



Mountain Telephone

MAY/JUNE 2023

CONNECTION



Music man

West Liberty native
tours the world

VET FINDS PEACE
IN VIETNAM

MEATBALL MANIA



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Training broadband professionals

New NTCA partnership will make a difference

As rural communities like yours experience the life-changing benefits of fast, reliable internet service, the NTCA is proud to expand its support of the professionals making these innovations possible.


We are partnering with Northwood Technical College, which will offer remote workforce training opportunities exclusively for NTCA members. This agreement is one example of how we are pulling out the stops to help providers like yours bridge the digital divide.

Building a robust internet network requires a range of skills, but the work doesn't end after the first connections are installed. Maintaining the systems that power work-from-home jobs, telehealth and so much more demands highly skilled workers.

This new initiative with Wisconsin-based Northwood Tech will help NTCA members secure the expertise needed to not only accelerate broadband deployment but also sustain future-proof technologies.

Northwood Tech has several decades of innovative telecommunications and broadband training experience, but its Broadband Academy's focus extends beyond network systems, hardware and software. The consumer experience, and how communications professionals can better serve their customers, is also a priority.

Northwood Tech President John Will says the partnership with NTCA allows the school to reach and train more students and upskill employees who will gain industry-recognized digital badging credentials.

Also, the remote classes mean NTCA members and Northwood Tech will use broadband technology for broadband training. It's just one more example showing how fast internet service can make a difference in the nation's rural communities. 

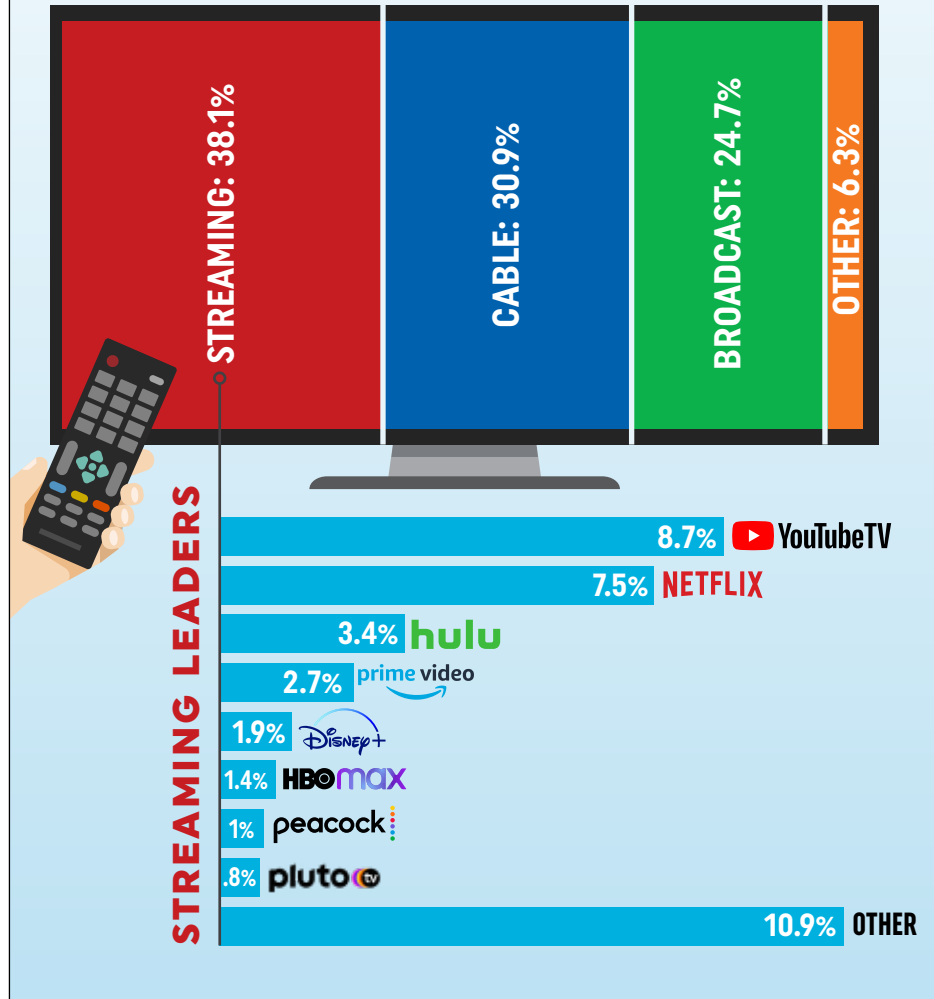
Entertainment riches

Viewers match their interest to the service

Whether you enjoy the predictable pace of a baseball game, catching a 30-minute comedy viewed when your schedule allows, watching a movie from your favorite genre — or just about any other entertainment choice — there's a wealth of options.

