



Mountain Telephone

MARCH/APRIL 2024

CONNECTION



EAR to help

A student program
aids the community

PHOTO
PHENOM

BACKYARD
CHICKENS

By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
 NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Agriculture thrives with broadband

Every day I hear examples of how the fast, reliable internet service provided by NTCA members brings telemedicine, rich entertainment resources, educational opportunities, jobs and far more to rural communities like yours.

But that’s just the beginning. These internet networks also create a vital foundation needed by a range of industries critical to the nation’s economy. While agriculture might not immediately come to mind when considering the internet, the \$4.4 billion ag tech market is a showcase for how broadband can bring farms and ranches the internet-connected tools that make agriculture more efficient, productive and sustainable.

Smart irrigation systems, farm management and automation software, drones and sensors that can remotely monitor factors such as soil moisture are just a few of the innovations used in modern agriculture. They make a real difference, too.

For example, consider just one part of the agricultural equation — water. Leveraging these high-tech tools can reduce water use by 4%. When considering the scope of the industry, that’s a tangible difference, the equivalent of filling 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Without reliable internet access, these tools wouldn’t be possible, nor would the benefits to consumers. When agricultural production is less expensive and yields are higher, we can all enjoy more favorable prices.

So, when you think about all your internet service provider does for you personally, take a moment to appreciate they’re making a difference for all of us, nationwide. 📶



The ag tech advantage

CONNECTED TOOLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Internet-connected technology makes a bottom-line difference in agriculture, responsible for as much as an **8% increase** in the value of the corn crops alone. That’s an attention-getting result, and it makes it worth a closer look at ag tech.

THE DETAILS:



Ag tech includes smart irrigation farm management software, drones, remote sensing, biotech, automation and more. Many of these tools rely on the internet to share access and store and share data.

Value of the U.S. ag tech market:
\$4.4 billion

Value of agriculture, food and food-related industries:
\$1.26 trillion

Agriculture supports **43 million jobs**, **\$2 trillion** in wages and generates **\$718 billion** in taxes.

CURRENT AG TECH OFFERS:



9% reduction in chemical use



6% reduction in fossil fuel consumption



4% reduction in water use — enough to fill 750,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools



30-million-pound decrease in herbicide use

THE BOTTOM LINE: Ag tech enables farmers to lower costs while increasing yield and productivity.

