



Mountain Telephone

**BROADBAND:**  
HEALTH CARE EDITION

MARCH/APRIL 2019

# CONNECTION

## BOY WONDER

Local kid gives family  
a new outlook on life

### DISASTER DENIED

Alarm system keeps  
cultural treasures safe

### PALMETTO SWEETS

Pulling back the layers  
on Vidalia's cousin



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

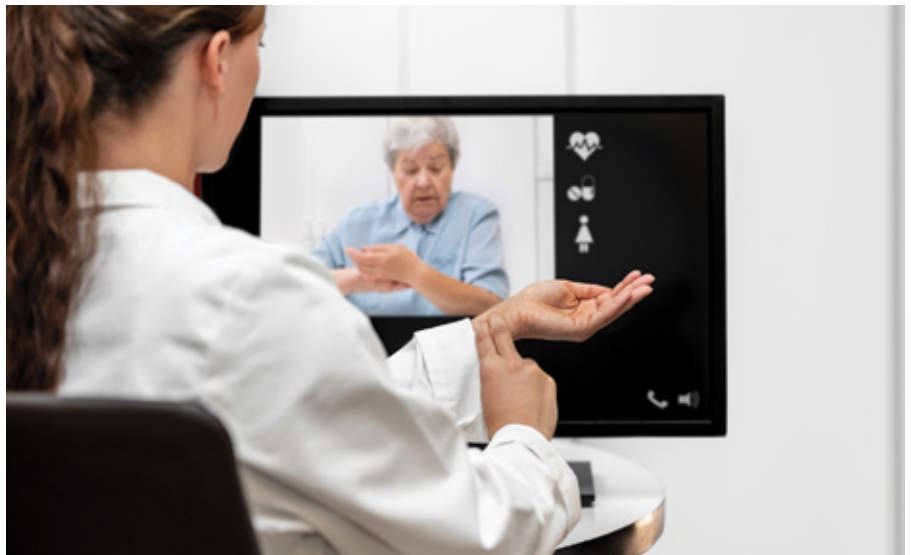
## Broadband and rural health care

This magazine brings you stories of businesses operating across the broadband network your telco is building. You read of people who are working from home or getting an online degree thanks to their connection. Stories like these are endless throughout your area, and across the rural landscape served by the members of NTCA.

In this issue there is a focus on a particularly powerful use of broadband — health care. Better health leads to stronger families and happier, more productive communities. With a reliable internet connection and technology such as smartphones, tablets and monitoring devices, people of all ages have the tools to improve their health, access physicians, age in place, and live better lives. Be sure to read this issue's special health care section.

Innovative approaches to solving the challenges of rural living are nothing new for your telco and others like it across the country. Recently, I was delighted to visit with hundreds of executives and board members who lead these companies at our association's national meeting and expo. I was encouraged — as always — to be around these women and men who face the challenges of serving rural America and do an incredible job delivering some of the best broadband service in the nation.

Your community-based provider is part of a national family creating new opportunities for your community and those like it from coast to coast. From health care to education to economic development and beyond, they are building the future of rural America. 🗨️



## Patients to have more access to telehealth services in 2020 under proposed Medicare Advantage changes

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

The elderly and disabled who participate in Medicare Advantage programs could see more opportunities for telehealth services next year.

The proposed changes, announced in October, would remove barriers and allow Medicare Advantage plans to offer additional telehealth benefits starting in plan year 2020, according to a press release from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Seema Verma, administrator of the CMS, says these changes “give Medicare Advantage plans more flexibility to innovate in response to patients’ needs,” adding that she is “especially excited about proposed changes to allow additional telehealth benefits, which will promote access to care in a more convenient and cost-effective manner for patients.”

The key to providing telehealth services, including remote doctor visits and patient monitoring, is the availability of reliable broadband access. The research paper *Anticipating Economic Returns of Rural Telehealth*, published by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, states: “Highly advanced, state of the art telemedicine applications — including some not even yet developed — can only be possible when accessed via a high-speed, reliable broadband network. This is particularly critical in rural America, where the highest potential benefits from telemedicine — and the greatest challenges to deploying broadband — can be found.”

Rural telecommunications providers continue to expand broadband service to some of the most sparsely populated areas of the country. All of the nearly 850 NTCA member companies provide broadband service, many bringing gigabit internet speeds to their communities.

In remarks at a telehealth policy forum shortly after the CMS announcement, Verma said the proposed Medicare Advantage changes are “a major step towards expanding access to telehealth services because the rule would eliminate barriers for private Medicare Advantage plans to cover additional telehealth benefits for enrollees in MA plans.” 🗨️

# MULTITASKING

## CONSUMERS FIND NEW WAYS TO ENJOY MEDIA

Phones, tablets, streaming boxes, smart televisions, desktops, laptops and more provide consumers a wealth of opportunities to go online, resulting in increasingly complex and individualized habits for content consumption.