And today, you can design the viewing experience you want.

Nielsen, a company that measures audiences to provide important research to advertisers, released a report earlier this year that gives a peek into our viewing habits:



GAMING FAVORITES

For many people, a little screen time means something more interactive than a show or movie — they play video games. Nielsen identified some of the top games from recent months, so here are a few to consider if you're looking for fresh options.

- ▶ Hogwarts Legacy
- ▶ The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom
- ▶ Resident Evil 4
- ▶ Diablo IV
- ▶ Minecraft



Home security

KEEP YOUR DATA SAFE WHILE WORKING REMOTELY



Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Working from home is no longer uncommon. As access to high-speed internet and tools for remote collaboration become more widespread, employers are increasingly warming to the idea of letting people get out of the office at least a few days a week.

The comfort and accessibility of remote work mean it isn't likely to go away anytime soon. But it can also introduce new challenges like security concerns. Whether you're taking your laptop to the nearby coffee shop or setting up a work station at home, keep these guidelines in mind to make sure your work is secure wherever you are.

STAY UPDATED

When you see an alert about a new software update, don't wait to install it. Among other things, these updates often close security loopholes that malware can use to get access to your data. It's also important to have an antivirus program installed that can protect your devices from the latest viruses, spyware and phishing scams.

DON'T TAKE THE BAIT

Speaking of phishing scams, it's important to be extra alert when working remotely. Bogus emails can hit an office just as easily as your home computer, but it's easier to spot a fake when the co-worker supposedly asking for sensitive information is in the same room as you. Always make sure your devices are secure outside the office, and be sure to double check any suspicious requests directly.

PROTECT WORK DEVICES

Working from home often means exposing your work devices to kids or other family members who may not be as careful about security measures as you are. Take steps to make sure others

aren't using your work devices or accidentally seeing sensitive information. Also, try to avoid doing work on personal devices that may not be as well-secured.

KEEP YOUR VPN ON

Many companies use virtual private networks, or VPNs, to help employees communicate securely via an encrypted network. If your employer does the same, it's important to stay connected for as long as you're working. Dropping that virtual defense could open the door for someone to steal important information.


STAY IN THE CLOUD

Not only do cloud applications receive regular security updates, but saving your work to cloud storage creates a shared backup of all your work. That way, even if local files on your device are lost, corrupted or stolen, you'll still have access to everything.

MAKE VIDEOCONFERENCES PRIVATE

The popularity of videoconferencing apps like Zoom has skyrocketed in recent years as more teams collaborate from afar. But a digital meeting space comes with additional security considerations. To prevent unwanted visitors from listening in or even trying to intimidate people, consider requiring a password for calls or keeping any new arrivals in a waiting room.

UP YOUR PASSWORD GAME

Strong passwords are always important, but they're even more crucial when you're working remotely. A password manager can help you keep track of numerous strong passwords, which should generally be at least 12 characters and contain letters, numbers and symbols. If that's too much to keep up with, consider using favorite song lyrics, movie quotes or other phrases that are easy to remember but more complex than your dog's name. 

Ready to serve

There for you when needed most

One of the pleasures of my role at Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative is the honor of working alongside some of the most dedicated and hardworking professionals in our industry. We are blessed to have an experienced, committed staff devoted to serving you.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

Their efforts are most visible — and most critical — when times are the hardest. Sudden storms, flooding and so much more can disrupt not only the services we provide, but also the lives of individuals and productivity of businesses. We know you depend on our communications tools, especially in critical moments such as the need to call for emergency help.

So, even in the most trying of conditions, our crews go into the field as our front line in the effort to keep you connected. They work tirelessly for as long as needed to restore service to you.

I'm always appreciative as these crews go out into environments most of us wish to avoid, including in the middle of downpours, high winds or extreme heat. The challenges change by season

and are as unpredictable as the weather itself. But our commitment to excellence means your service is as consistent and reliable as possible.

