



Mountain Telephone

JULY/AUGUST 2021

# CONNECTION

## ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Elliott County celebrates Minnie Adkins



### READY TO RESPOND

MRTC works through storms

### ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Broadband extends art beyond the theatre



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## Partnering to fend off cyberattacks

In recent years, we've learned even the biggest of corporations, including Microsoft, Target and Marriott, are vulnerable to cyberattack. Then, last year, the pandemic increased the number of remote workers, moving more technology from the office into homes.

"The pandemic gave cybercriminals the opportunity to discover new malware families, successful new tactics and 'double extortion' strategies," says Roxanna Barboza, our Industry and Cybersecurity Policy analyst. "And since then, they have further honed their skills to exploit fear, gather intelligence and attack."

If this sounds like the trailer for a horror film you have no interest in seeing, I promise you, the possible impacts of a cyber breach are much more frightening. So, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association is working to support the security efforts of internet service providers such as yours.

NTCA initiated CyberShare: The Small Broadband Provider Information Sharing and Analysis Center as a pilot project five years ago. We now have a robust team focused on the critical topic of cybersecurity, and NTCA members are encouraged to join the effort to recognize, analyze and respond to vulnerabilities, threats and other risks.

Also, CyberShare partnerships link us to the owners and operators of critical infrastructure like electric and water systems. More than 90% of CyberShare participants say the information received through the program enhances their ability to combat cyber threats.

It is through programs like CyberShare that we help organizations like your service provider protect consumers by creating a safe, secure digital experience. 📧



Convenience and a seemingly endless supply of options drives online shopping, which is safe as long as you take a few straightforward precautions. The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency offers a few straightforward tips to ensure that no one uses your personal or financial information for their gain.

### THE THREATS

1. Unlike visiting a physical store, shopping online opens the doors to threats like malicious websites or bogus email messages. Some might appear as charities, particularly after a natural disaster or during the holidays.
2. Vendors who do not properly secure — encrypt — their online systems may allow an attacker to intercept your information.
3. If your digital device and the vendor's systems aren't properly updated and protected, the risk increases.

### PROTECT YOURSELF

- Before providing any personal or financial information, make sure that you are interacting with a reputable, established vendor. In case of trouble, note phone numbers and physical addresses of vendors.
- When shopping, check the address bar of your web browser to be sure the address begins with "https:" instead of "http:" and that it has a padlock icon. These generally indicate a secure site.
- Remember, a legitimate business will not use email to request account information or ask you to confirm a purchase.
- Use a credit card for purchases, which limits your liability for fraudulent charges. Debit cards do not have the same level of protection.
- Keep a record of your purchases and copies of confirmation pages, and compare them to your bank statements. Report discrepancies immediately.
- Before providing personal or financial information, check the website's privacy policy to understand the storage and use of your information. 📧

# Summer reading on the go

**B**efore you jump online to order your top picks to round out summer reading, you might consider tapping into what could become your own personal librarian. And you might even keep more money in your pocket.

Most libraries offer free digital resources. So, all you need is a library card, an internet connection and a digital device. Here are a few other resources that could make the digital literary journey for you or the young reader in your family much easier.

## OVERDRIVE:

Most libraries buy the digital licenses to book titles they think you would enjoy. Then, you can use your library card to reserve those free e-books. OverDrive can work with apps like Libby so you can send your e-book to a Kindle or other reading device.

[overdrive.com](http://overdrive.com)

## LIBRARY EXTENSION:

If you're crunched for time and enjoy browsing for digital books, Library Extension offers a free browser plug-in so you can see your library's digital book offerings while skimming titles on sites such as Amazon.com.

[libraryextension.com](http://libraryextension.com)

## PROJECT GUTENBERG:

The oldest digital library features some of the world's most popular classic literary titles. With more than 60,000 e-books to browse, you can read your favorites online or download them to your device.

[gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org)

## TUMBLEBOOKLIBRARY:

This interactive reading program takes existing picture books and turns them into talking, animated e-books. It also offers read-along chapter books. And another neat feature is that each book is offered in English, Spanish and French. Many school and public libraries offer the service to students or card holders. There's also a new TumbleBooks app.

[tumblebooks.com](http://tumblebooks.com)

## SORA:

OverDrive's educational reading app offers students access to e-books and audiobooks in multiple languages through participating school and local libraries. The app allows teachers to track the amount of time students spend reading. Sora makes notes as students read and can share those notes with teachers and classmates.