There is no better company to illustrate the trends than Nielsen, a global enterprise specializing in measuring and tracking consumer media trends. In December of last year, the company took a deep dive into how audiences are making use of the growing media world to create its Nielsen Total Audience Report.

Adults in the United States spent more than 10 hours daily with some form of media: live or time-shifted TV, nearly five hours; radio, nearly two hours; and digital devices, nearly three and a half hours. They often combine the tools they use. For example, someone might watch television while also surfing the web on an iPad.

Forty-five percent of those responding to a survey of Nielsen's Media Enthusiast Community watched TV while using digital devices "very often" or "always." Nearly a third reported using both platforms "sometimes," while only 12 percent never use both at the same time.

The report concluded that new digital platforms such as smartphones and tablets have changed how consumers interact with and consume media, often using multiple devices at once to create a better overall experience.

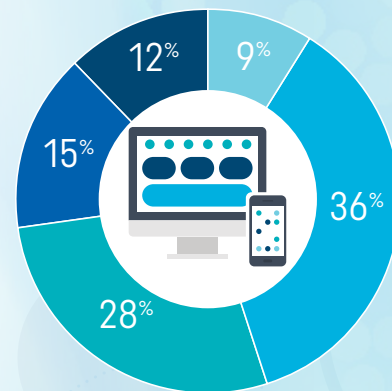
How often, for example, have you been watching a TV program, wondered what other shows an actor has appeared in and used a smartphone or tablet to find the answer? Well, you're not alone. More than 71 percent of respondents to the survey had looked up information about TV content they were viewing, and 51 percent reported the same habit for audio.

While some trends are changing as the technology landscape expands, others do not: Prime time still rules. Adult media usage still peaks from 9-10 p.m., with nearly 38 out of a possible 60 minutes spent consuming media.

The study reached a clear conclusion: Today's media landscape keeps consumers engaged. 📱



## SIMULTANEOUS USAGE TV + DIGITAL



How often do you watch TV and use a digital device simultaneously?



## SIMULTANEOUS USAGE OF DEVICES

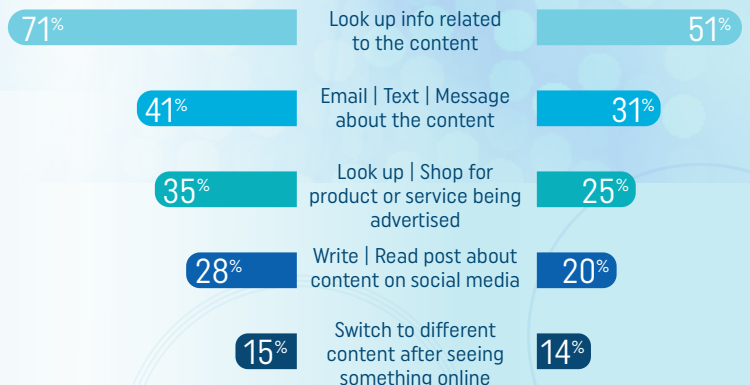
### DIGITAL USAGE WHILE WATCHING TV

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with the TV content you were watching?



### DIGITAL USAGE WHILE LISTENING TO AUDIO

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with audio content you were listening to?



# Broadband opens new health care frontiers

When I talk to state and local leaders, they say they're pleased by what a broadband network can do in our homes, schools and businesses. But increasingly, the place where experts and leaders are most excited about broadband technology for rural America is at the doctor's office.



**SHAYNE ISON**  
General Manager

The American Telemedicine Association defines "telehealth" as "the remote delivery of health care services and clinical information using telecommunications technology." It's no overstatement to say that it can revolutionize health care across our country.

And since telehealth requires high-speed broadband, we're excited to be in the middle of that revolution.

As you'll read in the pages of this issue, telehealth is already helping doctors deliver improved care to patients on cases ranging from stroke to mental health. It's helping sick people eliminate trips to the emergency room. It may even encourage doctors to come to rural clinics and hospitals.

Based on studies, telehealth is already improving patient outcomes and satisfaction while also reducing costs and increasing efficiency for health care providers.

Because of broadband technology, local residents can work with their physicians to connect with specialists around the country via virtual visits and consultations. Eliminating the hurdle of traveling to big-city hospitals has proven to make patients more likely to seek care when they need it, which may result in faster and more complete recoveries.

Telehealth can also increase the pace of care when minutes and seconds matter. Whether it's giving a stroke patient an immediate evaluation by a specialist or enabling a regional radiologist to read the X-ray of a broken arm in the middle of the night, health care providers can use technology to eliminate dangerous delays. Tapping into a regional telehealth network of experts over broadband could mean that patients don't have to wait for help from local medical professionals who may not have the resources or simply can't be everywhere at once.

