



Mountain Telephone

The Mountain Telephone

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

CONNECTION



A SWEET GOLDEN TREAT

A family turns
maple sap into
delicious syrup

ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY

An artist transforms gourds into
striking creations

SUFFERING FROM THE BUFFER?

Find the speed you need for
your devices

NTCA takes rural broadband message to America's industrial site selectors

Companies looking to relocate or expand their operations have a list of features that must be available in a community for it to be considered. For most industries, a reliable broadband network is at or near the top of that list.

NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association serves as a collective voice for telecommunications companies like ours, and the organization recently shared on a national level the good work we are doing to provide broadband to rural America. In a recent issue of Site Selection magazine, NTCA placed a

full-page ad on the inside front cover of an issue focused on infrastructure. Site Selection is read by company leaders and consultants who make decisions about where to locate new businesses or industries — something on the mind of every rural community leader.

This ad is another example of how we work with other rural telecommunications providers through our national organization to tell the positive story of rural broadband, and to benefit our customers and their communities.



Smart Rural Community: Broadband Enabled. Locally Driven. Globally Connected.

The efforts of nearly 900 community-based broadband providers all over the country have created dozens of smart rural communities by increasing access to broadband services for many local businesses, civic institutions, schools and libraries. Their success stories are building the broadband future for rural America.

Learn more at www.ntca.org/smart.

 NTCARuralTelecom
  @NTCAconnect
  RuralTelecommunity
 

The ad above appeared in the September 2016 issue of Site Selection, sharing the rural broadband story with those who make the decisions on where to locate new job-creating industries in America.



RURAL CONNECTIONS

BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association

NTCA will work with new administration on broadband challenges

Following the Nov. 8 election, NTCA quickly reached out to president-elect Trump's team with this message: Ensuring all Americans have sustained access to reliable and affordable advanced communications services is a long-standing national priority.

For decades, small telecommunications providers have gone above and beyond to build the infrastructure that allows our country's most rural residents and businesses to access the same services and technologies found in our nation's largest cities. The ongoing commitment of these small rural providers to their neighbors and communities is essential to making rural America a vibrant place to live, work and raise a family.

We look forward to working with the new administration and Congress to harness the enthusiasm of the rural voters who cast ballots in this election. We hope to build upon past successes to find innovative solutions to our nation's broadband challenges so that every American — rural and urban — will have access to robust and affordable broadband.

A recent analysis showed that, under a possible Trump telecom agenda, small companies would be at a disadvantage to a Trump preference for larger companies. I remain hopeful that he and his team will remember that the angst about being "forgotten" in the fly-over states was part of his victory path to the White House, and that rural telecommunications providers will have their voices heard around his policy table. ☑

LIFELINE

Save money on phone or broadband service

You may be eligible to receive a discount on your phone or broadband service through Lifeline, a federal program designed to help low-income Americans pay for vital telecommunications services.

Several changes to the Lifeline program went into effect in December, with the goal of continuing the mission of assisting all Americans to get connected and stay connected with today's technology. One of the most important changes to the program is that it now helps consumers pay for a broadband connection.



How much will Lifeline save me?

If you qualify for Lifeline, you will receive a credit of \$9.25 each month on your bill.



What services are covered by this credit?

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

- Fixed or mobile broadband
- Fixed or mobile voice-only
- Bundles of fixed or mobile voice and broadband

NOTE: Lifeline can only be used for one source of communication — mobile (cellphone) or fixed (landline).



Can I receive more than one Lifeline credit?

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



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

To find out whether you qualify for Lifeline assistance, you must fill out standard forms available at your local telephone company's office.

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



How do I qualify?

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

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

Additionally, consumers at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines will continue to be eligible for a Lifeline program benefit. (State determinations of income will no longer be accepted.)

There are no changes to the eligibility criteria for Tribal programs.

Some state-level allowances and stipulations may apply. Please check with your local telecommunications provider for information about benefits that may be available at the state level.

Do you qualify? Stay connected with a Lifeline discount. Apply today!

The need for speed over 10 years

Imagine if Ford built a car that could drive five times faster than the 10-year-old vehicle you are driving. Or what if Kenmore came out with an oven that could cook a casserole 10 times faster than it did a decade back? That seems a little far-fetched, don't you agree?



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

There's one industry where this kind of incredible increase has become the norm, and the upgrades we're making here at Mountain Telephone are bringing these incredible advancements to your homes and businesses. As we enter a new year, it's always interesting to look back at where we were in years past. Ten years ago, we were proud to offer speeds of 1.5 Mbps or even 3 Mbps to our customers, and in most cases, that connection offered plenty of capacity to meet their needs.

Now, in 2017, we can offer speeds of up to 1 gigabit in some areas — 300 times faster than the fastest connections we could offer 10 years ago. In areas where the network is not yet capable of such speeds, we're working to expand and upgrade equipment to make higher speeds possible.

