



Mountain Telephone

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

CONNECTION



Marble Mania

Family keeps a
tradition alive

REMOTE
WORK

COMFORT
FOOD



By Shirley Bloomfield, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

An Ongoing Mission NTCA supports rural broadband

As we begin a new year, our NTCA members are on my mind, specifically how they do so much to create a better tomorrow by deploying and sustaining reliable broadband networks that connect rural communities to the world.

We've come a long way since the creation of NTCA in 1954, and I wanted to start 2025 with a reminder—or possibly an introduction—to who we are and how we serve the people who work so hard for you.

We represent about 850 independent, family-owned and community-based rural telecommunications companies. Without NTCA members, many communities would continue to be left behind by larger, national internet providers. So, we strive to advance policies that help these companies close the digital divide. This includes supporting programs like the Universal Service Fund, which helps rural consumers get and stay connected to high-quality, affordable internet.

I'm proud to note how well our NTCA members do their jobs. The robust and reliable broadband they provide enables businesses to connect to customers, doctors to patients and teachers to students. And the work they do in their communities goes beyond providing internet service. Many host digital literacy classes, sponsor STEM and esports initiatives at schools, support economic development initiatives and so much more.

In short, NTCA members are dedicated to improving the communities they serve.

As we enter a new year, we continue to support our members as they work to make your lives the best they can be. 🗨️

HIDDEN CONNECTIONS

BROADBAND NETWORKS SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

Your fast, reliable internet connection connects you to the internet, bringing you a seemingly endless number of services. Whether you enjoy streaming entertainment, gaming, video calls and more, this essential service adapts to your needs.



Did you know, however, that same network may also underpin a range of other services essential to your community? While the specifics may vary from place to place, fast internet networks create a foundation for rural America.



PUBLIC SAFETY

The communications systems serving first responders often rely on broadband-speed internet.



EDUCATION

School systems send large amounts of data and offer classrooms access to online resources.



GOVERNMENT

From informational websites and apps to the computer networks and databases needed to operate, local governments require excellent connectivity.



HEALTH CARE

Whether transmitting medical records or for telehealth visits, medical providers increasingly rely on digital tools.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Fast broadband networks provide a community resource attractive to both businesses and homebuyers, creating a keystone for growth.

A Safe Place to Stay

Isaiah House provides comfort for foster children



Photo courtesy of Corey Paulson

Television host Mike Rowe, center, surprises Isaiah 117 House co-founder Ronda Paulson and her family for a taping of his Facebook show “Returning the Favor.”

Story by MELANIE JONES

When Ronda and Corey Paulson met their first foster child at the back door of the Carter County, Tennessee, Department of Children’s Services, he was wearing too-small pajamas. The clothes he was wearing when he was removed from his unsuitable home were filthy, and DCS was unable to provide any that fit him properly.

The 9-month-old was fortunate the couple could come get him quickly. Some foster children spend hours—if not days—at overwhelmed and understaffed DCS offices, sometimes sleeping on the floor.

That situation has begun to change, however, thanks to a far-reaching program the Paulsons were inspired to establish in 2018. Thanks to word of mouth and a 2020 feature by “Dirty Jobs” host Mike Rowe on his Facebook page, their effort is spreading nationwide.

When the couple took the baby boy, Isaiah, home they lavished him with love and everything else an infant could need. But the Paulsons couldn’t stop thinking about something they learned in their

foster-parenting classes—the DCS office is usually the only place for a child to go on removal day.

They thought of little Isaiah. And they started studying the Bible’s book of Isaiah, including part of one verse in particular, Isaiah 1:17, which calls on people to “take up the cause of the fatherless.”

Then they thought, “What if there was a home?” Corey says.

BUILDING A MOVEMENT

So, that’s what they set out to create. Ronda put together a board and worked with the local DCS office to come up with a workable concept. They raised money, bought a house and renovated it to DCS specifications. They painted the door red, and they called it Isaiah 117 House.

The house provides space for DCS workers who now bring children there instead of an office building. Children and teens have access to baths and showers. They get brand-new clean clothes and

toys. They have beds to sleep in if the placement takes more than a few hours. Volunteers cook them nutritious meals and comfort food.

That was 2018, and it was supposed to be one and done. “Clearly, we’ve learned that God had other plans,” Corey says.

Word of mouth spread. Soon neighboring Tennessee counties wanted their own Isaiah 117 Houses. Then, in 2020, Ronda and the Isaiah 117 House were featured on Mike Rowe’s Facebook show “Returning the Favor.” Two million people saw that episode on March 9, 2020. Then the calls really started coming in. Corey says they heard from people in 41 states and four countries wanting to start their own Isaiah 117 Houses. Now about 30 are open and more are in the works across 12 states.