I find, however, that when explaining what telehealth is, it's also important to discuss what it's not. In my view, telehealth should not be a way to replace local physicians with robots or with doctors a patient never meets in person. Telehealth should be an essential tool and an important resource for your doctor to use in the care of his or her patients.

When we say our mission at Mountain Telephone is to improve the lives of the people in our service area, I can't think of a better way to do that than by working with talented doctors and nurses to help local residents live longer and healthier lives.

As we've built and improved our network, we're happy for the convenience and entertainment it provides. But it is health care — along with economic development and educational opportunities — that drove us to invest the millions of dollars required to build a modern communications network in our rural area. [☞](#)

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2019. 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 12,000 members.

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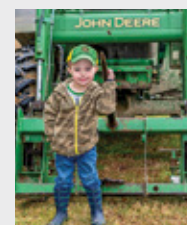
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### On the Cover:



Jase Phipps, who was born with Down syndrome, loves to ride his tractor and give hugs to everyone he meets.

See story Page 12.

Photo courtesy of William LeMaster.



*It's that time again!*

Don't forget to move your clocks forward one hour! Daylight saving time begins at 2 a.m. on Sunday, March 10.

## SHOUTOUT TO ALL SHUTTERBUGS!

**Have you captured a breathtaking snapshot that shows the beauty of Bath, Elliott, Menifee, Morgan or Wolfe counties? If so, we want to hear from you.**

Mountain Telephone is accepting photos for its 2020 directory and calendar. We are no longer accepting printed photos.

Each submission can include up to two photos and must be digital high-quality JPEG images. Submit images to Lisa Fannin at [lfannin@mountaintelephone.com](mailto:lfannin@mountaintelephone.com).

Photos will be selected on the basis of creativity, quality and portrayal of the service area. Deadline for submission is June 1. Winners will be announced on or before Aug. 30.

All entries must be submitted by the original photographer, who has sole ownership of any copyright. By entering the contest, you agree to have your photograph displayed on the MRTC directory or annual calendar without any fee or other forms of compensation.

**For more information on the photo contest, please visit [www.mrtc.com](http://www.mrtc.com).**



*Have a Good Friday!*

Our offices will be closed on Friday, April 19, in observance of Good Friday. We want to wish you and yours a wonderful Easter.

# Home

*is where the hope is*

BY ANNE BRALY

Laurel,  
Mississippi,  
finds the  
spotlight



Ben Napier and his wife, Erin, are the stars of HGTV's "Home Town" filmed in Laurel, Miss.

**B**rick-lined streets, century-old homes along avenues fringed with old-growth trees, cute shops, restaurants and heavenly bakeries all make Laurel, Mississippi, a charming Southern town. In its heyday, it was the lumber capital of the country. Somewhere in the 1980s, however, it became little more than a whistle-stop for people traveling between Birmingham and New Orleans.

But much changed when Erin Napier and her husband, Ben, returned to her hometown. They are the stars of the HGTV show "Home Town," now in its third season. And what they've done to bring Laurel back is nothing short of amazing.

The show's premise is this: Take an old Laurel home in need of restoration and bring it back to life with a bit of paint, some woodwork, drywall and lots of ingenuity. They turn a house in need of updates into a neighborhood showplace.

The success of "Home Town" brings people not only from around the country but also from around the world to Laurel. Visitors find renovated houses and some of the show's hot spots, including Laurel Mercantile Co. and The Scotsman General Store, both owned by the Napiers. Another stop is Pearl's, a lunch-only establishment highlighted in the show's first season. It's not uncommon to see a line at the restaurant, which features black-eyed peas and fried chicken.

## FINDING A PATH

Before becoming HGTV and local celebrities, Ben Napier was a youth minister and Erin Napier made wedding invitations so pretty that they caught the eye of Martha Stewart. Long story short: He is an eternal optimist, but she is just the opposite, which led her to some self-reflection and therapy in the form of writing down one positive thought daily. Those thoughts are now collected in a book, "Make Something Good Today," but her writings, which she posted on social media, also caught the eye of HGTV. The rest is history.

"There was a defeatist attitude that permeated the town, a kind of communal and contagious giving up," Ben Napier says.

# Small towns with allure



Local businesses and homes are featured on "Home Town" and on walking tours.



Destinations such as The Scotsman General Store bring hundreds of visitors to Laurel, Miss., annually.

## BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY:

With a population of just more than 13,000, the community offers small-town living loaded with Southern charm.

In the center of the Bluegrass State, Bardstown is Kentucky's second-oldest town, founded in 1780. It holds dear its claim as the Bourbon Capital of the World, and it has been named by USA Today and Rand McNally as the Most Beautiful Small Town in America.