Why is this progress important? A study released in 2015 showed that adults spend twice as much time online now as they did 10 years ago, and teenagers spend three times as much time online as teenagers did a decade back.

And the changes go deeper than just time spent online. The way people are using their time spent on the internet has changed in that decade. While some early adopters were starting to try to stream movies in 2006 or 2007, it was not the norm. Now, streaming has gone mainstream, bringing with it the huge demands for faster broadband speeds. The past decade has seen the most photographed years in human history, and most of those photos are being published or stored online. In 2007, most music lovers still waited for CDs to get new music, whereas now we stream or download most of our songs.

Today we use our broadband connections to order pizza, buy groceries, collaborate with co-workers, sell products, learn new skills and connect with friends in ways we could barely imagine just a decade ago.

Just take a moment to think about how many ways you use the internet every day. With all of these changes, Mountain Telephone still has customers who have not changed their internet speeds in years. Having the proper broadband speed is the best way to ensure you are getting the most out of your devices.

Looking back on the past year and the past decade, I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish at Mountain Telephone. I hope you will take a moment to evaluate your broadband needs and be sure you are taking full advantage of the robust network that is available to you. We have made these upgrades so that you, our customers, can enjoy a higher quality of life. ☺

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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 12,000 members.

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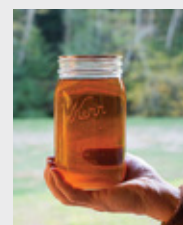
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Each winter, when the nights are still cold but the days begin to warm, the Howard family taps maple trees to begin creating syrup. See story Page 12.

A death in the Mountain family

Homer Barrett Jr. joined Mountain Telephone about 13 years ago. In his early 50s and from Indiana, he didn't fit the mold as a new hire for a cooperative that puts an emphasis on developing a home-grown team.

The man known as Junior, though, was an engineer with a sterling reputation. "He was an excellent employee, and he was a master of his craft," General Manager Shayne Ison says. "Junior was always willing to take on any project, no matter what size it was."

At Mountain, Barrett showed that his reputation as a high-performing engineer was deserved. "Junior proved it, time after time and day after day, that he was as good as advertised," Plant Manager Steven Gullett says.

But Barrett was more than just another member of the team. "Mountain Telephone was his family here, and in a sense we adopted him," Gullett says. "We were his family in Kentucky."

The man from Charlestown, Indiana, also brought skill and personality to the job. Co-workers suspected Barrett had something close to a photographic memory because he could recall details such as the specifics about the cables strung on a particular pole in the Mountain network or the identification number of a pole near a specific home.



Mountain Telephone engineer Homer Barrett Jr. passed away in October.

He also could engage members, helping them understand the services they received. "He was really good at putting the fires out before they ever got started," Gullett says.

"He was very gifted and a very talented person whom I thought a lot of," Ison says. "He was an excellent co-worker, and we hated to lose him."

Homer Barrett Jr., 66, of Hazel Green, Kentucky, passed away Oct. 18 in Sevierville, Tennessee. Survivors include his wife, the former Vanessa Frickhoeffler of Hazel Green, Kentucky; sons Anthony Snell of Charlestown, Indiana, and Travis Barrett of Charlestown, Indiana; and daughter Chanda Austin of Madison, Indiana.

Do you know how to have sweet dreams?

Go to sleep knowing your loved ones are safe and secure.



MRTC SECURE

Premium Security and Surveillance Systems

MRTC Secure's security and surveillance systems provide an extra layer of protection for your home or business.

So sleep well tonight — contact MRTC Secure.

BONUS: Get a FREE smoke detector, a \$78 value, with any MRTC Secure security or surveillance system purchased in February.

And there's more: **Carbon monoxide detectors** are available for **half price**.

You can also receive a free in-home quote. And don't forget, MRTC uses high-quality Honeywell products.

Call now for a quote!

606-743-3121



HELP US FIND OUR SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR!

- Visit BroadbandBuildsBusiness.com
- Complete the online nomination form
- Share the link on Facebook and Twitter
- Encourage others to nominate their favorite small business

Hurry, the deadline for nominations is March 10!



Northern cardinal



Carolina chickadee



Tufted titmouse

Photos courtesy of Ray Reeder.

TRIPS FOR THE BIRDS

Join others from around the world in an annual bird count

You don't have to travel far to watch the birds. Your own backyard will do the trick, and you can help the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a computer.

The count is an online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time, creating an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds around the world. Last year, more than 160,000 bird lovers participated, counting 5,689 species of birds in 130 countries.

During the count, you can explore what others are seeing in your area or around the world. Share your bird photos by entering the photo contest, or enjoy images and actual bird sounds pouring in from across the globe.

You must create a checklist before getting started. It's all free and fun. This year's count is Feb. 17-20. All that is required of you is to tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count.

