



Mountain Telephone

**BROADBAND:**  
GAMING EDITION

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

# CONNECTION

## BEATING THE ODDS

Basketball star  
keeps her eyes  
on the goal

### HOOP DREAMS

Menifee basketball player  
shoots for the stars

### READY, SET, PLAY

Broadband gives gamers  
a competitive edge



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO  
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

## We need better mapping data

Several states have adopted loan and grant programs to help extend service to those areas of rural America still lacking a reliable broadband connection. Beyond its traditional programs, the federal government continues looking for ways to invest in this critical infrastructure.

A challenge associated with deciding where to invest these dollars is identifying where service is or is not already available. The FCC's broadband maps are the determining resource.

The FCC issued an order over the summer that will move away from the overly broad use of census blocks for reporting broadband coverage, instead requiring providers to submit "shapefiles" showing where they actually offer broadband service.

I had the opportunity to appear before a Congressional committee in September, where I shared a few key steps to move us toward more accurate mapping.

First, we need standardized reporting. It is also important to have a back-end validation process.

Finally, a robust challenge process is needed to allow providers and policy-makers to do one last "sanity check" on the accuracy of the maps before decisions are reached.

Providers like yours are making great progress in connecting rural America. But if we hope for a future where everyone has broadband access, we must have better mapping data. 📍



## Celebrate rural health on Nov. 21

Despite the challenges of serving rural America, health care professionals are delivering quality care, embracing technology and finding creative ways to encourage wellness among their rural patients. On Nov. 21, rural health offices will honor these providers — along with the partners and communities who support them — by sponsoring National Rural Health Day.

### How can you celebrate National Rural Health Day?

Find free, downloadable resources for many of the activities below by visiting [www.powerofrural.org/nrhd-toolkit](http://www.powerofrural.org/nrhd-toolkit).



**PARENTS:** Prepare a healthy meal for dinner, and talk with your kids about the blessings — and the challenges — of living in rural America. Mention the health care providers who service your rural community.



**PATIENTS:** Write a note to your health care team, thanking them for their help and their commitment to serving a rural population.



**PHYSICIANS:** Display National Rural Health Day posters in your office. Provide a staff appreciation lunch. Visit [www.WalkWithADoc.org](http://www.WalkWithADoc.org) and consider starting this fun, active outreach in your community.



**FACEBOOK USERS:** Share a story about your doctor, a nurse or other health care provider who has made a positive impact on your life.



**TEACHERS:** Give your students coloring book pages. Sponsor a rural health-themed poster contest. Invite physicians or nurses from local hospitals and clinics to speak to students.



**BROADBAND USERS:** Search for health information over your broadband connection. Ask your physician if there are telehealth resources that could help you maintain or improve your health.



**SMALL BUSINESSES:** Show appreciation to your local rural health professionals by providing them with discounts or special offers.



**YOU!:** Make healthy eating choices. Take a walk. Avoid tobacco products. Schedule an appointment to have your cholesterol and blood pressure checked.

Share your experiences across social media using the hashtags [#powerofrural](https://twitter.com/#powerofrural) and [#nationalruralhealthday](https://twitter.com/#nationalruralhealthday).

# Gaming generation

## Millennials — the first lifelong gamers

The U.S. launch of the Nintendo Entertainment System in late 1985 helped create an entertainment revolution. The oldest millennials at the time were about 4 years old, and that generation would be the first to make gaming a common pastime.

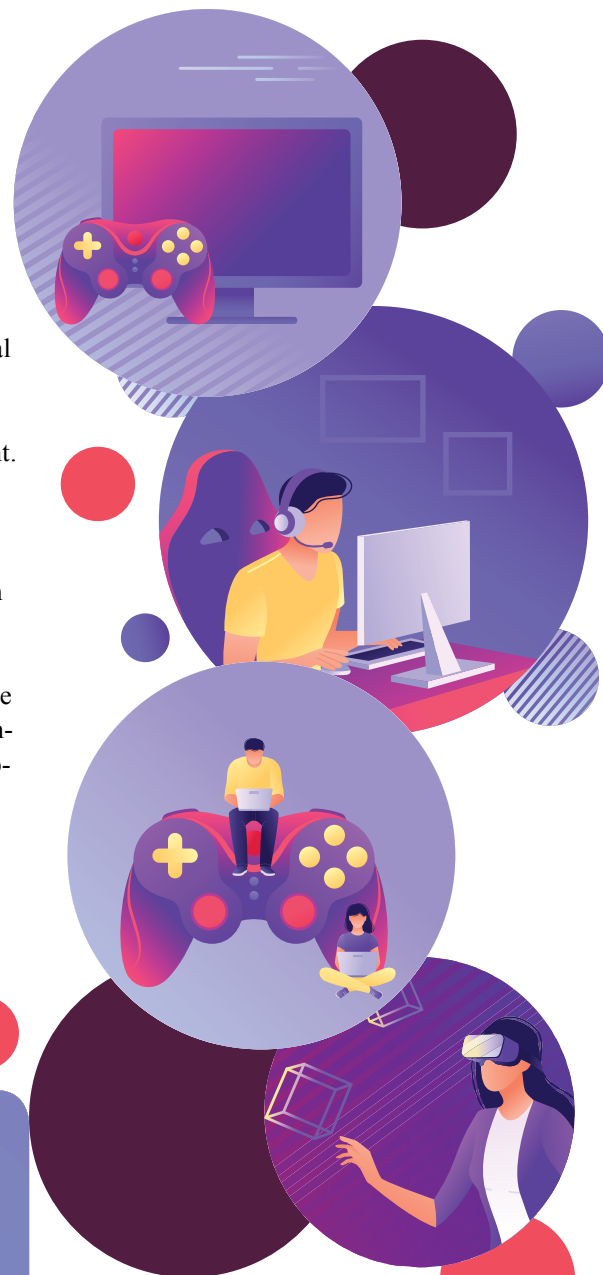
Members of this group, also known as Generation Y, are closely tracked by experts such as The Nielsen Company to monitor entertainment and technology trends, because the habits of millennials shape those industries.