Truly personal fitness

Online fitness offerings bring workouts to wherever you are

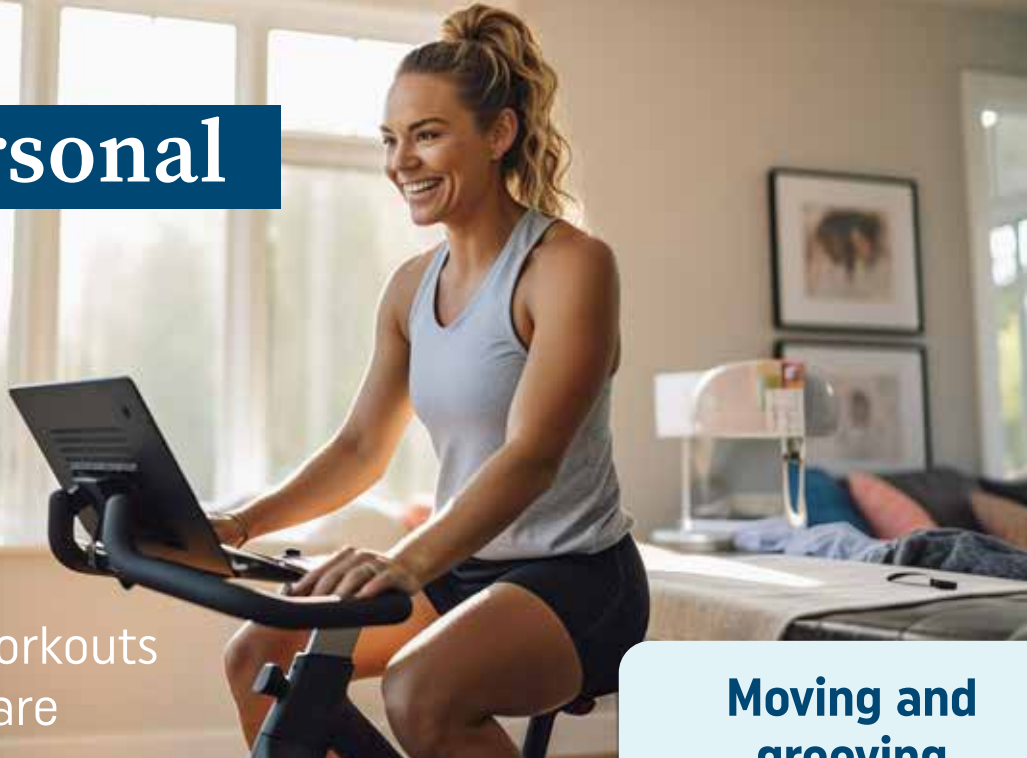


Photo by wolfhound97/Adobe Stock

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON

After an exhausting workday, heading to that boring fitness class that's way too expensive to skip sounds like about as much fun as a root canal. What if you could just click an app or website and join a class from home? Think of the time, energy and frustration you could save.

With live and prerecorded classes and a fast and reliable internet connection, it's easy to turn any space into a gym. Thanks to apps and an array of online workout programs, you have the ability to exercise whenever, wherever and with whomever you want.

Some apps create personalized daily workout programs, while others provide a library of on-demand classes. Take a live class and become part of a community where everyone feels the burn.

PICKING THE PERFECT PLAN

As the popularity of online exercise programs continues to grow, so does the number of available options. Before choosing one, here are some factors worth considering.

Cost: Pricing can vary widely, but many apps and programs offer a free trial before requiring a subscription or financial commitment.

Instructors: Check their credentials to make sure they're certified in whatever they're teaching.

Variety: You'll maximize your results by

finding a program that keeps you interested while increasing the difficulty over time.

Devices: Make sure the program you choose works across all your devices. Compatibility is important since one of the biggest benefits of online fitness is the ability to take it with you anywhere.

FITNESS TO GO

While the at-home workout might seem isolating, it's actually a gateway to a digital community of like-minded fitness enthusiasts. The classes can provide a connection to a new whole world.

Onepeloton.com: Most famous for its much-advertised, in-home bike revolution, the Peloton digital app features on-demand and live classes of all kinds — no equipment needed.

Nike.com/ntc-app: This free app provides a variety of classes and styles for folks with busy schedules.

Apple.com/apple-fitness-plus: These classes, including yoga and Pilates, are personalized and perfected for Apple Watch users.

DailyBurn.com: This site offers the opportunity for one-on-one instruction. You can discover a favorite series or search for a specific workout depending on your mood.

Beachbody.com or BODi: This platform features '80s-style bootcamp classes, progress-tracking and nutrition hacks. 📱

Moving and grooving

Some mobile fitness fans are turning to more creative ways to work out at home. Harkening back to the days of Richard Simmons and Jazzercise, online dancing is fast becoming a personal fitness staple.

Online dance classes can be less expensive than in-person sessions and offer more style options. And, many people feel more comfortable staging a dance party in their own living rooms rather than in a studio full of strangers.

Zumba.com: The Latin-inspired cardio workout has motivated millions around the world to get moving since dancing into the spotlight in 2001.

Obefitness.com: With more than 8,000 classes and 20 different class types to choose from, there's something for everyone. Up to 22 live classes are available, seven days a week, starting at 6 a.m. Eastern time.

Dancio.com: Here you'll find hundreds of recorded classes covering various dance styles.

Steezy.co: Work out while learning a variety of urban dance moves.

Broadband has the power to uplift everyone

Each of us is blessed with our own gifts, as well as unique challenges. We often talk about how fast, reliable internet service uplifts this place we call home, benefiting not only individuals but also businesses, schools, hospitals and more.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

As I've watched the positive impacts our broadband network has made, I'm appreciative of how it has the power to touch almost everyone and how often this resource makes a fundamentally positive difference in day-to-day life. Consider people with disabilities. Internet-connected tools and resources can bring hope and tangible benefits to their lives.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as many as 1 in 4 adults live with a disability. Some have issues with mobility, while others simply have difficulty living independently. Truly, the circumstances are as unique as the individual.

At Mountain, we believe it's a vital part of our mission to serve everyone in our community, particularly those with the greatest needs. A modern, reliable internet network can bring new resources

that would otherwise be unavailable.