It's during the months of winter that some birds, just like their human counterparts, become snowbirds, visiting the South for a little warmth. One of the best things about bird-watching is that it takes nothing more than your eyes, ears and birds. If you really want to get fancy, add some binoculars and a good bird guide and you're ready to go.

For more information and to start a checklist, go to gbbc.birdcount.org. Here are some places around the South that take you out of your backyard to start you on a birding adventure.

REELFOOT LAKE, TENNESSEE

Tucked into the northwest corner of Tennessee, Reelfoot Lake is a wonder of nature. The lake was formed during a large earthquake in the early 1800s, leaving a massive swamp and creating the perfect mix of water, trees, reptiles and fish to attract birds by the score — and bird-watchers, too.

The most common birds are bald eagles, white pelicans, geese, ducks, short-eared owls, the Lapland longspur and 23 species of warblers. But if you have patience, you may even see a golden eagle, black-billed cuckoo or a long-tailed jaeger.

"Birding is prevalent here because we are located on the Mississippi River Flyway, so migration is great," says MaryAnn Holt, administrative assistant at the Reelfoot Lake Tourism Council.

The best areas for viewing are on the Mississippi levee, the Reelfoot National Wildlife Refuge/Walnut Log area and Reelfoot Lake itself. "You can see thousands of geese, ducks and eagles," Holt says.

"Bird-watching has brought many, many

people to our area,” she adds. “The eagles bring many here December through March — some days you can see up to 50 eagles a day.”

- ▶ Reelfoot Eagle Festival: Feb. 3-5. Admission: \$5. Bus tours, children’s activities and more.
- ▶ Information: reelfoottourism.com.

RAINS COUNTY, TEXAS

Rains County is known as the Eagle Capital of Texas for good reason. With large bodies of water full of fish and surrounded by tall trees, such as Lake Fork and Lake Tawokoni, it’s the ideal place for feeding, nesting and raising their young.

“A newly mated pair of eagles may look over an area for several years before building a nest to make sure it’s in the right location,” says Amanda Pruitt with the Rains County Chamber of Commerce.

Each January, the county celebrates its bald eagle population with Eagle Fest. Barge tours take visitors out on the water where they might witness an eagle swoop down to grasp its prey with its magnificent talons or see its nest high in a lakeside tree.

There are also bus tours, but Pruitt says barge tours offer the best chance of seeing America’s national bird. Eagle Fest also includes a walk on the wild side, with eagle shows throughout the day and wildlife demonstrations in an outdoor setting.

- ▶ Admission: \$5 (festival), \$10 (bus tours), \$25 (barge tours).
- ▶ Information: www.rainscountychamberofcommerce.com or 903-473-3913.

LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES, KENTUCKY

With two rivers flowing to create a massive greenway host to more than 250 species of birds, Land Between the Lakes is one of the best places to bird watch in Kentucky. Listen to the song of a warbler, watch the playful antics of the eastern towhee, or see the beautiful blue of an indigo bunting or the majesty of an American bald eagle taking wing. It’s the best of Mother Nature all on display.

“During winter, many northern birds, such as bald eagles, ducks and geese, pelicans, kinglets and waxwings, migrate

to the Land Between the Lakes area,” says Aviva Yasgur, a naturalist at Land Between the Lakes Nature Station.

Many wintering birds are fish eaters, drawn to Kentucky and Barkley Lakes.

“Anywhere near the water is a good place to look for birds,” Yasgur says.

Some people like to get out on the lakes by boat, so the Nature Station accommodates them on guided eagle-viewing cruises. For those who like a nice hike, both the Hematite Trail and Honker Trail go around small lakes and offer great birding opportunities. And if you’re lucky, you might spot some rare sights: a golden eagle, tundra swan or sandhill crane.

- ▶ Birding opportunities: Eagle-viewing river cruises and van tours.
- ▶ Information: www.landbetweenthelakes.us.

CAROLINA SANDHILLS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Winter months change the face of the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge as migratory birds flock to the area, putting out tweets that beckon bird-watchers to gaze upon the playful antics of warblers and sparrows. Listen for the distinct call of red-cockaded woodpeckers, just one of the hundreds of species found there. The refuge, spanning more than 45,000 acres, offers a mosaic of habitats perfect for a diversity of birds.

“South Carolina is essentially a watershed where you can see bird species from the mountains, to the piedmont and to the coastal plain,” says Nancy Jordan, wildlife biologist.

The best places for bird-watching in the refuge are in open fields located along the main drive where raptors and wild turkeys may be spotted. Put on your boots and walk the Woodland Pond Trail where you might catch a glance of a Bachman’s sparrow or perhaps the rarest of all, the lark sparrow. There are also several lakes, wetlands and bottomlands where untold numbers of ducks, geese, hawks and turkeys come to nest and feed. Just don’t go expecting to see Sandhill cranes because of the refuge’s name, which comes from

its geographical location in McBee, South Carolina, a town in the center of the state between coast and mountains.

