie or watch a true crime documentary. "It helps me decompress in the evening," she says. "TV is good for that."

But Lee likes Westerns, and he tends to watch them faithfully when college football's not in season. "Before, we just had the one TV set up with the cable box," Julie says. "But now we can all watch what we want, because SpreeTV lets us get Mountain's service on all three of our TVs."

BEST IN SHOW

Julie says she likes that she can record shows through SpreeTV's DVR function or back a program up to the beginning if she needs to. She can also flip through the channel guide when she's not sure what she wants to watch. "There's nothing hard about it," she says.

Mountain launched the SpreeTV app in mid-2023. As of Sept. 1, 2023, anyone subscribed to the company's video services was automatically set up with the SpreeTV app instead of the set-top boxes. "It just seems more up to date than those cable boxes," Julie says. "And you don't seem to lose your signal like you sometimes would with the box. It's so much better."

As a Mountain internet subscriber, Julie also appreciates the fast and friendly service. "If there's any kind of issue, it just seems like they respond so quickly," she says. "It's the best customer service I've ever seen. I think it's what I love about them most." 

Stream on!

To get started, call MRTC and request the SpreeTV package that works for you. Find the app at your favorite app store. On your smart TV or device, log into the app with a username and password provided by MRTC. You can also visit mrtc.com to find the plan that works for you.

Benefits of SpreeTV include:

- No more cable boxes
- Simple to use platform
- Watch TV in any room
- Maintain one account for multiple devices, including TV, smartphones and tablets
- Restart, catchup and 50 hours of DVR included for free
- Guide channel to make programs easy to find
- Choose the channel package that fits your budget



When one pot hits the spot

Simple, delicious and easy

Meals you can make in one pot are ideal for today's busy cooks for two reasons. For starters, little time is wasted going from one pot to another, making sure everything is cooking together nicely. Secondly, you're cooking in one pot, so there's minimal cleanup.

As the name implies, one-pot meals are just that. They are the secret to getting dinner on the table in a jiffy. Generally, the vegetables and protein are cooked together in the same pot. If any other side dishes are needed, it's usually nothing more than a green salad with buttery croutons or a nice piece of crusty bread.

One-pot meals are filled with comfort, something we all yearn for like a big, cozy blanket on a chilly winter's night.



**Food Editor
Anne P. Braly
is a native of
Chattanooga,
Tennessee.**

Photography by **Mark Gilliland**
Food Styling by **Rhonda Gilliland**

CHEESEBURGER PASTA

This is the perfect easy wintertime one-pot meal. It's like having a cheeseburger and spaghetti at the same time, and the kids will love it!

- 1 yellow onion
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 pound ground beef
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 2 cups beef broth
- 8 ounces pasta shells, uncooked
- 4 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 tablespoons pickle relish
- 2 green onions, sliced

Finely dice the onion. Add the onion, olive oil and ground beef to a large deep skillet, and saute over medium heat until the beef is fully browned and the onion is soft and translucent. Drain off any excess fat, if needed.

Add the flour to the skillet and continue

to stir and cook for 1 minute more. The flour will begin to coat the bottom of the skillet. Be careful not to let the flour burn.

Add the tomato sauce and beef broth to the skillet and stir to dissolve the flour off the bottom of the skillet.

Add the uncooked pasta to the skillet and stir to combine. The liquid in the skillet may not fully cover the pasta, but that is OK.

Place a lid on the skillet, turn the heat up to medium-high, and let the liquid come up to a boil. Once it reaches a boil, give it a quick stir to loosen any pasta from the bottom of the skillet. Replace the lid, and turn the heat down to low. Let the pasta simmer, stirring occasionally (always replacing the lid), for about 10 minutes, or until the pasta is tender and the sauce has thickened. Turn off the heat.

Add the shredded cheddar to the skillet and stir until it has melted into the sauce. Stir the relish into the sauce, then top with sliced green onions. Serve warm.



FIVE-HOUR BEEF STEW

Delicious smells will fill your home as this stew cooks slowly in the oven.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 1/2 pounds chuck roast, cut into bite-size pieces 1 cup celery, chunked 4 carrots, chunked 2-3 medium potatoes, chunked 1 onion, sliced or large dice 1/2 cup fresh bread crumbs 1 large can tomatoes 1 cup red wine, optional 1 tablespoon salt 2 tablespoons sugar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-5 tablespoons minute tapioca 2-3 generous splashes of Worcestershire sauce |
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Do not brown the meat. Combine all ingredients in a large baking dish with a tight-fitting lid or cover securely with foil. Bake in a 250 F oven for 5-6 hours. Do not hurry this stew. The slow oven is the key to success.



ONE-PAN CHICKEN PASTA

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon minced garlic, divided
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 1/2 cups crushed tomatoes
- 8 ounces penne pasta
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large broiler-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Add panko and 1 teaspoon garlic. Cook, stirring, until the panko is golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside. Wipe out the pan.

Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in the pan over medium-high heat. Add chicken, Italian seasoning, salt and the



remaining 1 tablespoon garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until the chicken is no longer pink on the outside, about 2 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes and penne. Bring to a boil and cook, uncovered, stirring frequently, until the penne is cooked and the sauce has reduced and thickened, 15 to 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, position an oven rack in the upper third of the oven. Preheat the broiler to high. When the pasta is cooked, sprinkle mozzarella over the penne mixture. Place the pan under the broiler. Broil until the mozzarella is bubbling and beginning to brown, about 1 minute. Top with the panko mixture, Parmesan and basil.



ONE-POT PRIMAVERA

- 4 skin-on, bone-in chicken thighs
- 1 pound small red potatoes, halved
- 1 pound Brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, or as needed
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 (1-ounce) package of ranch dressing mix
- 6 slices bacon, chopped

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place chicken thighs in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

Toss potatoes, Brussels sprouts and garlic together with olive oil in a bowl until vegetables are lightly coated. Add vegetables around and between chicken thighs in the baking dish. Season with salt, pepper and thyme. Evenly pour the entire packet of ranch seasoning over the chicken and vegetables. Sprinkle chopped bacon on top.

Bake until chicken is no longer pink at the bone and the juices run clear, 30 to 35 minutes. An instant-read thermometer inserted near the bone should read 165 F.

Set an oven rack about 6 inches from the heat source and preheat the oven's broiler. Place the baking dish under the broiler, and cook until chicken skin becomes golden brown and crisp, 2 to 3 minutes. 🍴



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