“On March 13, the world shut down,” Corey says of the COVID-19 pandemic. “But our mission kept growing. We say Mike Rowe and Jesus are building houses for children.” 📺

LEARN MORE

Interested in learning more about Isaiah 117 House or how to establish one in your area? Visit isaiah117house.com.

Key Choices Ring in the New Year

Our students begin their paths to the future

Happy new year. I hope you had a wonderful holiday season and enjoyed your time with friends and family. Now, we're at a moment for resolutions and contemplating all we'll achieve in the next 12 months.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

One particular group will soon reach a significant milestone—graduating from high school. Some members of the Class of 2025 already cemented their plans for the next few years, but others are likely considering the short-term steps that will determine their long-term paths.

As these students begin their final months of high school, I want to thank them and their families for all they do, because these young people will become our community's leaders for decades to come.

In my role with Mountain Telephone, I appreciate the opportunities these young people have. We provide the essential communications resources for online education, work-from-home jobs and so much more. Every day, we see how young people make the most of

the digital tools connecting our community to the world.

Many students complete the early college selection process by late winter. Come spring, others will pick their next destinations. We celebrate these choices because a college education is a wonderful, challenging opportunity. From engineers to physicians, business leaders and so many other professional paths, the road begins with college.

However, that's far from the only option. Traditional colleges won't meet the needs of everyone. Some future members of the workforce will enroll at a community college, trade or technical school, and we applaud these options. The route from high school to high-paying jobs in in-demand fields based on trade school educations may be shorter and much less expensive than traditional college degrees.

What would we do without expert locksmiths, reliable truck drivers, electricians, plumbers and the other tradespeople who make modern life possible? Individuals who invest their time to learn these skills are invaluable.

These are topics close to our hearts at Mountain because the people who install the networks that make our services possible need the training to bring you the highest-quality service. In fact, local technical schools and colleges provide training and accreditation to create a foundation for these vital professionals.

Our hope is all our young people have the resources and ability to choose the career best for them. Then, hopefully, they'll be part of our community for generations to come.

As we begin this new year, remember the high school seniors around us face important decisions. As their communications provider, we're proud to offer the powerful internet network linking them to all the resources they need to take their next steps.

May your 2025 be filled with joy. Thank you for letting us serve you. 📞



CONNECTION

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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:



Roby Gullett shoots a marble in a game that's helped keep generations of his family together. See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of 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, 2025.
- To find out more, visit moreheadstate.academicworks.com, or call Kesha Ison at 606-743-3121.

Mountain Telephone and Kentucky Community & Technical College System scholarships

- 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, 2025.
- To find out more, visit kctcs.edu or contact your high school guidance counselor.

Foundation for Rural Service scholarship

- FRS, a nonprofit organization that advocates for rural telephone providers, awards multiple \$2,500 scholarships to students all over the country.
- 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.
- Applications must be submitted by February 14, 2025.



“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 if you qualify for and receive one of the following benefits:

- SNAP
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- 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 checklifeline.org or call 800-234-9473.

BATTERY BACKUP NOTICE

The fiber telephone service in your home requires electric power to operate. Therefore, at no added 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 longer backup battery operation is desired, we now have 24-hour battery packs available for an additional fee. Should longer operation be needed, we suggest you look for commercially available backup-power options, like a generator, from vendors such as Uninterruptible Power Supply, etc. For more information, please call 606-743-3121.

Roll Out the Red Carpet

Fans play key role in film festivals' success

Story by KATHY DENES

The new year brings film fans front-row access to the latest—possibly greatest—in movie entertainment. Surprising plot twists, emotional turbulence, enlightenment, wild outdoor adventures, horror, invasions from space and even close encounters with celebrities are all in store. The 2025 film festivals are ready for their close-up.

These festivals in communities large and small offer great destinations. There's something for everyone. For example, the Lookout Wild Film Festival is a staple in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