- ▶ Points of interest: Lake Bee (picnic shelters and tables; restrooms); Oxpen Area (scenic views with observation tower); Martin’s Lake (picnic area with photography blind).
- ▶ Information: www.fws.gov/refuge/Carolina_Sandhills

NORTH ALABAMA BIRDING TRAIL


With 50 bird-watching sites in 12 of Alabama’s northern counties, there’s a place for bird-watching at its best: the North Alabama Birding Trail.

Carrie Threadgill, a nongame biologist with the Alabama Division of Wildlife, says the diversity of North Alabama’s geography, with large lakes and the Tennessee River, combined with mild winters and waste grains in neighboring fields, make an ideal winter home for waterfowl and other birds.

“The most exciting bird reported in the area in the winter time would have to be the endangered whooping crane,” she notes. “Their winter numbers have increased over the last few years, and we now have a substantial part of an experimental population wintering in North Alabama.”

Other birds becoming more common along the Tennessee River in Alabama are American white pelicans and common loons.

The North Alabama Birding Trail is not an actual trail that you can hike. It’s a network of points that are excellent for bird-watching. Printed guides, an app for iPhone users and GPS coordinates are available at alabamabirdingtrails.com.

- ▶ Popular stops along the trail: White Springs Dike at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge; the dam at Guntersville Lake; and Town Creek Marsh in Town Creek, Alabama.
- ▶ Information: www.alabamabirdingtrails.com. 

The divine gourd

An artist turns the ordinary into the stunning

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Everyone obviously knows what a gourd looks like ... until you see the work of artist Linda Harse-Lancette. In her hands, that simple, hard-skinned fruit becomes something special.

Turning gourds into art isn't unheard of, but Harse-Lancette has taken things a few steps further. "A lot of people think you should keep the gourd in its natural shape to honor the gourd, and that's really nice," she says. "But, that bored me after about three gourds, so I started tearing them apart and adding pieces."

While examples are found throughout the Wolfe County home she shares with her husband, Bernie, the upstairs workshop houses her current collection.

One item was once a large round gourd, but she cut it open and hollowed it. The top became an intricately painted lid, and a music box is secreted away in the base of what is now a bowl.

Another gourd is hinged, and opening the small doors reveals a nativity scene framed against a metal panel. Smaller

gourds have become Easter eggs, contained in a larger gourd basket.

But those items, if you look closely, remain recognizable as gourds. Other creations, however, do not. Harse-Lancette often takes parts of one gourd to pair with those of another. And she carves, paints, etches, burns and more to shape pieces that are far removed from the fruits' original shapes. There is a cat with a swooping U-shaped tail, a rooster and a stunning bird, and that is only the beginning.

A PASSION FOR ART

A trained artist raised in New York, Harse-Lancette moved to Kentucky in 1998 from Syracuse. She has a bachelor's degree in art education, and she studied for a master's degree in fine art. She taught art and later worked in merchandising, and along the way she met her future husband, who worked as the manager of an engineering department.

They wanted a change, though, and found land in the Bluegrass State. Their new home became a work of art of its own, an ongoing construction project. Once they settled, she found a job as a teacher in the Head Start program.

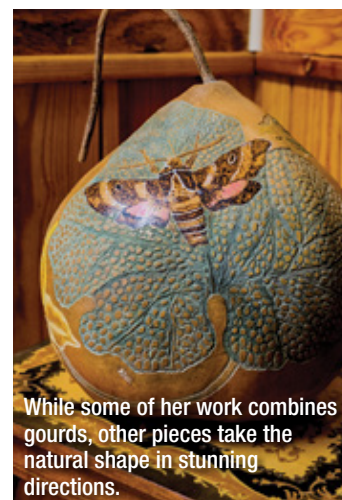
She understands the power art has in her life, something made clear before the couple



In her upstairs workshop, Linda Harse-Lancette is surrounded by her creations.



A gourd basket holds decorative eggs created from smaller gourds.



While some of her work combines gourds, other pieces take the natural shape in stunning directions.

moved south. One of her stepsons was seriously injured, and her artistic work became a balm for her during his recovery.

"I've always done art. If I don't do it, I have a physical need to do it and a mental need to do it. And it's also solace," she says.