[meet.soraapp.com](http://meet.soraapp.com)

## SCHOLASTIC SUMMER READING:

If your child needs a more structured summer reading experience, then you might want to check out the Scholastic Summer Reading Program. While mostly web based, it also offers some e-books. You'll have to create a Home Base account for your child through Scholastic. Home Base is a free, kid-safe, online digital community that offers fun reading-related activities.

[scholastic.com/site/summer/home.html](http://scholastic.com/site/summer/home.html)

## NOOK:

The Nook app is another option for finding free e-books for children. Just download it in the app store and look for the "Explore Kids" section. You can scroll through a range of topics to find free digital copies for download. 📖



# Uniquely rural

## Robust internet service helps us keep pace

I'd like to ask a favor of you. The next time you're driving through our community, take a few moments to reflect on this place we call home. If you're like me, you appreciate the breathing room we have, the natural beauty that surrounds us, our unique small towns and the possibility of really getting to know your neighbors.



**SHAYNE ISON**  
General Manager

Much of this nation isn't so fortunate. In fact, our lifestyle is increasingly rare. About 83% of our nation's residents live in urban areas. That's up from roughly 64% in 1950, according to a 2020 report by the University of Michigan's Center for Sustainable Systems. If the projections prove correct, by 2050, nearly 90% of the nation will live in communities considered urban.

What does that mean for places like ours? In many ways, not much. Our way of life is tried, true and much loved. We know who we are and why we live here, and most of us wouldn't have it any other way.

There is positive news, too. A couple of years ago, the National Conference of State Legislatures noted an uptick in rural population. There was an increase of 33,000 residents for the entire nation. It was a positive sign but not overly inspiring. While the pandemic has some wondering if more people would consider leaving densely populated cities for places like ours, that is a story that will require the next several years to play out.

Meanwhile, we can't ignore the trends that seem to indicate our way of living is increasingly rare. After all, the money usually goes where the people are. Federal and state governments gauge the population to determine where to invest in infrastructure. Private businesses look at demographics to decide where to locate stores, restaurants and more. Where there are jobs, there is growth.

So, we need every tool possible to balance the scales, and it's here where we are not only making up ground but where we also have the potential to excel. The foundation of that success is built on the people you see around you as you travel the local roads, enjoy a picnic, pick up groceries ... those day-in and day-out moments of life.

How do I know this? Well, we're already well down the road. This community makes a company like ours possible. Our one mission is to provide communications services to connect you not only to your neighbors but also to the world.

That's why we've focused on offering internet services, which form a bridge between you and a world of opportunities that rural areas simply never enjoyed until now.

It's a system you may well not notice as you drive along our roads. But it's there. And its presence is reflected in the success and happiness of those you know because we're doing what we've always done, which is working together to build a better home.

As you enjoy these long summer days, please do take a few minutes to reflect on all we have. Everyone is not so lucky. 📧

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2021. It is distributed without charge to all member/owners of the cooperative.



### Mountain Telephone

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

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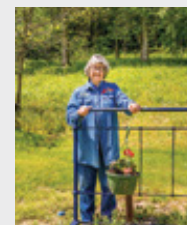
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#### On the Cover:



The carved sculptures and paintings of Minnie Adkins, 87, bring delight. See story Page 8.



**EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT**

**HELPING HOUSEHOLDS CONNECT DURING THE PANDEMIC**

*What is it?*

**A temporary FCC program to help households struggling to afford internet service during the pandemic. The benefit provides:**

- Up to \$50/month discount for broadband service
- Up to \$75/month discount for households on qualifying Tribal lands
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, desktop computer or tablet purchased through a participating provider

*Who is eligible?*

**A household is eligible if one member of the household:**

- Has an income that is at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participates in certain government assistance programs
- Receives benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch or breakfast program
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year
- Experienced a substantial loss of income due to job loss or furlough since Feb. 29, 2020
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 program

