



Mountain Telephone

BROADBAND:
HELPING YOU LEARN



MARCH/APRIL 2020

CONNECTION

PARADISE IN THE HILLS

Sunset Farms
provides a luxe
retreat



GAME ON

Wolfe County's esports
team stays strong

UNLIMITED LEARNING

Broadband creates
educational opportunities



By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Let's 'build once' under RDOF

As an organization representing rural broadband providers, we are excited about the FCC's plans to invest \$20.4 billion to bring affordable high-speed broadband to rural Americans. While the agency's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) is a terrific opportunity for unserved and underserved communities, it is important that as a nation we are investing in networks that can meet broadband needs for the foreseeable future.

Services delivered in high-cost rural areas using RDOF funds should be reasonably comparable to those in urban areas — both now and over at least the term of support distribution, if not longer. We believe it is far more efficient to have policies that encourage providers to “build once,” deploying rural networks that are scalable and will offer services at speeds that are still relevant to customers another decade from now.

NTCA was one of the biggest and earliest supporters of a program that will promote sustainable networks capable of delivering the best possible broadband access for many years to come. After months of advocacy by our members and staff, including securing bipartisan letters signed by dozens of members of Congress, the FCC announced in January that it will consider rules to fund sustainable and forward-looking networks.

This will help strike a terrific balance by looking to reach as many rural Americans as possible while ensuring that the FCC is funding the best possible networks for the available budget. I am energized by the role that NTCA members can play in being a key part of the solution in bridging the digital divide. 🗨️



Once a decade, the United States counts its citizens. This results in a treasure trove of data relevant to politics, businesses, schools and much more. For example, federal agencies use census results to distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds annually.

Similarly, states use census data to draw congressional district boundaries. The numbers can even determine how many congressional representatives a state sends to Washington, D.C. Locally, many counties, cities and towns lean on census statistics when planning infrastructure such as roads, schools and emergency services. Businesses also factor census data into calculations that determine the locations of new stores, hotels and more.

As you can see, the census is an important program and one in which you'll be asked to participate. For the first time, everyone can complete the census online, as well as by phone or by mail. You will still receive a census form by mail, but you will have the option of visiting respond.census.gov/acs to complete your duty to respond to the census.

Census Day is April 1, and census takers will visit households that have not already replied to census questionnaires online, by phone or through the mail. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau hired thousands of temporary workers to help implement the 2020 census.

The bureau also understands the unique challenges of counting people in rural areas. Some rural homes do not have typical mailing addresses, using instead post office boxes in nearby community centers. However, census questionnaires are not mailed to P.O. boxes. In these remote areas, census takers will deliver paper questionnaires to each home and offer guidance on how to respond by phone or online. If there's no response, expect an in-person follow-up.

By law, the Census Bureau must keep your information confidential, using the details to produce statistics. The bureau may not publicly release responses in any way that might identify an individual. 🗨️

Maybe it's not so smart

Streaming boxes can add a layer of TV security

Story by NOBLE SPRAYBERRY



Is your TV watching you? Could it be a backdoor to your private information? Those are questions recently posed by the FBI. For people who rely on a smart TV, the answer might be, “Yes.”

A smart TV can connect directly to the internet, allowing access to services and applications that provide movies, TV shows, music, videoconferencing, photo streaming and more. It's all right there in one consolidated interface.

But convenience comes with tradeoff. Some smart TVs include microphones and cameras. These features allow voice commands and the potential of using facial recognition to customize content to an individual viewer.

Those innovations, however, raise the possibility of TV manufacturers eavesdropping. Similarly, an unsecured TV has the potential to be used by a hacker as a backdoor into your other Wi-Fi-connected devices.

The FBI suggests a range of strategies to ensure a TV protects your security. Do internet research on your specific TV model to check the status of updates and reports of security breaches. Also, if possible, change passwords. Then, learn how to turn off microphones, cameras and the ability of the TV manufacturer to collect personal information. Even placing tape over the camera lens is an option.

There's another strategy, too — do not directly connect your TV to the internet. Instead, consider a third-party device to create a bridge between your television and streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and more. [🔗](#)

HERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS TO CONSIDER:



Roku: Many devices that allow TVs to connect to online streaming services are sold by companies that also offer TV content. As a result, not all services are available on every device. If that's a concern, consider a Roku, which can generally connect to all content providers. Rokus typically range in price from \$30 to \$99.