For example, technologies, such as screen readers, magnifiers, speech recognition software and more, can help people with visual or hearing impairments. Similarly, there are resources for people who need assistance with motor or cognitive skills.

Many of those technologies — made available through broadband — are accessible from the comfort of home. And in some cases that can mean the difference between living independently and requiring assistance.

For some in our community, making a trip to a doctor's office is daunting. Traveling can be difficult or may require help. The wait can be tiring, and the interactions in a medical office may be challenging. But even a little help can make a big difference, and that's where telemedicine services come into play. An online videoconference might not replace a face-to-face visit, but it can offer a peace-giving supplement to traditional medicine.

People with disabilities are vital, productive members of our community. Online educational resources can often help them reach new heights or contemplate fresh goals. Online courses and tutorials can teach valuable skills and expand knowledge.

Online communities can even offer support from others with similar experiences, and for a company like Mountain, committed to supplying the best communications experience possible, this is a resource we're honored to provide. We are proud of our roots in bringing telephone access to a region other companies chose to ignore. There's also excitement in the new ways our internet service links people, often when those connections matter most.

By investing in critical broadband infrastructure, we've made a positive difference for our entire community, and we're committed to continuing to advance that cause by innovating as new technologies become available. We'll never forget we serve unique individuals, because, well, that's what we do in our part of this world. Neighbors help neighbors, and we're all better for it. 🗨️

The Mountain Telephone Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, © 2024. 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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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



From left, Andi Wells and Cassidy Heizer confer with Adam Adkins, Menifee High School JAG specialist for the EAR project. See story Page 12.

Photo contributed by Ebie Adkins

MOUNTAINS OF MONEY FOR SCHOOL!

Scholarship application deadlines are nearly here

Mountain Telephone is proud to invest in our community by offering several ways to earn money for school. This year, we are excited to offer even more scholarships to help local students build bright and prosperous futures.

► **Mountain Telephone and Morehead State University scholarships**

- Multiple \$3,000 scholarships will be awarded.
- Scholarships are available to residents of Elliott, Wolfe, Morgan, Meniffee and Bath counties who are attending Morehead State University.
- Application deadline is March 15.
- To find out more, visit the Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative Facebook page, or call Lisa Fannin at 606-743-3121.

► **Mountain Telephone and Kentucky Community & Technical College System scholarships**

- Multiple \$1,500 scholarships will be awarded.
- Scholarships are available to residents of Elliott, Wolfe, Morgan, Meniffee and Bath counties attending Maysville Community & Technical College.
- Application deadline is April 15.
- To find out more, visit maysville.kctcs.edu or contact your high school guidance counselor.



“The biggest mistake that students and their families make is they feel they wouldn't qualify – they opt out.”

— James Lewis, president and co-founder of the National Society of High School Scholars



Photographers,
**TAKE YOUR
BEST SHOT!**

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

Mountain Telephone is accepting photos for its 2025 directory and calendar. We are no longer accepting printed photos. Each submission can include up to two photos, which must be digital high-quality JPEG images.

Submit images to Lisa Fannin at lfannin@mountaintelephone.com. Winning photos will be selected based on creativity, quality and portrayal of the 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.



TOTALLY AWESOME

APRIL ECLIPSE WILL WOW!

Story by KATHY DENES

The Southeast boasts plenty of beautiful scenery, but the heavens get credit for two of the region's most spectacular sights in a span of less than six months. For three hours on Oct. 14, an annular eclipse created a "ring of fire" visible along its path from Oregon down through Texas. April 8 will bring yet another eclipse, this time plunging all beneath its route from Texas up to Maine and beyond into total darkness.

Except for Southwest Kentucky, very little of the Southeastern U.S. will be in the path of totality. The shadow will barely hit the northwest corner of Tennessee as it cuts through the Kentucky Band region, skims Mayfield and then darkens Paducah and Henderson around 2 p.m. EDT.

For those not in the path of totality, even the partial eclipse will be awesome to behold. Starting around 1:55 p.m. in areas east of totality, the orbiting moon will obscure the sun's bottom-right section and make it look like a crescent by around 3 p.m. By about 4:20 p.m., the sun will again be a complete ball of fire.