If you've ever wondered why someone would work so hard, the answer is simple. Each member of our crews — truly our entire staff — has roots in this area. We know we're working to help our friends, our families, our neighbors and our entire community. They genuinely care about those they serve.

When an outage does occur — and no matter the preventative steps we take they sometimes will — we ask for your patience as our crews hit the road to restore service. Also, as you're driving please keep in mind to take note of repair vehicles on the roadside. Please slow down and give them a little extra space. They're working to help everyone, and in return you can help keep them safe.

While repair crews are some of the most visible members of the MRTC team, others play equally critical roles. When problems arise, everyone helps.

The fast internet network we manage requires care, and our professionals work daily to keep it safe and secure. MRTC is your local hub on the global internet, connecting you to resources needed for health, education, employment, entertainment and far more.

Our teams keep that connection solid, a highly technical, always-evolving role. After all, cyberthreats are real, and we follow industry best practices to secure our network. But the responsibilities extend to the needs of individuals and business users. If you have an internet problem, our customer-support experts and technical staff are committed to helping.

Whether it's the immediate recovery after an event such as a storm or the day-to-day aid to keep critical services like internet access working, everyone at MRTC makes your needs the priority.

Thank you for letting us serve and to be a part of this wonderful community. 🗨️

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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:



Daxson Lewis taught himself to play banjo when we was 11 or 12 years old. Today, he's winning awards and touring the world as a musician.

See story Page 12.

Photo by William LeMaster

Find **peace of mind** this summer



MRTCsecure helps you **protect your nest** starting at \$29.95/month.



NEW Logic Mark security pendant now available for only \$19.95/month with \$99 installation and activation.

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, like a generator, from vendors such as Uninterruptible Power Supply, etc. For additional information, please call us at 606-743-3121.



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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible agency or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

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ROAD TRIP

Revival

YOU'LL GET THERE, EVENT-UALLY!

Story by ANNE BRALY

From a celebration of Moon Pies in Tennessee to glorifying okra pods in South Carolina, the South is famous for the funk it puts in festivals.

“Funky festivals allow folks to do a deep dive into niche interests in a way that generalized, traditional festivals don’t allow,” says Jamie McCormick, operations manager for the Southeast Festivals &

Events Association. “Maybe you can get lucky and find shrimp and grits or banana pudding at your standard festival, but can you compare 14 different recipes and flavor profiles, or find strawberry banana pudding or shrimp and grits pizza? Offbeat festivals allow us to celebrate the weirdest things about ourselves — the things we think only we like — and in the process,

find out that quite a lot of other people like them, too!”

Here’s a look at festivals across the South that celebrate the love of offbeat fun.

Hula hooping is hard enough on its own, but have you ever tried it while eating a MoonPie and drinking an RC Cola? It’s not as easy as it looks, but you can give it a try at the annual **RC Cola-MoonPie Festival Festival** held the third week of June in the charming, historic town of Bell Buckle, Tennessee.

Folks have come from near and far — England and Australia and up to 17 states — to sample small-town life and see what this quirky festival is all about, says Jenny Hunt, public relations director for festival sponsor Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce. The event kicks off with marathons on certified courses before transitioning into a full day of fun for all, with a grand parade and the crowning of the RC Cola-MoonPie Festival King and Queen; hula-hooping; and a test of skill to see just how many cans of RC Cola



ABOVE: The RC Cola-MoonPie festival features a can-balancing contest.

LEFT: Hula hooping while eating a Moon Pie and drinking an RC Cola isn’t as easy as it may look.

Photos courtesy of Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce

you can stack on your head and walk across the festival stage.

The festival culminates with the cutting of the world's largest Moon Pie to be shared with all.

▶ Date: June 17

▶ Information: bellbucklechamber.com

The Original Gullah Festival in Beaufort, South Carolina, celebrates the history, customs, cultures and accomplishments of African Americans who carved remarkable lives in the Lowcountry. The festival is like none other, highlighting the culture and history of the Gullah people — their art, crafts, music, dance and yes, their food. This isn't your typical festival fare — it's platters of fried catfish, bowls of shrimp and grits and soul food by the plateful. It's a family-friendly weekend that brings in travelers from around the world.

▶ Date: May 26-28.