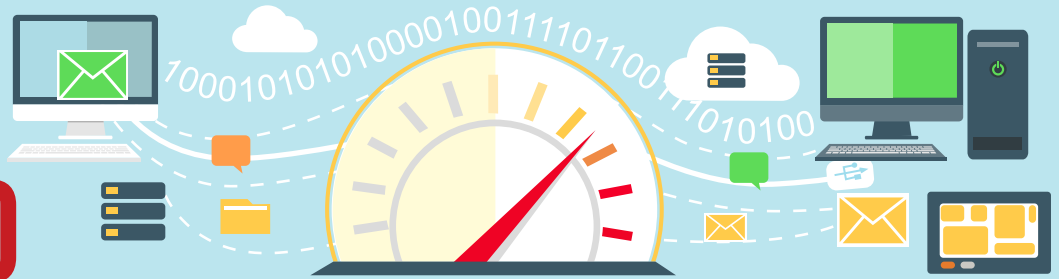
Originally, one outlet was carving eggs, turning them into delicate, jewel-like showpieces. "You have to concentrate because you can't

think of anything else, and then you'd still break the egg," she says.

After moving to the South, though, a new discovery sparked her imagination. "Gourds are much easier than eggs," she says. "I had never really paid attention to gourds until I moved to Kentucky, and I saw one and thought I should try that."

Now, her work appears in art galleries throughout the area. ☞

WHAT SPEED DO YOU NEED?



Is your connection 'just right,' or will it leave you and your new devices out in the cold?

BY ANDY JOHNS

On a cold winter day, a small electric space heater is usually enough to warm up one person, if they stay in one place. But if you have plenty of people to keep warm in a large area, you're going to need to upgrade to a bigger heater. The same is true for your broadband connection from Mountain Telephone. The broadband speeds that enabled a single computer to check email and surf the web in the past won't be able to handle tablets, a game system, a family of smartphones and a streaming box or smart TV. And just like trying to heat a whole house with a small space heater, connecting a house full of devices over one small-bandwidth connection is likely to create frustration and leave someone out in the cold.



THE FUNDAMENTALS

To understand how to meet your family's internet needs, it's important to understand some internet basics. Broadband speeds are actually measuring the capacity or amount of data a connection allows. Someone with a 50 Mbps connection can download and upload information much faster than someone with a 5 Mbps connection — whether that information is from video games, high-definition movies, holiday photos or business files.

It's important to keep in mind that when multiple devices share a connection over a Wi-Fi network, they also share that connection's capacity. Two people streaming movies on different devices need twice the bandwidth as they would with one streaming device.



AVOID THE GADGET GAP

Studies show U.S. households have an average of 16 connected devices, and that number is growing. How many new connected gadgets did your family members get for Christmas? At 7:30 p.m., how many devices are in use? When you factor in how many devices your family may use at any given time, it's easy to see how your connection could be maxed out. And without the right connection, they're not getting the most out of those new devices.



HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

If you have multiple Wi-Fi-enabled devices in your home and think you should be getting more out of your connection, contact a representative of **Mountain Telephone** at **606-743-3121** so they can help get you a connection that meets your family's needs.



THE GUIDE BELOW

lists the recommended connection speeds for certain online services. It's important to factor in other devices that may use services at the same time. For example, if someone in your house will want to play an online game while someone else is watching Netflix, you should consider at least an 8 Mbps connection.

XBOX LIVE

Min. Download Min. Upload

Online Gaming3 Mbps.....500 Kbps
HD Video.....5 Mbps

NETFLIX

Recommended Download

HD Quality.....5 Mbps
Super HD Quality7 Mbps
3D Video..... 12 Mbps

HULU

Min. Download

Streaming Video..... 1.5 Mbps

Mbps and Kbps stand for megabits and kilobits per second, respectively.

Helping your kids use technology wisely begins with setting boundaries

“Mom, can I take my iPad?”
 “Is there going to be Wi-Fi?”

These are two of the most frequently asked questions by my boys when it’s time to go. Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes it is no. The truth is, I want my kids to love and use technology but not let it consume their lives. Gadgets are wonderful for kids, but only if they are used in moderation. I believe the negative effects of kids being online too much comes down to parenting, not technology. There must be balance in our children’s lives, and that includes technology skills.

My sons, Dalton, 10, and Patton, 7, love their iPads and video games. If they had their way, they might play with them all day and all night. Luckily for my sons — whether they like it or not — they don’t get that as an option. They also need to help with chores, play with toys, draw, be active in sports, talk with friends and have imaginative adventures. All of these skills are important for them to become well-rounded adults.

Technology is a huge part of my life. I live and work in a town with less than 400 people, but I have gigabit internet service to our home so I can work as a technology education consultant. My husband works on the family cattle ranch, so we don’t have the option to move to the big city. I have found a way to work the type of career I want and still live in a small town. My job is helping people use and understand broadband, gadgets and all that goes with it in today’s world.

So, you might ask, how do I keep my



boys from turning into anti-social, techie monsters? It comes down to parenting and setting boundaries. It’s that simple. Sometimes we just have to take something away. We have rules, and we enforce those rules. We aren’t perfect parents (far from it), but we are trying to find the balance that works for our family. I also have some helpful apps, gadgets and resources that help me to manage their online activity and keep them connected but safe. I look forward to sharing some of those in future issues. 📱

“I have long felt that the way to keep children out of trouble is to keep them interested in things.”