Apple TV: Prices for an Apple TV device range from \$149 to \$199, with the more expensive options having more storage capacity and the ability to play 4K video. The device will connect to most streaming services, and currently the purchase of a new Apple TV comes with a one-year subscription to the Apple TV+ streaming service.



Amazon Fire TV Cube or Fire Stick: Amazon's Fire streaming devices cost from about \$30 to nearly \$200, based on capacity and the ability to offer 4K content. Look for frequent sales to find a bargain. The interface is clean and useful. Fans of Amazon Prime can have easy access to that service's streaming options. While most streaming services may be available, that has changed from time to time.



Google Chromecast: Google offers its twist on the streaming boxes with a small, hockey-puck-shaped device that allows content to be “cast” from a computer, tablet or phone to the television. Most streaming services are supported, and viewers with a Google Home smart speaker can control programming with voice commands.

The 2020 census matters for rural America



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

How important is the 2020 census? For rural areas like ours, \$675 billion is at stake.

In mid-March the U.S. Census Bureau will send postcards to most addresses in Kentucky and across the country. That is one of the more important pieces of mail you will receive in 2020. Why does the census matter to your broadband and telephone provider, and why am I using this space to encourage you to participate?

Simply put, our part of Kentucky has a lot to gain from accurate census numbers — and a lot to lose if we aren't all counted.

These risks and benefits come in three main areas dependent on census data: government funding, political representation and statistics for economic growth.

According to the Census Bureau, census data determines the spending of more than \$675 billion in federal funds. That can mean anything from schools, roads and equipment for first responders to programs that help those in need. Many of those projects seek to do the most good for the most people — and if we don't help to create an accurate count of all of our people, that funding may go elsewhere.

As you may have heard if you follow political news, the census data is used to draw and redraw districts for state and federal lawmakers. The number of congressmen and congresswomen we have representing Kentucky is dependent on our population. If we don't count all of our state's residents, we would show a lower population and run the risk of losing representation in Congress to a bigger state that may have different interests than ours.


The same thing is true on a more local level in the state legislature. If the counties in our region come up short on the population count, we could lose a legislator and have a more difficult time making our area's concerns heard in Frankfort.

Lastly, our area's population is a key factor in almost all of the statistics businesses look at when considering a market to build. Whether it's a fast-food restaurant or an industrial plant, corporate managers are looking at our population when it comes to customer base, workforce and market potential. Showing a lower population on the census because many people weren't counted would make us less appealing for businesses to locate here.

If you want to know more, visit [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

I know everyone is busy, and that little postcard later this month may seem like just adding one more thing to your to-do list. But from what I've read, the Census Bureau is making things simple, quick and easy for everyone to be counted.

As someone who cares deeply about our rural area, I hope you'll take those few minutes of time to make sure you and your family participate in the census.

Our communities are counting on you. 

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2020. 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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On the Cover:



A happy couple gets married at Sunset Ridge Farms, the 50-acre former farm made perfect for special events and stays.

See story Page 12.

Cover photography contributed by Becky Willard



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

Mountain Telephone is accepting photos for its 2021 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. 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 Sept. 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.

Have yourselves a Good Friday!

Mountain Telephone offices will close on Friday, April 10, in observance of Good Friday. May you and yours have a wonderful Easter.