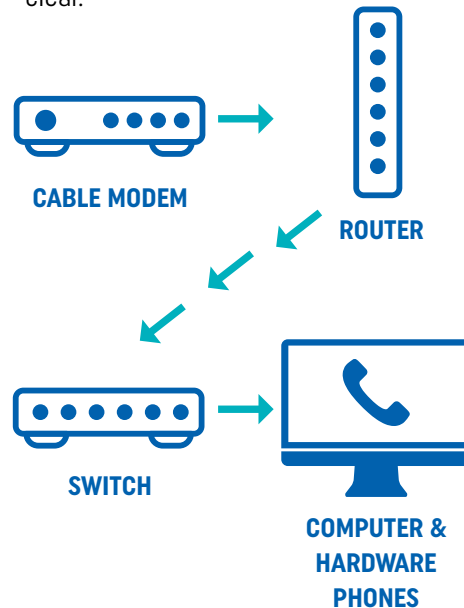
**For more information, visit [getemergencybroadband.org](http://getemergencybroadband.org).**

**What is VoIP?**

**Clear, fast, reliable phone calls**

Chances are, you've heard of VoIP, or Voice over Internet Protocol. But what is it really?

- Voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP, describes the way phone calls are made and received over the internet.
- An IP address is an Internet Protocol address. It's the way computers and devices communicate over the internet.
- VoIP uses your existing internet connection to make phone calls and doesn't require you to sign up for traditional landline phone service.
- In short, your phone connects you to other phones through your router, making calls cheaper, faster, more reliable and clear.



**Get connected**

VoIP is a service provided by Mountain Telephone that is separate from internet service or landline telephone service. But as a VoIP service provider, we do more than establish calls. We route outgoing and incoming calls through existing telephone networks, making it easier and less expensive for homes and businesses to manage and maintain their phone systems.

**Save with this special offer**

**Get a \$5 credit every month for one year by signing up for VoIP and a broadband-only plan.**



★ Mountain Telephone offices will be closed Monday, July 5, in observance of Independence Day. We wish you a happy, festive and safe Fourth of July!



# GORGE-OUS

## The exquisite scenery of the Red River Gorge

Story by ANNE P. BRALY

Cliffs dominating the skyline, rushing mountain streams and a landscape chiseled by millions of years of wind and water erosion bear witness to the forces of Mother Nature in Kentucky's Red River Gorge Geological Area.

Nestled largely within Daniel Boone National Forest along the Cumberland Plateau, the gorge encompasses 29,000 acres filled with history, wonder, excitement and adventure.

Matt Vogt, information assistant at Red River Gorge's Gladie Visitor Center, has no problem identifying the No. 1 prominent feature of the gorge — the landscape. "It's the gullies, caves, rock shelters, arches, cliffs and all the natural, rugged, scenic beauty," he says. "And many are drawn to the gorge's naturally formed arches."

Vogt says the gorge has up to 150 such arches, the greatest number east of the Rocky Mountains.

Red River Gorge is a photographer's dream, a paddler's fantasy and a hiker's paradise.

Hidden waterfalls and rock houses — rocky overhangs once used as shelter by native tribes like the Shawnee — are the perfect backdrop for a photo to treasure.

The many natural features of the gorge can be found along its 77 miles of trails. Take a short day hike or pack your sleeping bag, food and other essentials and

make an overnight, or longer, journey out of it as you explore the thousands of acres of hills and valleys. Campers must have permits for overnight stays, along with proper food storage equipment to keep black bears at bay.

Swift Camp Creek Trail is a good starting point for extended hikes. Descending from the top of the gorge to the lower areas, it's a 7-mile trek that follows Swift Camp Creek. The dramatic scenery includes cascading mountain streams rushing through dense stands of rhododendron and, at one point, flowing under one of the gorge's famous arches.

For even longer treks, the Sheltoewe Trace National Recreation Trail extends 319 miles, starting in Daniel Boone National Forest and ending at Pickett State Park in Jamestown, Tennessee.

At peak season the trails may be busy, but on weekdays and during the colder months you may not run into a soul. The quiet is only broken by a deer foraging through the brush or sipping from a nearby stream.

But there was a time when the raucous sounds of sawmills echoed through Red River Gorge. Early in the 20th century, loggers harvested its hardwood. Sawmills and logging camps sprang up on the hillsides. Railroads snaked through the valleys, and dams were constructed along the Red River and other tributaries to power the sawmills. It was a massive operation. That is, until the gorge was saved, enveloped in the arms of Daniel Boone National Forest in 1937.



The Red River Gorge Geological Area is a Kentucky treasure, a place for scenic beauty, relaxation and adventure.

Photo courtesy of Matt Vogt.

The area also includes Clifty Wilderness, named for its towering cliffs and added to the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1985. The section of the Red River that runs through Clifty Wilderness is a Kentucky Wild River, one of nine such river sections in the Bluegrass State.