Today, millennial gamers are finding new ways to play. There are mobile games and online, community-based games. Some people compete, and others enjoy the movielike experiences of modern games. And for millennial gamers, the male-to-female ratio is roughly even.

Thanks to games that emphasize social features, about 70% of millennial gamers and the generation following, often known as Gen Z, turn to multiplayer gaming for the social component.

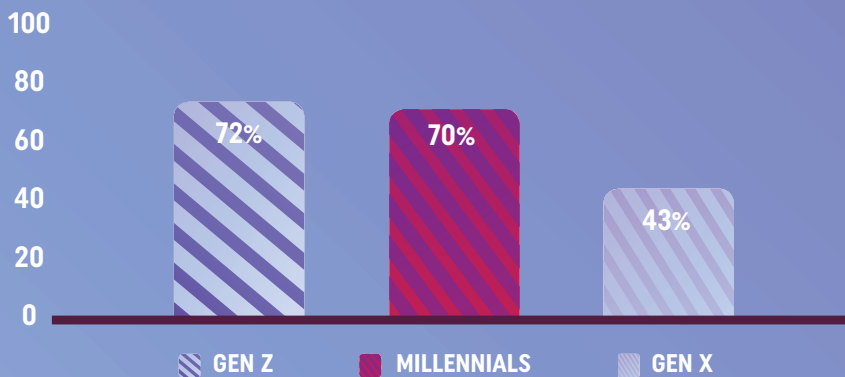
Also, the pastime remains a critical entertainment choice even when the competition ends. About 70% of gamers turn to YouTube or Twitch to watch online videos about gaming. On average, this form of viewing totals nearly six hours weekly. Millennial gamers are willing to pay those who create the content they enjoy, either through subscriptions or by donating directly.

A Nielsen report concluded that millennials will not quickly outgrow this form of entertainment, and they will become the first generation of lifelong gamers. 🗨️



### Games have become a social activity for millennials

Thanks to social features that let connected gamers chat and play with each other, a large share of millennials and Gen Zers play multiplayer games to virtually hang out with their friends and families. Members of Gen X and up are, in contrast, far less likely to play multiplayer titles.



### Millennial gamers are a wide-ranging demographic group

- 54%** with full-time employment
- 76%** pay for a movie/TV streaming service
- 43%** with a bachelor's degree or higher
- 38%** pay for a music streaming service
- 46%** with children
- \$58,000** average household income

# Like Nintendo, we go beyond technology

**A**t first glance, Mountain Telephone and Nintendo don't have a lot in common. Nintendo is a video game giant based in Japan, and we are a small broadband provider in rural Kentucky.



**SHAYNE ISON**  
General Manager

But a quote I ran across recently made me realize we may have more in common than you'd think.

In the pages of this issue, you'll see a focus on gamers. I thoroughly enjoy playing video games myself and I know there are several thousand of our members who enjoy gaming on our network. As I hope you'll read, gaming has certainly become mainstream — to the point where there are college scholarships for team gamers.

For decades now, one brand has been synonymous with gaming: Nintendo. It's a company with an interesting history. Like Mountain Telephone, it evolved over the years to meet customer demand. In fact, many people don't know that Nintendo started

off in 1889 as a small manufacturer of playing cards. Nearly a century and a half later, it's changed the world with its electronic gaming systems, handhelds and characters like Mario.

Similar to the way Nintendo developed, we've evolved from party line phone systems to lightning-fast broadband. But a quote from former Nintendo President Satoru Iwata drove home another similarity our two companies share.

In discussing his company's success, the late Mr. Iwata stated that in order to be successful, Nintendo had to look beyond the hardware and software it developed. "Please understand, I am not saying that technology is unimportant," he told an interviewer. "But if we are just focusing on technology ... we will not succeed."

In order to succeed, Nintendo had to focus not on the processors, electronics and equipment driving its games but instead on what the games did for people. Similarly at Mountain Telephone, we constantly remind ourselves that the technology our business provides is only part of the equation. What matters most is how our members use that technology and the ways their lives are improved because of it.

Maybe it's when a young adult can enroll in distance learning classes because of our network. Maybe it's when an entrepreneur connects to markets around the world through our services. Or maybe it's simply when a customer gets to play a video game online with friends.

Just like with Nintendo, the bits and bytes of our business are secondary. Our primary focus is on the difference that technology can make for you. 📠

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 11,500 members.

### Send address corrections to:

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative  
P.O. Box 399 • 425 Main St.  
West Liberty, KY 41472  
Telephone: 606-743-3121

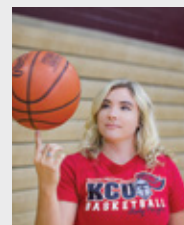
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### On the Cover:



Former Elliott County High School basketball star Brittani Worthington overcame brain surgery to reach her goals.

See story Page 8.