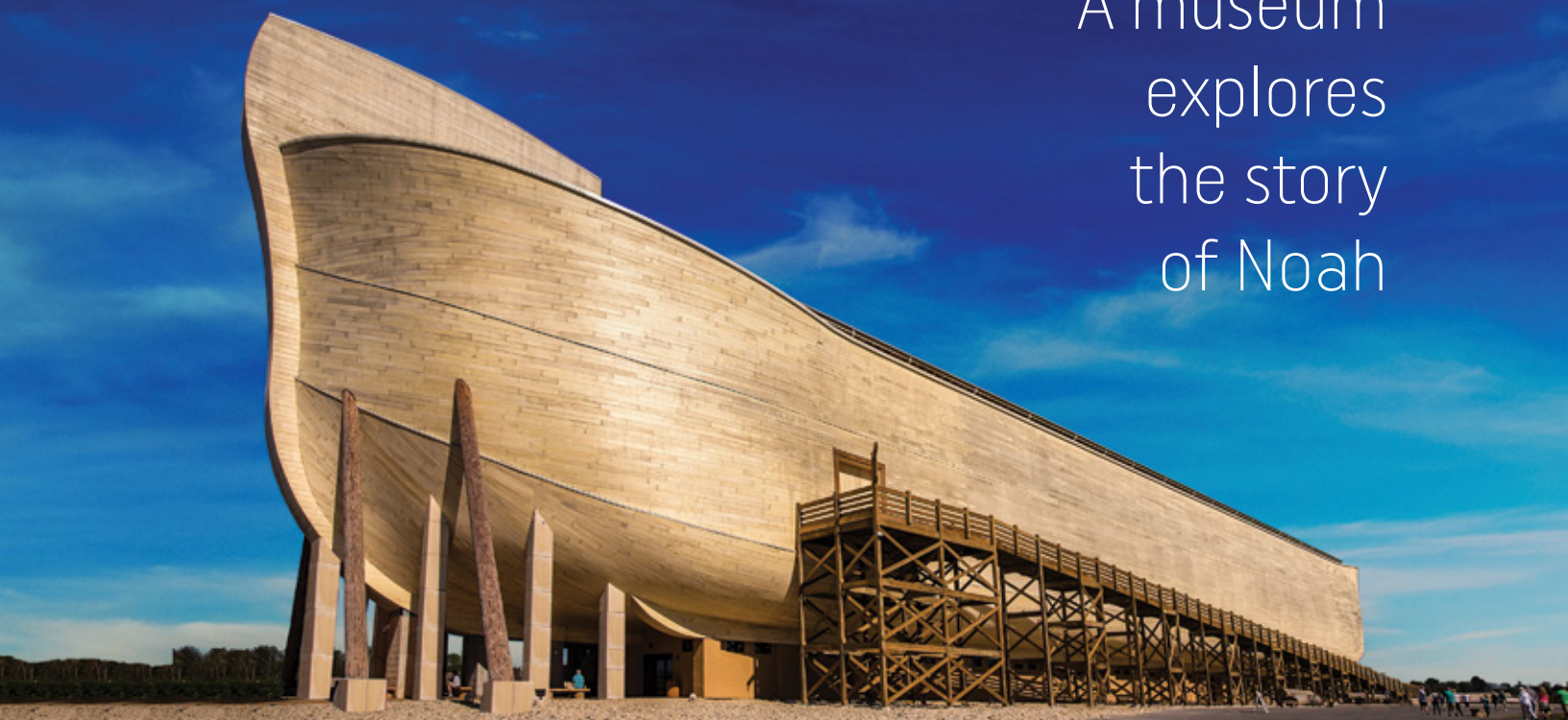
*Spring forward,
chickadees!*

Don't forget to move your clocks forward one hour!

Daylight saving time begins at 2 a.m. on March 8.

A biblical journey

A museum
explores
the story
of Noah



Story by ANNE BRALY

The heavens opened, and the rains came down — not in biblical proportions as they did in Noah’s day, but could there have been a better backdrop for a recent visit to the Ark Encounter?

This religious attraction in Kentucky opened just over three years ago on an 800-acre site. At a cost of \$100 million for Phase I, its primary feature is the massive ark, taller than a four-story building and built to the specifications God laid out for Noah. In keeping with measurements in the book of Genesis, converted from the Hebrew cubits specified in chapter 6, the three-deck ark is 510 feet long, 85 feet wide and 51 feet high.

Sitting in a beautifully landscaped area

just off Interstate 75 in the small town of Williamstown, Kentucky, the Ark Encounter draws more than 1 million visitors annually from around the world who come to learn more about Noah and his family, the animals aboard ship and the ancient flood that most Christians believe engulfed the earth. Ticket booths are located at the 4,000-spot parking lot, which has plenty of room for group buses, and guests take the free shuttle service from the lot to the ark grounds.

In addition to the ark, the attraction offers a zip line and the Ararat Ridge Zoo. And you won’t walk away hungry — a tremendous buffet replete with Asian, Cajun and American fare will satisfy your hunger, and there is seating for 1,500.

THE SHIP

It took Noah 50 to 75 years to build his ark. It took a team of Amish builders and others just two years to build Kentucky’s

new ark, a project that was the dream of Australian Ken Ham, founder and CEO of the Answers in Genesis ministry, the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum in nearby Petersburg, Kentucky.