Adding to the pristine charm are numerous creeks that rush through the canyons of the gorge and empty into the Red River. The Red River's upper reaches provide Class II and III whitewater canoeing. This Wild Rivers section is generally navigable from December to May, but the Falls of the Red River is a 3-foot drop. Unless you're an expert canoeist, portage your canoe or kayak around them.

Just below the falls is the Narrows of the Red River, which in some places is no more than 6 feet wide and littered with large boulders. This section can also be dangerous when water levels are high. As the Red River continues through the heart of the gorge, it levels out and provides gentle Class I paddling, ideal for



## Points of Interest

You'll find Mother Nature at her finest throughout Red River Gorge, but there are a few places where she really shines.

- ▶ **Chimney Top Rock** is easy to reach — a short, quarter-mile hike — and provides one of the most beautiful overlooks of the Red River as it passes through the gorge.
- ▶ **Sky Bridge** is a mile-long road open to vehicles. It offers several good overlook opportunities. The road ends at a traffic circle and parking lot, where you'll find good picnic spots and the start of a 1.5-mile hike to the largest arch in the gorge.
- ▶ **The Grays Arch Trail** is also very popular and leads to one of the most spectacular arches in the forest. It gets busy in peak season, however.
- ▶ **The Auxier Ridge Trailhead** follows a narrow ridgeline where it ends with views of several outstanding rock formations.



## Digging the past

Archaeologists have found a treasure trove of artifacts that reveal life as it was 13,000 years ago when Native Americans lived in the Red River Gorge, including pottery, seeds and tools.

In more modern times, the ruins of moonshine stills dotting the hills have been found.

Photos courtesy of Mark Vogt

# FOLK HEART

## Minnie Adkins' spirit shines through in her art

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

**M**innie Adkins may be considered one of the greatest folk artists alive today, but she's not so great at being a celebrity.

Sure, the Elliott County native will politely answer questions about her carved wood sculptures and paintings that have ended up in the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the private collections of superstars like Oprah Winfrey and Barbara Streisand.

But after that, she's ready to talk about what really matters — her dearest friends, her son, her three grandchildren and her seven great-grandchildren. Their names trip off her tongue, followed by their ages and all the things that make them smart, strong, beautiful and special.

It's that same generosity of spirit that guides her art, too. With her woodcarvings and paintings of animals, she offers a loving take on the qualities that make people unique, whether it's a cocky rooster, a bewildered sheep, a laughing bear or a proud-but-addled mama possum with a string of babies on her tail.

"I guess that's why people buy them — to look at them and get a laugh out of it," says Adkins, who turned 87 this year. "That's what it's supposed to do. I can make something with four legs, and all four legs don't have to be the same size. One can be a little bigger. Whatever makes people laugh. A lot of people don't understand that folk art is supposed to make people laugh and make them be happy."



Minnie Adkins is a world-renowned artist best known for her wood carvings of animals.

### MAKING TOYS

Adkins first started whittling toys out of wood when she was a child growing up on her parents' farm. In the summer, her mother would make sunsuits for the children — little shorts sets sewn from the colorful, printed cloth of feed sacks. Curly-headed Minnie and her brother, Edgar, would run around playing with toy slingshots and pop guns she had made to pass the time. "Back then, kids were too poor to have toys, so I figured I could make bows and arrows and stuff to play with," she says.

As she got older, Adkins continued to carve shapes out of wood. Looking at the

forked piece of wood of her slingshots, she realized that with a head and a tail, they could resemble a chicken. So, she made one. It would be the first of many chickens and roosters that helped define her signature style.

### AN ARTIST IS BORN

Over the years, Adkins gave away her roosters, birds and other creatures, or she sold them for some change. But it wasn't until later in her life — her only son grown and married — that Adkins would stumble upon fame and acclaim.

She and her late husband, Garland, had gone to Morehead to sign up for



unemployment for Garland. There, the pair came upon a shop with an old wooden goat out front. Inside the shop, she saw art that reminded her of the little animal carvings she'd been making for years. She questioned the proprietor, Adrian Swain, an Englishman who would go on to become a curator at the Kentucky Folk Art Center, about selling some of her own pieces.

Swain, who is now a good friend, asked to see some of her work. Not long after Adkins brought a few pieces to Swain, she received a bill of sale and some money. "I still have that piece of tablet paper," she says. "I can't remember off the top of my head, but it seemed like he'd sold a cow and maybe a pig, and I don't know what all. I had \$30, and I thought, 'Boy, I am in the big time.'"