—Walt Disney



CARISSA SWENSON is a training and education consultant for Consortia Consulting, a Nebraska-based company. She also serves as a director for Consolidated Telecommunications Cooperative in Dickinson, North Dakota. Carissa’s columns on Parenting in the Digital Age will appear throughout the 2017 issues of this magazine.

**PARENTING
TIPS →**

You don’t have to understand how to use all the technology your kids use, but you need to be aware of what they are doing. Create rules, enforce rules and stand by your rules when it comes to using technology.



PROTECT YOUR IDENTITY

DEFEAT THE LATEST SCAMS

BY LISA SAVAGE

The phone rings, and an automated voice on the line claims to be from the Internal Revenue Service, explaining that a lawsuit will be filed if taxes aren't paid. Or another call might be left on voicemail with a similar message and phone number, asking for someone to call back immediately for more information about the lawsuit.

But any call from someone claiming to be the IRS is a scam, says Cindy A. Liebes, regional director for the Federal Trade Commission, southeast region.

"People think 'What if it really is the IRS?'" she says. "But the IRS will never call you."

The frequency of this type of impostor scam has grown dramatically. "They're hoping you will call them back and give them your personal information," she says.

It's difficult to catch the scammers because they spoof the telephone number. "The number you see may not be the number from which they are calling," Liebes says. "The scammer may actually be calling from overseas."

WHAT DO THIEVES DO WITH YOUR INFORMATION?

Once identity thieves have someone's personal information, they can drain a bank account, run up charges on credit cards, open new utility accounts or get medical treatment using someone else's health insurance, Liebes says.

"An identity thief can file a tax refund in your name and get your refund. In some extreme cases, a thief might even give your name to the police during an arrest," she says.

There are clues if someone's identity has been stolen, such as withdrawals from a bank account that can't be explained or missing credit card statements or other types of bills in the mail. "Monitor your accounts," Liebes says. "If you don't get your Macy's bill this month, don't think, 'Woo-hoo! I don't have to pay the bill.' It might be a good indicator that someone has stolen your identity."

Other common clues are merchants refusing to take a check or debt collectors calling. "You might find unfamiliar accounts or charges on your credit report," she says. "A medical provider might bill you for services you didn't use."

Or, the IRS could notify someone that more than one tax return was filed in their name or that income was falsely reported from an unknown employer.

However, if a wallet, social security

number or other personal information is lost or stolen, there are steps to take to help protect against identity theft, Liebes says. "Minimize personal information you carry in your purse," she says. "Don't put passwords somewhere on your smartphone."

If someone's identity is stolen, it's important to report it and get help, Liebes says. A report can be filed with the Federal Trade Commission, local police or both. Then, call the companies where you know fraud occurred and credit bureaus to report the fraud.

"Your identity theft report proves to businesses that someone stole your identity and makes it easier to correct problems caused by identity theft," Liebes says. There are also great resources available at identitytheft.gov. "It's a one-stop resource for victims," she says. ☞

VISIT FTC.GOV/IDTHEFT
FOR PREVENTION TIPS AND
FREE RESOURCES.

A SWEET WINTER TRADITION

An Elliott County couple produces **maple syrup**

Tapping the maple trees on the rugged hillsides of their property is a winter tradition for Dail and Ethel Howard.



BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Just about Valentine's Day, maybe a little earlier or a bit later depending on the weather's fickleness, the sap begins to flow in the maple trees scattered across the steep property of Dail and Ethel Howard.

The cues are easy to spot: cold nights followed by warm, sunny days. That's when it's time to go to work tapping the trees for the water-laden sap that will eventually turn into sweet, amber-colored maple syrup.

A few people will end up buying syrup from the Howards, and others will find the treat sold or auctioned at fundraisers such as the one supporting local firefighters or the Elliott County Christian Community Center.

For the Howards, though, the often challenging process of making maple syrup is not about earning money. It's about tradition, that of their family and a community on the far southern boundary of maple syrup production.

"It's a nostalgia type of thing," Howard

says. "Once you've done it a few times, it becomes about that time of year coming around again. It's kinda like deer hunting. We'd be lost if we weren't out there trudging through the mud and ice to collect it."

EMBRACING TRADITION

The Howards both spent their careers in education and retired from Morehead State University, not far from their home in Elliott County. Married for 51 years, they live on about 300 acres of land owned by Ethel Howard's family, and their home is a stone's throw from the house where she was born.

While she does not recollect her family making syrup, he remembers his family

talking about the "sugar orchard" on land outside Sandy Hook.

He began researching, reading a book by Helen and Scott Nearing, authors of "Living the Good Life," that described how to make syrup. "We started piddling and tapping some trees 15 years ago, and then we were just using an iron kettle over an open fire," he says. "We were probably tapping a dozen trees or so."