▶ Information: originalgullahfestival.org.



Don't want to commit to an entire day or week of festival fun, but still want to experience the unusual? Here are some places around the South that offer something a little different from your typical sightseeing experience.

It's not often a restroom is a major attraction, but such is the case for the men's room at **Nashville's historic Hermitage Hotel**. The restroom features a spectacular and memorable design, with lime green and black glass tiles, lime green fixtures and a shoe-shine



Photo courtesy of Town of Irmo

No town celebrates okra the way Irmo, South Carolina, does. In fact, there's no other okra festival in the world, other than **Irmo Okra Strut**, a chance for townfolk and others to showcase the often-unappreciated pods. The festival has been growing strong for more than 50 years and commences with live bands on Friday night. Then the fun begins Saturday morning with a parade — the largest in the state — before opening up to thousands of festivalgoers who come for magic shows, demonstrations and the okra-eating contest.

▶ Date: Sept. 29-30.

▶ Information: okrastrut.com.

Whether you call him Bigfoot, Sasquatch or Yeti, the **Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival** in Townsend, Tennessee, is the

station right in the middle of the room. The men's room has been the setting of many business deals in the past, as well as movies and music videos in current times. Note to families: Have a man check it out first to make sure the room is empty.

▶ Information: thehermitagehotel.com

Clayton City Cemetery in Clayton, Alabama, is home to a tombstone with a story. Both the headstone and footstone are shaped like whiskey bottles, designed by an extremely frustrated woman who reportedly told her husband, William T. Mullen, that she'd make him a tombstone shaped like a whiskey bottle if he didn't stop drinking. It seems as though she kept her word.

▶ Address: 41 N. Midway St.

Read my lips. Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, is home to the world's only museum



Photo courtesy of Blount Partnership

ABOVE LEFT: Celebrate okra at the annual Irmo Okra Strut.

ABOVE RIGHT: Live music is part of the fun at Smoky Mountain Bigfoot Festival.

place to celebrate the big guy. There's Bigfoot wrestling, Bigfoot calling, a wood-carving challenge and other Squatchy competitions. Visitors will also find food vendors and live music, along with Bigfoot hunters and researchers. Do you believe?

▶ Date: May 6.

▶ Information: exploretownsend.com/event/smoky-mountain-bigfoot-festival-2023. 🗨️

dedicated to the art of ventriloquism, the **Vent Haven Museum**. If you love little wooden people, this museum is a must-see. Renovations to the museum are near completion, and it will reopen on May 9.

▶ Information: venthaven.org

The Harry and Harry Too restaurant in Bishopville, South Carolina, takes most of its interior decor cues from pop culture — The Three Stooges, Elvis and Tomb Raider, among others. What sets it apart is its colorful handmade outdoor sign promoting its connection to a local monster, the terrifying, car-chomping Lizard Man. The restaurant displays replicas of the monster's footprint casts — the originals are in the town museum — and serves Lizard Man sandwiches.

▶ Online: Check out the menu and more on Harry and Harry Too's Facebook page.

On a mission

Vietnam vet finds peace in an unlikely place

Story by JEN CALHOUN
Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

J.C. Stamper spends much of his time painstakingly restoring old International Harvester tractors to like-new condition. It's a satisfying job that lets him work on his own property in Ezel. But it also lets him help others along the way.

These days, Stamper uses the extra money he makes to visit friends in Vietnam — a country he never thought he'd see again after returning home from the war in 1969. In 2010, however, a local dentist invited him to go back to the country as part of a medical team that provided dental care through Vets with A Mission. "As much as I wanted to say, no, I said yes," he says.



J.C. Stamper restores old tractors to make money for his trips overseas.



Stamper, a Vietnam War veteran living in Ezel, video calls a friend in Vietnam.



J.C. Stamper, pictured here in front of a quilt made by Vietnamese friends, says he was inspired by Acts 1:8 in the Bible.

That trip changed his life. While there, Stamper gave a Vietnamese woman one of his copies of the New Testament, which paved the way for her to become a Christian. The interaction touched Stamper and gave him a better understanding of the Vietnamese people and all they'd been through. "By the end of it, I was thinking, 'What have I been missing out on?'" he says. "That's where the ministry was born."

FRIENDS IN CHRIST

Since that first trip, Stamper has returned to Vietnam 14 more times to visit old friends and to make new ones. He's invited into their homes with a warmth and a love that has changed his life.