In the mid-1980s, her work appeared in Morehead State University's Folk Art Collection, which preceded the Kentucky Folk Art Center at the school. Larry Hackley, a renowned folk art dealer, started handling her work, which meant more art dealers came calling.

### ARTFUL COMMUNITY

Since then, Adkins has helped bring along other artists, including Tim Lewis, Jimmy Lewis and Linvel Barker, through her encouragement and her status in the folk art community.

She also helped found the former A Day in the Country folk art fair, and she's the inspiration behind Elliott County's Minnie Adkins Day arts and crafts fair at Little Sandy Lodge. The event, to be held on July 17, will feature about 50 artists from around the country, including Adkins and other regional artists and artisans.

"At one time in my small, little area, we had 15 people — whole families — making a living selling folk art," she says. "Now, we're building another new, little colony, Sharon Boggs and Jo Ann Butts and lots of others."

Folk art is meant to be pure, Adkins says. "I told somebody a long time ago that folk art is from the heart," she says. "You don't have to be educated or anything to make it. I just love whittling and turning it into something that you can see and somebody else can enjoy." 📱



Roosters and pigs and bears, oh my! Many of Adkins' pieces reflect the creatures that make up life on a mountain farm.



As a child, Adkins whittled sling shots and toy guns to play with. Now, at 87, she still carves and paints.



## Celebrating Minnie, celebrating art ♥ ♥ ♥

Minnie Adkins Day will be held at Little Sandy Lodge in Sandy Hook on **Saturday, July 17**. Artists and crafters from all over the country will be there with their work. The event is free for attendees. For more information and the latest updates, visit [littlesandyloodge.com](http://littlesandyloodge.com) or the Little Sandy Lodge Facebook page. To see more of Adkins' work, or to purchase it, visit the Possum County Folk Art and Collectibles website at [possumcounty.com](http://possumcounty.com).

# ON WITH THE SHOW

Virtual platforms keep performances going on and off the stage

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Less than a week before the Northeast Alabama Community College Theatre Department's virtual spring production of "Dear Edwina," the show hit a major snag. With just one dress rehearsal left before the musical's live debut, one of the lead actors had to drop out of the show, leaving assistant director Halle Huber to step in.

It was just one more twist in an already unusual season that saw NACC's Theatre Department in Rainsville, Alabama, put on two virtual productions. Much of the early preparation for "Dear Edwina" occurred over Zoom, an inconvenience that suddenly came in handy when Huber needed to brush up on her part fast.

"Because the video and choreography was already online, I was able to look at those and make sure I understood the correct movements," Huber says. "We even did the vocal rehearsals online, so we had some of those tracks to help me understand what part I needed to sing, as well."

Putting those remote practice sessions together was a challenge for performers used to playing off each other. For Director of Theatre Kayleigh Smith, it often required drawing the movements each

performer needed to make on the back of script pages and holding them up to the screen.

"It's crazy to block a show and do choreography without being on the stage," Smith says. "Once we did get on stage we realized one girl had learned everything backwards. So she had to flip everything around in her head on the fly."

## VIRTUAL ESCAPE

The cast's final performance didn't take place in front of an audience but in front of cameras. The entire show was filmed live and made available to stream on demand via the ShowTix4U platform. Additional learning materials for local middle and elementary school students and teachers were also available.

While the remote preparations were a challenge, they forced performers to take an even greater degree of responsibility for their parts. "One of the cast members told me they've never been in a show before where they were this ready and this prepared for the performance," Smith says. "I'm really hoping they carry that with them forever."

With one more virtual show on the schedule this summer, NACC



Photos courtesy of Trey Gilliland and Lauren Cantrell.

A production of "Dear Edwina" by the Northeast Alabama Community College Theatre Department went online to reach its audience.

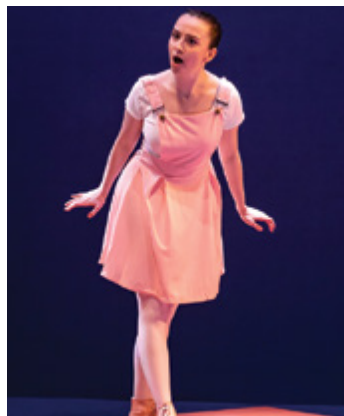
Theatre is on course for its first entirely virtual season. That wasn't the department's ideal plan for the last year but NACC President Dr. David Campbell is impressed with how creatively everyone involved has adapted.