Photo by Aditi/Adobe Stock

Illustration by James Threw/Adobe Stock

*“And the moon
in haste eclipsed
her, and the sun in
anger swore.”*

– Aristophanes, Greek writer, 450-385 B.C.,
after observing an eclipse

ECLIPSE 101

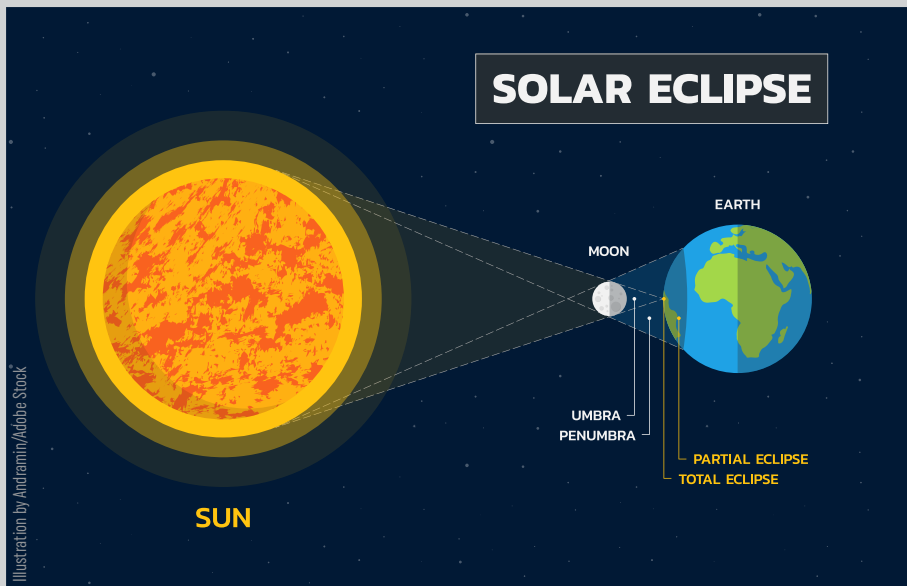
TOTAL ECLIPSE: When the moon passes between the Earth and the sun and briefly covers the sun’s disk completely, areas within the narrow path of the moon’s shadow will experience total darkness. Those outside the path of totality will see a partial eclipse. Go to greatamericaneclipse.com or eclipse2024.org to see how the eclipse will look in your area and to find loads of other information.

VIEWING AN ECLIPSE: The only time it is safe to look at the sun with the naked eye is during the brief totality phase of a total solar eclipse, so that only applies to those directly in its path. At all other times, eclipse phases and locations, direct viewing of the sun is only safe through special solar filters and viewers. Look for the ISO 12312-2 standard, and make sure they are free of scratches or flaws. No. 13 or 14 welder’s glass also provides protection.

EVENTFUL OPTIONS

Events for seeing and celebrating the eclipse include Paducah’s two-day downtown street fair and a viewing party at its National Quilt Museum. Louisville’s Kentucky Science Center is chartering buses to take eclipse fans to Evansville for a riverfront view of totality.

U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, home to the INTUITIVE planetarium, is setting up solar telescopes. Many educational activities are planned, including NASA’s livestream of the eclipse which will be shown throughout the center.



Of the 350-plus permanent planetariums in the U.S., six are in Alabama, eight in Kentucky, four in South Carolina and five call Tennessee home. Find one near you at go-astronomy.com/planetariums.htm.



Michael Boggs

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sandy Hook photographer makes an impression

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Fishing had always been a sacred kind of sport for Michael Boggs and his father. Starting when Michael was a little boy, the two would head off to the lake in search of catfish.

But when his dad died in 2015, fishing held no joy for Michael. “I tried to go back a few months after he died,” he says. “I might’ve fished for 30 minutes or an hour. But the memories just started popping up, and I had to leave. I felt like I just couldn’t do it.”

It wasn’t until a few years later that something shifted. Michael was sitting in a motel room after a day of training as a heavy equipment operator when an idea came to him. “I thought, ‘You know what would be pretty cool? To buy a camera.’” Over the years, he’d enjoyed taking photos on his cell phone, and he decided he was ready to learn everything he could about photography.

The next day, he went straight to Murphy’s Camera in Louisville. “I wasn’t planning on buying anything, but I walked out with my first camera,” he says. That was in 2018.

GOING THE DISTANCE

Today, Michael’s part-time photography career has taken him all over the country. In addition to his day job as a sales manager, he’s photographed dozens of concerts and car races, including dirt track racing and NASCAR events. He also takes portraits of high school seniors and families, and he photographs weddings.