Photo courtesy of David Bennett and Vicky Madden

# Holiday closings

Mountain Telephone offices will be closed for the following holidays:

**Veterans Day** — Monday, Nov. 11

**Thanksgiving** — Thursday, Nov. 28, and Friday, Nov. 29

**Christmas** — Tuesday, Dec. 24 (closing at noon), and Wednesday, Dec. 25

**New Year's Day** — Wednesday, Jan. 1

**We wish you a happy and blessed holiday season!**

## HONORING ALL WHO SERVED!

Mountain Telephone would like to thank everyone who has served our country. You help keep our nation safe and protect our freedoms. Thank a veteran in your life on Veterans Day, Monday, Nov. 11.



Collin Granger, CEO and president of Mapcom Systems, left, and Shayne Ison, Mountain Telephone general manager.

Photo courtesy of NTCA

## Mountain Telephone wins national award

Mountain Telephone recently earned a Smart Rural Communities Showcase Award from NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association. This put the region among similar progressive communities across the country.

"It's not enough to simply build broadband — communities must adopt it, embrace it and use it creatively," says Joshua Seidemann, vice president of policy for NTCA. "More than 75 locally operated broadband providers across the United States and Canada have earned the Smart Rural Communities Showcase Award after rigorous review by panels of experts in telecom, agriculture, education, economic development and other industries that have critical stakes in rural areas."

Among its recent accomplishments, Mountain Telephone has worked with a local school district to deploy a 10 gig network which allowed the school system to install an advanced security system. Mountain Telephone's superior business systems also provided high-speed broadband services to local companies, allowing them to network with offices across the state and around the country.

Shayne Ison, general manager of Mountain Telephone, says he was thrilled with the award. "Today, strong internet services are a big part of any community's infrastructure," he says. "Like roads, bridges and interstates, a high-speed broadband connection keeps us connected to people here and all over the world. It opens up so many opportunities to bring economic development to our area, stronger educational resources and better health care. Becoming a Smart Rural Community means that we are working at the top of our game."

## UK 2019-20 BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

### MEN

DATE	OPPONENT
OCT. 27	GEORGETOWN (KY) 5 p.m. SECN
NOV. 1	KENTUCKY STATE 7 p.m. SECN
NOV. 5	MICHIGAN STATE 9:30 p.m. ESPN
NOV. 8	EASTERN KENTUCKY 7 p.m. SECN
NOV. 12	EVANSVILLE 7 p.m. SECN
NOV. 18	UTAH VALLEY 7 p.m. ESPN2
NOV. 22	MOUNT ST. MARY'S 7 p.m. SECN
NOV. 24	LAMAR 6 p.m. SECN
NOV. 29	UAB 7 p.m. SECN
DEC. 7	FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON 4 p.m. SECN
DEC. 14	GEORGIA TECH 5 p.m. ESPN
DEC. 18	UTAH 11 p.m. ESPN2
DEC. 21	OHIO STATE 5:15 p.m. CBS
DEC. 28	LOUISVILLE 3:45 p.m. CBS
JAN. 4	MISSOURI 2 p.m. SECN
JAN. 7	GEORGIA 9 p.m. ESPN/2/U
JAN. 11	ALABAMA 12 p.m. ESPN/2/U
JAN. 15	SOUTH CAROLINA 6:30 p.m. SECN
JAN. 18	ARKANSAS 4 p.m. ESPN/2/U
JAN. 21	GEORGIA 7 p.m. ESPN/2/U/SECN
JAN. 25	TEXAS TECH 6 p.m. ESPN
JAN. 29	VANDERBILT 6:30 p.m. SECN
FEB. 1	AUBURN 6/8 p.m. ESPN/2/U
FEB. 4	MISSISSIPPI STATE 9 p.m. ESPN/2/U
FEB. 8	TENNESSEE 1 p.m. CBS
FEB. 11	VANDERBILT 7 p.m. ESPN/2/U/SECN
FEB. 15	OLE MISS 2 p.m. ESPN/2/U
FEB. 18	LSU 9 p.m. ESPN/2/U
FEB. 22	FLORIDA 6/8 p.m. ESPN/2/U
FEB. 25	TEXAS A&M 7 p.m. ESPN/2/U/SECN
FEB. 29	AUBURN 3:45 p.m. CBS
MARCH 3	TENNESSEE 9 p.m. ESPN/2/U
MARCH 7	FLORIDA 1 p.m. CBS
MARCH 11-15	SEC TOURNAMENT ESPN/SECN

### WOMEN

DATE	OPPONENT
NOV. 5	MOUNT ST. MARY'S 7 p.m. SECN+
NOV. 10	MIDDLE TENNESSEE 3 p.m.
NOV. 13	STETSON 7 p.m. SECN+
NOV. 16	VIRGINIA 5 p.m. ACCN EXTRA
NOV. 21	MOREHEAD STATE 7 p.m. SECN+
NOV. 26	GRAMBLING STATE 7 p.m. SECN+
DEC. 1	AUSTIN PEAY 4 p.m. SECN
DEC. 4	CHARLOTTE 11 a.m. SECN+
DEC. 8	SAMFORD 2 p.m. SECN+
DEC. 11	WINTHROP 7 p.m. TBD
DEC. 15	LOUISVILLE 1 p.m. ESPN2
DEC. 21	CALIFORNIA 7 p.m. TBD
JAN. 2	SOUTH CAROLINA 7:40 p.m. SECN
JAN. 5	TENNESSEE 4 p.m. SECN/ESPN2
JAN. 9	ALABAMA 8 p.m. SECN+
JAN. 12	FLORIDA 12 p.m. ESPN2
JAN. 16	TEXAS A&M 6:30 p.m. SECN
JAN. 19	LSU 2 p.m. SECN
JAN. 27	AUBURN 7 p.m. SECN
JAN. 30	MISSOURI 7 p.m. SECN
FEB. 2	FLORIDA 1 p.m. SECN
FEB. 6	ALABAMA 7 p.m. SECN+
FEB. 9	ARKANSAS 4 p.m. ESPN2
FEB. 16	MISSISSIPPI STATE 5 p.m. ESPN2
FEB. 20	OLE MISS 8 p.m. SECN+
FEB. 23	SOUTH CAROLINA 2 p.m. SECN/ESPN2
FEB. 27	GEORGIA 7 p.m. SECN+
MARCH 1	VANDERBILT 2:05 p.m. SECN
MARCH 4-8	SEC TOURNAMENT