"They have done some outstanding virtual productions that have given our students experience and a way to display their talents, while at the same time, keeping everyone safe through all the COVID-19 prevention techniques," he says.

In addition, the digital format opened the doors to greater accessibility to shows and new opportunities for students interested in film. Smith also hopes that it has provided a respite during the pandemic for people who haven't had the same access to the live experiences they enjoy.

"We were able to provide a little bit of art, and hopefully a virtual escape, safely," she says. "Theater has been healing for us doing it, but also for audiences. I do think it's an escape from what everyone's going through right now and it can be a healing thing." 🗨️

The NACC production of "Dear Edwina" is available to stream on demand through April 19, 2022. Visit [showtix4u.com](http://showtix4u.com) and search "NACC" for more information.



Photos courtesy of Trey Gilliland and Lauren Cantrell.

## NEW HORIZONS

For Texas Ballet Theater, digital performances provided an opportunity to expand the horizons of ballet beyond the traditional stage. In its two-part "The Poetry of Expression" series, company dancers choreographed their own pieces specifically for the digital medium, using the entire Dallas-Fort Worth area as their backdrop.

Dancers and choreographers collaborated with local businesses and nonprofits to bring community landmarks and locations with personal significance into the performances. The result was an innovative showcase filmed at familiar locations like downtown Fort Worth, Firestone & Robertson Distilling, the Benbrook Dam and the Kimbell Art Museum. The prerecorded performances were available for streaming in March and April in lieu of the nonprofit dance company's traditional spring lineup.

For more information, visit [texasballettheater.org](http://texasballettheater.org).

"We hope audiences enjoy a new kind of performance experience through these productions," executive director Vanessa Logan says. "They show us all how the beauty and art of ballet can be found anywhere, even in unexpected places."



Digital performances gave the Texas Ballet Theater a new outlet for expression.



## SOMETHING NEW

For more information, visit [mnopea.org](http://mnopea.org).

More than a year after it put live performances on hold, Minnesota Opera continued to find new ways to connect with its community with the premiere of "Apart Together" in April. The free virtual program featured original performances from members of the opera's Resident Artist Program and the orchestra, ranging from spoken word to piano pieces.

The goal of the project was to give artists a chance to step outside their traditional creative roles within the opera. Resident artists who typically perform pieces composed by others were given the opportunity to pursue their own visions, while audiences could see orchestra musicians perform in a more intimate capacity.

"I really think the future is on the internet, video and how you connect with people through this form we're not used to," says Joey Leppek, resident tenor. "I think getting these kinds of skills in how to create something that's effective on screen is helpful for us, and I hope all artists out there feel permission to get out there and try something new."



Mountain Telephone crews set off to fix cable lines over ice-covered roads in February. Crews worked seven days a week for several weeks to help their customers.

Photo courtesy of Matt Daniel.

# WEATHERING THE STORMS

## Ice storm impact sends Mountain Telephone workers into overdrive

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Mountain Telephone Plant Manager Steven Gullett remembers a tense feeling after the first ice storm hit the region on Feb. 11 of this year. The cooperative's crews were finishing up repairs even as the latest weather reports warned of more dangers on the way — more ice, to be exact.

The ice would hit in two more waves. One came on Feb. 15, while the most damaging bout arrived on Feb. 18.

Gullett and other cooperative leaders knew there was much to consider before the next round of storms struck. The fact was, the very things that make the region beautiful — the trees, hills and remoteness of the area — also make things extra difficult for rural utility companies in bad weather.

### CHALLENGING TERRITORY

Relatively speaking, the first ice storm hadn't been too bad. But additional ice and snow likely meant more downed trees and utility poles. It meant the electricity that powered the cooperative's extensive fiber network could go out, which would require constant fueling of backup generators, and that impassable roads might leave Mountain's vital work crews trapped at home.

Other worries cropped up, too. "We knew this would be the first really bad storm where we had a complete fiber optic network," Gullett says, adding that about 96% of Mountain's customers subscribed to its fiber broadband services. "It was new for us, and we didn't know what to expect."



Photo courtesy of Tim Mays.

With 117 different stations, or offices, connecting the fiber network, the team needed to make sure the station connections weren't broken and that they would keep running even if the electricity wasn't on. Each station has backup batteries and propane-fueled generators for when the batteries run out. "Keeping those levels of propane up was one of the biggest challenges we had," Gullett says. "To keep the network going, we had to keep those offices running."