LEFT: Michael Boggs started his photography business in 2019. Since then, he’s taken photos of everything from car races to concerts, as well as traditional photography like weddings and senior pictures.

ABOVE: Michael developed a connection with country music singer Oliver Anthony during a music festival last year. Oliver has since chosen Michael as his official photographer.

Michael’s biggest win to date, however, is snagging the title of official photographer for Oliver Anthony, the chart-topping country music singer-songwriter. Oliver garnered national attention when his song “Rich Men North of Richmond” blew up in the summer of 2023, reaching No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. He also earned a spot in the cultural narrative when GOP presidential candidates discussed the song during an August debate.

Michael met Oliver backstage at the Poppy Mountain Music Festival in Morehead in September. After showing the singer a few pictures he’d taken of him that night, Oliver was impressed. The next night, the pair ended up talking for over an hour and exchanged phone numbers. Michael agreed to photograph Oliver at the Louder Than Life music festival in Louisville a few weeks later.

“It wasn’t until he called me the next day and said he had



Michael Boggs combined his love of dirt track racing with his passion for photography. Now, his racetrack prints sell quickly on his website.



Michael stays busy during music festival season.

confirmation I could come to the festival that it hit me, ‘Man, this is real,’” Michael says.

These days, Michael’s still in awe of his newest job. He’s scheduled to tour with the singer this year, including going to a show in Australia in March.

DOING THE WORK

Michael’s success comes from a few basic principles hard-wired in his brain. They include goal setting, his willingness to keep learning and improving and sheer persistence. “I tell people all the time — if you have a dream, just chase it and never slow down and always work hard for it, because you never know where you’ll end up,” he says.

When he got his first camera back in 2018, he couldn’t wait to get back to his motel room and learn how to use it. “I was just so overwhelmed at first,” he says. “I was, like, ‘Man, what do all these buttons do?’”

The first thing he did was hop on YouTube and find some videos that walked him through the basics. “I was trying to understand the photography triangle, which is your ISO, your shutter

speed and your F-stop,” he says. “When I got home from the job, I went to an Elliott County basketball game to try it out.”

Every day in his spare time, he worked on learning more. Then, in 2019, he got up his courage to make what he figured was a huge request at the time. “I messaged someone out at Mudlick Valley Raceway in Wallingford,” he says. “They had a race that night, and I was just like, ‘Hey, I don’t know what I’m doing, but I just wanted to see if I could come out there and take pictures of race cars.’”

To Michael’s surprise, they said yes. Racing had always been one of his passions, and to combine it with his newest passion seemed like a dream. From the beginning, he kept a log of his photos. He also started a professional Facebook page to document his shots. The page now has more than 18,000 followers.

And while his first pictures weren’t great, Michael says he didn’t really realize it at the time. Now, even when he looks back and cringes a little, he won’t take them down. They show him how far he’s come.

“I look at them, then I look at where I am today,” he says. “It’s the difference between daylight and dark.” 🗨️

TO FIND OUT MORE about Michael Boggs Photography, book a photo shoot or buy one of his prints, visit his website at michaelboggsphotography.net. You can also find him on Facebook, Instagram and X.

FUNKY CHICKENS

Ornamental poultry are not your basic backyard birds



Light Brahma bantams are Turner's favorite chickens to breed and show.

Story by SARA D. PATTERSON



Joe, Meagan, Turner and Kaiser Holland have found a home in the world of exhibition poultry.

Seven-year-old Turner Holland wanted to keep busy outside of school, but he knew he wasn't athletic and couldn't stand sports. That's when his dad, Joe, brought home a half-dozen baby chickens from Tractor Supply.

Those first six chicks led to hundreds more as Turner and his family jumped into the world of backyard poultry at their home in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Now known as Chicken Hill Farm, they are a go-to source of the rare blue Araucana, as well as several other breeds of ornamental chickens.

Their clientele is a growing group that finds joy in raising chickens. More than 12 million people — about twice the population of Arizona — share their yards with a flock, according to The American Pet Products Association's most recent national pet owner survey. The number of households with chickens rose from 8% in 2008 to 13% in 2020.

Many people choose to keep them as pets or as a steady source of fresh eggs.