HOME GAMES IN BOLD  
ALL TIMES EASTERN

# History comes alive

NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM HONORS SOLDIERS THROUGH THE YEARS

The birth of the U.S. Army Airborne units came about in 1940 with the aid of a batch of borrowed Riddell football helmets from the United States Military Academy at West Point. The helmets, which were used to protect the heads of aspiring paratroopers, came with instructions, however. The team needed them back when football season returned.

With that bit of information, visitors can enter the Airborne & Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Situated just a few miles from Fort Bragg, the museum honors the sacrifices of all airborne and special operations units with an extensive collection of memorabilia and military equipment dating from World War II to the present day.

## WHY FAYETTEVILLE?

Now-retired Gen. James Lindsay led a push for the museum. He served as the first commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, which is located on



One of the Vietnam War-era museum displays re-creates soldiers on a rescue mission jumping out of a helicopter.

Fort Bragg and oversees various unconventional warfare units. The Army post also serves as headquarters for the XVIII Airborne Corps, which has long presided over some of the most storied Army units in the nation's history, including the 101st Airborne and the 82nd Airborne All American Division, which is still located on Fort Bragg. "But our museum represents more than the 82nd," says Jim Bartlinski, museum director. "We represent all U.S. Army Airborne troops and Special Operations. So we tell those histories here."

## FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The exterior design of the museum features soaring metal beams that play on the looks of the jump towers paratroopers use to practice. An imposing Iron Mike statue greets entering visitors. Various monuments commemorating American soldiers bear the nickname. This Iron Mike details the look of a World War II-era paratrooper, but it represents all paratroopers and special operations soldiers, Bartlinski says.

Inside the museum, visitors get a chronological look at the world of paratroopers and special forces soldiers — from their first test jump in Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1940 to today's missions in Afghanistan.



A U.S. Army Airborne & Special Operations Museum display re-creates a temporary post in Afghanistan.

There is a special emphasis on World War II, which saw not only the beginning of the Airborne but also the most concentrated use of airborne operations. During that time, paratroopers dropped behind enemy lines to work with groups resisting the Nazi invasion of their countries. They also landed in Normandy just before the D-Day invasion of Europe.

Displays include artifacts, true-to-life dioramas, the various types of aircraft used for missions, specialized Jeeps and other equipment used for airborne drops and specialized missions behind enemy lines. One glass-encased display shows a card with an early version of the special forces' red arrowhead insignia. The cards sometimes turned up conspicuously on the uniforms of dead Nazis as a chilling warning.

*Hooah!*

The Airborne & Special Operations Museum is at 100 Bragg Blvd., about 8 miles from Fort Bragg, in the heart of historic downtown Fayetteville, North Carolina. It is within walking distance of the North Carolina Veterans Park, a variety of local shops and restaurants, and the new baseball stadium of the Houston Astros' minor league farm team, the Fayetteville Woodpeckers. For more information, including hours of operation, visit the museum's website at [asomf.org](http://asomf.org) or its Facebook page.



Interactive displays are also scattered throughout the museum, including one that gives visitors a chance to sit in the hard, metal seats of a C-47 fuselage and then experience a simulation of jumping out of the cargo carrier. In addition, the museum's theater shows movies several times a day, and a 25-seat simulator room offers virtual reality experiences that mimic those of paratroopers.

The museum offers visitors a chance to refresh their history knowledge and see it in the context of the ongoing military operations of the times. But it also gives them a chance to better understand history from the eyes of a soldier, Bartlinski says. "What we do here commemorates the service of all these paratroopers," he says. "It points out all their sacrifices in the past and the ways they've continued to make sacrifices. It's important to remember that our troops are still out there in harm's way." 📱

## VISIT A MILITARY MUSEUM THIS VETERANS DAY

Military museums continue to fill visitors with respect and appreciation for the men and women of the U.S. armed forces. But today's military museums feature dazzling interactive activities, exciting simulations and realistic visual displays that bring history to life and educate visitors about the people who fought. Looking for an inspiring military museum in the Southeast? **Here are just a few of the greats:**

### NATIONAL NAVAL AVIATION MUSEUM

Pensacola, Florida

The National Naval Aviation Museum is the world's largest Naval aviation museum. It explores the rich history of Naval aviation with more than 150 beautifully restored aircraft representing Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviation. These historic and one-of-a-kind aircraft are displayed both inside the museum's nearly 350,000 square feet of exhibit space and outside on its 37-acre grounds. For more information, visit [navalaviationmuseum.org](http://navalaviationmuseum.org).

### NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM & SOLDIER CENTER

Fort Benning, Georgia

With thousands of artifacts, monuments, interactive exhibits and video presentations on display, the National Infantry Museum is one of the nation's leading military history destinations. Visitors of all ages can experience firsthand the American infantryman's journey to defeat tyranny around the globe. For more information, visit [nationalinfantrymuseum.org](http://nationalinfantrymuseum.org).