If those stations shut down for any reason, people wouldn't be able to make internet-powered cellphone calls, which many rely upon these days. They also couldn't access weather reports from either TV or the internet, regardless of whether or not they had power in their homes — even those who had generators or other methods to keep their cellphones and other devices charged.

On a positive note, the fiber optic lines themselves were likely to be in fine, says CEO Shayne Ison. “The fiber is encased in a strong layer of protection,” he says. “So the lines might not be in bad shape. The problems usually come from downed trees and utility poles.”

Inclement weather can be especially trying for rural cooperatives, Ison says, and it’s not just because of the challenging terrain. “Our philosophy is to keep people up and running with good reliable service all the time. These folks are our neighbors. We go to church with them and Little League games and all that. So, it can feel personal to us when that’s not possible.”

### TEAMWORK

Before the most damaging storm on Feb. 18, Gullett requested help from telecom contracting teams in Indiana and Burkesville, Kentucky. He also assembled Mountain Telephone’s entire plant staff of 46 people, including the central office employees, the construction and maintenance teams, dispatchers, help desk technicians, engineers and more.

All were essential, and they worked as a team. “All the departments stepped up equally, and everybody had to wear a lot of hats,” Gullett says. “People were coming up to me saying, ‘I got that done. Point me at what’s next.’” Many of the employees worked 12-hour days, and some worked around the clock. Some even slept overnight at the cooperative office when they were unable to drive to powerless homes on icy roads.



February’s ice storms knocked out power lines and downed trees.

Photo courtesy of Matt Daniel.

“They made do with whatever they could,” Gullett says. “You’ve got to hand it to their families, too. They had to take care of everything at home, and a lot of them didn’t have power.”

The cooperative also worked closely with electric providers and other utilities, all of whom were trying hard to get services restored. Law enforcement helped, too, by directing traffic while they worked and keeping people safe, Gullett says.

Maintenance Supervisor Reggie Easterling says repairing fiber lines can be dangerous, mostly because workers are operating under power lines carrying high-voltage electricity. But his team members also had to ride the roads to remote locations.

Location can be challenging, too, he says. Since the worst of the damage from the last ice storm occurred in Elliott and Morgan counties, the crews were far from their home base and all the materials at the West Liberty plant. “There’s always the challenge of not having what you need and having people running back and forth with supplies,” Easterling says.

### FOCUS

Within a week after the last storm, Mountain Telephone had service to most of its customers up and running, Gullett says. “I think the community in general was very understanding,” he says. “They knew everything wasn’t going to be fixed immediately. But they saw our trucks and knew we were working and giving it our best effort.”

The damage from the ice storm still wasn’t the worst Mountain Telephone and its members have experienced. Easterling remembers when the crews pretty much rebuilt Mountain Telephone’s infrastructure in West Liberty in about 2 1/2 weeks after the 2012 tornado.

It won’t be the last storm, either. But Gullett believes Mountain Telephone workers’ preparation and experience should reassure the community. “There’s a lot of satisfaction in maintaining this network and making it work when there’s really bad weather,” he says. “You can either panic, or you can focus. We choose to always focus. When times get tough, we put blinders on, and we get out and work.” ☑



Mountain Telephone CEO Shayne Ison.

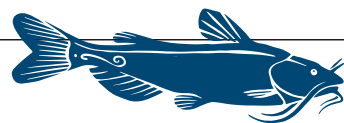


Maintenance Supervisor Reggie Easterling.



Plant Manager Steven Gullett.

Photos by William LeMaster.



# A fresh angle on catfish

## Catch the secret to a wonderful meal

**C**atfish holds a special place in the heart of a Southerner, but take a little care to make sure you get the tastiest results.

Bad catfish can be mushy and have a funny, almost metallic flavor. Good catfish is sweet, with firm, flaky flesh. But, go ahead and give your fillets a bath in some buttermilk before cooking to help neutralize any fishy odors. And to ensure even cooking, choose fillets that are meaty with an even thickness from end to end.

No fish dinner screams Southern flavor more than a platter of fried catfish, complete with sides of coleslaw and hush puppies. No well-rounded collection of recipes is complete without a good catfish option, such as this one from Whole Foods Market.