Patrick Kanewske, director of ministry and media relations for the Ark Encounter, says much of the ship matches accounts in Genesis, but “ark”-tistic license — imagination — fills in the blanks. Such license includes names of the women/wives onboard, the color of their skin, the placement of rooms and animal cages, and so on.

Look up from the first deck to the top of the ship, and it’s easy to see the scope of the Ark Encounter. Sixty-two trees, mostly Douglas firs from Utah that were standing dead timber, went into the frame structure. Throughout each deck are divided rooms, each with a different theme and exhibits — some interactive — telling stories of the ark, the flood and



Photos courtesy of the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum.

If you go...

- **WHAT:** Ark Encounter
- **WHERE:** 1 Ark Encounter Drive, Williamstown, Kentucky
- **HOURS:** Times vary by season, so please check the website
- **TICKETS:** \$48 for adults 18-59, \$38 for seniors 60 and up, \$25 for youth 11-17, \$15 for children 5-10 and free for children 4 and under
- **PARKING:** \$10 for standard vehicles, \$15 for oversized vehicles
- **INFORMATION:** arkencounter.com

why it happened; what life was like before and after the flood; and the Christian belief that God created Earth in just six days. Movies on the second and third decks depict life then and now.

Plan on spending a good half-day at the Ark Encounter to experience all it has to offer. And when your day is through, Kanewske hopes people will walk away with the truth of God’s word and the gospel. “We proclaim that here,” he says. “That’s the bottom line. People will learn a lot about the flood account, Noah and his family and all that, but what we want them to take away is God’s word.”

ALL ABOARD

How, one may wonder, did all of the animals fit on the ship? First — according to “Ark Signs That Teach a Flood of Answers,” a book that you can pick up in the Ark Encounter gift shop — you need to consider the term “animal kind,”

referring to a group of animals not related to any other animals. So at the most, Noah, who God only charged with bringing air-breathing animals on board, was responsible for fewer than 6,744 animals to house, feed and clean. “When you see the size of the ship, there’s every possibility that 6,000 to 7,000 animals could fit in a ship of its size without any problem,” Kanewske says.

Cages large and small line the walls and center of the lowest deck. Once again, ark-tistic license is used to show how Noah and his team might feed the animals and store grain. For a realistic experience, live animals come from the zoo onto the ship each day.

Jose Jimenez, a Naval chaplain from Rhode Island, recently brought his young family to experience the Ark Encounter. “It’s a great place for kids,” he says. “And it’s good for people who have questions. It doesn’t answer all of them, but a lot.”

ARK ENCOUNTER PHASE II

Plans are in the works for major expansion of the Ark Encounter, and some of those plans have already been realized. April 2019 brought the opening of The Answers Center, with a snack bar, a gift shop and a 2,500-seat auditorium that hosts daily presentations, movies, special speakers, concerts and more.

A new playground has also opened and is designed to accommodate children of all abilities. And the summer of 2019 saw the opening of the zoo expansion, including the addition of more animals — lemurs, sloths, peccaries and a bearcat — and stages for zookeeper talks.

“We take things seriously here,” Kanewske says, “from our food to exhibits to how our employees are trained. It’s a world-class experience.”



The Wolfe County High School esports team were semifinalists in the 2019 state tournament. Front, from left, are Logan Creech, Cameron Caskey, Dylan Profit and Matt Riley. Back, from left, are Will Hurst, Tim Evans, Jeremy McKinney, Cody Wethington and Dillon Mayse.

SUPER COMBO

Wolfe County High gaming team scores big

Story by JEN CALHOUN
Photography by MELISSA GAINES

In his first year of coaching, Timothy Evans, a math and computer science teacher at Wolfe County High School, led his brand-new sports team all the way to the state semifinals. But these kids weren't playing basketball, football or soccer. They played competitive online games.

That's right. The high school's very first esports, or electronic sports, team made it all the way to the state playoffs in its first year. "We were going up against schools with 1,000 to 1,500 students, and here we are this small, rural school in Eastern Kentucky," Evans says. "People took notice of us."

Esports, which the Kentucky High School Athletic Association sanctioned in 2018, is far more organized than a few students playing video games. It follows a strict set of rules and guidelines. Teams practice together, develop strategies and bond, just as they do on other sports teams.