Later, he leaned on his experience as a grant writer, securing a grant through the Brushy Fork Institute at Berea College. The goal was to see if syrup production could provide a secondary source of income for the area's farmers. Five people agreed to give it a try, and the Howards, Glenn

Each year, Dail and Ethel Howard produce a few gallons of maple syrup. Many bottles are sold to help raise funds for local organizations.



Dail Howard might work from dawn to late into the night when preparing a run of maple syrup.



Photo contributed by Dail and Ethel Howard.

“Willie” Skaggs and George Plage are the ones who continue it.

TAPPING NATURE'S GOODNESS

It all begins with the trees, and the science behind exactly how the sap begins to flow is complex. But the weather sends the signal that the trees' internal pressure is likely starting to build. “The ideal is when nights are below freezing and then there's a warmup the next day with sunshine,” Howard says. “That's the beginning of spring, when the trees start waking up and sending the sap up. If you get a prolonged cloudy week, it won't run, so getting a good run is dependent on sunshine.”

Maple syrup, however, is unpredictable. “At times, the flow stops as the sun goes down, or sometimes it will run all night,” he says.

When the sap is moving, though, Howard chooses the trees he wishes to tap, about 50 last year. He drills a small hole into each tree and then places a tap, which, when opened, sends sap into a gallon-sized plastic bucket.

Each of those buckets is dumped into a larger container that is then carried out of the woods to a vehicle with a collection tank. To make it all a little easier, on

some trees growing on the steepest ground, the Howards now use plastic piping and gravity to send the sap to a collection area downslope.

And thanks to all that work, they may collect dozens of gallons' worth of sap, but sap is a long way away from syrup. The sugar content of sap is usually no more than about 2 percent, but the amount of sugar in maple syrup is typically between 90 and 95 percent.

Converting sap to syrup requires extracting the water, and for the Howards that means a wood-fired extractor. “You're boiling away 40 to 50 gallons of water to get one gallon of remaining syrup,” he says.

After the sap is collected, you can usually find Dail Howard and his friend, Skaggs, overseeing a steaming, wood-burning, silver-sided evaporator sheltered beneath a shed just outside the Howards' home.

If they start the fire early in the morning, they might operate it late into the night to complete a run. Leaving it on the heat too long, however, can put all of the earlier work to waste. Overcooked sap turns to foam, signaling it's too far gone to save.

But with experience and care, the syrup producers can recognize when the bubbles begin to multiply and grow smaller, knowing just when to pull the fluid off the heat.

And even then, it's not finished.

The goal is to boil it down to a point that it's almost ready to produce syrup, and then the liquid is sealed in jars. When it's time to put the syrup into one of the bottles bearing the image of a colorful maple leaf, Ethel Howard boils the liquid down to create the final product. Because they use no preservatives, the last reduction guarantees the final syrup is as fresh as possible. “Remember, once it's opened, if you don't use it pretty soon, it needs to be refrigerated,” she says.

It's a lot of work, and they both know there's an easier way because their daughter, Joy, lives in Burlington, Vermont, where syrup production is a commercial business.

“We may ask ourselves every winter why this is important to do,” says Ethel Howard, smiling.

Dail Howard says, “I could send sixty dollars to my daughter and have her bring back a gallon of Vermont syrup, and it would be more than I'd ever need for the year.”

But, that wouldn't be the same as following their own maple syrup tradition. “It happens at a time of the year when there's not a lot of other outdoor activities,” Howard says. “And we got a reputation for doing it, and it's a niche we can serve.” ☑

CRAZY FOR SAUSAGE

From the outside, Dobbins Supermarket looks like a typical small-town grocery store. Windows are filled with signs handwritten in blue advertising weekly specials: fryer legs for 89 cents a pound, hot dogs for 99 cents a package and snack cakes — four for \$5.

But it's not chicken, hot dogs or snack cakes that bring folks from hundreds of miles away to this no-frills market atop Sand Mountain in the heart of Bryant, Alabama. It's the sausage that puts Dobbins Market on the radar of sausage lovers throughout the South.

In 1945, Gordon and Ruby Dobbins opened the market in a small store next to their home, selling hardware, groceries, feed and fertilizer — items most all farm families needed at the time, says their son, Roy Dobbins, one of the couple's nine children.

But it wasn't until Roy Dobbins took over the market, buying out his twin brother Troy Dobbins in the early 1970s, that sausage, made in-house from pigs slaughtered on the nearby family farm, appeared on the shelves in the meat department.

It didn't take long for word to spread, and now people drive from as far away as West Palm Beach, Florida, to take home packages of the prized pork, Roy Dobbins says. "They come every year and buy 60 to 80 pounds to take home for Christmas gifts," he says.