But exhibition chickens like the Hollands' are often inconsistent layers. Instead, these flashy fowls have a different job — strutting their stuff.


The Hollands' signature Araucana chickens are recognizable by their poof of feathers — known as tufts — that grow at their ears instead of at their “rumpless” tail ends. While the “hilarious, friendly girls,” known for their pastel blue eggs, are Chicken Hill Farm's stars, they share the spotlight with many other funky chickens. There's the Muppet-like jet black Polish with their explosion of fluffy, white head feathers that often obscure their eyes. The Brahmas have abundant, soft feathers that cover their legs and feet. And then there are the small silkies, the most unique of all. Lacking the barbicels that hold a feather's shape, they look — and feel — like they're covered with fur rather than feathers.

Maintaining the chickens' genetics is fascinating, says Turner's mom, Meagan.

At first, she and Turner focused on breeding, but then they discovered the exhibition part of fancy poultry. They took a few of their favorites to a local county show in June 2022 and then to another one a week later. Turner is now 11 and a rising star on the exhibition poultry circuit.

“After that, it just snowballed, and he’s all in,” Meagan says. “He just fell into it and is obsessed. This is such a great activity for him and for us to do as a family.”

The family now spends most weekends in the summer and fall traveling to exhibitions where Turner is making a name for himself. Meagan handles the birds. Joe, an Army veteran, drives. And younger son, Kaiser, is beginning to join his brother in the show ring.

“I don’t know if my husband was as excited about our new lifestyle,” Meagan says with a laugh. “He’s not into the breeding like Turner and I are. But he enjoys the birds and the time we spend together as a family.” 



ABOVE: Turner’s light Brahma bantam cockerel won champion of the Feather Legged Class in the junior show at the Ohio National Poultry Show.

LEFT: As more people become involved with raising fancy chickens at home, the number of exhibition poultry shows and entrants continues to grow.



Photo by Sara D. Patterson

Are you ready for backyard chickens?

Saving money and healthier eggs are the intent of many people who raise chickens, but those goals are often difficult to reach, says Gregory Archer, associate professor and extension specialist for Texas A&M Department of Poultry Science.

“I tell people it should be more about self-satisfaction and the desire to know exactly how and where your eggs came from. Chickens are also fun, and kids love them.”

Possible challenges include bird medical care, waste management or strategies for excess eggs. Similarly, predators can quickly be an issue.

Also, there are geographic-specific considerations. “Often, people don’t manage heat or get the correct breeds for Texas heat,” he says. “You need to make sure you have fresh water, shade and maybe some fans.”

A little research will help identify birds suitable for heat, cold or any environment.

CHICKEN CONSIDERATIONS



If you’re contemplating backyard chickens, consider these points before adopting the chicken lifestyle.

LOCAL LAWS AND NEIGHBORHOOD REGULATIONS

- Check for the latest rules on chicken ownership in your town and county. Many cities limit the number of chickens allowed per household and prohibit roosters entirely.
- Often, cities require chickens to be kept enclosed and that the coop is well maintained and cleaned frequently.
- If you decide to sell your eggs, ensure it’s legal where you live.

EXPENSES

Even small-scale chicken farming requires ongoing expenses after buying or building a coop and fencing.

- A 40-pound bag of feed can cost \$25 or more, depending on the brand, nutritional value and other factors.
- Dietary supplements are typically needed, so budget for extra proteins and treats, like dried insects — a 5-pound bag can cost at least \$50.
- Chickens require fresh bedding, like pine shavings or chopped straw, every time the coop is cleaned.

CARE

While caring for chickens isn’t a full-time job, do expect to invest time.

- Most people adopt a daily or twice-daily routine for feeding and watering.
- Many times, chickens need to be let out of a small coop in the morning and herded back in at night for safety.
- Remember, chickens can fly. Some people prefer to clip their wings regularly, while others choose a run with fencing or netting overhead.

Source: Osceola County Extension Agent Jessica Sullivan

HOPE FOR HEARING

Menifee High project highlights hearing loss

Story by JEN CALHOUN



Menifee County High students and the LOVE Project team are, from left, Grace Rogers, Kassidy Heizer, Andi Wells and Jaycee Gevedon.

Photos contributed by Ebie Adkins

Kassidy Heizer noticed something was off with her hearing, but, as a teenager, she didn't pay much attention to it. It wasn't until a year or so ago that she realized how significant her hearing loss had become.