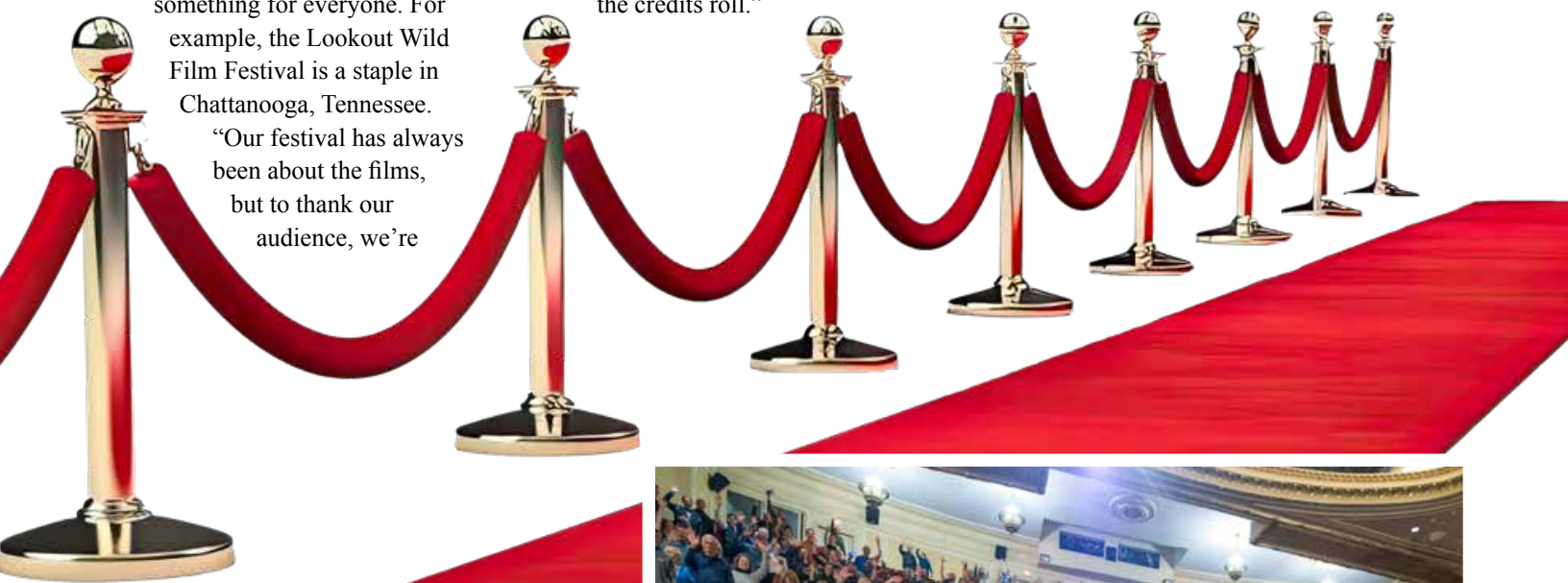
“Our festival has always been about the films, but to thank our audience, we're

trying to bring in more of the festival aspect,” says Steve Rogers, event director for Lookout Wild Film Festival. “It's about creating a welcoming and inclusive festival culture. You get to be in a room where every person around you shares a love for adventure and the craft of storytelling. Exploring amazing locations, cheering for stunning visuals and tearing up at touching moments become shared experiences that stay with you long after the credits roll.”

FAN FOCUS

Almost every film festival relies on fan participation. Screenings and special events are typically open to the public.

Fans at film festivals often rub elbows with industry insiders, filmmakers and actors as they get an inside look at the movies and topics that will shape the entertainment scene in the coming year. They also get to see impactful projects that



Festivalgoers pack a Chattanooga venue for the Lookout Wild Film Festival.

REGIONAL FESTIVAL FARE

The Lookout Wild Film Festival, Chattanooga, Tennessee: The festival season in the Southeast starts out on the wild side when this returns to Chattanooga, Jan. 16-19, for its 13th year. The festival welcomes guests to its new venue, The Signal at the historic Choo Choo complex, to screen films capturing the thrill of outdoor adventures and the importance of environmental conservation. Live music is thrown in for good measure before screening sessions and during intermissions. Find details on the festival focused on "wild places and the people they inspire" at lwff.org.

The Chattanooga Film Festival, named after its host city: The festival is June 21-28 at the historic Read House. The films are a treat for fans of horror, and the festival touts itself as a summer camp for cinephiles. Actor and producer Elijah Wood won the Moonstruck MoonPie Eating Contest back in 2015.

The Southern Fried Film Festival, Huntsville, Alabama: This festival combines independent film, music and technology.

The Lindsey Film Fest, Florence, Alabama: The University of North Alabama hosts the Lindsey Film Fest, Feb. 27 to March 1. Created in 1988 by George "Goober" Lindsey of "Andy Griffith Show" fame, the festival is free.

The Beaufort International Film Festival, Beaufort, South Carolina: The festival returns Feb. 18-23 for its 19th run. Last year fans saw actor Gary Sinise receive the Pat Conroy Lifetime Achievement Award as the festival celebrated the 30th anniversary of "Forrest Gump." Beaufort served as a backdrop for the film.