### U.S. ARMY AVIATION MUSEUM

Fort Rucker, Alabama

Life-sized dioramas of aircraft and personnel capture the rich heritage of Army aviation, which started during the U.S. Civil War with hydrogen-filled balloons that directed artillery fire. About 50 different aircraft fill this cavernous museum and tell the wild and uplifting stories of U.S. Army pilots. For more information, visit [armyaviationmuseum.org](http://armyaviationmuseum.org).



# DON'T STOP. DON'T QUIT.

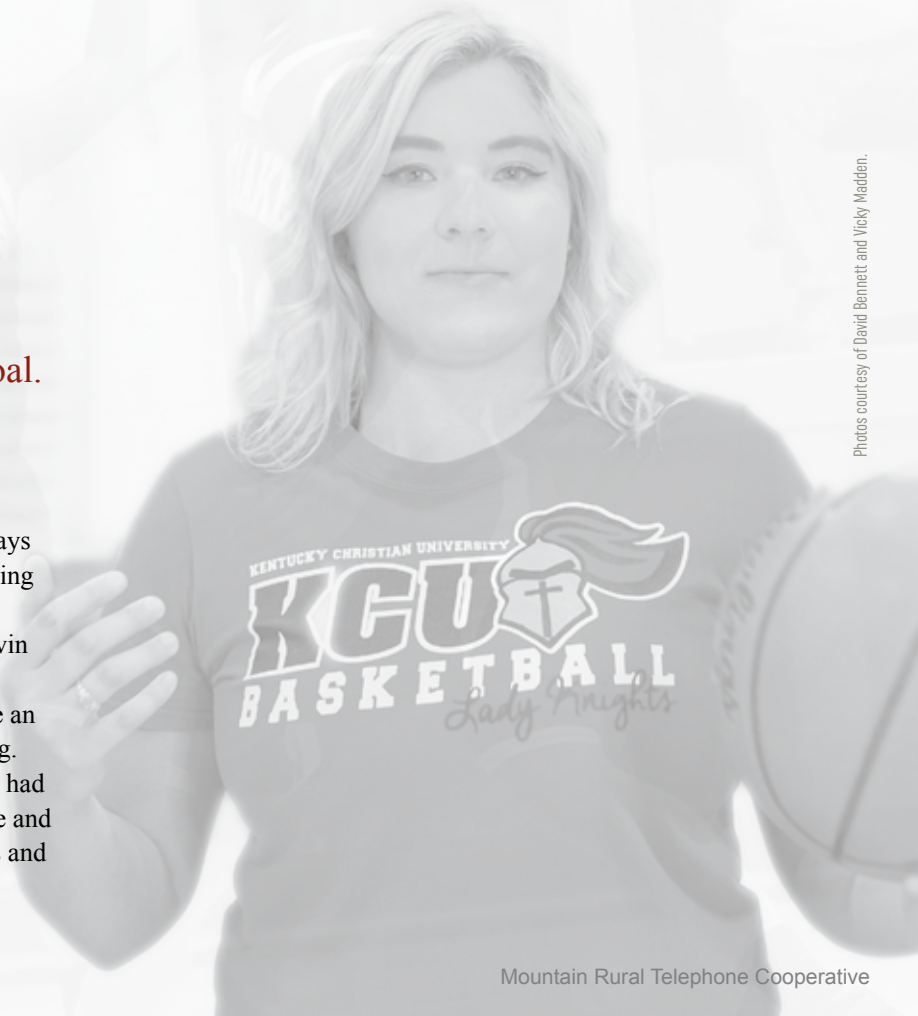
## Sandy Hook star overcomes obstacles to reach her goals

BY JEN CALHOUN

**T**he minute Brittani Worthington stepped onto the basketball court in first grade, she knew it was her sport. She loved everything about it — the athleticism, the mental game and the excitement of a quick pass or a sudden goal. It was most definitely her thing.

By the time she reached seventh grade, she also knew her way around the court. She was a point guard, and she understood the game. “It kind of came naturally to me,” says Worthington, who is now 22. “I knew I was good at handling the ball, and it was my favorite thing to do.”

She studied the moves of her favorite NBA players, Kevin Garnett and Rajon Rondo, and worked on those moves at home after her school practices. The basketball grew to be an extension of her — not much different than an arm or a leg. “Every chance I got, I was out there playing,” she says. “I had older friends that played, and I saw how athletic they were and how their game had developed. I saw them lifting weights and improving, and I thought, ‘I want to be that dedicated.’”



Photos courtesy of David Bennett and Vicky Madden.



## HOOP DREAMS

During high school, her own dedication paid off. Her classmates at Elliott County High School nicknamed her Li'l Rondo and LKG — Little Kevin Garnett. She loved the comparison, and she tried even harder to play like them.

Before her 2015 high school graduation, she signed on to play basketball at Kentucky Christian University. Once she got there, her legs started aching during a workout. The pain was intense enough that she knew something was wrong. “It turned out I had compartment syndrome,” she says.

Compartment syndrome is a condition that occurs when pressure within the muscles builds to dangerous levels, which can decrease blood flow. This, in turn, prevents nourishment and oxygen from reaching nerve and muscle cells. Worthington underwent a successful surgery for the condition during spring break of her freshman year.

## ANOTHER HOOP TO JUMP THROUGH

For the next year or so, her basketball career thrived as Worthington pursued a major in business administration with an emphasis in sports management. But things changed again for her when she began suffering from headaches in her sophomore year at KCU. Her body grew weak, and she struggled to walk to classes on the small campus.