"She had noticed some things were hard to hear, but she didn't realize that everybody didn't struggle like her," says Elizabeth "Ebie" Adkins, teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing at Menifee High School. "It was mind-blowing."

Ebie had seen students struggling with similar issues before. In lunchrooms, they would choose to sit back and disengage from conversations instead of asking "What did you say," repeatedly. Even

with hearing aids, they might leave a loud room when the noise grew overwhelming.

ENTER JAG

That struggle acted as a catalyst for Menifee County High's EAR Hope for Hearing project — an acronym for Encouragement, Awareness and Resources. The student-led project started to help people in the county who are deaf or experience hearing loss. It's being conducted by students in the high school's Jobs for America's Graduates club in connection with JAG's national LOVE Project.

Schools across the nation that offer JAG clubs can participate in the LOVE Project

by developing their own community-based projects. LOVE, an acronym for Lifting Our Voices for Equity, encourages young people to help create a more inclusive world by identifying challenges in their communities and working together to make changes.

While JAG offers several classes at the school, it also involves participation in competitions to promote job preparedness and civic mindedness. One of these opportunities is the LOVE Project, says Adam Adkins, the school's JAG specialist and teacher. Adam is also Ebie's husband, and they work with some of the same students, including Kassidy.

"It was sort of a lightbulb moment,"



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sarah Otis, a Menifee County junior with hearing loss, wrote a poem for the LOVE Project to express the struggles she experiences.

Kassidy Heizer, left, and Grace Rogers review the data they collected from their high school peers related to knowledge of hearing loss facts.

Students organized a class to introduce their peers to American Sign Language. Elizabeth “Ebie” Adkins, Ph.D., teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing, led the class as students practiced their finger spelling.

Ebie says. “A project like this would be perfect for our needs.”

JAG’s focus on community service, employability and leadership skills offered the perfect resource. With EAR, the JAG club gave its members a chance to stretch their minds, learn new things and take on a challenge affecting a relatively large number of people in the community.



ISOLATING FACTORS

In the beginning, EAR project members Jaycee Gevedon, Grace Rogers, Andi Wells and Kassidy developed and conducted a survey of the student body. “They wanted to see a baseline of what the student body knows about the deaf and hard of hearing community,” Adam says. “Then they used that data to create an awareness campaign.”

The club members also performed detailed research on hearing loss and deafness. They learned many people in the community are affected, and that it can be isolating for young and old alike. “Older people will hesitate to use the telephone, for instance, or they might not engage in conversations where hearing conditions aren’t really that great,” Ebie says. “So that isolation is there, and we feel like it’s unfair. So, what can we do to try to bridge those gaps?”

They also learned how daunting it can be for parents with children who are either born deaf or hard of hearing. Help

is available, but finding those resources is difficult, especially when some of the options are contradictory. They planned to hold a communitywide event in late January, but it was canceled due to inclement weather.

“One of the things the kids wanted to do through the event was to bring together the people who did have hearing loss in the community,” Ebie says. “They wanted them to be able to see each other, know they’re not alone and share stories.”


They also hoped to direct people to community resources. The club members approached Mountain Telephone to partner with them, so they could look for ways to promote or expand their project. “We found out that Mountain offers an amplifying handset,” Ebie says. “It might be something people don’t know about.”

As a bonus, the club presented its EAR project at JAG’s LOVE competition. Regionals were in February followed by a state competition. National finalists compete in April.

BUILDING A BETTER PLACE

Kassidy says some of the project’s findings came as a surprise to her. She learned there were far more people her age who were hard of hearing or deaf than she could have imagined.

“I didn’t know how many people in Menifee County were like me,” she says. “As someone who is hard of hearing, I know firsthand that people here are lacking in awareness and knowledge of the deaf and hard of hearing community.”

She also knows how important a project like this could be for the community. “I think disabilities tend to get overlooked, so giving those people in need attention is a must,” she says. 

CHECK IT OUT

Find out more about Menifee High School’s Jobs for America’s Graduates program and the Hope for Hearing EAR project by visiting the Menifee JAG Facebook page.



Regional Accents

Local favorites are
key ingredient of
America's melting pot

Every local dish has a story behind it, history heaped with flavor. One of the best ways to discover these is by stirring the nation's culinary pot to see what's cooking.