"They're also required to keep their grades up, like they have to do with other school-related activities," says Evans, who was named KHSAA's 2019 Coach of the Year for esports. "There were a couple kids last year in danger of failing, but they told me they wanted to be on the team. The next semester, they brought me their grades, which had improved. So, they came on board. It can be a big incentive for these students."

BUILDING A TEAM

When the high school's athletic director first approached him about forming an esports team, Evans jumped at the chance. "He knew me from when I was a student," says Evans, who graduated from Wolfe County High in 2008. "I played sports then, and he knew I played video games."

Shortly after that, Evans invited students to join the team. Twenty-two students came on board. "We just went from there," he says. "We started fundraising and raised enough to buy gaming computers with dedicated graphics cards, headsets, keyboards and computer mice. Our community has been so supportive."

Mountain Telephone's fiber internet also provides the players with a boost, Evans says. "There are some counties around where students don't even have access to basic internet services, let alone the high-speed broadband we have," he says. "The game is online, so a good, solid, reliable internet connection is a necessity. Mountain Telephone has one of the best in the state."

A GROWING SPORT

The high-speed internet connection is more important than some people may realize. While esports is still evolving, its growth is undeniable. KHSAA notes that esports has 400 million fans worldwide and that 200 colleges and universities are offering almost \$10 million in scholarships.

Last year, several of Evans' players were offered esports college scholarships for around \$3,000. They didn't accept them because of stronger academic scholarship offers. Still, Evans believes that esports scholarship amounts will grow in coming years as more colleges see the packed auditoriums that come with esports competitions.

HOW IT WORKS

KHSAA esports is managed by a third-party firm, PlayVS. More than 50 Kentucky high schools participate, and competitions take place throughout two different seasons during the school year, one starting in the fall semester and the other in the spring semester.

PlayVS partners directly with game publishers and states to build and operate sanctioned leagues across the country. The firm provides the infrastructure and platform for amateur esports, according to information from its website, www.playvs.com.

Currently, KHSAA and PlayVS offer three games — League of Legends, Rocket League and SMITE. During the fall season, the Wolves esports team competed in League of Legends, a fast-paced, multiplayer, competitive online game that pits teams of five against other teams. Each player has a role, not unlike regular sports. Teams battle remotely in most cases, but state championships take place in auditoriums.

WINNING FORMULA

Practices include scrimmages against teammates, other schools or people online. Players also watch game films, develop strategies, review game stats and check out other teams to examine their strengths and weaknesses.

The team captain, senior Cameron Caskey, helps gather information and fine-tune strategies. Will Hurst, a social studies teacher at the school, serves as assistant coach. Drew Bush, a former student at the school, acts as the team's shoutcaster, a commentator with expert knowledge of the game who offers a play-by-play.

In December, PlayVS selected Evans to be a "super coach." The designation means he'll be helping recruit other coaches at high schools in Eastern Kentucky and helping with the state championships. "I take it seriously because I see how important it is," he says. "Kids need a place to play, and they need a coach who is invested in them. I had a school board member come up to me once. They told me they had their doubts. But once they attended a practice, they saw the work and effort that goes into it." 🗨️



Coaches moderate the competition from another classroom.

CATCH LOCAL ESPORTS ACTION

Interested in seeing what esports is all about? Watch the Wolves play on the team's YouTube channel at Wolfe County Wolves esports. Their competitions can also be viewed live most Tuesdays during the school year on Mountain Telephone TV's Channel 2.



A class of their own

Broadband brings education to students on their schedule

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

In 2012, Aziza Zemrani was busily putting together an accelerated online program for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The curriculum would allow students to complete courses they need in just seven weeks from anywhere in the valley or beyond. But there was a lingering concern about handling presentations using the available online technology.

“I needed them to present so I could see their skills and competency in communication,” Zemrani says. “We use Blackboard Collaborate, which allows for face-to-face engagement and interaction. But my colleagues were worried about how it would work if we had a student with a disability.”

As if in answer to those concerns, the program’s first cohort group in 2013 included one deaf student, Phillip Robinson. When it came time for each student to present that June, the university’s Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology worked with the disability office to arrange for a sign language interpreter to present with him.

“He presented live with his classmate, and it was beautiful,” Zemrani says. “He was almost in tears telling me this was the first time he was able to present live like that in an academic setting.”