Bardstown has nearly 300 structures on the National Register of Historic Places, including a stagecoach stop built in 1779 that now stands as the Old Talbott Tavern, a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant.

► **Details:** [www.visitbardstown.com](http://www.visitbardstown.com)

## BELL BUCKLE, TENNESSEE:

The name comes from a creek of the same name. The town, which dates back to 1852, exudes Southern hospitality. Its people are friendly, and it offers a laid-back vibe that appeals to the visitors who come for a day or overnight stays in one of several bed-and-breakfasts.

The downtown features a row of businesses with rocking-chair front porches covered by metal shed roofs. It's a place where fried green tomato sandwiches are the go-to meal at Bluebird Antiques and Ice Cream Parlor.

Only about 600 people live in Bell Buckle, but that number easily swells into the thousands every June during the Moon Pie Festival or during weekends in October when The Webb School plays host to its huge Arts and Crafts Fair.

► **Details:** [townofbellbuckle.com](http://townofbellbuckle.com)

## AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA:

This town boasts a thriving arts scene, is home to a number of equestrian events, has a dynamic restaurant presence and offers numerous choices for overnight stays.

Catch the three-day Antiques in the Heart of Aiken show and sale in February, horse shows throughout the year, a couple of steeplechase events during the year and bluegrass at the Aiken County Fairgrounds in May. But it doesn't have to be a special event that brings you to town. The Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame is open year-round, as are the Aiken County Historical Museum and the Center for African American History, Arts and Culture.

► **Details:** [www.visitaikensc.com](http://www.visitaikensc.com)

"The perception from the inside was that Laurel was a dying town and a relic of a once-booming past. I didn't see it that way at all. It was beautiful, but it wasn't putting its best face forward. Our mission was twofold: We wanted Laurel to be the way Erin remembered it, but at the same time, we wanted to bring a little big-city style and culture into it, because we wanted to change the perception of living in a small town. We wanted others to realize that coming home wasn't 'settling.' It could represent a deep connection to your roots and a commitment to preserving the goodness of a small, tightknit community."

Since the launch of "Home Town," tourism to Laurel has grown tenfold, says George Bassi, tourism chairman for the Jones County Chamber of Commerce. "It used to be we'd see maybe 10 people downtown. Now there are more than 100 on the streets every day," he says. "It's so much fun for us to see the town come alive."

While the homes featured on the show, including that of the Napiers, are not open for public tours, there are plenty of reasons for folks to linger in town. They can visit the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art and its exquisite collections of British Georgian silver and American works from the likes of John Henry Twachtman and Winslow Homer. They can walk through parks designed by Frederick Olmsted, the same man who designed New York's Central Park. Then they might lunch at Pearl's or dine at one of several restaurants, such as Mimmo's, known for authentic, made-from-scratch Italian, or The Loft for a good steak.

After three seasons of filming, the Napiers have found their rhythm in making "Home Town." "The show made sense as part of the overall mission," Ben Napier says. "With each house we saved, we felt we were putting Laurel back in its rightful place on the map." 🗺️

# PRESERVING A CULTURE

## Local museum's brush with fire reminds us of its importance

BY JEN CALHOUN

LAUREL GORGE  
CULTURAL HERITAGE  
CENTER

West County  
Historical Society

LAUREL GORGE  
CULTURAL  
HERITAGE  
CENTER

FOOTHILLS  
ARTISAN  
CENTER

The Laurel Gorge Cultural  
Heritage Center is protected by  
Mountain Telephone Security.

**O**n a Sunday night in October, a fan failed on one of the furnace units at Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center in Sandy Hook. As the furnace overheated, it smoldered, and the center started to fill with smoke.

Located off the main road on a stretch of land owned by the Army Corps of Engineers, the center is remote, says Director Christy Lewis. "There's very little traffic that goes by, especially on a Sunday night," she says. "Nobody would have noticed until it was too late."

A fire in the building could have destroyed centuries-old artifacts from the region, including Native American tools, antique household appliances, farming equipment from a bygone era and dozens of the works of local artisans. It also would have wiped out an educational resource center and gathering spot for students and adults.

### SOUNDING THE ALARM

But that never happened, thanks to some wise planning on the part of the center's leaders. "In July, we had decided to update our security system," Lewis says. "We called Mountain Telephone and had them do it. They also installed some extra cameras and new smoke detectors."

As a result, the fire department arrived quickly and notified center members. "A lot of smoke billowed out of the building as soon as the firefighters opened the doors, but we were very fortunate," Lewis says.



Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center Director Christy Lewis says she is thankful for the quick response to the alert sent out by Mountain Telephone's security system.



The building escaped fire damage, which was limited to a couple of pieces on the furnace. “Had we not gone through Mountain Telephone and had that system in place, our building may very well have burned to the ground,” she says.