Certain dishes are common to us Americans across the board. We'll fry just about anything. From Twinkies to turkeys, they all go in the deep fryer. But, when it comes to comfort-food classics, states and regions have their own distinct accents. U.S. culinary traditions form a giant melting pot with regional flavors blended in for extra deliciousness.

Regional foods are some of the most fascinating bites one can experience. Here's a look at some of the ones that are favorites across our nation.



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

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

SMOKED GOUDA MAC AND CHEESE

You'd be hard-pressed to walk into a diner around the South and not see mac and cheese on the menu. This recipe just takes it up a notch.

- 1 pound short pasta, such as elbow macaroni or shells
- 1 pound smoked gouda cheese, grated
- 8 ounces extra-sharp white cheddar cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Salt, to taste
- 4 slices of bacon, crumbled (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Cook pasta according to package directions to al dente stage, then set aside.

In a large Dutch oven or other deep pot, heat butter over medium-low heat. Once butter has melted, add in flour and whisk until all flour disappears, then slowly add in heavy cream and whole milk. Stir and let mixture come to a slight boil. Add in all spices and stir again. Lastly, add in 8 ounces of smoked gouda cheese and white cheddar cheese. Whisk until all cheese has melted.

Add in pasta and mix everything together to fully incorporate, making sure all pasta is coated with sauce. Add salt, to taste.

Transfer mixture to a large, lightly greased baking dish, then top dish with remaining smoked gouda. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until mixture is golden and bubbly.

Let cool for 15 minutes and serve warm topped with crumbled bacon, if desired. Makes 8 servings.



WILD RICE CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Wild rice is found throughout the Midwest, where this recipe originates.

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) chicken broth
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 4 cups cubed, cooked chicken
- 4 cups cooked wild rice
- 2 jars (4 1/2 ounces each) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 jar (4 ounces) diced pimentos, drained
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- 1/3 cup slivered almonds

In a large saucepan, saute onion in butter until tender. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper until blended. Gradually stir in broth. Bring to a boil. Boil and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Stir in the half-and-half, chicken, rice, mushrooms, pimentos and parsley. Heat through.

Transfer mixture to a greased 2 1/2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with almonds. Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30-35 minutes or until bubbly. Makes 6-8 servings.

SALMON PICCATA

This is a popular recipe in the Northwest where fresh salmon is easy to find. In other states, try to get your hands on the freshest fish possible to bring out the flavors in this dish.

- 4 salmon steaks, 1 inch thick
- All-purpose flour (for dredging)
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons butter, divided
- 3 tablespoons onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 heaping tablespoon capers, drained
- 1/8 teaspoon dried Italian seasonings, crushed
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons beef broth

Preheat oven to 400 F. Rinse salmon steaks under cool water, pat dry and roll in flour.

In a large ovenproof frying pan or saute pan, heat 1/4 cup butter until it melts. Briefly saute the salmon steaks, browning them lightly on both sides.

Bake, covered, 10 to 15 minutes until a meat thermometer registers an internal temperature of 140 F, or until salmon is slightly opaque in the thickest part. You may need to cut to test. During this time the meat continues to cook because the meat temperature will rise 5 to 10 degrees after it is removed from the oven and the juices will redistribute. Remove from oven. Reserve liquid in the pan, and transfer salmon onto a warm serving platter.

Using the same pan over medium heat, stir into the reserved liquid the onion, garlic, capers and Italian seasonings. Simmer for 5 minutes. Add white wine, lemon juice and beef broth. Stir until well blended. Turn off the heat, whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons butter until blended. Remove from heat, pour sauce over salmon and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings. 🍴

SALSA ROJAS

Salsa is the condiment of choice throughout Texas and many of the Western states.

- 1 can (28 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with garlic and onion, drained
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) stewed tomatoes (with Mexican seasonings, if you can find them), drained
- 1 can (10 ounces) diced tomatoes and green chilies, drained
- 1 medium onion, quartered
- 2 banana peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 cup minced fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 ripe avocados, peeled and cubed
- Tortilla chips



Place the first 10 ingredients in a food processor; cover and process until chopped. Add cilantro and lime juice; cover and pulse until combined.

Transfer to a bowl; stir in avocados. Serve with tortilla chips or use as a condiment for your favorite Tex-Mex dishes.



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