Robinson graduated in December, joining hundreds of other students who have

come through the accelerated online program of the university in Edinburg, Texas. While Zemrani originally expected the program to appeal primarily to students from outside the state or even the country, it has also been popular among local students in the valley looking to fast-track their education.

“Some of these students might be working two jobs, so they can’t fit traditional classes into their schedule,” she says. “With the online program, because of the course delivery and structure, students can take up to two more modules and finish in one year.”

A PLACE TO START

Online courses like the ones offered at UTRGV are taking off across the country thanks to improved broadband access. But with so many online options available to students, it can be daunting to figure out which one is the best fit. That’s why the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system contracted with Distance Minnesota to act as a single point of contact for all online students in 2004.

Distance Minnesota was founded as a consortium of three local colleges that wanted to offer online courses. Today, the organization partners with 37 colleges and universities throughout





the state, answering any questions prospective or current students may have about their online options.

“We do chat, phone assistance and email assistance seven days a week,” says Distance Minnesota Executive Director Lisa Leahy. “In all, we handle approximately 25,000 student inquiries a year.”

But more than acting as a helpline for students, Distance Minnesota compiles data on the programs each school offers and the level of interest in each course. This makes the organization a resource for schools deciding which classes to offer online and for students looking to fulfill a specific course requirement. That help is particularly important for making online programs accessible to out-of-state or international students.

“Throughout our nearly 20-year history with the school system, we’ve come to understand what each of the individual universities has to offer,” Leahy says. “Many of us have worked closely with the faculty and the administration on these campuses. So if a student has a specialized need for a certain class, we can tell them the best course is at this school, and often we’re able to put them in touch directly, whether they’re in Argentina, California or New York.”

VIRTUAL HIGH

College coursework isn’t the only level at which online programs are giving students more flexibility. Connections Academy, a nationwide program that offers tuition-free online K-12 public schooling in 28 states, launched a new online academy last fall in Tennessee. Since it opened, the academy has grown from about 750 students to 1,300 enrolled.

The Tennessee Connections Academy is authorized by Robertson County Public Schools, though it is available to students throughout the state. The system was already using a virtual curriculum from Connections Academy’s parent company, Pearson, to offer online classes to approximately 50 students. So it was a natural partnership to work together to bring that same experience to students across the state.

“It’s a unique learning environment with certified teachers in all subject areas for the kids,” says Derek Sanborn, principal at Tennessee Connections Academy. “The students are able to interact with their teachers and other kids with live lessons throughout the week. They receive textbooks and other materials at each level, and it’s all at no cost to the parent.”

The online academy is held to the same standards as any public school in the state, and students are required to attend for six-and-a-half hours each day. The program has been a good fit for kids who may be homebound, live in remote areas, or even be on traveling sports teams, allowing students to complete their hours in the evening or on weekends.


“We also have students who may have been bullied in their school or didn’t feel safe. Maybe the traditional setting wasn’t motivating for them,” Sanborn says. “I think giving parents that choice is really important because they get to decide what’s best for their kids.”


NEW ENGAGEMENT

Even with the increasing quality of online classes, there are still challenges educators work to overcome, including engaging students.

One way Tennessee Connections Academy attempts to address this issue is by scheduling in-person field trips, allowing families to meet and connect with their teachers and other students.

In her own classes, Zemrani has recorded live classroom sessions and used apps like Flipgrid to allow students to record short intro videos about themselves. While engagement continues to be a challenge for any online course, she believes finding new solutions is well worth the investment.

“We have students in the military who may be called to serve somewhere in the middle of their program,” Zemrani says. “The online course is a great opportunity for them to finish their program when they might not otherwise be able to. Broadband is so important to that.” 



The Collett family built an open-air wedding chapel with antique stained-glass windows and vestibule doors.

Fairytale farm

Local family creates a luxurious event venue and retreat

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by MELISSA GAINES

Julie Collett remembers the first few times friends suggested she transform her family's 50-acre former horse farm into an event venue. The comments started rolling in after her daughter's wedding, which took place on the spread.

"We said, 'Oh, there's no way. We're too busy,'" says Collett, an interior designer who owns Sunset Ridge Farm with her husband, Richard. Still, the idea kept presenting itself, and the couple liked the thought of sharing with others the place that had brought their family so much joy.