Roy Dobbins' wife, Diona, says, "It's just amazing how many people know about our sausage. We go to the doctor



Dobbins sausage is fresh, made from locally sourced pork.

in Chattanooga, and people who see our name and where we live on the sign-in sheet ask us, 'You're not those Dobbinses who make that homemade sausage, are you?'"

Linda Diggs Keefe lives in Valley, Alabama, near Auburn, and makes the 300-plus-mile round trip to Dobbins Market two to three times a year to fill a large cooler with sausage to take home. "I wish they were closer to me," she says. "I usually buy about 20 pounds every time," she says.

But it's not only for her. In her world, Dobbins sausage is for sharing. "My neighbors ask me all the time, 'When are you going back to the sausage store?'" she says.

The secret to Dobbins' sausage is in the seasoning. Roy Dobbins took a Goldilocks approach in finding just the right blend. He tried one, changed it around, tried another and changed it, too. "I kept changing it till I got the one that I liked, and I haven't changed it in 15 years," he says.


There are four varieties available: mild, mild with extra sage, hot and hot with extra sage. Mild is the most popular, Roy Dobbins says.

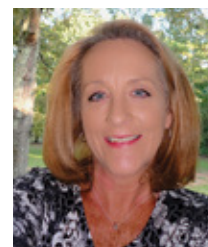
But for Keefe, it's a mixture of mild and hot that suits her taste. "I just love it

because it's so fresh," she says.

The Dobbinses make sausage regularly, slaughtering six massive 300-pound hogs to make an average of 1,500 pounds of sausage a week. At a rate like that, you may think the Dobbinses would grow weary of it, losing their taste for sausage. But no.

"I never get tired of eating it," Roy says. His sister, Delray Dobbins Wright, works in the market alongside her brother and adds, "We just like to fry it up. Make patties and serve them with biscuits and gravy and scrambled eggs."

But there are more ways the Dobbins family uses sausage when gathering for family events, sometimes as many as 70 strong, at the family homestead. From sausage balls using Cheese Whiz, to sausage rolls with the creamy richness of cream cheese, there are much-loved recipes that have come from store patrons, family and friends through the years. 



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SAUSAGE BALLS

- 1 pound sausage
- 16 ounces baking mix, such as Bisquick
- 8 ounces shredded cheese
- 1/2 jar Cheez Whiz
- 1 tablespoon paprika

Combine all ingredients, mixing well. Form into balls and place on cookie sheets. Bake at 350 F for 15 minutes or until golden brown. Serve plain or with honey and/or spicy mustard.

VELVEETA SAUSAGE DIP

- 2 pounds Velveeta cheese, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 pound sausage, cooked and drained
- 1 (10-ounce) can Rotel tomatoes with green chiles, undrained
- 1 can cream of chicken or cream of mushroom soup

Put all ingredients in a slow cooker. Cook on medium-high, stirring occasionally, until cheese is melted and mixture is heated through. Serve with tortilla chips.

SAUSAGE-CREAM CHEESE CRESCENT ROLLS

- 1 pound mild sausage with extra sage
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese
- 1-2 (8-ounce) cans refrigerated crescent dough

Heat oven to 375 F. In skillet, cook sausage over medium-high heat for about 5 minutes or until no longer pink, stirring frequently. Drain well. Put sausage back in skillet and add cream cheese, stirring until cream cheese is melted. Set aside. Separate crescent rolls and arrange into two rectangles. Form log of sausage mixture lengthwise down center of each rectangle. Fold over the long sides of pastry to cover sausage log. Place on ungreased cookie sheet, seam-side down. Bake 20 minutes until crust is



golden. Let cool slightly, then slice into 1 1/2-inch slices and serve warm.

SAUSAGE APPLE PATTIES

- 1 1/2 pounds ground pork
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1/2 cup finely chopped sweet onion
- 1 large tart apple, finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne
- 1 tablespoon honey

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients. Form into 3/4-inch-thick patties. In a skillet over moderate heat, cook sausage patties until center is no longer pink. Serve as a breakfast or dinner entree.

SAUSAGE HASH BROWNS

- 2 pounds mild sausage
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 (8-ounce) carton French onion dip
- 1 cup chopped onion

- 1/4 cup chopped green bell pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (30-ounce) package shredded hash brown potatoes, thawed

In a large fry pan, crumble and cook sausage until thoroughly browned. Drain grease out of pan, then place sausage on paper-towel-lined plate to drain completely. In a bowl, mix together 1 3/4 cup cheese and the next 7 ingredients. Add potatoes and fold in gently. Spread half of potato mixture into a greased shallow 3-quart casserole dish. Top with sausage then remaining potato mixture. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Cover with foil and bake at 350 F for 45 minutes. Uncover and bake 10 minutes more or until heated through and bubbly. 🍷

Dobbins Supermarket

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