## CELEBRATING EASTERN KENTUCKY

In the 15 years since it opened, the Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center has become a fixture in Elliott County, offering visitors a chance to examine the rich history and culture of the area from its Native American roots to a strong musical heritage that spans centuries.

Miles of walking trails surround the center. The main trail includes about 3 miles of pathways with wooden walkways and maintained paths. One section follows Laurel Creek, while another follows the line of a cliff. “That’s my favorite section,” Lewis says. “That’s where you can go up and overlook Dog Falls, which is a 100-foot waterfall.”

The building itself contains a local history museum featuring artifacts from the Shawnee and Cherokee people. “We have a case that has arrowheads in it and some of the tools they would have made, a fish hook made of bone, and some furs,” Lewis says. “There are also several antique items from old farms, such as butter churns, washboards and an old corn planter that would sow the seeds by hand.”

But one of the most talked-about items on the site is an old moonshine still. “Quite often, someone visiting the center will say, ‘Well, so-and-so and their family used to have one of those,’” Lewis says. “People remember those days, and they like to share the stories.”

Other exhibits include an area carved out for memorabilia from bluegrass legend Don Rigsby and the late country music singer Keith Whitley, a former Elliott County resident who made it big in the late ’80s with the No. 1 Billboard hits “Don’t Close Your Eyes,” “I’m No Stranger to the Rain” and “When You Say Nothing at All.” Whitley died in 1989, but his songs — performed by other artists — continued to top the charts long after his death.

The center is also home to a new quilting group, the Laurel Gorge Quilters, whose members gather to enjoy their hobby. They also make quilts for disabled veterans in the county and Alzheimer’s patients at the local nursing home.

In addition, Laurel Gorge houses the Foothills Artisan Center, an ongoing arts and crafts display and sale that the region’s artists, including internationally known folk artist Minnie Adkins, created. “While our mission is to be able to preserve the cultural heritage of the area, I like to go even further,” Lewis says. “More than just preserving it, I think we attempt to promote it, as well.” 🗨️



The center displays memorabilia from local musicians, including the late country music superstar Keith Whitley.



The center has arrowheads, music memorabilia and other culturally significant items on display for visitors.

## ENJOY A DAY OF CULTURE

Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center is open weekdays from noon to 4 p.m. and some Saturdays. Tours are free. The center is at 32 Old Kentucky Route 7 and 32 Old Laurel Curves Road in Sandy Hook. For more information on upcoming events, check out the center’s Facebook page. The center runs on private donations. For more information about donating money or artifacts, call 606-738-5543 or email Christy Lewis at [info@laurelgorge.com](mailto:info@laurelgorge.com).



# Closing the gap

## Broadband brings high-tech health to rural communities

BY DREW WOOLLEY

In rural communities, the local pharmacy is often more than just a place to pick up over-the-counter cold medicine and fill prescriptions. It's the first stop for all things health care.

"We've had trouble keeping doctors in our town," says Cole Sandlin, owner of Fred's Pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama. "We are the first health care center for most people, and that goes for all independent pharmacies in small towns."

Fred's Pharmacy, independently owned since 1951, has been in the Sandlin family for three generations. Since he took over the business from his parents in 2014, Sandlin has seen people travel nearly an hour to cities like Jasper, Alabama, or Tupelo, Mississippi, just to visit a general practitioner.

So he jumped at the opportunity to install a telemedicine kiosk at his pharmacy as part of a pilot program with American Well. The company provides services connecting patients and doctors.

Installed in December 2017, the kiosk gave Hamilton residents the chance to consult with a remote physician without the lengthy drive.

The kiosk was equipped with devices to monitor blood pressure, oxygen levels, skin and ear health, and more. In short,



Cole Sandlin, left, works with the telemedicine kiosk installed in 2017 at his pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama, as part of a pilot program with American Well.

Photo courtesy of Mandy Green.

it gave patients access to routine medical care right down the street.

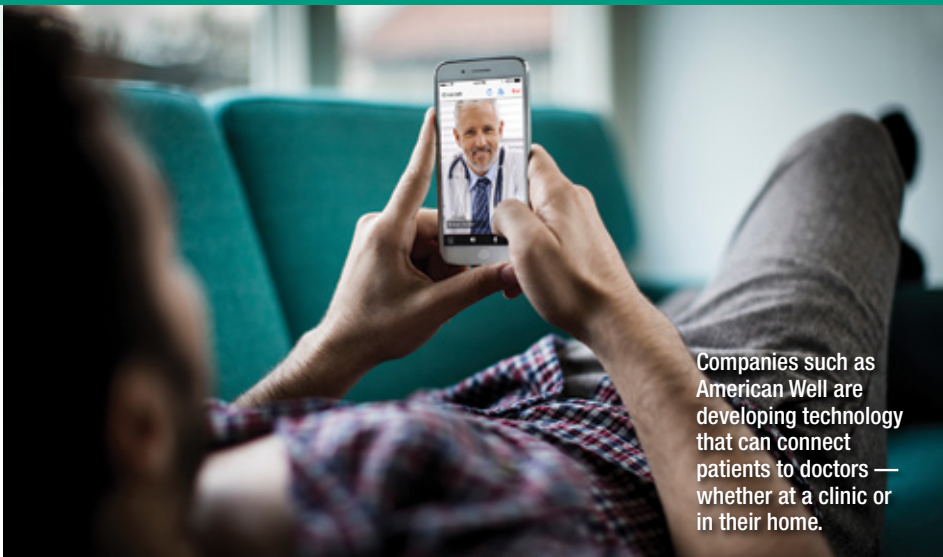
"For us, it just provides another avenue in our store to help patients," says Sandlin. "And in my little town of Hamilton, I want everybody to have the same amenities people have in bigger cities."