Cosmic Holler Film Fest, Ashland, Kentucky: An out-of-this-world experience is guaranteed. This one-day fall film festival at the Paramount Arts Center is a celebration of all things science fiction. Last year's festival kicked off with a visit from Capt. Kirk himself, William Shatner.

may never make it to their neighborhood theaters. But beyond that, fans meet people with similar interests, making the festivals social events involving much more than just cramming in as many screenings as possible.

Finding a great festival to attend is easy—they are plentiful. One great resource for starting your search is filmfreeway.com.

HIT THE MARK

A festival's website is the best resource to find everything from ticket availability to screenings info, schedules, parking and even lodging. Online ticket sales for the public often start well in advance, and popular festivals can sell out quickly.

A great option for the adventurous film buff is to sign up as a festival volunteer. Many festivals are staffed by volunteers, and even the largest festivals rely heavily on volunteer workers. Duties range from greeting patrons and taking tickets to helping at evening parties. Volunteers often reap the rewards such as free admission and sometimes even access to industry professionals.

Another option is to become a member of the organization putting on a festival, which can bring year-round benefits. Some festivals also offer members the option of in-home streaming of films throughout the year, while others have affiliations that provide discounts at movie theaters throughout the country.

Once at the festivals, attendees can easily navigate their many options through schedules continually updated on the event's website or even through an app. Take, for example, the Sidewalk Film Festival, which will take over the Historic Theatre District in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, Aug. 18-24. Spread across about a dozen venues, it offers more than 200 film screenings, plus educational and Q&A sessions. To help attendees stay on track, the festival's website, sidewalkfest.com, has maps and an interactive schedule. 📱



Outdoor adventure gets top billing at the Lookout Wild Film Festival.

Photos courtesy of LWFF



The marbles used by the Gullett family date back to the 1940s, at least.

Playing for Keeps

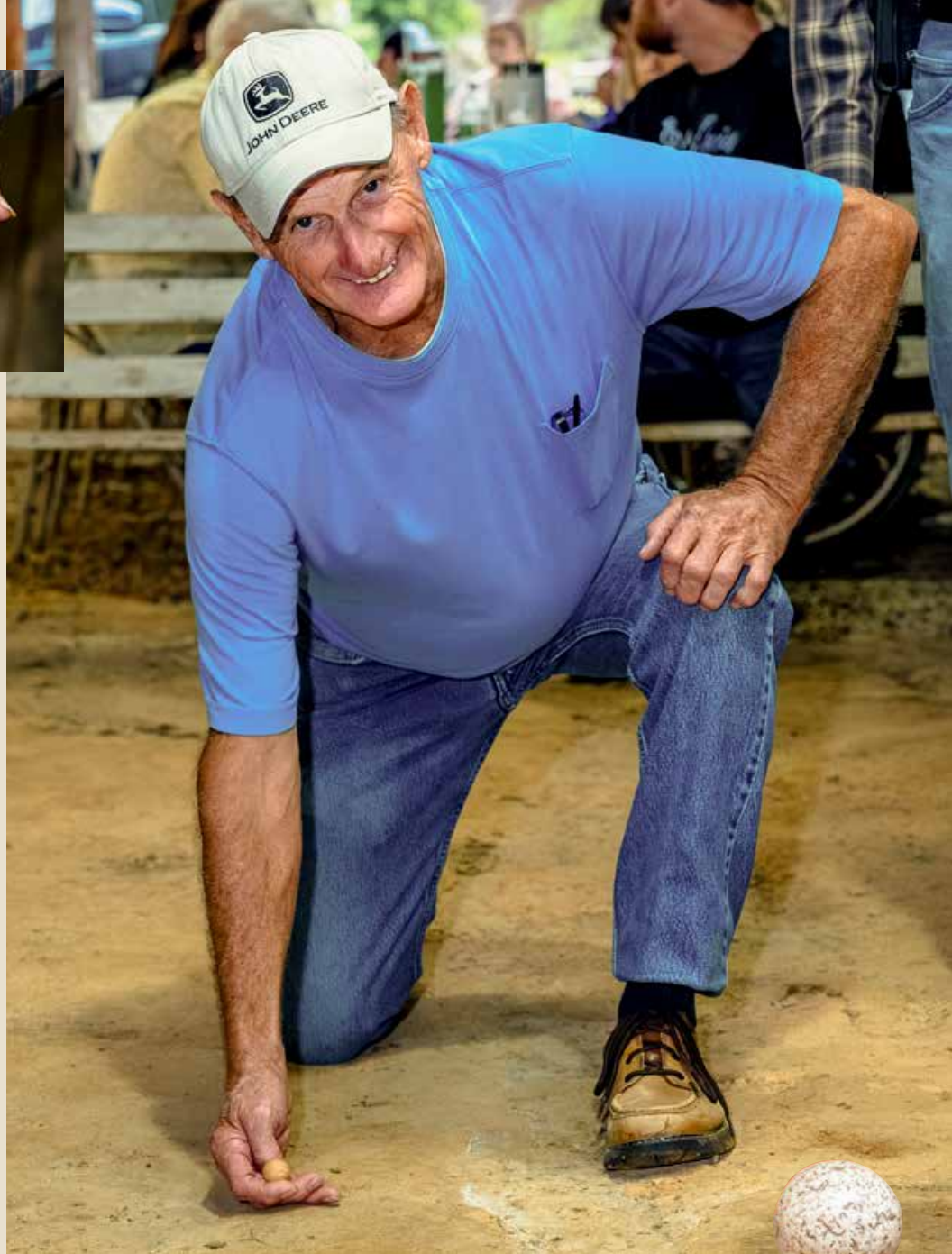
Gullett family
bonds with an
old-fashioned
tradition