On one trip, a Vietnamese friend invited

him to dinner. On the way, he learned her parents were former Viet Cong soldiers. The idea scared him, but after meeting the couple, he experienced nothing but kindness. "I found love, and I found forgiveness," he says.

Stamper keeps in touch with many of his friends through video calls on Facebook Messenger using his Mountain Telephone broadband connection. Some of his friends still live in Vietnam, while others have moved to Thailand, the United Kingdom and other countries in Europe. "The internet made it possible for me to stay connected and work with people and share our stories," he says. "I have stories that would make the hair stand up on your back."

The talks might be short or the conversations may last for hours. Nearly always, they want to discuss their Christian faith and share stories of perseverance and strength. Stamper says many of his friends have been persecuted for their faith in Jesus. "No one can imagine the hardships they've had," says Stamper, who says some of his friends have faced trials because of their love for Christ. "Vietnam has my heart. There's something special about them. It makes me feel complete." 📞

Frenchburg comes alive

Menifee Mountain Memories Festival turns on the charm

Story by JEN CALHOUN

When Venus Hurt and Tammy Cole get together, there's usually plenty of laughter in the air. "We like to cut up when we're together," Tammy says of her sister-in-law.

But ever since they took over coordinating the Menifee Mountain Memories Festival about five or six years ago, the duo has learned to mix their good times with hard work. In just a few years, they've helped bring the number of festival vendors from 13 to more than 100.

Today, the two-day event features live music, a rubber duck race and vendors from across the country, selling everything from food to handmade fishing lures, clothing and jewelry.

"Our vendors come from all over," says Tammy, whose Facebook skills helped the festival grow from a relatively small event into a large production. "We even had one come from California. We had to call him and say, 'Are you sure about this? Do you understand where we are?'" He was like, "Yes, I do!"

COMMUNITY TRADITION

Despite its success, the festival hasn't forgotten its roots. When it started about 25 years ago, the Menifee Mountain Memories Festival's purpose was to introduce the community to local makers and musicians. "This is one place where people can get together and enjoy themselves and maybe buy something if they want to," Venus says. "It also lets us help the people in the county that are so artistic."

Making things by hand is a tradition in Appalachia, a place where previous generations were forced to rely on their own resourcefulness to survive. "I think a lot of us here in Menifee County are still connected to those older generations," Venus says. "They made what they needed, and they passed those skills on to us."

FACEBOOK FOLLOWING

Even though the heart of the festival is about tradition, Venus and Tammy use modern technology to make it work. Tammy says her love for working on computers came in handy when the pair became festival organizers. "I fixed up our Facebook page and started advertising for vendors," she says. "Then every time we'd get an application, I'd get a few pictures from them and advertise their business on our page."

Vendors would be so pleased with the turnout and professionalism of the event that they'd usually want to sign up for the next year's festival a full year in advance. "We're always like, 'Wait, we're not there yet!'" Tammy says, laughing. ☺



ABOVE: The Menifee Mountain Memories Festival takes place June 2-3 at the Frenchburg Farmers Market and along Back Street.

LEFT: The festival's popular duck race offers first-, second- and third-place prizes for winners.

BELOW: The decades-old festival offers something for everyone.



Photos contributed by Menifee Mountain Memories Festival Committee

Making memories in Menifee

The Menifee Mountain Memories Festival takes place June 2-3 at the Frenchburg Farmers Market and along much of Back Street. For the latest information, visit the Menifee Mountain Memories Festival Facebook page.

HOW DOES YOUR ONLINE GARDEN GROW?

Digital communities revolutionizing backyard agriculture

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

Starting a garden in your own backyard isn't something you have to do alone. While you're unlikely to find help digging holes, putting in plants or moving mulch on the internet, you can find countless friends online to offer advice and support.

Online communities have revolutionized gardening, according to Adriana Copaceanu, whose 2016 gardening blog grew into the website backyardgardenlover.com. More than 100,000 gardeners also turn to its Facebook page where they can exchange tips and experiences. "By making it easier for people to find information and connect with others online, gardening communities have made gardening more accessible and appealing to a wider audience," Adriana says. "In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed."