### A SMARTER APPROACH

That gap between health care access in rural and urban areas is a challenge not just in Hamilton but throughout the country — a problem largely brought on by the rapid advancement of medical technology over the last century.

"Seventy-five years ago, when doctors carried most of what we could do in a black bag, you could have about the same care in tiny towns as you did in the big city," says Dr. Nancy Dickey, executive director of Texas A&M's Rural and Community Health Institute. "The reality today is it takes a much bigger patient base to pay for high-tech care."

But thanks to modern broadband connections, patients no longer have to make a trip in person to benefit from the latest medical technology. Electronic medical records allow a specialist hundreds of miles away to stay apprised of a rural



Companies such as American Well are developing technology that can connect patients to doctors — whether at a clinic or in their home.

patient’s condition while the patient has remote checkups at a local clinic or pharmacy.

“What we always try to tell people is that telemedicine is not meant to replace a physician,” says Lloyd Sirmons, director of the Southeastern Telehealth Resource Center. “The whole goal behind telemedicine is to create access.”

While some rural clinics may be deterred by the idea that telemedicine requires expensive technology beyond their means, Sirmons is quick to point out that flashy setups aren’t always the answer. A remote mental health counseling program, for example, is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish.

“It doesn’t take much in the way of equipment,” he says. “I can take a laptop, one I use every day as a physician, and download software that gives me the ability to connect to a specialist. Then, I have a telemedicine unit.”

### SUPPORT NETWORK

For larger health networks, broadband connectivity gives every hospital and clinic on their system access to the same quality of care. One such system is Essentia Health, which consists of 17 hospitals, about 70 clinics and eight nursing homes across Wisconsin, North Dakota and Northern Minnesota.

Since bringing on Maureen Ideker as a senior telehealth adviser six years ago, Essentia has installed videoconferencing

technology at each of its locations. “They wanted to stretch scarce specialist resources to bring their expertise to rural communities, and that’s what we did,” she says.

In all, Essentia clinics and hospitals have access to about 30 specialist programs, including stroke, psychiatry and neonatal care. Larger hospitals can even partner with local pharmacies to design prescription dosages to ease patients who struggle with opioids off their addiction.

Ideker estimates that Essentia specialists see around 5,000 patients via telemedicine annually, with patients’ satisfaction improving as they have grown accustomed to the new technology. It also provides needed support for rural physicians.

“If you’re the only health provider in a rural community, that can be a pretty isolated feeling,” Ideker says. “I think they feel a lot of support from this, which makes for happier doctors who are likely to stay around longer.”

### NEW SOLUTIONS

As broadband continues to open up health care opportunities in rural communities, new challenges also arise. Along with educating patients about the medical options available to them, Sirmons sees consistent insurance coverage for telemedicine and across the board as one of the biggest hurdles to its adoption.

That hurdle was enough to put an end to telemedicine at Fred’s Pharmacy, at least for now. Despite hoping to continue offer-

ing consultations through the American Well kiosk, Sandlin was forced to end the service after the pilot program concluded due to a lack of insurance coverage for users.

“We were probably a little ahead of our time, but it was an opportunity we didn’t want to miss,” he says. “We learned a lot, and we plan to have telemedicine back as soon as it’s covered.”

In fact, according to experts like Dickey, as broadband internet becomes more widespread, telemedicine won’t just be an option in rural communities. Patients will increasingly demand it. The rise of technology in medicine may be the source of the health care gap, but she believes it can close it as well.

“Not everything can be done by telemedicine,” Dickey says. “But if we can provide medical care for someone in space using this technology, we can probably close the distance between your local clinic and the next big city.”

## Did you know?

Kentucky and Tennessee passed telehealth parity laws in 2000 and 2016, respectively, that require private insurance companies to reimburse telehealth services at comparable rates to in-person care. In 2016, Alabama also enacted a partial parity law to cover remote mental health services.