But it couldn't be just any old event venue — not with Julie Collett in charge. "Everything I do is very eclectic," she says. "I like to think outside the box. If I can't do something different, then I don't want to do it. So, we decided the only way to do it was if we could rent the whole place out for a full weekend."

Now, Sunset Ridge Farm is a luxury wilderness retreat that backs up to the Daniel Boone National Forest, not far from the Red River Gorge. Guests can rent the entire 50 acres for a weekend or longer, depending on availability. The property includes a log lodge that has a swimming pool and hot tub and comfortably sleeps 19, an open-air chapel, a completely renovated barn, a helicopter pad, two fully stocked ponds and super high-speed fiber optic internet service from Mountain Telephone.

NEW LIFE FOR A HISTORIC BARN

For 24 years, the sprawling property served as the family's home. It was where the Colletts raised their three children and bred Rocky Mountain horses, which, despite their name, originated in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky.

The Colletts renovated the 114-year-old barn into a 6,800-square-foot event space. They tore down the horse stalls and repurposed the wood for flooring. They renovated the former tack room into a bridal suite with revitalized vintage vanities and other furniture for the bridal party. The barn also was updated with giant chandeliers, a patio and a handcrafted cedar staircase for grand entrances.

And while the barn is large enough for a wedding and a reception, it's just one of several locations on the farm where families can choose to hold events. Other locations include an open-air chapel and two waterfront docks in front of picturesque ponds.

"You can get married in the chapel and then have a reception in the barn," Collett says. "Or you can get married by the water and have the reception there, too. There are several ways to do it, and it doesn't matter how you want to lay it out. You just tell us where you want it set up. We'll set everything up, supply the tables and chairs, clean up afterward and transport guests to the different places. That's all part of the price."



Photo courtesy of Scarlett Michele.

Come stay awhile

Sunset Ridge Farm gives guests the chance to rent a 50-acre luxury farm near the Red River Gorge and Cave Run Lake for weddings, events or a peaceful stay. Daniel Boone National Forest backs up to the former horse farm, which offers a renovated barn, a chapel, two fully stocked ponds and an amenity-filled lodge that sleeps 19. For more information and a complete list of rates, visit www.sunsetridgefarmevents.com. You can also find them on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.



Photo courtesy of Scarlett Michele.



GOING TO THE CHAPEL

Despite its vintage facade, the chapel isn't original to the farm. It was built after the Colletts decided to develop the farm into a wedding venue. "We wanted it to look like an abandoned chapel sitting out by the side of the road, surrounded by wildflowers and natural grass," Collett says.

They found a pair of doors that came from an old bar in Mount Sterling. As guests approach, they see what looks like a rustic church in an abandoned field. Once through the doors, they go through a set of antique vestibule doors and onto an open-air chapel for the ceremony. The bride and groom stand under a piece of antique stained glass that Collett recovered.

The space between the sets of doors provides a hideout for the bride just before the ceremony. "The second set of doors slide open like barn doors," Collett says. "So, when those doors open, and the bride is revealed to the groom — well, he sees that, and he just falls apart."

NOT-SO-TYPICAL FARM

Since the venue's official opening in June last year, Sunset Ridge Farm has hosted guests from all over the country. Many people are surprised at the number of amenities and the flexibility they have in using them.

"I wanted it to be as special for other people as it has been for us," Collett says. "We've raised our kids here, and we've had so much joy here. It's so cool when other people come here, and they're smiling when they get out of the car. Then, they keep smiling the entire weekend. It blesses us beyond measure to share this."

The hard work and love they put into building every facet of the venue gives visiting families a sense of intimacy and connection. "We designed and built every aspect with our own hands with the help of our friends and family," Collett says. "I think it means something to people that we put our heart and soul into every detail." 📱

Mystery and intrigue

High Point Restaurant chef shares secrets for a great steak

High Point Restaurant opened in January 2000, and Eric Gipson, executive chef, has been there since the second day of business. As a child growing up in Monteagle, Tennessee, he remembers the restaurant when it was a spooky old house — “the kind of run-down, ghost-infested mansion of campfire stories,” he says.