More than half the country — 55% of American households — gardens, according to findings by Scotts Miracle-Gro. The average garden measures 600 square feet, and tomatoes are the most common plant grown, appearing in about 85% of U.S. gardens. In addition to providing produce for a healthier diet, gardening has many other positive impacts including stress relief, promoting exercise, fighting dementia and staving off loneliness, to name just a few.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES

While gardening has always offered opportunities for interactions at garden centers and at farmers markets, the online gardening community now presents limitless forums for collaboration. "I get daily emails with questions," Adriana says. "Sometimes, it's a quick answer, and other times I need to do some research because I'm not familiar with their specific location."

More than 5 million gardening enthusiasts have forged connections with other green thumbs through Reddit, a website that's home to thousands of online communities where users can anonymously discuss their interests and hobbies, seek support and share tips. They can also post photos and find immediate answers to questions like "I just pulled this dead squirrel out of my garlic patch, can I still eat the garlic in the summer?" or "Is this snake dangerous?"

"As the size of the gardening community has grown, there are more dumb and wrong answers; unfortunately, that's the nature of a platform that encourages participation," Reddit contributor kirbs2001 says. "The flip side is that more people are gardening and want to share what they know, or think they know, with others, and that's cool."

Still others just want a place to enjoy the outdoors in a community setting. "The gardening season is pretty short where I am, so



Photo by dprodi/Adobe Stock

Photo by Diederik/Adobe Stock

ONLINE RESOURCES ARE IN FULL BLOOM

Gardening apps

- * **From Seed to Spoon Gardening** — Created by new gardeners struggling to find all the right information for growing their first gardens, this covers it all.
- * **SunCalc** — This is a sun-finder for garden placement. Enter an address and the app will tell you where to plant.
- * **Homegrown with Bonnie Plants** — America's most-trusted vegetable company provides all the answers to questions about what to grow for specific conditions.
- * **Planty** — Not sure what you've grown? This cute, simple app will identify and offer care tips for plants.
- * **Garden Answers** — This extensive identification app provides garden and horticulture experts at your fingertips. The app identifies more than 20,000 plants and answers more than 200,000 commonly asked care questions.

Websites

- * The National Gardening Association's **garden.com** offers courses, gardening guides, a database and much more.
- * The Old Farmer's Almanac has tips, daily facts and information, and other tried-and-true suggestions at **almanac.com**.
- * Through its website **ahsgardening.org**, the American Horticulture Society promotes healthy, sustainable gardening practices and the critical role of plants.

“In the last few years, the amount of information online on gardening and resources has absolutely skyrocketed.”

— Adriana Copaceanu, founder of backyardgardenlover.com

I like to live vicariously through other people's gardens to get me through winter, lol,” says Calamity 0o0, another Reddit member who's active in the site's garden community.

Other gardening websites — including gardening-forums.com, gardenweb.com and gardenstew.com — offer all kinds of answers to all kinds of questions. Gardeners can also find like-minded friends on Twitter, and if it's easier to learn from videos, YouTube is for you.

The holy book of gardening and all things outdoors-related, The Old Farmer's Almanac, now offers a comprehensive website, almanac.com, full of valuable tips, along with a daily newsletter. The National Gardening Association formed in 1971 simply to promote gardening, and is now the largest

social media website dedicated exclusively to gardening. The group's garden.org offers online tools “to help gardeners connect, teach, share and trade with each other.”

Websites are great resources, but apps truly can be a gardener's best friend. First-time gardeners will find everything they need to start their plots through the Seed to Spoon app. Based on a home address, the SunCalc app designates the perfect location for plants to thrive, and Homegrown with Bonnie Plants has a “Help Me Choose” section to help gardeners determine which plants to grow, as well as one to help schedule tasks like sowing, watering, weeding and fertilizing.

So, while you may be on your own physically, you'll never lack for company along your gardening journey. 📱



Bluegrass state of mind

West Liberty native nominated for prestigious music award

Story by JEN CALHOUN
PHOTOS BY WILLIAM LEMASTER

When Daxson Lewis was a child, bluegrass music surrounded him every time he visited his paternal grandparents in West Liberty. Whether it was tapes, CDs or “Jubilee” and “America’s Bluegrass Gospel Show” on the television, the sounds of Ricky Skaggs, Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver and The Isaacs nearly always filled the rooms.