In South Carolina, live video consultations are covered by Medicaid in some circumstances, while Kentucky Medicaid recipients can be reimbursed for video consultations and teleradiology.

→ To learn more about telehealth reimbursement in your state, visit [cchpca.org](http://cchpca.org).



Photo courtesy of William LeMaster

Jase Phipps, an outgoing 4-year-old, loves farming and the outdoors.

# ABOUT A BOY

Little go-getter charms a community

BY JEN CALHOUN

**M**ost everybody around West Liberty knows Jase Phipps. Chances are, they've even gotten a hug from the 4-year-old. "He's a very affectionate child," says his mother, Latisha Phipps, a longtime customer service representative at Mountain Telephone. "He wants to give everybody a hug."

But Jase gave his parents a scare before he was even born. Latisha Phipps says she was 20 weeks along in her pregnancy with him when she learned he would likely be born with Down

syndrome, a chromosomal condition that occurs when a person has a full or partial extra copy of their 21st chromosome. Nearly half of people with Down syndrome experience heart defects and other serious health problems.

"I was scared," says Phipps, who along with her husband, David, worried their son might not survive his early years. "I honestly didn't know what to expect because I hadn't been around anyone with Down syndrome. I just knew there were a lot of health problems associated with it. So, I immediately started researching and just praying, honestly."

## MIRACLE BABY

For months after the original diagnosis, the Phipps family made repeated doctor visits to check on Jase's status. "We prob-



Siblings Gracie and Jase Phipps enjoy some playtime.

ably went twice a month for ultrasounds after I found out,” Latisha Phipps says. “There are certain markers they look for in babies born with Down syndrome that are common. They wanted to check his heart, his kidneys and other things. A lot of babies born with Down syndrome have an esophagus that did not attach to their stomach. There’s just so much that comes with it.”

Luckily, Jase was born without serious health issues. But the first few years, the family was still required to make the 90-minute drive to Lexington several times a month to see specialists. “At one point, Jase probably had five or six doctors,” his mother says. “That first year was rough.”

As a toddler, Jase’s development was delayed. He started walking just before he reached the age of 2, which pediatricians consider late. And he was slow to talk, which prompted his mother to learn sign language and teach it to him. “We’re on the same path as all the other parents,” she says. “We’re just taking the scenic route.”

All the work and worry paid off. Now, Jase is a happy, healthy go-getter who won’t stop trying until he’s mastered whatever it is he’s attempting to do, his mother says. “He farms with his Pappy,” she says, speaking of Jase’s paternal grandfather, Lynn Phipps. “He loves to ride the tractor and ‘drive’ the tractor. He

loves to feed the cows. He loves to fish, and he’s excited about the idea of hunting one day when he’s older. He just loves the outdoors.”

His sister, Gracie, 11, is amazed at how many people around town know and love her little brother. “She says, ‘Mom, everybody knows Bubby,’” Latisha Phipps says with a laugh.

### HELPING HANDS

Phipps began her research through an organization the family’s pediatrician recommended, Down Syndrome Association of Central Kentucky, based out of Lexington. “It’s a support group that provides information for new families with a diagnosis,” she says. “They support families that are currently raising a child with Down syndrome.”

DSACK also offers classes, job placement services for adults with Down syndrome, as well as information and guidance. Each year, they raise money and awareness through the organization’s Fun Day and Walk, which takes place in Lexington each fall.

The Phipps family participates in the walk most years, and they also receive plenty of support from their Mountain Telephone family. “I told them about Jase when I was pregnant with him and found out he had Down syndrome,” Latisha Phipps says. “We’re a pretty tight-knit bunch here. Everybody was so support-



One of Jase’s favorite activities is working the farm with his Pappy — his grandfather, Lynn Phipps.

ive. They just offered a lot of words of encouragement, and some even cried with me. They also just prayed with me. They were my support system, and they continue to be my support.”

Mountain Telephone employees also offer their own brand of support on World Down Syndrome Day, which is on March 21 every year — a date that signifies Trisomy 21, or a third 21st chromosome, which causes most instances of Down syndrome.

“We have a crazy sock day here at the office,” Phipps says. “That’s one of the ways World Down Syndrome Day brings awareness to it. We’ve done it for two years here, and we’ve tried to include other businesses in town, too. We usually take pictures of the crazy socks people wear and post them on our Facebook page. We’re just trying to get the word out to everybody.”



### EDUCATION HEALS

Not everybody understands Down syndrome or the hurdles kids like Jase Phipps face. To find out more, or to support them, check out Down Syndrome Association of Central Kentucky’s website, [dsack.org](http://dsack.org).

# Palmetto Sweets

## Spring onions bring a taste of the South

About this time every year, the gems of spring — Southern-grown onions — appear on grocery shelves, and they are certainly a long-awaited treat for onion lovers. Unlike those other onions that bring you to tears, these are so mild they're considered tear-free. Many people love them so much they bite right into them like an apple.