Story by JEN CALHOUN
Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

It happens every Labor Day weekend in a barn in Magoffin County. After the hellos and some quick catching up, the Gullett family men gather around a circle about 12 feet in diameter while holding ancient stones. It's not a formal occasion, but it is an important one. They are there to perform a ceremony that has helped keep the family together for generations.

They're going to play marbles.

For those who didn't grow up with it, marbles is an old-timey game that involves players shooting marbles with their fingers to try to knock other players' marbles and a group of larger marbles



Steve Gullett shoots a marble that will help determine his partner.

out of a marked area. Led by the Gullett family patriarch, 85-year-old Roby Gullett, each game can last a few minutes or a solid hour.

The marbles the Gulletts use have been in the family for generations. They're not the traditional glass orbs most people think of. Instead, they're old, imperfectly rounded stones. Roby keeps them in a vintage Folgers can, the metal kind that still says "Mountain Grown" on the tin.

"We do this every year at the family reunion," says Steven Gullett, plant manager for Mountain Telephone and one of the marble-playing Gulletts. "It

got started because my late great-grandfather, Wade Gullett, really loved to play marbles. So, every Sunday the family would get together and play marbles. Then, as the family spread out and got busy, they'd get together on Labor Day weekend and play marbles."

THE LOST HIGHWAY

The Gullett marble games are believed to have started in the 1940s. Around that time, the coal industry was starting to mechanize and needed fewer workers, while factories in Ohio and Michigan needed more of them after World War II.



A sign hangs outside the barn in Eastern Kentucky at the most recent Gullett family reunion event.



The Gullett family reunion brings together relatives from all over the region, as well as Ohio. Pictured here, from left are siblings Ella Mae Nickell, Roby Gullett and Lexie Francis. They are the last surviving children of the late Wade and Minnie Gullett, who started the tradition of the family reunion.



A painting of Roby Gullett's barn by Peggy Gullett Lewis includes names of some of the family's late loved ones.

As a result, many Appalachian families headed north to find better-paying jobs and a better way of life.

Looking back, it was a time of socioeconomic upheaval for Eastern Kentucky. The changes in the coal industry were more than a money problem. They also strained the deep family bonds Appalachians had relied on for generations. Northern migration separated sibling from sibling, cousin from cousin and grandchildren from their grandparents. The Gullett family was no different.

But the close-knit Gullett family stumbled on an unusual way to stay connected. "What I was told is that the ones that worked in the factories or construction sites would go and spend the week in Ohio, then come back home on the weekends," Steven says. "They'd get back on Thursday or Friday, and they'd have the weekend to get caught up with their chores. On Sunday afternoon, they'd get together and play marbles before heading north late Sunday evening."

Over the years, the Sunday night marble games grew less frequent, but the Gulletts always managed to meet up at the family farm every Labor Day weekend. The reunion has been going on since 1945, with only a couple of breaks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a tradition that looms large in the family lore, Steven says.

"Growing up, I always thought we got out of school for Labor Day because of the

reunion," he says. "I didn't even realize it was a holiday for everyone."

They always meet at Roby's barn on Saturday, set up a giant pot of soup beans to cook overnight, let the kids run down to the creek, then start up a game of marbles. On Sunday, they eat their dinner and start up another round of marbles.

"We've had horseshoes come and go, and maybe a game of volleyball when I was younger," Steven says. "But marbles has always been a staple."




STAYING CONNECTED

Today, the marble-playing tradition, as well as the plentiful potluck and the excellent play opportunities for the kids, is credited for keeping the barn full. Reunion attendance can range anywhere from 100 to 300 people in a weekend.