Daxson always loved the visits and the music. Something about the tight harmonies and distinct rhythms captivated him. But there was one sound that stood out the most. “I was always drawn to this particular sound,” Daxson says. “For a long time, I’d put my headphones on, close my eyes and try to pick that one sound out.”

That sound was the banjo. “When I realized what it was, I immediately started asking for one,” he says. “I was 11 or 12, and I was just hounding my parents for one — probably for Christmas. My dad said, ‘Son, you probably don’t want that. You probably want an electric guitar.’ But I didn’t. I wanted a banjo.”

ON THE ROAD

A few years after picking up the banjo, Daxson got so good that he was awarded the Deering Banjo Company’s Brian Friesen Award at the age of 15. After the presentation, he got the chance to play the



LEFT: Daxson Lewis serves as director of the Kentucky Center for Traditional Music and also plays venues around the country with the McLain Family Band.

BELOW: Daxson credits his grandparents for his interest in bluegrass.



Grand Ole Opry for the first time alongside the band Riders in the Sky.

Today, his banjo skills have taken him to the top of the bluegrass world. In January, he was nominated for Banjo Performer of the Year by the prestigious Society for Preservation of Bluegrass Music of America. Since 2017, he's toured with the McLain Family Band, an internationally known group that's often called "The First Family of Bluegrass." Since its formation in 1968, the band has performed in all 50 states and in more than 60 countries. They've also served as cultural ambassadors for the United States government. Over the years, the McLain Family Band worked extensively with orchestras, and they've played the Grand Ole Opry, Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center to name just a few high-profile venues. Daxson has also toured with The Price Sisters and Dailey & Vincent.

In addition to playing, Daxson serves at his alma mater as the director of Morehead State University's Kentucky Center for Traditional Music. The center offers courses and programs that help young musicians develop while teaching them about performance, recording, history and how to navigate the music industry. Students get an opportunity to play events in various locations.

MOUNTAIN MUSIC

Daxson says the banjo came to him more naturally than other instruments, maybe because his love for bluegrass and bluegrass-gospel music blossomed at such an early age. Long before he started playing, he remembers being with his great-grandmother and some of his extended family, when the women started singing the gospel song "There's a Light at the River" while they cooked.

"I remember all these ladies in the kitchen just singing harmony with one another," he says. "It was one of the most beautiful things. I was really small at that time, but I remember it."

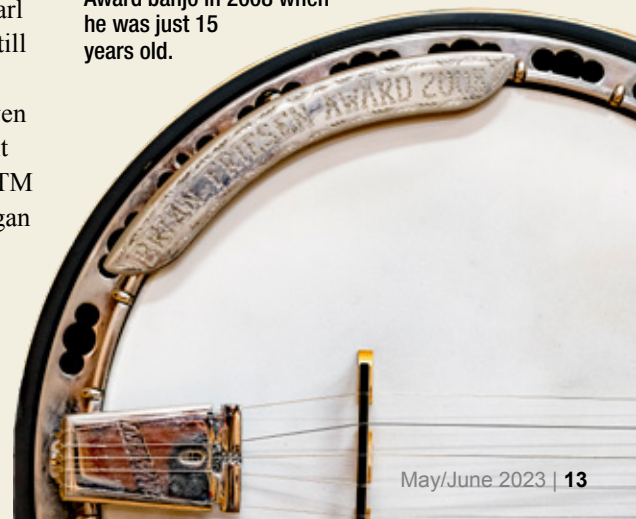
After he received his first banjo, Daxson mostly taught himself to play. "I did a lot of listening to records and tapes and CDs — just over and over," he says. "I also bought instructional books. There was one that sort of changed my life — 'Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo.' It's still on my desk today."

And while he'd been playing and even touring throughout his teenage years, it wasn't until Daxson started in the KCTM program at Morehead State that he began studying music formally. "There'd be certain people back then that I'd see out at festivals, and they'd say, 'Oh, you should see so-and-so,'" Daxson says. "People did show me things,

but overall I was largely self-taught, and I learned to play by ear."

Daxson says bluegrass music is a unique sound — a blending of old-time mountain music with elements of jazz and other musical styles. It's often complex, which can make it a challenging style to master. But the challenge hasn't stopped all the Eastern Kentucky musicians who play it. Daxson thinks that's because they understand the culture that surrounds the music and they want others to understand it, too. "I think there's a determination that runs very deep in the people of this region," he says. "They're very determined to do what they set their minds to and carry forward with what they're passionate about. I think that's a testament to this culture and the folks here." 🗨️

Daxson won this Brian Friesen Award banjo in 2008 when he was just 15 years old.