Legend has it that mobster Al Capone financed the 1929 home for his book-keeper/mistress and used it as a place to stop on his bootlegging travels between Chicago and Miami. This was well before Interstate 24 ran up and over Monteagle Mountain, so its hard-to-reach location made for the ideal hideaway. Supposedly, the floors had a lining of sand to muffle the sound of gunfire, and escape routes aided in getting the illegal hooch to its final destination during the days of Prohibition.

Today, it’s a place for an amazing meal along the road between Nashville and Chattanooga in a beautiful mountaintop location. But can you duplicate the restaurant’s wonderful steak at home?

It’s a familiar scenario: You take the family out to a fancy restaurant and order the steak, and there goes your budget for the week. It’s an amazing steak that sends your taste buds on a trip through culinary heaven — an experience you’re not likely to forget. So, you go home and try to reproduce it, and it’s an expensive disaster. It’s still less expensive than a night out at your favorite steakhouse, but the flavor is less than memorable.



Eric Gipson, executive chef of the High Point Restaurant, serves up great steaks and other dishes.

What went wrong? How do restaurants get their steaks so tender, so flavorful, so perfect? Gipson says making a great steak involves several keys. “I think it’s mostly attention to detail and knowledge of how best to prepare what you are given,” he says. “A truly good steak is first and foremost a good piece of meat. Proper seasoning and heat can turn it into something great.”

It all begins at the grocery store, but customers don’t always go for the best. You may go for the bright red cuts. They look appealing, but they have little fat, and the end result will most likely be a dry, tough piece of meat. Gipson says to look for cuts that are a little paler in color and have fine lines of fat running through

them. “The ones with the faded, almost pink hue are more tender,” he advises. “That may just be optics, as I also look for a cut that has fine white lines of fat that may make it appear less than red.”

And there’s one more thing. “People I have spoken to have the misconception that putting salt on the outside of a steak will dry it out,” he adds.

Not true.

“When heat is applied, the salt on the outside causes the outer layer to tighten up, creating something of a moisture barrier,” he says. “This traps more of the juice inside, making for a more flavorful steak all around.”

The steaks at High Point are a main feature on the menu. With nine different

options, the most popular are those that feature filet mignon, including filet mignon with Burgundy mushroom sauce, High Point Oscar, Black and Bruised Steak, Steak and Lobster, Steak and Shrimp, and Steak Diane.

And people come from near and far to order them — Chattanooga, Huntsville, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Tullahoma and everywhere in between, Gipson notes. Tennessee's partnerships with foreign corporations like Nissan and Volkswagen bring customers from around the world, and the nearby University of the South in Sewanee supplies guests from among its student body and their visiting families.

"We always strive to deliver an excellent meal at a reasonable price point. Also, our steak seasoning is unique to High Point," Gipson says. "So the seasoning, combined with fine sauces and compound butters, add to an already excellent cut of meat."

Gipson says grocery stores have improved on the cuts of meat they offer customers. "Of course, that is dependent on where you shop," he says. "For years, most grocery stores sold only the cheaper USDA grades of beef or meat that wasn't graded at all.

"What we serve is USDA Choice," Gipson says. "That means that it is closer to USDA Prime," which is only around 2% of all beef sold. "However, all of our meat has been aged a minimum of 21 days, which makes for a more tender, flavorful steak. I'm sure that with the multitude of high-end grocery stores these days, a comparable steak can be found."



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'Steakhouse' Steaks

This recipe is adapted from one by Food Network's Ina Garten.

- 2 (8-ounce) filet mignons
- 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided

Set the steaks out on the counter at least 30 minutes before you plan on cooking them to take the chill off.

Heat the oven to 400 F. Pat the steaks dry and then brush each steak with the oil. Mix the salt and pepper on a plate, then roll each steak in the salt-and-pepper mixture, liberally coating all sides.

Heat a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet over high heat — as high as your stove will go. Open your window and turn on your fan. This is a smoky process. Once the skillet is very hot, add the steaks to the pan. Sear them evenly on all sides, getting a nice brown crust all over. It should take about 2 minutes per side to get a good sear.

Remove the pan from heat, place a pat of butter on top of each steak, and then transfer the skillet to the oven. Bake the steaks until their internal temperature reaches your preferred doneness — 120 F for rare, 125 F for medium-rare and 135 F for medium.

Remove the steaks from the skillet and cover them tightly with aluminum foil. Allow them to rest at room temperature for 10 minutes before serving. ☞



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