Some days, she would lose feeling from her elbow down to her fingers. Her hands and arms shook involuntarily, and she couldn't play basketball for more than a few minutes without stopping from exhaustion. One day, her entire mouth went numb, and she feared her airways would close up. At first, doctors were puzzled. “They thought I was allergic to exercise,” she says. “I thought they were joking. But it turns out that's a real thing.”

Worthington wasn't experiencing exercise-induced anaphylaxis, however. Her situation was much worse, although doctors didn't diagnose it for nearly a year after her initial symptoms. She suffered from a Chiari malformation in her brain —



Brittani Worthington is a former Kentucky Christian University basketball player.

a structural defect at the base of her skull that, in her case, was cutting off the flow of fluid between her brain and spinal cord.

“The symptoms were progressing super fast,” she says. “It was getting to the point where, every day, I was waking up and there was a new symptom. I had really bad balance issues. It was affecting my memory, too. I worried about my grades all the time, and I would study for hours. I would literally have to study until the test was, like, right up in front of me. Even then, I would still have to sit there and stare forever at a question. I couldn't even remember what I'd just read.”

In October 2017 she underwent brain surgery to fix the Chiari malformation. She wanted to wait until after basketball season, but she knew she couldn't play much anyway. “When they went into surgery, they said it was actually worse than what the MRI had shown,” Worthington says. “It had been awhile since the MRI had been done, so my condition had actually gotten worse.”

The surgery lasted 4 1/2 hours, during which time doctors removed a piece of her skull and inserted a plate. “It opened up where my brain was actually descending down and cutting off where the spinal fluid was supposed to flow through,” she says.

## CLIMBING UPWARD

Doctors warned Worthington that it could take six months to a year to get back to her physical activities, but she had different ideas. Within four months, she got back on the court. “I just felt like it was my job to be there for my team,” she says. “I started doing exercises and physical therapy — everything I could to get my strength back. I was really, really sore, but I had to work it out one way or another. I just really wanted to play. It was killing me not to play.”

Worthington ended her college basketball career at the end of her junior year so she could graduate early in December 2018. She's been gaining business experience through summer jobs in Mountain Telephone's business office, and she hopes to one day work with sports teams — preferably her beloved Boston Celtics.

But whatever she does, she knows basketball is part of her past, present and future. She says her passion for the sport wouldn't let her quit, even when so many other people might have. “I just love it,” Worthington says. “Playing makes me feel free.” 🗨️



# Esports go mainstream

High-speed connections create winners

BY JOHN CLAYTON

A dozen gaming computers provide an ethereal green glow along the stage at Lander University's Abney Cultural Center in Greenwood, South Carolina, as esports competitors prepare for an early round at the 2019 Peach Belt Conference League of Legends Championship tournament.

In traditional sports, the PBC is a member of NCAA Division II and composed of small colleges and universities in the Carolinas and Georgia. But as esports begins to find a larger niche, this is something different and new. While the video game industry has been around for decades, esports continues to evolve with college and professional teams, increasingly stunning games and graphics, and more platforms on which to play.

"I grew up playing stick-and-ball sports, and I never saw the difference in intensity between those sports and esports," says J.T. Vandebree, associate college esports manager at Riot Games, the creator and distributor of the battle arena game League of Legends. "In esports, all the competitors play the same games, and they all have the same experiences. And they all get to chase the same dream."

Vandebree spoke during a forum on esports hosted by Lander University during the 2019 PBC tournament. Members of the forum's panel agreed that esports and video gaming are expected to continue to broaden their reach and market shares.

Georgia high schools are now involved in sanctioned esports leagues. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones bought a stake



Lander University esports competitors prepare for the Peach Belt Conference League of Legends tournament.

in professional esports team Complexity Gaming in 2017 and moved its training center to the Cowboys complex in Frisco, Texas. In 2017, 240 colleges and universities competed in esports. That number grew to 357 in 2019, and many of those schools offer scholarships to promising video gamers.

Despite the growing popularity of esports on college campuses and beyond, the NCAA has not sanctioned esports. Instead, the National Association of College Esports serves as its primary governing body, and the NCSA — Next College Student Athlete recruiting service — has added esports to its portfolio.

ESPN signed on as sponsor of the Collegiate Esports Championship and plans to

continue its support of the genre across its platforms, John Lasker, ESPN's vice president of digital programming, told Cheddar Esports during a regular show dedicated to gaming and esports.

"The conversion is happening right before our eyes," Lasker says. "Sports teams and franchises are evolving into esports franchises and esports teams. As that continues to happen, ESPN expects to continue to be there as we have been in other sports."

## THE NEXT BIG THING

Gaming consoles such as Xbox and PlayStation have long incorporated internet connectivity into its gameplay, but Google is taking gaming one huge



The Peach Belt Conference League of Legends Tournament took the big screen at Lander University's Abney Cultural Center.

step outside of the console. Google was to introduce its much-anticipated Stadia online gaming platform — described as a sort of Netflix for gamers — in November. With the cloud-based Stadia, gamers will not even need a gaming console or PC to play. The cost is \$9.99 per month in the U.S.

“Google may have just unveiled the future of gaming,” wrote Tom Warren, a senior editor for TheVerge.com, following Google’s introduction of Stadia’s beta version at the Game Developers Conference in March.

The cloud-based technology, which relies on fast internet speeds, an array of servers placed around the world and special game controllers that relay commands quickly to the servers, puts more pressure on internet companies and cooperatives to deliver.

High-speed internet connections make it possible for gamers to compete, and the expansion of broadband services into rural areas makes it possible for more people to enjoy the games and to take advantage of the potential opportunities they offer.