Steven's father, Steve Gullett, who is 72, has been playing since 1960. "It brings new generations of the family together," he says. "We don't get together as much as we should."

As some of original marble-playing Gulletts age, they hope to get together more frequently, Steve says. After last year's reunion, they held an October barbecue and marble-playing event.

Steven says these events aren't the only thing that keeps the family strong, however. The Gulletts maintain a group Facebook page that lets them share pictures, stories and information. Many of the Gulletts live in the region served by Mountain Telephone, while others live in other counties and states. But the bond that stretches over nearly a century can be maintained whether they're playing with old stone marbles or using social media.

"The marble game with those old stones is on the other side of the spectrum as far as technology goes," Steven says. "These marbles bring us together for one weekend, but it's great to have the technology from Mountain Telephone to keep us connected the rest of the time." 



A SMOLDERING SITUATION

Volunteer fire departments face dwindling numbers, aging workforce



Illustration by Adobe Stock

Story by MELANIE JONES and JEN CALHOUN

When a crisis strikes in a rural community, the first people on the scene are usually friends and neighbors who sacrifice their time and safety because they want to help, not to draw a paycheck. They put out the fires. They drive the rescue vehicles. They save lives.

According to the National Volunteer Fire Council, nearly 19,000 of the nation's 29,452 fire departments are all-volunteer, and the number of volunteers has been shrinking. In 2020, the number of volunteer firefighters reached a record low. On top of that, more than half of those volunteers in smaller departments are aged 40 or older, and 34% are 50 and older.

That doesn't mean older firefighters can't get the job done, says Steve Hirsch, NVFC chairman. At 62, Steve is the training officer of the fire department in Sheridan County, Kansas. He recalls a man once asking him the age of the oldest firefighter in his department. He told the man 93. The man laughed and said, "No, I mean the age of your oldest firefighter that's still responding to calls." The man was shocked when Steve again replied, "93."

"But you know, that was out of a station that might get one or two calls a year," he said. "He'd grown up in that area his entire life. He knew where every hole and every gate was in his neighborhood. He wasn't out there pulling hose or doing entry, but he was able to drive a pickup. It worked out nice."

A HEALTHY MIX

Steve doesn't believe older firefighters are a bad thing. He sees the importance of having all ages.

"We can't let the fire department get all old," he says. "Nothing wrong with a good mix. That's pretty important. But we still have to have young people to get out there and do the work. Is there a safety factor in having everybody that's older? Probably, because

the older we get, the more likely we are to have heart attacks and other health issues."

Depending on the state, county or even the fire district, firefighters may not have to meet physical requirements. "A lot of places, they're hard up enough for people that if you've got a pulse, you're probably qualified," Steve says.

Not all volunteer fire departments are having trouble recruiting younger volunteers, however. The Vincent Volunteer Fire Department in Owsley County, Kentucky, maintains a squad of 17 or 18 members between the ages of 25 and 55. That's not too bad for a small, unincorporated community in a county of about 4,000 people.

"It's hard to find younger people, because a lot of times, the tradition just doesn't carry," says Capt. Billy Long, who heads the department. "There's just not a lot of involvement with it. But here lately, we've had a lot more involvement with the community. It's been good this past five, six, seven months."

BENEFITS AND SACRIFICES

Billy, who is 41, understands the benefits and the difficulties of becoming a volunteer firefighter. On the one hand, the job is rewarding, especially in a small town like Vincent. "You get to know everybody," he says. "Also, the involvement—it can open up other doors. I've been a volunteer firefighter since 2002, and I've also been an EMT for 12-13 years now."

But it's also a tough, time-consuming job. "I guess a lot of it is the time, the effort, the training," Billy says. "You've got to attend training every year. It's a lot of effort to do something without pay."

Steve says his best recruitment tool is his existing firefighters. He also says his department is probably the only one in a

“A lot of places, they're hard up enough for people that if you've got a pulse, you're probably qualified.”

—Steve Hirsch, chairman of the National Volunteer Fire Council

Photo courtesy of Steve Hirsch



National Volunteer Fire Council Chairman Steve Hirsch has been training firefighters for 25 years.

Photo by Adobe Stock/Teerapong23



multicounty region that has an aerial ladder. Park that on the street, and people start coming in. Being active on social media is a good way to recruit younger people, he says. But having a good attitude is a big part of it.

He hears a lot of negative comments about the younger generation, how they're always on their phones. “What I find is, most of the time, they're checking to make sure that I know what I'm talking about, and that's OK,” Steve says.

It's important to keep recruiting, he says, because we can't let the fire departments die.