### FRIED CATFISH

- 3/4 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 4 catfish fillets
- Canola oil, for frying

#### Tartar sauce:

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise (store-bought or homemade)
- 1 small dill pickle, chopped very small (3 tablespoons)
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, plus more to taste
- 1 tablespoon capers, chopped, optional
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill or 1 teaspoon dried dill
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Hot sauce (optional)

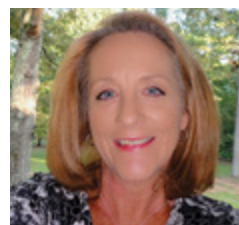
Combine the cornmeal, flour, paprika, salt and both peppers in a shallow bowl or pan.

Coat the fillets with the mixture on both sides, shaking off excess.

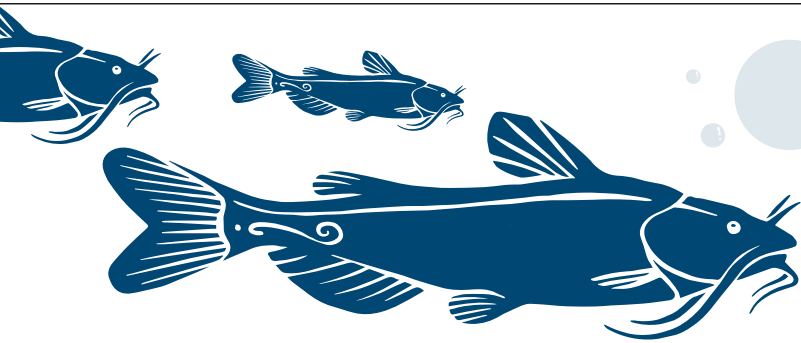
Fill a heavy skillet or large frying pan with about an inch of oil. Heat the oil to 350 F (ready when a small piece of the fish will bubble and rise to the top).

Add the catfish fillets, two at time, and fry until golden, 5 to 6 minutes, turning once. Remove and drain on paper towels. Serve with tartar sauce and a dash of hot sauce, if desired.

**To make tartar sauce:** Combine the mayonnaise, pickles, lemon juice, capers, dill, Worcestershire sauce and mustard in a small bowl and stir until well blended and creamy. Season with salt and pepper. Taste, then adjust with additional lemon juice, salt and pepper.



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



## CATFISH WITH LEMON PASTA

### Lemon pasta:

- 1/2 pound fettuccine pasta
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1-2 teaspoons lemon zest
- 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped (or 1 tablespoon dried)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper



### Catfish:

- 4 catfish fillets
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon dried, crushed red pepper flakes
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 cup dry white wine (or chicken broth)
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 3 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley (or 1 tablespoon dried)
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil (or 1 tablespoon dried, crushed)
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves, crushed

Cook the pasta in salted water until tender but still firm. Meanwhile, whisk oil, cheese, lemon juice, lemon zest and basil to blend. Drain the pasta, but reserve 1 cup of the water. Toss the pasta with the lemon blend. If needed, add some of the reserved pasta water. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Season the fish with salt and red pepper flakes. Heat 3 tablespoons of oil in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add the fish and saute, rounded side down, for 3 minutes; turn and saute 3 minutes or until cooked. Transfer the fish to a plate and set aside.

Add the chopped onion to the same skillet and add 1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil. Saute until translucent.

Add the undrained can of tomatoes, wine (or chicken broth), garlic, parsley, basil and oregano. Simmer until the sauce is reduced slightly, about 10 minutes.

Gently return the fish and any juice to the tomato mixture to absorb the spices, then spoon it over the pasta. Makes 4 servings.



*Catfish With Lemon Pasta*

## SPICY CHIPOTLE CATFISH SANDWICH

- 4 catfish fillets
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 regular or multigrain sourdough rolls
- 4 slices sweet onion
- Chopped cabbage or Romaine lettuce

### Chipotle mayonnaise:

- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon capers
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- Half of chipotle mix

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Mix the lemon zest, lemon juice, garlic and chipotle pepper. Divide equally into 2 bowls.

Rub a small amount of olive oil on the fish. Top the fish with half the chipotle-lemon mixture, then sprinkle it with salt and pepper.

Bake for 8 minutes or until done.

While the fish is baking, make the chipotle mayonnaise by combining the mayonnaise, capers, paprika and half the chipotle-lemon mixture.

Assemble sandwiches with fish, chipotle mayonnaise, onion and lettuce or cabbage. Makes 4 sandwiches.

— Courtesy of Catfish Institute



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