In Kerrville, Texas, first-year Schreiner University esports coach Ryan Lucich says he often suffered through frustrating internet speeds and iffy connections while a student and esports competitor at Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas.

“Obviously, the biggest challenge in running a wide, multiplayer online game is the internet connection,” says Riot Games’ Vandenberg. “We have dozens of people at our company who work with telecommunications providers to try to figure out the best way to make our game packets work. Anything that makes our infrastructure stronger in our country, and any other country, is good for the game.”



UNC Pembroke’s Crystian Amaya and teammates competed at the Peach Belt Conference League of Legends Tournament.

## Gaming old school in new ways

Using internet connections to play traditional games is an updated take on an old norm. “People used to play chess by mail or by messenger,” says Chris Bellinger, a Staunton, Virginia, resident and avid gamer. He participates in role-playing games with friends and family from across the miles thanks to internet connections and gaming platforms that allow real-time communication and play.

Bellinger says members of his groups, which total about eight people in each, are involved in Pathfinder, Dungeons & Dragons and Star Wars role-playing games. He participates in Pathfinder and D&D games with old friends and runs another D&D game with members of his family. Group members include people in Virginia, Florida, South Carolina and Iowa.

“We’re pretty spread out, so now it’s pretty cool,” Bellinger says. “It allows us to stay in touch. I don’t know that I would have much contact with my friends otherwise.”

One of the current games now played through the popular Roll 20 gaming platform originated from one that Bellinger and his friends started at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. “That game ran for about eight years with different people coming in or going out,” he says.

Roll 20 makes game play smooth and easy when coupled with a communications platform called Discord that allows for group chats and messaging.

While those platforms are relatively new, Bellinger says traditional gamers have been taking advantage of internet connections since the introduction of the World Wide Web. And before that, players used text-based multiuser dungeons, or MUDs, to meet up online for a gaming experience once confined to table tops or living rooms. “So, there’s always been ways to game online,” Bellinger says.



Photo courtesy of William LeMaster

Ashton Woodard is from Menifee County. She started playing basketball at the age of 5.

# TRUE GRIT

## Menifee County basketball player strives for excellence

BY JEN CALHOUN

Ashton Woodard was 5 years old when her dad put up a basketball goal outside their home and asked, “Hey, wanna go shoot?”

“We would play Around the World, and he would beat me every time,” she says.

But that changed when Woodard was about 7 years old. That’s when she started winning those shooting matches against her dad, Danny Woodard. From there, it wasn’t long before she would find even greater success on the court as a star player at Menifee County High School and now as a senior at Transylvania University.

### STAR QUALITY

In sixth grade, Woodard, who is now 21, tried out for the team at Menifee Elementary K-8. At 5 feet, 8 inches, she was taller than the other girls on the court, and her passion for the sport was still growing. “Our school was so small that we just took whoever wanted to come play,” she says. “So, there was me and six other girls in my grade who went out for it. I think we only won one game the whole season.”

But something else happened that first season of middle school basketball. The coach for Menifee County High School’s girls basketball team was sitting in on one of Woodard’s games when he saw her pull a move he’d never seen a sixth-grader perform. “I was at the free-throw line, and I did a pump fake, where I pretended to pass the ball then drove past another girl to score,” she says. “So, he asked me to come play for him, and he put me on the varsity team.”

By eighth grade, Woodard was a starter on the high school's varsity team, and she hadn't even started high school. The game was a release for her. It gave her an outlet she didn't have elsewhere. "I grew up as a shy kid," she says. "Basketball was a way I could express myself and be comfortable in front of a lot of people."

It was also a way for her to push herself to the limits of what was possible as an athlete and a person. She watched hours of footage of NBA stars Michael Jordan and Steph Curry and tried to do the things they did. She also started watching women's basketball games. That's when it dawned on her that she might be able to continue playing basketball in college. "Before then, I probably didn't think about playing in college because it never appeared to be an option for me," Woodard says. "There didn't seem to be that many girls playing, so I was kind of like, 'Do girls really play basketball?'"

When the realization came to her, she wouldn't let it go. "I turned to my dad and said, 'I want to do that. I want to play in college.' He said, 'OK,' and that's what we started working towards."

### NO TIMEOUTS

As she grew older and reached her max height of 5 feet, 10 inches, Woodard left the position of center. "My dad said, 'OK, Ashton, you're probably not going to be 6 feet, so you're going to have to transition into being a guard,'" she says. "He said, 'You're going to have to dribble better and think quicker.'"



With that, she increased the intensity and scope of her workouts. She practiced dribbling, rebounding and defense. She lifted weights to improve her strength and stamina. She found workouts that college teams used and did them. She also played with the AAU team Kentucky Crush Elite, which competed in other states and regions. "They have that saying, 'Ball is life,' and that's exactly what it was for me," Woodard says. "I spent every single moment I could in the gym with my dad, doing all these workouts."

When she chose Transylvania University, Woodard knew it was the right fit. "I visited them, and I fell in love with the school," she says. "I loved the coaches, and I loved how close the team was."

### SETBACK AND FAST FORWARD

The program was helpful in other ways, too. During a particularly intense practice going into her freshman year, Woodard passed out. A then-assistant coach caught her mid-fall. "It wasn't long before I came to, but they knew something wasn't right," she says. "I was in great shape."

Doctors soon found the problem. Woodard suffered from pulmonary stenosis, a condition in which a problem with her pulmonary valve caused a reduction in blood flow from her heart to her pulmonary artery and lungs. While it sounds like a setback, Woodard has been able to work with doctors and trainers to keep the condition at bay. "As far as I know, it shouldn't get worse," she says. "But it won't get fully better, either. I do know how to listen to my body, though. When I reach a certain point, I know to slow down or take a break."