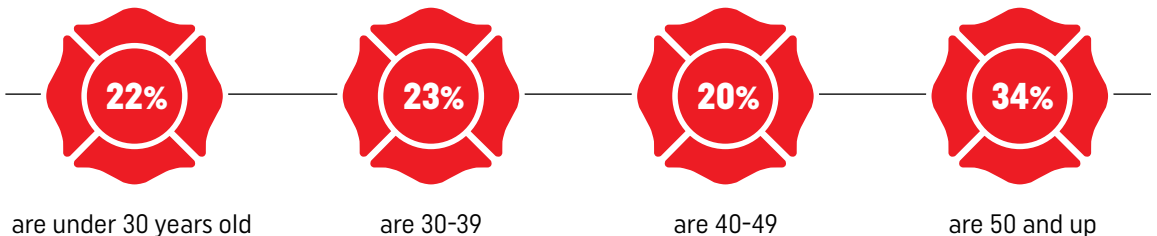
“What is a community going to do when they don't have a fire department?” he says. “That's probably the newest, biggest building in that town of 80-some people. People use that fire station for all sorts of events in the community. A lot of our small towns have lost their school, they've lost their grocery store. A lot of them have lost their banks. Some of them don't have cafes anymore. So that fire department becomes the glue that binds that community together. And, you know, you lose one more glob of glue, and pretty soon, things just fall apart.” 📱



The number of volunteer firefighters reached a record low of **676,900** in 2020

200% Increase in call volume in the last 35 years

The volunteer fire service is an aging population. In communities under 2,500:



Source: National Volunteer Fire Council

The World at Our Fingertips

Working without the commute



Story by JEN CALHOUN

Changing careers in her 40s wasn't exactly part of Sue Keeton's plans.

But when her husband got hurt on the job after 30 years, she knew it would be hard to make ends meet on just the salary from her job at the time.

"Before, I didn't really have to work, because my husband was the main breadwinner in the family," says Sue, who lives in Morgan County. "I did it mostly because I liked the job."

After talking to a few people and learning more about jobs in the medical field, Sue decided to take a yearlong course in medical coding at Quality Medical Solutions in Flemingsburg. Classes met every other Saturday, and the coursework

included everything students needed to learn to pass the certified professional coder, or CPC, exam.

While studying and working, she also took on a second full-time job in the late afternoons and evenings at a hospital emergency room. "That gave me some medical background," she says. "I did that for a year, and I was blessed when I got a job as a medical coder."

The job offer came from a health system in a nearby state. It gave Sue the opportunity to work from home—something she loves.

"I've got great benefits, and the money is good," she says. "Also, there's no commute."

REMOTE READY

After Sue started working from home, she learned other folks held a few misconceptions about the setup. She admits the job does have its perks when it comes to being a little more comfortable—you get to work in your own home, you don't have to spend money on gas or the wear and tear on a car.


But you still need to show up with the same professionalism and sense of purpose you would with an in-person job. "You have to be disciplined about that," Sue says. "You can't just get up and go run errands or do things. You know what I'm saying? You have to focus and do your job."



Adobe Stock photo by aggressive lab

“They’re going to know if you’re working or not,” she adds. “I’ve got a quota. If I’m not working, I’m not going to reach it.”

With this in mind, Sue set up her home office in a spare bedroom. “I’ve got all my office equipment in there and a desk.” Using her Mountain fiber internet, she connects to her employer’s virtual private network, or VPN. Mountain’s reliable fiber optic connection makes work flow smoothly and quickly.

“If it wasn’t for Mountain, I couldn’t do this,” she says. “You’re able to do your job. If you’ve got one of those internet services that won’t pick up half the time, you can’t do your stuff. But mine does really well.” 

TIPS FOR WORKING FROM HOME

Remote jobs offer plenty of advantages, especially for those who live in rural areas with limited access to the employment opportunities available in larger cities. It can save time and reduce commuting costs associated with gas, vehicle wear and tear and the ever-growing price of restaurant lunches.

But remote work is still work, and employers expect productivity, professionalism and accountability. That’s why remote workers should stick to a few basic rules.

Create a designated workspace.

Working from home doesn’t mean you’re working from your couch. That’s possible, sure, but most remote workers need a desk, a good chair and a way to shut out the outside world for important calls. Designate a room or a quiet corner in your home to set up shop.

Walk into your office every day prepared to work.

Some remote workers might be able to do their jobs in their PJs, but most need to be video-ready for meetings and conference calls.

Make sure your family and friends know that working from home is, in fact, working.

It’s easy for those who’ve never done it to assume you’re free to run errands, take care of children or enjoy a long phone call. That’s not the case. Set firm boundaries around your work schedule.