When people think of sweet onions, most envision Georgia's Vidalias. But South Carolina Palmetto Sweets, which entered the market about a decade ago, are gaining ground.

Dupre Percival is a caterer and restaurateur who is passionate about South Carolina products, including Palmetto Sweets. "We're known for our foods," he says of his home state. "Our grits. Our peaches. Our peanuts. And dishes like our Frogmore Stew. I add a lot of onions to that. When you think South Carolina, you think food."

Most Palmetto Sweets are grown in the state's Piedmont region, where the weather is just a bit cooler and the soil, much like that across the border in Georgia's Vidalia-growing counties, is rich and loamy. But, Percival notes, soil changes from place to place. "You can have two fields of onions on one farm and they won't taste the same," he says. However, no matter the sweetness, they're all good for cooking.

### A PASSION FOR FOOD

A good part of the 70-year-old restaurateur's early years was spent in real estate. He entered the restaurant business in the 1970s for a few years after assuming financial obligations for two sub and pizza restaurants. Within a month, take-out orders were coming in and a side catering business was established.

Fast-forward through a couple of decades: The two pizza restaurants are

closed, but Percival continues to cater through his Dupre Catering and Events. Five years ago, he opened The Market Restaurant at the State Farmers Market in West Columbia, South Carolina. "I'm a caterer who owns a restaurant now," he says from his home in Irmo, a bedroom community to Columbia.

Two much-loved items on his catering menu are his tomato pie and the onion dip. Both call for sweet onions, but Percival always adds more than the recipe calls for.

"Sweet onions have a gentler impact in recipes," he says. "If you put sweet onions in an omelet or in a dip, it gives it a good onion taste without overpowering it. Every recipe requires balance. I'll put onions in some recipes that don't call for them. But when you don't put onions in recipes that do call for them, they're not right. The dish is not good without them."



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



### CAROLINA SWEET ONION DIP

*This is a signature dish for Dupre Catering.*

- 1 cup finely chopped sweet onions
- 1 cup mayonnaise (preferably Duke's)
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Paprika
- Pita chips

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Combine onions, mayonnaise and cheese and place in baking dish. Lightly dust top with paprika and bake for 20-30 minutes or until bubbly and brown on top. Serve with pita chips.

**Tip:** Add collard greens that have been cooked, mashed and very well-drained to this dip for a taste explosion.

## SWEET ONION TOMATO PIE

*Dupre Percival says using Duke's mayonnaise and Sunbeam bread makes a big difference in the outcome.*

- 1 1/4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1-2 tablespoons finely minced sweet onion
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 15 slices day-old bread, divided
- 10 medium ripe tomatoes, washed, cored and sliced (the freshest and ripest you can find)

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare cheese spread by combining cheese with mayonnaise, onion, salt and pepper.

Grease a 9- by 12-inch casserole dish with butter, olive oil or cooking spray. Layer the bottom evenly with 7 slices of bread cut into medium-sized cubes.

Create a layer of tomatoes by overlapping them in a single layer on top of the bread cubes. This usually can be done with 5 of the tomatoes making 4 rows. Season liberally with salt and pepper.

Trim the crusts from the remaining slices of bread and place the slices over the top so that they completely cover the tomatoes. Spread the slices with the cheese spread. Cover well, but don't be tempted to use too much cheese spread or the pie will be soggy. Arrange the remaining tomatoes in slices in the same manner as before. Then, season with salt and pepper. Dollop the rest of the cheese spread in rows across the top or in whatever design you want.

Bake, uncovered, for 25 minutes or until the cheese mixture becomes golden brown. Makes about 15 servings as a side dish.

**Note:** The pie can be dressed up by adding fresh herbs such as basil, oregano and marjoram to the cheese mixture.

## Sweet Onion Tomato Pie



## ROASTED BALSAMIC ONIONS

*Always a sweet way to enjoy the sweet onions of the South.*

- 2 large sweet onions, peeled
- Coarse salt and coarsely ground pepper, to taste
- 4 tablespoons butter
- Good-quality balsamic vinegar

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a baking dish just large enough to hold the onions. Slice off the top and the bottom parts of the onions so they sit flat in the baking dish; cut the onions in half.

Arrange the onion halves, cut side up, in the prepared baking dish. Season with salt and pepper, and place 1 tablespoon of butter on each half.

Cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake 50 to 60 minutes or until onions give slightly when the edges are squeezed together between your fingers. Remove from oven. Uncover and sprinkle each onion half with balsamic vinegar while using a fork to spread the onion layers apart so that the vinegar can dribble down between them. Serve hot or at room temperature. Makes an excellent side dish to a juicy grilled steak. 🍷



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