If that prospect sounds daunting, Woodard isn't too worried. After she graduates in 2020 with a degree in exercise science and a minor in psychology, she might go straight on to graduate school or she might try for something completely different. "How cool would the WNBA be?" she asks. "Or, I've even thought about playing overseas. That could be an option, even if it's just for a few years. I could get my housing and expenses paid for by the team and still get to play basketball and make money." 🗨️



Photo courtesy of William LeMaster

Woodard averaged 13.3 points per game in 2018-19 as a junior at Transylvania University.

# A holiday delight

## Baking Christmas cookies makes for a strong tradition

It's the most wonderful time of the year, when cooks around the country take to their kitchens to bake Christmas cookies.

"It's a tradition in families," says Stephany Houston, baker and owner of WildFlour Bakehouse in Sevierville, Tennessee. "Ours was that we would go to my grandmother's house — all of us girls — and make cookies. Then we would have them for the whole week before Christmas."

Houston recalls her grandmother, Alva Dell, using an old pastry press to create beautiful shapes for her German spritz cookies. That press is now long gone, but a new "old" one has taken its place. A friend found it at an antiques auction and brought it to Houston so she could re-create that experience she fondly remembers in her grandmother's kitchen years ago.

Spritz cookies are just one confection filling bakery cases during the holiday season, tempting customers as they walk through the bake shop doors. This is only WildFlour's second year in business, but as word spreads, a



Baker Stephany Houston re-creates the experience of making cookies with her grandmother.

growing, loyal customer base has taken root.

"Most every neighborhood has their baking lady," Houston says. "That's what I am — the neighborhood baking lady, who also has a storefront." In a previous life, before opening WildFlour, Houston was a 911 operator and "had a lot of downtime," giving her the opportunity to watch YouTube videos about cookie decorating.

"I pretty much taught myself," she says.

Now, she teaches others at classes at the bakery and makes cookies for customers who bring in their own recipes. "Everybody has their own little cookie recipe they want to have in their homes over the holidays," she says.



### Tips for GREAT COOKIES

Stephany Houston, owner of WildFlour Bakehouse, teaches baking classes, where she stresses important steps to take before getting started:

- ▶ Read the entire recipe before you begin. A lot of people don't, and they skip important steps.
- ▶ Always cream the butter and sugar together. That's very important. Then, mix the dry ingredients and incorporate the two together.
- ▶ Do not overmix the batter, which will result in tough, dry, crumbly cookies. Stop mixing when the ingredients are just mixed together.



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

## STEPHANY'S GINGERBREAD MEN

- 3/4 cup butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 3/4 cup molasses
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon Chinese five spice
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon cloves
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 3 3/4 cups all-purpose flour

In a saucepan over low heat, melt butter, then stir in brown sugar, molasses, salt and spices. Transfer the mixture to a medium-sized mixing bowl, let it cool to lukewarm, then beat in the egg.

Whisk the baking powder and soda into the flour, then stir into the molasses mixture. The dough will be very soft and sticky, but don't be tempted to add more flour. It will firm up once it's chilled.

Divide the dough in half and pat each half into a thick rectangle. Wrap well and refrigerate for 1 hour or longer. The dough may be sticky and hard to roll if not thoroughly chilled, so make sure it's chilled before continuing.

Heat oven to 350 F. Once the dough has chilled, take one piece of dough out of the refrigerator and flour a clean work surface. Roll the dough to a thickness of 1/8 to 1/4 inch. The thinner you roll the dough, the crispier the cookie. Flour both the top and bottom of the dough if it starts to stick.

Cut out shapes with a floured cookie cutter, cutting them as close to one another as possible to minimize waste. Transfer cookies to ungreased cookie sheets. Bake the cookies until slightly browned around the edges — 8 to 12 minutes — or until they feel firm. Let cookies cool on baking sheet for several minutes until set. Then, remove to a wire rack to cool completely. Repeat with remaining dough. Decorate cookies as desired.



## ALVA DELL'S CHRISTMAS SPRITZ

*As you can tell by reading, Alva wrote this recipe for her family.*

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 large egg
- 1/2 pound unsalted butter at room temperature, cut into small cubes
- Decorations of choice

Heat oven to 350 F. Whisk together the flour, sugar and salt in a large bowl, then sprinkle with vanilla and almond extracts. Crack the egg in the center of the bowl, then dot the flour mixture with the pieces of butter. Mix everything together with your clean hands until you get a dough. Try not to knead too much, as this makes tough cookies. You just want the dough to come together cohesively.

Press the dough through a cookie press to make traditional spritz. Put on the die of your choice — star and snowflake

patterns are good for the holidays. Then, load the press with the dough. Ratchet out the dough onto an ungreased cookie sheet. This takes practice, so be prepared to mess up at first. Just return the not-so-good ones to the dough ball and start again. Some people like larger cookies that require two or three cranks. Others like a more dainty cookie that requires just one crank of the cookie press. My mum sometimes twisted her wrist a little when making these to get a swirly pattern going on.

Bake the cookies at 350 F for 10-12 minutes. As they bake, get your decorations ready, because you'll need to act fast once they come out of the oven.

The cookies will not brown, so don't wait for that to happen. As soon as they come out of the oven, start decorating them. My favorite toppings are colored sugar and pieces of walnuts stuck in the center of the star pattern.

Cool the cookies on the sheet for 5 minutes, then carefully remove them to a rack. Let cool completely before putting them away. These cookies freeze well. 📺



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