Photo courtesy of Sue Keeton

Sue Keeton began working from home after finishing a year of training to become a certified professional coder in the medical field.

NEED HELP FINDING A REMOTE JOB?

Teleworks USA is a nonprofit, Eastern Kentucky-based employment service that helps connect job seekers who want to work from home with legitimate employers who have immediate staffing needs. Teleworks USA also offers computer refresher courses to prepare future employees for work-from-home jobs.

To find out more, visit the Teleworks USA Facebook and Instagram pages, or go to its website, teleworkusa.com.

All the Comforts of Home

Classic trio's widespread appeal endures

The definition of comfort food depends on your region. In the Midwest, it might be a bubbly hot dish just pulled from the oven. In the Southwest, comfort may come in the form of a steaming bowl of chili, while Southerners might look toward biscuits and gravy with a side of grits.

Three simple dishes, however, bring together the entire culinary country—tomato soup, a gooey grilled cheese sandwich and a warm slice of apple pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.



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is a native of
Chattanooga,
Tennessee.**

CREAMY TOMATO SOUP

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 3 cups yellow onions, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 (28-ounce) cans tomatoes
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil or
1 1/2 tablespoons dried basil, plus
more to serve
- 1 tablespoon sugar, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black
pepper, or to taste
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Heat a nonreactive pot or enameled Dutch oven over medium heat. Add butter, then add chopped onions. Sauté

10-12 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden. Add minced garlic, and sauté 1 minute until fragrant.

Add crushed tomatoes with their juice, chicken stock, chopped basil, sugar, pepper and a dash of Worcestershire. Stir and bring to a boil then reduce heat, partially cover with lid and simmer 10 minutes.

Use an immersion blender to blend the soup in the pot or transfer to a blender in batches and blend until smooth—being careful not to overfill the blender with hot liquid—then return soup to the pot over medium heat.

Add heavy cream and grated parmesan cheese and return to a simmer. Season to taste with salt and pepper, if needed, and turn off the heat.

Ladle into warm bowls, and top with more parmesan and a sprinkle of basil.



GROWN-UP GRILLED CHEESE

Makes 4 sandwiches

- 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 yellow onions, diced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme or 1/4 teaspoon dried
- 2 teaspoons fresh rosemary or 3/4 teaspoon dried, divided
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- 8 slices artisan sourdough bread
- Mayonnaise
- 12 ounces Gruyere cheese, grated at room temperature
- 6 ounces sharp white cheddar cheese, grated at room temperature
- 4 thin slices Muenster cheese, at room temperature

Add 1 1/2 tablespoons butter and olive oil to a skillet and heat over medium-low heat. Add diced onions, salt, pepper, fresh thyme and 1 teaspoon of fresh rosemary to the hot skillet and saute about 10 minutes, stirring often, until onions are soft and

starting to brown. Stir brown sugar into the onions and cook another minute. Transfer onions to a plate.

For each sandwich: Spread one side of two pieces of bread with a little bit of mayonnaise.

To the same skillet, add remaining butter and rosemary and heat over medium heat. Add both pieces of mayonnaise-coated bread, mayonnaise side down, and cook until bread is golden brown and crunchy, 2-3 minutes.

As soon as you add the bread to the skillet, add a bit of cheese to the top of each piece. Once it starts to melt a little, sprinkle a couple tablespoons of the caramelized onions over the top of one of the pieces of bread.

When the bread is golden brown, sandwich the pieces of bread together and cook on low heat until the cheese is fully melted. Transfer to a plate and repeat with remaining slices of bread and ingredients.

GRANDMA'S SIMPLE APPLE PIE

- 1 double-crust pie pastry
- 1 large egg, beaten
- Filling:**
- 6-7 cups apples, about 2 pounds
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg



Preheat the oven to 425 F. Peel the apples and cut them into quarters. Remove the core and slice the apples 1/4-inch thick.


In a large bowl, combine the apple slices with lemon juice, sugar, flour, cinnamon and nutmeg. Toss apple mixture well and set aside.

Roll out half of the pastry dough into a 12-inch circle. Line a 9-inch pie plate with the dough and fill it with the apple mixture.

Roll out the remaining dough and cover the apple filling. Pinch the edges to seal, trimming any excess. Style the edges as desired by crimping or pressing with a fork.

Cut four to five slits on top of the crust to allow the steam to release. Whisk the egg with 2 teaspoons of water or milk and brush over the crust.

Bake at 425 F for 15 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 375 F and continue baking for another 35-40 minutes or until the crust is golden and the apples are tender.

Remove from the oven and let rest for at least 30 minutes before serving. Serve with vanilla ice cream, if desired. 



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