Bite-size brilliance

A not-so-spicy meatball!



Few foods have the versatility that meatballs offer. They're perfect for parties served with toothpicks, but they can also be your dinner tonight served over pasta or mashed potatoes.

What makes a good meatball? Some recipes call for chicken or veal while others rely solely on ground beef. Some recipes call for frying them in a skillet while others send them straight to the oven.

No matter the approach to the finished product, most everyone can agree on one thing: Meatballs are a blessing in the culinary world all wrapped up in a ball of meat.



SWEET-AND-SOUR MEATBALLS

Sauce:

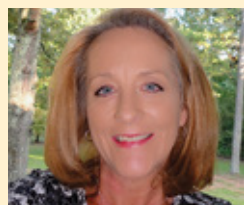
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/3 cup pineapple juice
- 1/4 teaspoon Chinese five-spice
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch

Place the brown sugar, vinegar, ketchup, soy sauce, pineapple juice and Chinese five spice in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer for 5 minutes or until the sugar has dissolved. Stir in cornstarch and simmer for 2 minutes more to thicken. Remove from heat and set aside.

Meatballs:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 (1-pound) bag frozen meatballs
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 red or green bell pepper, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup diced pineapple
- 4 green onions, cut into 1-inch pieces

Place a wok or large frying pan over high heat. Add the oil and the meatballs and cook, turning every minute or so, for 4-5 minutes or until almost cooked through. Add the onion and stir-fry for another 2 minutes. Add the bell pepper and stir-fry for another minute, then add the pineapple and the sweet-and-sour sauce. Stir-fry until well combined. Remove from heat and toss in the green onion.



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

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

SALISBURY STEAK MEATBALLS

- 1/4 cup grated onion
- 2/3 cup panko bread crumbs
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons ground mustard
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 1/4 pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (plus more, if needed)

Gravy:

- 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 6-8 medium mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 cup onion, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- 4-6 cloves garlic, minced

- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups beef stock
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce

In a medium bowl, combine grated onions, breadcrumbs, salt and all the remaining ingredients except the ground beef and oil. Allow the mixture to stand for 5 minutes, then add the meat and mix until just combined and divide the mixture into about 20 meatballs.

Add oil in a large skillet and heat to medium-high. Add the meatballs in a single layer and cook for about 10 minutes, flipping halfway through, until all sides brown evenly. Remove to a plate. If needed, add additional oil and cook any

remaining meatballs the same way.

For the gravy, add 1 tablespoon of butter to the skillet. When melted, add mushrooms and cook 3-4 minutes. Add the onions and saute for 3 minutes, add the garlic and let cook for 30 seconds or until fragrant. Add the remaining butter to the skillet. When melted, add the flour and stir to combine and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Gradually pour in the beef stock, still stirring constantly. Stir in Worcestershire sauce, Dijon and soy sauce and simmer for 3 minutes or until it thickens slightly. Add the meatballs to the skillet along with any juices that may have collected on the plate and cook for 4 minutes. If the gravy thickens too much, add a splash of water. Taste and adjust seasonings as desired.

BUTTERY CHICKEN MEATBALLS

- 1/2 medium onion, grated
- 1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 1/2 pounds ground chicken
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 2 tablespoons freshly chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Butter sauce:

- 1/2 cup butter
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon freshly chopped parsley

Mix the onion and bread-crumbs together in a large

mixing bowl. Let the mixture sit for 2-3 minutes. Add the rest of the meatball ingredients, excluding the oil, to the bowl. Mix everything together well. Form the mixture into meatballs.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the meatballs, working in batches if needed. Cook for 2-3 minutes per side until well browned. Transfer the cooked meatballs to a plate and set aside.

For the sauce, add the butter to the skillet, then stir in garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Add the tomato sauce, tomato paste, garam masala, smoked paprika, turmeric, cumin, coriander and chicken broth. Bring the sauce to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes or until slightly thickens. Stir in the cream. Return meatballs to skillet and let them simmer in the sauce until heated through. Garnish with parsley and serve. 🍴





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